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Images of a Hong Kong Mall

a grounded theory investigation of consumer retail mall brand image development

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**Images of a Hong Kong Mall:
A Grounded Theory Investigation of
Consumer Retail Mall Brand Image Development**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Coventry**

by

David Osborne

August 2011

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David Osborne

ABSTRACT

This study generated a substantive theory of retail mall brand image construction on the part of consumers for a retail mall in Hong Kong. The primary source of data was generated from face-to-face interviews, and analysed using a grounded theory methodology. From this analysis key categories emerged which provided the foundation for the substantive theory.

The theory of retail mall brand image construction proposes that consumers associate the retail mall with a particular stratum of society, through a series of interpretive processes that attach personal and social meaning to the mall. The resultant 'brand image' conceptualizes the mall as an integral and representative part of that social stratum and, in consequence, there is an associated series of consumer actions, behaviours, and appearances deemed to be expected and appropriate for that mall.

Based on this conceptualization there is a resultant 'character frame' - a set of socially acceptable parameters governing action, appearance and behaviour – from which a variety of identities can be adopted or assumed that are considered appropriate to the brand image. Consumers can then determine whether these available identities resonate with their own personal values – either through simple compatibility or through more aspirational desires - and thus their response to these identities

determines whether they accept or reject the positioning of the mall as 'suitable' or desirable to themselves.

On a theoretical level this study articulates the link between brand image, social position, and consumer culture, and can be seen to contribute to two of the four areas of theoretical interest to consumer culture theorists, namely the area of mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies and, secondly, the field of consumer identity projects. In addition the study addresses the gap in branding literature relating to consumer processes for developing (retail mall) brand images.

The implications of this study for professional practice are two-fold. Firstly, they can be seen to benefit the marketing of places and place-related products by providing additional knowledge regarding the consumer brand image construction. Secondly, they have the capability to inform and thus improve the design quality of the built environment.

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To B.J. Gran; who had the audacity to complete before me yet the unfailing graciousness and tenacity to chivvy me along on what seems like a daily basis. A star indeed. Then, of course, Ian Lyne. He started me on this journey and was there at every turn. He set the bar just a tad higher than was comfortable yet I have nothing but gratitude for his inspiration, guidance, and friendship.

Ultimately, this dissertation must be for my wife Cecile, and my boys Dylan and Mo. In all this time they gave me nothing but support, more support, and more support again.

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Chapter 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This has been a frighteningly exhilarating journey. What was originally perceived as a simple project to identify a series of factors that impacted on people's perceptions of place evolved into a complex philosophical challenge; this thesis serves to illuminate a part of that challenge yet, delightfully, leaves much more for future investigation. This study focuses on consumer perceptions of retail mall brand image, on a journey that travels through seemingly diverse territory from consumer research, through branding and marketing, to concepts of place. It seems almost obligatory to begin with a quote from someone unassailably intellectually and therefore I shall begin with a quote from Edward S. Casey, a geographer who provided much of both the fear and exhilaration throughout the journey:

“Philosophy and geography now need each other – especially when it comes to matters of place and space”. (Casey 2001, p.403)

1.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter provides an overview of this thesis and the study that it documents. It includes nine sections in addition to this brief introduction. Section 1.2 provides the background and motivation for the research, describing the impetus for the study from the researcher's professional experiences. Section 1.3 overviews the design of the research and the reasons for choosing the retail mall as the focus of this research. Section 1.4 describes

the research site (Pacific Place) in the historic context of Hong Kong's retail development. Section 1.5 then states the objectives of the research and the research questions. Section 1.6 explains the theoretical context for the study whilst section 1.7 discusses the choice of research methodology. Section 8 and section 9 provide the outline of the significance of the study and the limitations of the study respectively, whilst section 1.10 describes the organization of this thesis into 7 chapters, with a brief outline of the content of each.

1.2 THE BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THIS RESEARCH

The researcher is a design practitioner involved in the designing and marketing of commercial places; these include residential, office, and retail developments, theme parks, and public places. The work includes both designs to improve the quality of the built environment as well as the development of appropriate brands for these places for use by the clients' marketing teams. In the course of the brand development work, it became apparent to the researcher that there was an area within the process that could and should be improved. The professional process for developing brands of places focused on what consumers expected or wanted, yet it generally did little to understand why or how these desires came about. This was of significant importance to the researcher in his professional work; if the design professionals could better understand the ways in which consumers evaluated places they would be in a more informed position to develop their designs for places. As a consequence of this lack of clarity of consumer motivation, analytical work done by the

researcher in attempting to improve consumer engagement with commercial properties lacked any convincing theoretical foundation. The retail realm was particularly problematic; a common condition was that patronage of older shopping malls decreased in favour of new malls yet, when attempts were made to upgrade these older properties, the professional practices were focused more on aspects of the physical realm – make the old property look as close as possible to the new property - and little was done to understand the motivations of consumer expectations.

A preliminary review of academic literature related to consumer engagement with retail malls showed a predominance of literature concerned with measuring consumer responses to particular conditions (e.g Erdem, Zhao and Valenzuela 2004; Martin and Turley 2004; Roy 1994; Wakefield and Baker 1998) - what might be considered a bottom-up approach – rather than investigations into consumer motivations related to the retail mall – considered by this researcher as a top-down approach. From these initial observations was born the desire to explore the subject further with the aim of establishing – or discovering – a theory, or framework, that could fill this gap in academic knowledge and in the professional processes.

1.3 THE RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT STORYLINE

The research was a ‘work inspired’ investigation to establish a framework that could explain how and why consumer brand images of commercial ‘place’ were formed. The motivation for the enquiry came directly from the

researcher's work experience, and his existing client base offered access to a variety of commercial places. Given that 'commercial place' as a topic is broad, the retail mall was ultimately selected as the research site for four reasons:

- Retail malls generate strong brand identities and maintain them over a long period of time
- They offer unique and complex community activities
- Given the predominance of high-profile branded goods on sale, the mall offers both clarity and complexity of brands and brand relationship
- In the working practice of the researcher, the retail malls are consistently the most problematic with regard to image

Hong Kong Pacific Place mall was ultimately selected as the primary research site as a) it is a very well-known mall both in Hong Kong and the Asian region, b) it has a strong brand image, and c) the researcher has a close relationship with the owner thus making access easy.

1.4 THE RESEARCH SITE: HONG KONG PACIFIC PLACE

“If malls had star ratings, Hong Kong Pacific Place shopping mall would be a five star.....[it] is a dazzling selection of upmarket, international boutiques from Armani to Versace and just about everything in between.” (Boland 2010)

Hong Kong Pacific Place is the site for the research detailed in this thesis. Owned and managed by the Swire Pacific Group, phase 1 of the mall was completed in 1988 and the latest, phase 3, completed in 2004. Its high-end retail mall offers contemporary fashion and luxury goods brands and, in addition, the complex includes three 5-star hotels, a boutique hotel, and three Grade A office towers. The quality of the design, the high-end luxury brand

Figure 1.1: The research site: Hong Kong Pacific Place



tenants, and the up-market clientele has prompted many to regard Pacific Place as the benchmark retail mall in Hong Kong, and one of the most referenced in the Asian region (Culbertson 2000).

Prior to the introduction of formalised retailing Hong Kong always had a thriving retail industry in the form of innumerable streetside stores and wetmarkets, supported by a high population density (Culbertson 2000). Later, the high-profile offices (e.g. Swire House, Gloucester House, Central Building) in the central business district offered retail arcades as part of their

lower podia, but arguably it was not until the development of Ocean Terminal that Hong Kong gained its first shopping mall (Culbertson 2000). Completed in the mid-60's at the tip of the Kowloon peninsula, it was a 650,000 square feet facility built as a part of the Wharf Company's facility for cruise ships.

Figure 1.2: Shopper in Pacific Place

This image has been removed due to identifiable persons in it. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester Library, Coventry University

In the 1970's the Swire Pacific Group - who would later built Pacific Place - embarked on the design and construction of their first retail centre, City Plaza, a 1.1 million square feet facility in the heart of their residential development on the east side of Hong Kong island. As their first retail endeavour, and in an effort to better understand the functioning of these malls, the developer arranged a two week tour of North American malls for the design team. It is no surprise therefore to recognise the American influence in the design and management of the Swire Group retail portfolio. When the first phase of Pacific Place was built the company referred to it as their second generation

mall, a comment that acknowledged both the design influence of City Plaza and the progressive attitude of the company towards improving the product.

Given the high density of the Hong Kong population, coupled with its highly-efficient systems of public transport and its reputation as a shopping destination (Yeung et al 2004), it is not surprising that the Hong Kong retail industry is particularly vibrant (Irazabal and Chakravarty 2007). “Homes are small by Western standards, so people tend to enjoy conducting social activities away from home. Shopping and dining out are favorite pastimes.” (Culbertson 2000, p.58). And within this industry Pacific Place still, after more than twenty years, is considered one of the top five malls in Hong Kong (Boland 2010).

1.5 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTIONS

This study was focused on understanding and explaining the consumer influences, motivations, and processes that led to their perceptions of retail mall brand image. Thus the objective of the research was to develop a theory that could explain how consumers developed their image of the brand for a retail mall in Hong Kong. The specific objectives were to identify and explain the process by which this brand image was developed.

From these research objectives three specific questions were formulated:

- What are the factors that influence and inform the brand image?

- How are these factors interpreted and evaluated?
- How are these images used by the consumer?

These questions were developed and refined in the course of the initial interviews and with reference to discoveries made during the numerous ‘return to literature’ stages (Goulding 2002) of the research process.

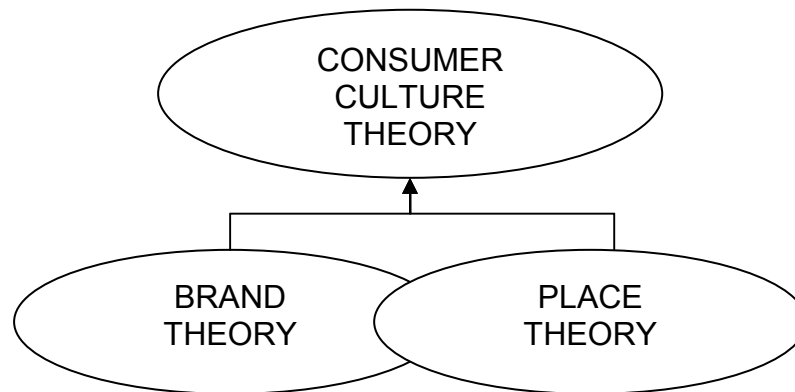
1.6 THE THEORETICAL CONTEXT

This research aims to explain “lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p.118). It recognizes that there is the potential for multiple and different interpretations rather than any absolute truth, and thus it is set in the interpretivist paradigm which holds that reality is socially constructed (Gergen 1999; Mertens 2005). The study adopts Blumer’s (1969) theory of symbolic interactionism, on the basis that there is no objective reality out there but, rather, there are dynamic and fluctuating realities which are “ socially and symbolically constructed, always emerging in and relative to other facts of social life” (Sherman and Webb 1990, p. 124)

Understanding brand image in the context of this study - particularly to describe it holistically as a phenomenon rather than as a tool of marketing – created a great deal of confusion at the onset of this research as to what conceptual perspectives were relevant and why. Initially the study focused on branding literature and on literature that described physical aspects of the retail mall – the physical realm – that might influence the consumer. Yet

whilst this was a rich body of literature, particularly in the area of brand development by the owners and marketers, and in studies of the brand construct, its emphasis on the goals of marketing made this too restrictive a perspective to fully address the questions of this research. Expanding the review of literature into the realm of place studies provided a much broader theoretical base to inform this study; ultimately however, the realization was that the focus of the study was on the consumer and his/her interpretation of a variety of signals and influences, and therefore consumer culture theory was adopted as a framework to position the research in the broader field of consumer behaviour studies (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 2007) (see Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: Positioning the study within theory



1.7 SELECTING THE METHODOLOGY

The selection of the research methodology should be based on that which offers “fidelity to the phenomena under study” (Goulding 2002, p.16). This

research study sought identify and explain the process by which this brand image was developed; as such grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for this research because of specific strengths inherent that support this investigation:

- The central aim of grounded theory is to generate theory, and “in the actual environments in which the actions take place, in natural situations, in order to analytically relate informants’ perspectives to the environments through which they emerge”. (Goulding 2002 citing Baszanger 1998, p.354).
- It is a particularly appropriate methodology in areas where little current literature exists (Flint et al 2002; Goulding 2002, Locke 2001)
- It allows for the holistic investigation of the phenomenon; in particular this accommodates both the influences of individual attributes on image formation and the collective influence of attributes working in concert.
- Grounded theory has been shown to be an effective methodology for identifying such changes in customer value sets (Flint et al 2002) for, as Warnaby and Davies (1997) point out, individual’s expectations of place can change based on circumstances and attitude.

1.8 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Within the branding literature there has been much research on brand ‘identity’ (the brand positioned from the owners’ and marketers’ perspective)

(Keller 1998); how to construct strong brand (e.g. Aaker 1996; Keller 1998), what is the construct of the brand (e.g. de Chernatony 1998; Keller 2003), and even the consumer response to brands (e.g. Hankinson 2004; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). What was lacking however was research that focused on brand 'image' (the way in which consumers perceive the brand). The literature clearly distinguishes between brand identity and brand image (e.g. Aaker 1996; de Chernatony 2001; de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley 1999; Hankinson and Cowking 1997; Keller 1998), yet there was no satisfactory explanation of the process or processes by which consumers develop these images of the brand. Thus the principle objective of this study was to address this gap in the literature and to develop a theory that could explain how consumers developed such images for a retail mall in Hong Kong.

The retail mall can be considered as a place, in a similar category to, say, the tourist destination (Lichrou et al 2008); in the general field of branding the literature tended to concentrate on product, service, or corporate branding, and less in the field of place branding (Hankinson 2001) and most of this was focused on 'uncontained' places such as cities, regions and countries (Kavaratzis 2005; Hanna and Rowley 2008; Kerr 2006), and so this study was seen to also contribute to this deficit.

Whilst the research questions were questions about 'brands' it was soon found that branding and marketing, with their focus on the creation of positive images and often economic gain, were too confined a perspective to satisfactorily resolve these questions. The literature in the field of place studies

offered much in the way of theoretical and empirical research to better understand people's perceptions of place (e.g. Agnew 1987; Canter 1977; Massey 1994; Relph 1976; Gustafson 2001) though often to the exclusion of aspects of consumption as it was related to place; this aspect of research could be found under the umbrella of consumer culture theory (e.g. Arnould 2005; Maclaren and Brown 2005; Sherry 1998; Urry 1990, 2005). Thus this study drew on consumer studies as well as place studies for its theoretical position and the outcomes could be seen to contribute cross-disciplinary theory involving consumer perceptions of brands, place brands, and places to the academic body of knowledge.

Finally, the study also addresses a weakness in professional practice for the design of the built environment in Hong Kong, which was the original motivation for this study. Little in-depth research of community members takes place when areas are being designed; research is generally restricted either to the gathering of quantitative demographic data, or web-based engagement that essentially canvasses opinion, or, in vary rare cases, public forum-type consultations that invariably take place in "an atmosphere of confrontation" (Kingston et al, 2000, p.111). This study aimed at generating theory that would better access the values of the community and its individuals which would ultimately contribute to a more relevant social environment for that particular community.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The immediate limitation of the study relates to its focus. As a retail study it is limited to a single retail mall type representing two strata of consumer (middle- and upper-income) and with a specific trade mix and reputation considered unique in Hong Kong.

There were limitations in the ability of the interview technique to access accurate data – indeed, it has been argued that the artificial nature of the interview environment may shape respondents constructions of emotions and events to yield ‘truths’ not accurate to actual experiences at the retail mall (Sikes 2000). As will be noted in later chapters the interviews were challenging the respondents to rationalize and articulate feelings about events that they had previously rarely, if ever, attempted to verbalise before with the result that, in one case at least, the respondent gave contradictory responses at different times during the interview. However, the length of the interviews (45 minutes to 1.5 hours) allowed time for the respondent to explore their own feelings about the mall, to revisit similar topics and, in many cases, to muse ‘out loud’ about possible motives. The role of the interviewer himself could be considered a limitation, as the respondents could potentially skew their responses to ‘please’ the interviewer yet, given the nature of the enquiry, this could be considered a ‘virtual’ extension of the mall brand as the respondent could be considered to be using references to the mall and its brand in order to make statements of ‘self’. However in order to minimize this aspect of the inquiry the researcher adopted as neutral a position as possible throughout the

interview.

A final limitation was the ability of the researcher to appropriately represent and interpret the data. Qualitative enquiry has been criticised for, amongst other things, being subjective as all the data is “filtered through the eyes of the data collector” (Goulding 2002, p.18). This can be minimized by the researcher adopting “a rigorous and self-conscious examination for bias at each stage of the research process” (Goulding 2002, p.18). In this research this examination took the form of frequent checks for negative cases, the use of member checking (asking respondents to examine initial coding of transcripts), and the use of inter-rater reliability (inviting another researcher to review the preliminary coding and interpretations). In addition to rigor during the research process, care was taken to ensure, firstly, that the grounded theory process was adhered to (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002) and secondly that transparency was maintained throughout through by providing clear and extensive documentation of the data collection and analysis process (Goulding 2002; Locke 2001).

1.10 ORGANISATION OF THIS DISSERTATION

This dissertation is organized into seven chapters which are briefly summarized here. The current chapter has introduced the research, provided the background to the study, and presented the aims and questions to be addressed. It has outlined the theoretical position and introduced the choice of methodology. It has concluded by discussing the significance and limitations

of the study.

Chapter 2 explains the conceptual framework for the study. It positions the research in the realm of consumer culture studies, and explains the rationale behind utilising consumer culture theory as the framework to locate this study in the broader field of consumer research.

Chapter 3 reviews the literature on retail malls, brands, and place brands studies. It discusses the literature on the immediate subject of the study, namely retail malls; it then discusses branding in general and place branding in particular, and highlights gaps in the literature that this study can address. Further, it draws attention to the narrow focus of such literature, making it unable to fully engage with the complexity of the research questions.

Chapter 4 broadens the literature review to include studies that focus on the larger topic of place. It discusses significant models of place, and theories of place that emphasise the influence of social networks on the construction of place identities, and proposes that this area of research provides a broader, more encompassing theoretical base for this study. At the same time it draws attention to the short-comings in the existing literature to resolve the questions posed by this research.

Chapter 5 presents the methodology adopted for this study. It explains the rationale behind adopting the grounded theory methodology and for specifically following the approach proposed by Glaser (1978, 1992) rather

than that of Strauss and Corbin (1990). It describes in detail the sampling and data collection processes, and the analytical processes applied. It further details how matters of credibility and ethicality were addressed, and concludes by explaining the limitations of the study.

Chapter 6 presents the findings of the study. It presents the substantive theory of retail mall brand image creation, and the three-stage cycle that operationalises the theory. It discusses in detail the core category, categories, sub-categories, and concepts that led to the theory, and explains how these divisions were derived. The chapter discusses how the findings answer the research questions, and concludes by summarising the main propositions inherent to the theory.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarizing the study and its achievements. It discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the study, and suggests opportunities for further study.

1.11 SUMMARY

This chapter has provided the background to and motivation for the study detailed in this thesis. It has explained the link between the researcher's professional work and the need for a satisfactory theoretical foundation to understand the consumer process for developing their image of the brand for a retail mall in Hong Kong. It has articulated both the objectives of the research and the specific research questions that this study aimed to address.

Further it has outlined the theoretical context for the study, and provided a brief introduction to the chosen methodology. In addition to noting the value of the study to professional practice, this introduction has identified the specific gap in the literature that the study aims to address and, at the same time, noted the limitations of the study.

The next chapter elaborates on the theoretical framework and the perspective adopted for the study; it discusses consumer culture studies generally and outlines the reasons for using the consumer culture theory (CCT) framework for positioning this research.

Chapter 2.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study was to develop a theory as to how consumers developed their image of the brand for a retail mall in Hong Kong. Thus whilst ‘retail mall’, ‘brand’ and ‘image’ were all relevant to this investigation and are discussed at length later in this thesis, the principal focus of the study was ‘the consumer’ and the consumer activity. Therefore this research can be seen to fall within the conceptual framework of consumer culture. This chapter explains the rationale for this.

In addition to this brief introduction, section 2.2 discusses the reasons for adopting a consumer culture perspective for this study. Section 2.3 then introduces the structure proposed by consumer culture theory (CCT), and its value to position this research within the broader field of consumer research. In particular it explains CCT not as a theory but as a framework that organizes consumer culture research; it describes the four areas of study or ‘major projects’ of CCT and locates this research within those domains. Section 2.4 then describes the relationship of consumer culture in general to the evolution of the branding paradigm.

2.2 CONSUMER CULTURE

Consumer culture as a field of study is, according to Slater (1997), seemingly rediscovered every decade or “to be uncharitable, it has been redesigned, repackaged and relaunched as a new academic or political project every decade since the sixteenth century’ (Slater, 1997, p.1). Nevertheless consumer culture offered a relevant and valuable perspective for this study which, together with the organising structure provided by consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 2007), provided the conceptual framework for the research.

The aim of this study was not to identify *what* the consumer response to the retail mall brand was but, rather, *why* they had that response and how that response was arrived at. Thus the focus was more on consumer motivation than it was on response. The value of a consumer culture perspective to this study was that it focuses the study more on the motivations of the consumer rather than responses of the consumer, and much work has been done in the general area of retail/mall/shopping. For example, earlier studies into consumer behaviour in the retail mall, particularly from the marketing perspective, focused on consumer response to conditions within the mall (e.g. attractiveness (Ruiz 1999; Nevin and Houston 1980; Huff 1964); mall attributes (Linguist (1975); atmospherics (Philip Kotler 1973; Turley and Milliman 2000). In comparison, studies of engagement between consumers and the act of shopping within the realm of consumer behaviour have tended

to focus on the motivations behind these engagements (Woodruffe-Burton et al 2001), and these studies have covered a wide range of subjects.

Table 2.1: Studies of consumer motivations

Impulse purchasing	Rook and Hoch 1985 Rook 1987 Gardner and Rook 1988
Compulsive consumption	O'Guinn and Faber 1989 Hirschmann 1992
Addictive consumption	Elliott 1994b Eccles 2000
Hedonic shopping	Arnold and Reynolds 2003 Babin et al 1994
Compensatory consumption	Woodruff 1997
Recreational shopping	Backstrom 2006 Tauber 1972
Self-gift giving	Mick and DeMoss 1990 Mick et al 1992 Luomala 1998

Based on Woodruffe-Burton et al (2001)

Table 2.1 summarises some of the studies into specific motivations; other studies have identified a number of personal motives for shopping ranging from role playing and recreational diversions (Tauber 1972), to information acquisition and shopping as a social event (Buttle and Coates 1996). Later

work by Buttle (1996) proposed the notion that shopping motives were “contextualized within life script, lifestyle, relationships, gender and location, for example” (Woodruffe-Burton 2001, p.263). So even before the consumer engaged with the mall they could be seen to have agendas related to the act of shopping and, given there is such a potentially large range of motivations behind the act of shopping, it would be reasonable to expect that these motivations play a part in how the consumer evaluated the mall, its facilities and products, and its brand. What was also significant about such agendas – and supported by such studies as Buttle (1996) and Woodruffe-Burton (2001) – was the implication that individual consumers may be driven by any or several of these motives on any given day, and therefore their responses – to the mall, the offerings, and the brand – are far from constant, potentially complex, and may vary from one day to the next. And so, in the context of this study, consumer engagement with shopping and the retail mall can be seen to be a complex human activity; far from being simply a response to a set of conditions or attributes that may exist in the mall it can be seen as a dynamic interaction of changing motives and expectations with an equally varied and fluctuating outcomes.

Within consumer culture the act of consumption is seen as a resource for meaning creation (Elliott 1997) and these ‘fluctuating outcomes’ can be seen as moments of choice related to the process of meaning creation. They should not be seen as singular acts of action/reaction but, rather, considered as creative processes of interaction (Blumer 1969) in the consumer quest for meaning. The consumer is not a “passive victim [of marketing] but is an active

agent in the construction of meaning” (Elliott 1997, p. 285); thus the act of shopping – which includes the consumer imaging of retail mall brand – is very much related to the act of meaning creation.

More recently, studies within consumer culture and consumer research in general have been organized within the framework of consumer culture theory (CCT) (Arnould and Thompson 2005). CCT provides a more focused positioning for this study; firstly, as a perspective from which to investigate the consumers’ engagement with the retail mall brand and, secondly, to organize this study within the broader field of consumer research.

2.3 CONSUMER CULTURE THEORY (CCT)

The term ‘consumer culture theory’ (CCT) was proposed by Arnould and Thompson (2005) to “provide a heuristic framework for mapping out this diverse body of research in terms of recurrent core theoretical concerns” (Arnould and Thompson 2007, p3). As a field of study consumer research is broad and comprises a diverse set of concepts; it is both contextually and topically diverse (Arnould and Thompson 2007) and has led to the evolution of consumer culture theory as a framework to unify many of these concepts within four main areas of study (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 2007; Belk and Sherry 2007).

It should be stressed that CCT is not a theory in itself; it is not “a unified system of theoretical propositions” (Arnould and Thompson 2007, p.6) but,

rather, a framework that clusters consumer culture research projects into four areas of theoretical interest, the purpose being to provide order and orientation within the consumer research tradition and provide a focus to position new research within the broad realm of consumer research. It was conceived as a “conversational vernacular rather than a cumulative body of verified truths.” (Arnould and Thompson 2007, p.6), and was intended to be used as an organizing structure for consumer research projects.

CCT has evolved from a stream of research over the past few decades and offers an interpretive approach to consumer research (Arnould and Thompson 2005). In particular it examines consumption in the cultural context within which it occurs (Belk and Sherry 2007).

2.3.1 CCT literature on place as the physical setting for acts of consumption

Within the CCT literature there is a notable body of literature that explores how aspects of the build environment function as major cultural influences (Zucker 1991). Such literature explores the interactions between consumers and their environment that “interweave and alter elements of meaning, nature, social relations and agency” (Sack 1992, p.134, cited in Sherry 1998a, p.6).

In Sherry (1998b), contributions from various authors built on a research stream that began “at the confluence of environmental psychology and cultural geography” and was driven by a “host of contiguous disciplines incorporating phenomenology into their conventional purviews” (Sherry 1998b, p.6). These

works concentrated on the cumulative effect that the physical realm had on consumer activity, a condition referred to as 'servicescapes'. The term 'servicescapes', coined by Bitner (1992), recognised the marketing influence of the built environment and that physical places embodied symbolic elements which emplaced meaning within consumer experience. These experiences varied and were "often conditioned by role incumbency" (Sherry 1998b, p.4), recognizing for example that the experience of the shopper could vary from that of the casual visitor.

In his chapter on Nike Town Chicago, Sherry (1998a) explored servicescapes through aspects of 'emplacement' and its relationship with 'brandscapes'. Emplacement referred to ways that a corporation's brand vision could be woven through the environment where the consumers engage with that product. Consumer engagement with and interpretation of these emplaced brands then created what Sherry (1998a) referred to as the 'brandscape', a "material and symbolic environment that consumers build with marketplace products, images and messages, that they invest with local meaning" (Sherry 1998a, p.112).

Sherry (1998a) focused on the elements of design in Nike Town Chicago that shaped the physical environment - from doorknobs and railings to the video theatre and the aquarium fish - and described the "dynamic by which the Nike brandscape becomes emplaced for consumers" (Sherry 1998a, p.12). His study provided the foundation for further investigations into aspects of both servicescapes and brandscapes; Kozinets et al (2002), for example, extend

Sherry's (1998a) framework of servicescape typologies to explore themed flagship brand stores and, in particular, the role of fantasy elements in the construction of retail environments, while Peñaloza (1998) returned to Nike Town Chicago to investigate the consumption of spectacle, and the key role that brandscape played in "producing cultural meanings of competition, exceptional performance, style and recreation." (Peñaloza 1998, p. 337).

Whilst Sherry (1998a, 1998b) and Peñaloza (1998) focussed on describing the marketers' efforts to shape the consumer experience through servicescapes, their research "imparted a limited, broad-brush sense of how consumers behave in a spectacular environment" (Kozinets et al 2004). Sandikci and Holt (1998) focussed on this behaviour in terms of the potential "tensions between owner interests and consumer interests in the use of retail space" (p.332). This tension between owner/marketer and consumer was later expanded by Kozinets et al (2004) in their study into consumer ludic agency within spectacular, themed environments, when they concluded that "consumer and producer interests are embedded in one another in a process of "interagency"" (p.658).

Sherry (1998a) pointed out that "multiple experiences of a single marketplace are not only common (Williamson 1992) but inevitable (Bass 1996, 55)" (p.9) which made the study and understanding of individual accounts of "being-in-the-marketplace...more pressing" (Sherry 1998b, p.6). Otnes (1998) is one example of a case study that described a particular being-in-the-Marketplace experience and, in particular, explored how the physical aspects of store

setting influenced the articulation of the various roles that consumers expected from a particular shopping experience – in this case a bridal salon during wedding preparations. Other ethnographic studies within the realm of consumer culture research have focussed on specific acts of retail consumption to explore the meanings these acts have for both the consumer and for the retailer. For example, McGrath (1989) focussed on the process of gift selection within a gift store, both from the perspective of the gift shopper and retailer involved in the gift-giving process.

The studies of place from a CCT perspective generally revolved around processes by which consumers developed meaning from acts of consumption, particularly retail consumption. These studies acknowledged the impact of the brand, the corporate messaging, and the extended efforts to emplace the brand in the physical context within which the consumer experience principally occurs. And whilst these studies acknowledged the ‘components’ of the experience they rarely studied them in isolation, recognizing instead both the dynamic nature of the consumption processes and the influential nature of each part unto the other.

2.3.2 The four major projects of CCT

CCT is structured as four “domains of theoretical interests” (Arnould and Thompson 2007, p.6) within which to organize the diverse body of consumer research knowledge. These domains are a) consumer identity projects, b) marketplace cultures, c) the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, and d)

mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Consumer identity projects: this domain of research explores how consumers, using marketplace materials, develop a “coherent if diversified and often fragmented sense of self” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.871 citing Belk 1988; McCracken 1986). This is based on the premise that much of what is available in the marketplace has assumed symbolic and mythic proportions and these are used by consumers as resources for developing their identity narratives (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk 1988; Holt 2002).

Such identity projects can be personal constructions; the consumer draws on the plethora of symbolic meanings provided by the marketplace to build their sense of self. In these cases the consumers can be conceived of as “identity seekers and makers” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.871).

In other cases the identity projects are more directed by the marketplace; it has been argued that “the market produces certain kinds of consumer positions that consumers can choose to inhabit” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.871). So whilst consumers can and do negotiate identities personally, there is often a desire to align these identities with “the structural imperatives of a consumer-driven global economy” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.871).

Such projects range from the symbolic meaning of material objects and their contribution to the construction of identity (Hill 1991; Holt 2002) to the

complex source of meaning produced by the intersection between the cultural world, material objects, and the individual consumer (McCracken 1986).

Marketplace cultures: the research in this domain revolves around the research question “how does the emergence of consumption as a dominant human practice reconfigure cultural blueprints for action and interpretation, and vice versa?” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.873). This perspective sees consumers as “culture producers” rather than the “traditional anthropological views of people as culture bearers” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p. 873), and focuses on how traditional cultural structures are being reshaped by consumption as a “prevailing human practice” (Jafari 2008, p.27).

This position is founded upon Mafessoli’s (1996) idea of neo-tribalism which proposes that globalization, and its associated socioeconomic transformations, have eroded historically-established social frameworks and resulted in new, though ephemeral, social frameworks founded on common lifestyle interests and consumption practices. This is epitomized by the rise of marketplace subcultures that nurture collective identities around common consumption practices involving “shared beliefs, meanings, mythologies, rituals, social practices, and status systems” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.874). As noted by Arnould and Thompson (2005) the tribal aspect of these sub-cultures has been observed in a wide range of shared consumption activities including skydiving (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993), youth subcultures (Thornton 1996), and Harley Davidson riders (Schouten and McAlexander’s 1995).

The sociohistoric patterning of consumption: this strand of research asks the question “what is consumer society and how is it constituted and sustained?” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.874). It explores the ways in which social and institutional frameworks shape consumption choices and behaviour (e.g. ethnicity, gender, social class hierarchies).

Equally research in this domain has studied the construction and practice of consumer communities relative to the social structures within which they evolve. For whilst these communities are built around the common consumption of commercial brands, and they often operate beyond the constraints of geographic location, they still retain “traditional markers of community” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p. 874) such as modes of socialization or negotiation of meaning.

Another area of research within this domain explores migrant populations and the way in which they reconstruct – or attempt to retain – identity when they move to another country or culture. The way in which displaced identities are recreated in an entirely different context - Chinatowns, for example – which often results in a kind of hyperculture, with traditions and culture often commodified through, for example, “costume, foods, crafts, music” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.874).

Mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies: this type of research examines consumption as operating within a meanings system that includes advertising messages and mass-media communication. It

considers not only how consumers interpret commercial messages, but also how they modify, transform, and hijack these messages for their own projects. Consumers are perceived as interpretive agents creating meanings for themselves by either embracing the dominant images of lifestyle and identity as packaged and presented by the popular media, or by consciously deviating from “these ideological instructions” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.874).

On the one hand this field of research explores the influences of economic and cultural globalization not only on the individual’s projects of identity but also on the “patterns of social interaction” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.874) that operate within distinct social contexts (Belk et al 2003; Bonsu and Belk 2003). On the other hand, this field of research considers how “particular cultural production systems, such as marketing communications or the fashion industry” (McCracken 1986; Thompson and Haytko 1997; cited in Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.874) increase consumer predisposition towards particular identity projects.

2.3.3 Positioning this study within CCT

Again it should be emphasized that CCT is not a theory in itself but a framework for conducting consumer research (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 2007). It is an interpretivist framework that is very much focused on the productive nature of consumption, and the ways in which consumers “actively rework and transform symbolic meaning” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p.871) in order to develop personal and group identities, and to position

themselves socially (Arnould and Thompson 2005). It has identified four areas of theoretical concern; however, these four areas are not proposed as absolute; CCT acknowledges that future research can potentially “identify domains of theoretical concern that have not been addressed by prior CCT studies” (Arnould and Thompson 2007, p.7).

When categorizing consumer research into the four areas of study, Arnould and Thompson (2005, 2007) stressed that CCT provides an holistic research framework; the domains are general categories, and studies can reference aspects of each rather than necessarily falling into one or the other of the categories. This study is no exception, but for the sake of clarity the following considers where and how the major parts of this research coincide with the particular domains of CCT.

From the study objectives, three main research questions were formulated; the first two questions were:

- What are the factors that influence and inform the brand image?
- How are these factors interpreted and evaluated?

These questions investigate the resources of meaning and the interpretive process that make sense of that meaning for the consumer. Thus this research coincides with the fourth domain of CCT, ‘mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies’.

The third question is:

- What is the purpose/meaning of the brand image for the consumer?

This question focuses on what use the consumer makes of the brand image and what value it has to the consumer. Arnould (2005) suggests that one reason that consumers engage in the act of shopping is to “self-consciously recompose their sense of identity and community” (p.89). Consumption, in the CCT literature (Arnould 2005; Arnould and Thompson 2005), is one method by which individuals can develop self image as well as community membership. This question therefore falls into the CCT domain of consumer identity projects.

The answers to these questions are intimately interlinked and reside within a complex act of consumer cognitive behaviour. This interrelatedness serves to emphasise the benefit of the holistic study framework offered by CCT, its four organizing areas providing additional, rather than exclusive illumination.

2.3.4 The specific value of CCT to this study

Consumer brands are, according to Douglas Holt (2002), legitimate cultural resources that have a role to play in consumer culture. And retailing – the act of making such brands available to the consumer - Arnould (2005) describes as “a field of cultural resources”, claiming that retailers make available their resources to enable consumers to accomplish their projects. Two such

consumer projects are authenticating acts and authoritative performances. Authenticating acts are behaviours that display the true self of the consumer and communicate it to others, whilst authoritative performances are generally collective actions aimed at refashioning a sense of tradition and community (Arnould 2005). Arnould proposes that a CCT-approach allows us to describe and explain how consumers utilize these cultural resources in the pursuit of such projects. CCT provides access to the complex network of events, factors, and contexts that surround the act of retail patronage and the accumulation of consumer goods; as Arnould (2005) stated "(a) ...CCT...perspective captures the motivating social and cultural contexts of retail patronage and purchase behaviours and the myriad motivating factors behind the retail purchase decision". (Arnould 2005, p.89).

It has been argued (Boulding 1956) that consumer behaviour is shaped by individual perceptions of reality rather than any notion of a more objective 'reality' – or circumstance - that might lie behind this perception. Such an argument suggests that the same circumstances can therefore be interpreted differently by different people, a viewpoint that accords with the interpretivist viewpoint of no one "grand narrative" but of a series of subjective interpretations (Stokowski 2002). Indeed, the growing literature on consumer culture theory emphasises the complexity of consumer behaviour and the subsequent need to study multiple theoretical conversations and multiple realities simultaneously (Arnould and Thompson 2005), references to the complexity of both the act of consumption and the beliefs associated with the act. With relation to consumer image, the implication for this study is

therefore that there is not necessarily one single description of a brand image common to all people. Thus any attempt to describe or model this image will need to accommodate a range of alternative interpretations. CCT offers a framework well-suited to study multiple narratives simultaneously (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Stokowski 2002); it specifically acknowledges such complexity within consumer behaviour (e.g. contradictory opinions residing together; contested views; the ability to measure the holistic phenomenon; the ability to measure the phenomenon within its context (Arnould and Thompson 2005, 2007)). CCT embraces all the aspects of people's engagement with consumer goods, it studies the functional, hedonistic, and symbolic applications of consumer goods and, generally, does it from an epistemological base of interpretivism.

2.3.5 Criticism of CCT

When CCT was presented by Arnould and Thompson initially at 2004 North American and 2005 European Association for Consumer Research (EACR) conferences it was not without its critics, resulting in a 'response' paper by Arnould and Thompson (2007). One of the major concerns – and in many cases causes of confusion particularly amongst PhD research students (Arnould and Thompson 2007) – was the use of the word 'Theory'. CCT was seen as a “totalizing narrative” (Arnould and Thompson 2007, p.5) rather than, as had been originally proposed (Arnould and Thompson 2005) a framework within which to categorise similar strands of consumer research from (potentially) different disciplines. This framework itself was called into

question on the basis that such categorization could exclude some forms of research, and recent ICR workshops have discussed the notion that CCT narrows down the domain of consumer culture research. This was argued against by Arnould and Thompson on the basis that the categories were a “framework for mapping this diversity into four clusters of theoretical interest [and] should be used as an orienting device and nothing more” (Arnould and Thompson 2007, p.6). In other words, whilst the proposed categories were considered flexible in interpretation they were not considered necessarily exhaustive. This study makes particular use of the CCT framework principally to maintain the study focus on the consumer and his/her responses, rather than, say, branding or marketing theory, or place theory.

2.4 CONSUMER CULTURE AND BRANDING PARADIGMS

There is, as Holt (2002) observes, a direct relationship between consumer culture and the shaping of brand paradigms. Consumer culture is “the ideological infrastructure that undergirds what and how people consume and sets the ground rules for marketers’ branding activities” (Holt 2002, p.80). Holt charts the evolution of this relationship, showing the brand paradigm shifting from the marketers to the individual. In the early ‘50s, due to a number of factors including the persuasive communication of television, the marketers were able to “seed a new consumer culture based upon acquiescing to the marketers’ cultural authority” (Holt 2002, p.81). This changed dramatically with the counterculture of the ‘60s and the desire for individual freedom; in this climate the authenticity of self was “premised upon making thoughtful sovereign choices rather than obeying market dictates” (Holt 2002,

p.82, citing Dickstein 1997). This attitude was embodied in an opposition to corporatism; it marked the beginnings of the postmodern consumer culture (Holt 2002) and paved the way for the development of postmodern branding paradigm (Holt 2002). The significance of the new paradigm was the notion that brands would be “more valuable if they are offered not as cultural blueprints but as cultural resources” (Holt 2002, p.83). However, one of the cornerstones of postmodern consumer culture was authenticity; if these brand resources were to be “valuable ingredients in producing the self” (Holt 2002, p.83) they needed to be perceived by the consumers as authentic, and to be authentic they needed to be impartial and divorced from any corporate or economic agenda. The point of this is, first, to illustrate the influential association between consumer culture and the prevailing brand paradigm; second, to reinforce the notion of consumer agency; and, third, to emphasise the consumer exploration of the brand for cultural meaning.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed consumer culture as providing the conceptual framework for this study. The aim of the study is to explain how consumers develop their image of retail mall brands, thus the focus is on the consumer and their behaviour. The chapter then explained the rationale for positioning this research within the conceptual framework of consumer culture theory (CCT). It explained CCT as an organising framework that groups consumer research projects into four distinct areas of theoretical interest. Based on the research questions raised by this study, the two areas of CCT most relevance

to the study are a) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies, and b) consumer identity projects. It was noted that these areas of study are not independent but overlapping areas of study which serve to frame the research holistically rather than dissect it into component parts. The chapter discussed the value of CCT as a conceptual framework; first, by allowing a broader study of brands and retailing as cultural resources and, second, by accommodating multiple and contested views and interpretations. The chapter concluded by discussing the iterative relationship between consumer culture and the brand paradigm, drawing particular attention to the power of consumer agency, and consumer exploration of brands as a cultural resource.

The next chapter begins with a brief look at the evolution of retail malls and an overview of the main research streams. It then looks at the nature of brands; it reviews brand studies in general and (retail) place brands in particular, and highlights some of the shortcomings of these studies in their ability to address the questions raised by this research.

Chapter 3.0 MALL, BRAND, AND PLACE BRAND STUDIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to develop a theory as to how consumers developed their image of the brand for a retail mall in Hong Kong; this chapter examines the literature on retail malls, brands, and place branding for its relevance to this objective. In particular, whilst the focus of this research was on the brand of the retail mall, this chapter highlights the limitations of the branding perspective to this study and proposes a broader frame of reference drawn from studies into place and place meaning.

In addition to this introduction (section 3.1), the chapter starts with a brief overview of the evolution of the retail mall and summarises the key research areas (section 3.2). Section 3.3 reviews branding research, including the development of place branding.

3.2 THE RETAIL MALL

3.2.1 The historical evolution of the mall

“Along with power mowers, "the pill," antibiotics, smoke detectors, transistors, and personal computers, the shopping mall was selected as one of the top 50 wonders that has revolutionized the lives of consumers (Consumer Reports, 1986).” (Feinberg 1991)

There are a variety of opinions as to what activity signalled the birth of the modern shopping centre, ranging from Crystal Palace, London, and the Great Exhibition in 1851 (Kazahara 2010), to Baltimore in 1907 when a group of stores established a collective off-street parking lot to serve them (Feinberg 1960), to the developments in California in the 1920's with supermarkets providing the anchor for strip malls (Consumer Reports 1986). The first enclosed, purpose-built retail mall is considered to be Southdale Shopping Center, in Edina, Minnesota, designed by Victor Gruen and opened to the public in 1956. Its was intended to evoke feelings of a European city centre, with cars banished to the outside of the mall and where people could “sit and debate over cups of coffee, just as they do in the Piazza San Marco or the Place Dauphine” (Kottke 2008). Southdale embodied two principles which would establish the notion of ‘mall’ worldwide as an enclosed retail centre (Csaba and Askegaard 1999). The first was the notion of positioning two department stores at either end of the development and connecting them with a pedestrian shopping ‘street’. The second was to enclose the entire development to allow for complete control of temperature. It was quickly discovered that this enclosure appeared to encourage a contented ‘captive audience’ which resulted in the commercial success of the development (Csaba and Askegaard 1999). Shortly after, managers and marketers began adding entertainment and events to the mix in order to enhance this new ‘leisure shopping’ activity and thus established the blueprint for the growth of malls across America and throughout the world (Bednar, 1989).

3.2.2 Changing nature of shoppers

Gruen's original ambition for the retail mall was a suburban place that offered a focussed community centre, a "colorful, lively, dynamic environment" that offered more than just commercial opportunities (Gruen and Smith 1960, p.18). He envisaged the mall as a social place, providing a sense of downtown in suburbia, and offering the local residents the "opportunity to participate in modern community life" (Csaba and Askegaard 1999, p.35). So, in addition to retail shops, Gruen-inspired malls began offering a variety of entertainment and recreational facilities, changing the way in which consumers related to and utilised retail centres and offering consumers ever-increasing ways to spend time at the mall without engaging with the commercial stores (Kowinski 1985). As Sherry (1990) observed the "seeking out of such experiences is often far more significant than the mere acquisition of products" (p.27). The impact of this evolution is reflected in the changing amount of time consumers spend in the mall; analysis indicates that "we spend more time in malls than anywhere else outside of home and work" (Bloch et al 1991, p.445).

The changing nature of the consumer can be seen reflected in the focus of consumer research. Over the past decade consumer research has tended to divide shopping motivation into two categories; either utilitarian - with a view to acquiring particular goods - or hedonistic, for the purposes of pleasure (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). However, this simple bisection of motivation is appearing overly simplistic given the increasing awareness of the role of consumption in modern society, and its function in a variety of consumer

projects such as the development of 'self', the production and communication of self-image, and the symbolic actions associated with community membership itself (Arnould 2005).

3.2.3 Review of research on retail malls

According to Martin and Turley (2004) "academic research focusing on malls began in earnest in the late 1960s" (p.465). Initially research was concentrated mainly on mall patronage, and distance/driving time to the malls (e.g. Brunner and Mason 1968; Bucklin 1967; Cox and Cooke 1970), but as the full social impact of malls began to be realized (Feinberg 1991) research topics broadened to examine a wide range of features and activities within the mall (e.g. shopping frequency (Roy 1994); browsing behavior (Jarboe and McDaniel 1987); mall excitement (Wakefield and Baker 1998)) (cited in Martin and Turley 2004).

The early studies generally were focused on the mall and its influence on the consumer and, in particular, examining how their physical qualities and characteristics affected the behavior of their visitors and impacted on their patronage. As noted by Genereux, Ward and Russell (1983), "Knowledge of how people internally represent the physical setting in which they carry out their lives may help us to understand such things as choices about where to go and what to do there" (p. 43). Yet whilst the importance of the physical realm was recognised, Bitner (1992) noted that "[in marketing] there is a surprising

lack of empirical research or theoretically based frameworks addressing the role of physical surroundings in consumption settings” (p.57).

Three areas in particular appear to have received particular attention in the literature; work that focuses on mall choice and attractiveness (e.g. Ruiz 1999; Nevin and Houston 1980; Huff 1964); mall attributes and image – much stemming from the seminal paper by Linquist (1975); and atmospherics, predominantly based on the early work of Philip Kotler (1973) (Turley and Milliman 2000).

Studies on mall choice and attractiveness

Mall image plays a major role in the attractiveness of malls (Ruiz 1999; Nevin and Houston 1980) and yet relatively little research has taken place on mall attractiveness and its impact on consumer choice (Ruiz 1999). Several studies on retail attractiveness generally (Erdem, Zhao and Valenzuela 2004; Popkowski Leszczyc and Timmermans 2001) and mall attractiveness specifically (Severin, Louviere and Finn 2001; Suarez et al 2004) have focused on testing specific and pre-determined attributes (rather than eliciting attributes). The studies intentionally selected some previously identified factors and, equally intentionally, excluded others. Therefore the holistic effect of combinations of factors was not measured. These so-called ‘probabilistic’ models focused on the size of the centre and the distance from the consumer, and many of these studies stemmed from Huff (1964) and his “theory of buyers’ spatial behaviour” (Huff 1964 cited in Ruiz 1999, p.513; Nevin and

Houston 1980). There are two main criticisms of such studies; first that by focussing on a select set of attributes to the exclusion of others they ignore other factors that might have an influence on consumer decision. Second, studying attributes in isolation ignores the possible cumulative effect of attributes working together as influences of image and choice. This poses a dilemma for the research proposed by this paper. On the one hand, investigating a chosen set of attributes to the exclusion of others will be subject to the criticism outlined above. On the other hand, attempting a study that encompasses all possibilities threatens to become a project beyond the capabilities of this researcher and his capabilities. The alternative would appear to be to enter the field of study in as neutral a position as possible and look for broad theoretical frameworks that potentially might explain the phenomenon (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002). The objective would be to generate theory of an holistic nature which can then provide the basis for more selective research in the future.

Studies on mall attributes and image measurement

In his oft-cited paper, Lindquist (1975) attempts a more holistic construction of store image, and develops nine “store image attributes” (p.31) as generalizations to describe the entity ‘store image’. These attributes were distilled from the work of 26 scholars, and comprised both empirical research and hypotheses. At first glance these attributes appear to be the components of the image, and their assembly seen as the construct of the image. Equally, however, they could be considered the ‘factors that influence the image’;

attributes such as “physical facilities” or “service” (p.31), for example, could be described either as the elements that comprise the image or as the elements that influence the development of the image. However, if they are to be considered as the influences of image then further study is required in order to ascertain the channels by which these attributes are communicated and, equally important, the manner by which they are assigned significant value. The clarification of this association will, by necessity, be required within this study.

In the Lindquist (1975) paper, each attribute is accorded a further set of describing ‘sub-attributes’, which enriches understanding of the core attribute. These describing sub-attributes vary from the tangible (e.g. elevators and washrooms as sub-attributes of “physical facilities” (p.31)) to such intangible concepts as atmosphere/congeniality and quality (p.31). Yet extensive though the list of attributes is, Lindquist himself sounds a significant note of caution that these attribute categories do not consider “possible, and most likely probable, combinations of factors” (p.32). Significantly, he does remark in his conclusion that “one might generalize from the data that the factors contributing to such retail store image are multiple in nature” (p.36), a recurrent observation in the literature (e.g. Kunkel and Berry 1968; Severin, Louviere and Finn 2001) yet the holistic study of which appears to be consistently avoided (Gustafson 2001). Equally it is an observation that should encourage an investigation not only into the effects of each factor, but also the effects of these factors working in concert. The research proposed in this paper focusses on the generation of theory that can provide a theoretical

framework to explain the phenomenon of retail mall brand image, rather than testing an hypothesis that restricts itself to a part of the phenomenon. This more broad-based approach will facilitate the discovery and investigation not only of individual attributes and their effects, but also the effects of these attributes working in concert.

Retail and store image is central to much research into consumer behaviour in a retail environment. The initial introduction of the concept of retail image by Martineau (1958) "ignited a stream of research" (Hartman and Spiro 2005) and the predominant motivation in extending these studies has been the investigation of image as a predictor of consumer behaviour in the retail context. It has been studied as a motivator of consumer choice (e.g. Grewal et al 1998; Hildebrandt 1988), as an indicator of store product quality (e.g. Baker et al 1994; Dardin and Babin 1994) and as a predictor of the quality of a store (e.g. Bloemer and de Ruyter 1998). Yet the research was very much motivated by a desire for market-place position (Steenkamp and Wedel 1991), and focused predominantly on the construct of the image, and the consumer response to that image, rather than the process by which the consumer formulated their interpretation of the image (Hartman and Spiro 2005). What was significant with Martineau's (1958) study was that he conceptualised the image not only by physical qualities but also by its "aura of psychological attributes" (Hartman and Spiro 2005, p.1112); in contrast, studies such as Lindquist's (1975) study, focused predominantly on the physical qualities.

Atmospherics

This stream of research began with an exploration of the physical factors that distinguished retail malls; the architecture, the interiors, the lighting, the events and promotions. These elements, categorized by Philip Kotler (1973) as “atmospherics”, played a part in influencing the consumers’ opinion of the mall; on one level they fulfilled the basic requirements of comfort, safety, function (Keller 1998). On a higher level they positioned the mall within a typology (Kotler 1978). At this point atmospherics became less influential in themselves – for their pragmatic qualities – but for their importance as signifiers to qualities beyond the physical realm. In other words the physical realm superficially could provide some answers as to ‘what’ influences our likes and dislikes about retail malls, but we have to look beyond the physical – look to that which is signified – in order to identify ‘why’ they influence us. More importantly, such research made the physical properties of the mall the subject of investigation – what is the consumer response to this property or that property – rather than focusing on the consumer. The research in this thesis aimed at exploring the consumer development of the mall brand; whilst it in part included their response to the brand identity put forward by the marketers (Keller 1998), the basic investigation revolved around ‘what is influencing the consumer?’ rather than ‘do these properties influence the consumer?’.

These earlier studies of consumer relationships with the mall and with retail stores were predominantly from a positivist perspective and were generally

narrowly focussed on particular and isolated aspects of the consumer engagement (Sherry 1998b). The CCT perspective maintained that the consumer engagement with place – particularly the *marketplace* – exposed them to the “perception-shaping, behaviour-inducing properties” of the environment which the “prevailing approaches to measurement” (Zimmer and Golden 1988, p.266) did not attempt to capture (Sherry 1998b, p.4).

Equally these earlier studies lacked the holistic approaches that are characteristic of branding studies (e.g. Aaker 1996, 2010; Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Keller 1998), where brands were conceptualized as being the sum total of the consumers’ impression of the product, service, or place. The next section therefore examines the literature within the field of branding, and discusses branding studies with reference to the objectives of this research.

3.3 BRANDING STUDIES

3.3.1 Definition of a brand within this study

Branding has a variety of meanings, from “the distinguishing mark or name” to the symbolic meaning represented by the product, corporation, service or place (McEnally and de Chernatony 1999; Keller 1998; Hankinson 2004).

‘Brand’ is the sum total of a consumer’s impression of a place, product, service or corporate body (Keller 1998). These impressions are formed

through direct experience (e.g. using the product or service, visiting the place) or indirect experience (e.g. advertisements, word of mouth) (de Chernatony 2001; Hankinson 2001; Keller 1998)

3.3.2 Brand identity vs brand image

Brand is generally regarded as having two principle dimensions; brand identity and brand image (Nandan 2004; de Chernatony and McDonald 1998; Keller 1993; Keller 1998). Brand 'identity' originates from the persons responsible for developing the product, service or place, in their efforts to create "a differentiated product with unique features" (Nandan 2004, p.264). Brand 'image' refers to "the brand associations held in consumer memory" (Keller 1998, p.93); essentially 'image' represents the consumer's perception of the product, service or place (Hankinson 2004; Nandan 2004). Thus the phenomenon of retail place brand image is considered to be the 'perception of the retail place' as held by the consumer. Given the earlier definition of brand as the sum total of the consumer's impression of brand (Keller 1998), this definition can be applied to retail malls as being the perception of experiences of and related to the retail mall; and it is a perception that is formed through both the physical and the emotional experiences that the user engages in both directly and indirectly (Travis 2000).

Image, particularly in a commercial context, is often taken to mean 'shallow'; a superficial, fragile and often temporary façade. However, in this research 'image' is used to refer to the full range of cognitive and emotional beliefs that

consumers accumulate for an object, service, or place. It is used to distinguish between one individual's perception of something and another individual's perception of the same thing, and thus this research acknowledges that 'brand image' is not a universal, objective truth, but an interpretative belief that varies between individuals (Aaker 1997; Algesheimer et al 2005; Bhat and Reddy 1998) and thus such images are not necessarily consistent between consumers.

Visual, mental and emotional images

It is also important to distinguish between visual representations of image (Scott 1994), and mental representations which go beyond visual representation to include other experiences including symbolic beliefs (Kahle and Kim 2006). More recent research has focused on the mental and abstract representation of brand image, constructs that embrace other attributes, benefits and values (Fournier 1998; Kahle and Kim 2006). This thesis adopts a broad definition of image based on Kahle and Kim's (2006) development of Keller's (2003) 'Multidimensionality Model of Brand Knowledge'; their definition encompasses both abstract and symbolic benefits and includes "elements like thoughts, experiences, attributes (both concrete and abstract), attitudes, values, and other symbolic benefits" (Kahle and Kim 2006, p.xvi).

Images as perceptions of truth, images as symbolic shorthand

There is a limit to the complexity and volume of information that people are willing and able to process and absorb and, in the formation of image, the human mind “attempts to oversimplify circumstances” (Linguist 1975, p.29). Boulding (1956) cites the use of John Bull and Uncle Sam as devices people use to reduce complexities of value and meaning into a icon, symbolic image that can simplify the decision process of liking or disliking. It is not clear, however, whether this repackaging into a familiar form permanently reduces the original complexity of the subject or merely produces a conveniently simplified representation that maintains reference to the original complexity. However, this tendency by the human mind to distil a product, service or place down to a minimal number of key attributes requires a prioritising on the part of the consumer, and some form of valuation to determine which attribute has the greater personal value to the consumer. In the branding discipline this valuation occurs, according to Keller (1993), by consumers attaching “personal values” to a set of attributes or associations that construct the brand image, suggesting that images are developed by the comparison of perceived qualities within the product or place with a personal set of values, expectations or aspirations that are held by the consumer. The ascribing of human characteristics through images such as John Bull and Uncle Sam would, through the subjectivity of the association, appear consistent with this suggestion, and indeed the practice of describing the phenomena in personality terms (Aaker 1997; de Chernatony and McDonald 1998; Dennis et al 2002; Keller1998) is a common practice in the field of branding. Keller (1998) goes on to describe these so called brand personalities as “the human characteristics

or traits that can be attributed to the brand” (p.320), and form one component of the brand image.

Image constructs

The term ‘image’ refers to a symbolic concept representing the sum total of the consumer response to the phenomenon of retail place. As such it should be capable of being described in terms of the components that make up this image – the image construct. Recent studies of image construct in a retail context have produced similar results to earlier studies of brand image in general. Pierre Martineau (1958) characterises store image as having two fundamental components. First, the functional qualities - elements of merchandising, price and layout that can be objectively assessed competitively - and second a less tangible component he describes as comprising an “aura of psychological attributes” (p.47). In the branding literature, similar characterizations of brand image can be found (de Chernatony 1998; Hankinson and Cowking 1997) in what Hankinson (2004) refers to as two-dimensional models that “typically categorise attributes as either functional or symbolic or functional and representational, appealing to reason and emotion.” (p.110). More complex three-dimensional models have been proposed (Keller 1993; Park et al 1986) which, through the addition of a third, experiential dimension, would appear to have more relevance to notions of place and retail branding. However, valuable though this research is, it informs only the construct of the image - the component parts of the image - and falls short of identifying the factors that influence these components and, hence, that

influence the image itself. More significantly it makes no attempt to understand the process by which these components are evaluated – what are the criteria that the consumer uses to value these components?

Arons (1961), in reference to store image, introduces the term ‘meaning’ when he proposes that consumers characterize the store as “a complex of meanings and relationships”(Arons 1961, cited in Lindquist 1975, p.30), a definition which clearly reinforces Boulding’s (1956) earlier assertion that image is a process by which people manage a complex of factors. In particular, Lindquist (1975) interpreted Aron’s (1961) definition as implying the presence of “attributes or dimensions” and a “plurality of dimensions” that echoes the work of Martineau (1958) (Lindquist 1975, p.30). The implications are that, whilst image is a distillation of meanings and values, it is still in itself capable of being a complex construction of attributes. Yet it can be seen as a semiotic relationship, with the attributes being the signifiers of meaning (Fuller et al 2008). In essence, therefore, accepting that image is the result of assigning meaning (Easthope 2004; Keller 1993, 1998), then the image of place is the result of assigning meaning to place. The assignation of meaning is through the use of symbols that represent the significant meanings and suggest a link between the image of place and some other core values held by the consumer. The basic nature and notion of consumer image in general would appear consistent with retail place image in particular. Thus the study of the factors that influence the creation of the retail mall image would be concerned with the consumer process of assigning meaning to place, and so the subject of the study is the consumer and his/her response to the condition of place rather

than place and its condition. Therefore, whilst one cannot ignore the impact of the disciplines that shape place - for example urbanism, architecture, human geography - the most logical perspective for this study was consumer behaviour, or the more over-arching discipline of consumer culture theory.

3.3.3 Evolution of branding conceptualizations

The marketer as creator of brand meaning

A good deal of brand literature focuses on the producer/marketer perspective, which sees consumers as passive receivers of the brand message (McEnally and de Chernatony 1999; Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008). The brand was seen as a communicator; as both a mark of ownership and a differentiator from its competitors (Aaker 1996; Hankinson 2004; Park and Srinivasan 1994). This definition has been expanded to conceptualise the brand as an identity, an identity that further expands the competitive differentiation by communicating the producing company's vision for the brand (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Hankinson 2004; Kapferer 2004).

Marketing management developed on this to position brands as being “material objects comprising intangible components” (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008, p.2). This perspective focuses on the methods by which brands are created and managed by the producers and marketers; the consumer in this scenario is very much a passive receptor (eg. de Chernatony and Harris 2000; Hatch and Schultz 2001; Leitch and Richardson 2003). Keller (2003), for example, claims that the actions of the marketer "creates or affects multiple

dimensions of brand knowledge and these multiple dimensions of brand knowledge, in turn, influence consumer response to marketing activity" (Keller 2003, p. 597). From this perspective researchers studied how best to develop and deliver their brand meaning to a passive audience.

Consumers developing brand image from brand meaning

A second conceptualization saw the brand as a perceptual entity; Hankinson (2004) claims this approach has its origins in consumer behaviour theory, as consumers perceived brands as having a set of attributes that offered a relevant value or values that appealed "to the consumer's senses, reasons and emotions" (Hankinson 2004, p.110). This definition can be considered as brand 'image' (Hankinson 2004; Nandan 2004), as it is an interpretive response to stimulation provided by the product, the company, and other social, cultural, and historic influences.

Fournier (1998) provided a broader conceptualization, suggesting that consumers interact with the brand to add meaning; later, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) proposed a third dimension - other consumers – and offered a triangular model of brand meaning creation between individual consumers, the branded product, and other consumers.

Brand communities

Whilst it was recognized that consumer interaction with brand was both an individual and a group act (Hankinson 2004; Kozinets et al 2004), theories of brand creation within a shared social context was expanded with the notion of brand communities (e.g. Luedicke 2006; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002; Muniz and Guinn 2001). Studies of brands as diverse as Harley Davidson motorcycles (Martin et al 2006), electronics (Muniz and Schau 2005), magazines (Davidson et al 2007), food spread (Cova and Pace 2006) presented a concept that brought consumers, marketing agents and producers together around a common brand interest in both formal and informal communities that further developed brand meaning at both an individual and a group level. Nevertheless, whilst the frame of influence of brand meaning was growing, these researchers still considered that the brand meaning was, primarily, determined by the marketers and that these interactions merely modified or refined the corporate intent. Whilst the consumers socialised around the brand they still regarded the brand as an object external to themselves (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008), and thus the meaning of the brand to the consumer - brand image - was still very much an interpretative adaptation of the corporate message

The consumer as co-producer of the marketing offer

Vargo and Lusch (2004) established, in their seminal article (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008), the notion of the consumer as co-producer of the final

marketing offer not only through interpretation of the corporate message about the good but by the value consumers derive from the use of those goods. They argue that "the marketing processes are completed only if and when consumers mobilize their own resources to avail themselves of services that marketers propose, and extract value-in-use from these offerings" (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008; p.5). They argue for a service dominant logic for marketing – in contrast with the goods-dominant logic – on the basis that goods do not have embedded value. The value is in how that good is used by the consumer; the use becomes the value, thus the consumer becomes the co-creator of value with the producer of the good. A similar logic was put forward earlier by Gronroos (2000):

“The focus is not on products, but on the consumers' value-creating processes, where value emerges for consumers, and is perceived by them...the focus of marketing is value creation rather than value distribution.” (pp 24-25)

Kozinets et al (2004) use this same logic for their concept of interagency, which refers to the interaction between producers, marketers and consumers in the co-production of brands. This concept is reinforced by Cova and Remy's (2007) suggestion that consumers are active prosumers (i.e. consumers who produce through consumption practices) who "take it upon themselves to weave realities (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008).

Thus the use of goods – the act of consumption – was recognized as a value-creating process. Interpretive consumer research began to relate the process of consumption to the development of its meaning (e.g. Arnould and Price 1993; Belk and Costa 1998; Penaloza 2001). This involved investigating how and why these objects were used through the different points of contact between consumer and product - i.e. the appraisal, acquisition, application and disposal of the product. In this context the productive nature of consumption (Firat and Venkatesh 1995) depends primarily on the symbolic nature of the brand as a tool for establishing relationships and communicating identities within social groups; studies have examined the character of brands as social symbols, and the way in which consumers use these symbols to negotiate social interactions (eg. Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988; Ellitt 1994; Solomon 1983). This raises questions about the relationship between brands and meaning; how that meaning is created and how it is communicated. As has been seen opinions as to the way in which such meaning develops vary considerably (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008); authors such as McAlexander et al (2002) consider meaning to be delivered by the marketer, whereas other authors (eg. de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo Riley 1999; Holt 2002) consider meaning to be “individually perceived” (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008, p.2) by the consumer.

More recently studies have focused on the social construction – or co-construction – of brand meaning between consumers and other stakeholders (Kates 2004; Luedicke 2006; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001; Vargo and Lusch 2004). Such studies propose “an integrated perspective” that conceptualizes

the brand meaning as being co-constructed by members of a “brand interest group” through social intercourse and interaction (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008, p.3). In what Ponsonby-McCabe and Boyle (2006) refer to “experiential brand places” (p.175) or ‘brandsapes’ (Kozinets et al 2004), consumers develop active brand cultures as the symbolic value of the brand eclipses the functional value of the product (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Muniz and Guinn 2001; Muniz and Schau 2005). Thus consumer culture scholars argue that “brands belong to and are created in concert with groups or communities” (Brown et al 2003; cited in Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008, p.5). This has led to the recognition that brand meaning is no longer the sole authorship of the manufacturer, the producer or the marketer. Through creative “buying, using, modifying, enhancing, or alienating” (Fuller et al 2008, p.360) of commercial goods and services consumers actively create their own brands to suit their individual and group needs. This was seen by some scholars as the consumer aggressively striving to evade the market logic (Kozinets 2002), to create emancipating consumer spaces (Murray and Ozanne 1991), and to escape the dominance of corporate commercialism (Muniz and Schau 2005).

Brand in a constant state of flux

Thus brands are now seen as a result not just of the product but of the use of that product; and, whilst individuals develop their own interpretations of the symbolic meaning of the brand, they do so in concert with others. The social consequences associated with these processes are factors that shape the brand

and thus through this deep involvement with the brand, and constant negotiation of the brand meaning in social contexts, consumers are seen to be constantly "employing, altering or rejecting brand meaning" (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008, p. 5). From this perspective brands no longer have a fixed or constant meaning; they are variables, open to interpretation and adaptation, and in a constant state of change (Fuller et al 2008; Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008). Pitt et al (2006) describe brands as "open systems" (p.115) and propose a theoretical framework to describe brands that comprise four dimensions; physical, textual, experiential, and meaning. These four constituents are co-produced in a social setting by consumers and producers. Their theoretical argument provides insight into the dimensions of the brand, and proposes that brands are more open to consumer modification and influence than was previously assumed; however their work to date "lacks empirical insights into how and why consumers contribute to the development of brands over time" (Fuller et al 2008, p.359). This study aimed in part to provide this insight.

Brand without the marketer

Whilst co-production acts to empower the consumer through their constant use, adaptation or rejection of brand meaning (Kates 2004; Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008), consumers were seen as being able only temporarily to escape the influence of the commercial market (Kozinets 2002; Fuller et al 2008). Whilst the service-dominant market logic envisioned by Vargo and Lusch (2004) empowered the consumer as the ultimate value creator, the

marketer or producer remained as a part of the value-creation process. However, Fuller et al (2008), in their study to investigate “an emerging phenomenon of community-driven brand creation” (p.359), drew attention to a consumer group that excluded the corporate marketer from the process. By way of example, the authors described the ways by which Apache, an Open Source software community, developed and communicated themselves as a brand. Each member of the Apache community was involved in the development of the products and the brand, yet what set Apache apart from commercial brands was that, rather than pass the communication of the brand to a third-party marketer, every member of the Apache community was an ambassador for the brand and communicated the brand, each communicating the brand through their own interpretation as formulated through their active and daily participation in the Apache community. Thus each brand message, whilst espousing a common set of values and beliefs, had a different voice and a uniquely personal perspective. Thus the brand could be conceptualised as a dynamic rather than static entity comprising not only product, but also process and producers.

Fuller et al (2008) point out that the activities of community brand members are not concerned with avoiding the logic of the market but with “evading the dependence on corporate innovation and brands” (p.364). They freely avail themselves of market processes – such as branding and off-shore production for their projects – whilst ignoring the marketing messages and meanings proposed by corporations as they develop their own, community-based, meanings. This study offers a unique response to Kozinet’s (2002) basic

concern that the consumer could only escape the market influence temporarily by proposing that it is escape from the corporate marketer, not the marketplace, which should be the objective. Indeed, Arnould (2007) states categorically that “escape is a Romantic idea, a response to the modern machine age, the apotheosis of which is the utopian dream” (p.108) on the basis that “the utopian spirit, however progressively motivated, is colonized by market logic” (p.103). In other words it is not avoidance of the market that is the goal, but rejection of corporate domination of the marketplace. And at the same time it highlights two current values of brands within society. On the one hand it emphasises the need for symbolic brands within a consumer culture; on the other hand it highlights the broadening and complex sources of reference and influence that consumers use to construct their brand images.

Beyond brand identity and brand image

In summary, progressive conceptualizations of brand have moved from the relatively simplistic notion of the brand as identifier and differentiator of the product – an identity instigated by the product owner or marketer – through visualizations of the brand as interpretations by the consumer in concert with both corporate stakeholders and other consumers, to the notion of brand image created by the consumption (use) of the product, rather than simply ownership of the product. And this consumption takes place in various social environments and interactions; it is a continual process of meaning development and, in consequence, results in brand meaning that is in a state of constant refinement or change. What is significant to the research described in

this thesis is that it is no longer a question of brand identity vs brand image, where image is interpretation. Consumers are moving past the point of merely interpreting that which is put before them; they are actively taking the product as raw material from which they can create their own, personalized individual or community brand (Fuller et al 2008). There is an obvious co-production, in that the manufacturer has put the product in the marketplace, but the meaning that product has to the consumer is far from determined by the marketer. Indeed, it is now the marketer who must respond to the meaning that the consumer chooses to develop for that product (Holt 2002).

3.3.4 Theories of brand attraction

Brand attraction is an area within brand research that has received particular attention. Consumer studies identify four major themes that encourage consumer brand attraction and influence brand image creation; community, distinction, authenticity and creativity (Fuller et al 2008). The key texts, and their study focus, are summarized in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Four major themes of brand attraction

Theme	Texts	Study focus
Distinction	Aaker 2010 Levy (1959) McCracken (1986) Thompson and Haytko (1997) Holt (2002)	Competitive relevance Symbolic value Cultural value Fashion meaning Consumer resistance

Authenticity	Holt (2002) Aaker (1996)	Consumer resistance Credibility
Creativity	Murray and Ozanne (1991) Kozinets (2002) Muniz and Schau (2005) Thompson and Coskuner (2007)	Market emancipation Market emancipation Religiosity Corporate resistance
Community	Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) Cova (2003) Kozinets (2002) McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) Thompson et al (2006) Luedicke (2006)	Brand communities Brand tribes Out-group resistance Building brand community Emotional branding Communities as social systems

Based on Fuller et al (2008)

Distinction: The symbolic value of the brand provides distinction; it creates emotional and functional relationships between the consumer and the brand, a relationship which is leveraged for both the development of self-identity and for social communications (Muniz and Schau 2005). Brands, particularly as tools for personal identity projects (Holt 2002), become “extended expressions of self” (Fuller et al 2008); the brand name becomes imbued with symbolic meaning through “the transfer of cultural resources, individual experiences, and social exchanges to the brand name” (Fuller et al 2008 citing Levy 1959,

McCracken 1986, and Murray 2002), and thus the brand attraction is their utility as resources for the development of distinctive identities.

Authenticity: Authenticity is claimed as being “among the most desired characters of a brand’s identity” (Fuller et al 2008, citing Aaker 1996). Corporations strive to replicate the brands as “authentic cultural resources” (Holt 2002, p.83), whilst consumers will modify the brand meaning to either increase or provide a perception of authenticity (Fuller et al 2008). Both these activities highlight a third quality of brand attractiveness, which is the opportunity for creativity provided by the brand. Recognition of the avenues for negotiation of meaning in the brand (e.g. Hankinson 2004; Kozinets et al 2004); Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008; Vargo and Lusch 2004) provides the consumer the creativity to modifying, vary, or even redefine brand meaning to their own agendas; for example, in efforts to emancipate themselves from the market (Kozinets 2002; Murray and Ozanne 1991) or to subvert them to their personal identity projects (Holt 2002).

Community: Other authors point to the formation of brand communities (Kozinets 2002; McAlexander et al 2002) as a method for consumers to “regain a sense of affectionate community within an exceedingly disinterested society” (Fuller et al 2008, p.359). Shared beliefs around a brand (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001) or a common consumption practice (Cova 2003) draw groups of consumers together in a process that not only reinforces existing consumer beliefs but also provides a sympathetic social group to further develop the meaning of the brand (McAlexander et al 2002). Brand communities are

significant to this study as they clearly illustrate that any consumer concept of brand has, in addition to its value on an individual level, a value in the context of social engagement and exchange.

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), a brand community is "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (p.412); they are communities of people who "cultivate close relationships with and around their most admired brands" (Fuller et al 2008, p. 361). Groups unite around a particular brand - e.g. Harley Davidson motorcycles (McAlexander et al 2002), electronics (Muniz and Schau 2005), magazines (Davidson et al 2007), food spread (Cova and Pace 2006) - and bring consumers, marketing agents and producers together around a common brand interest in both formal and informal communities that further developed brand meaning at both an individual and a group level. In addition such communities provide advantages to the individual including social distinctiveness (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), a place for social refuge (Kozinets 2001), and meaning and spiritualism (Muniz and Schau 2005 cited in Luedicke 2006). Models of brand community unite the brand, the producer, the marketer with groups of consumers (Luedicke 2006; McAlexander et al 2002). It is significant to note that these same brands create communities of antagonists against the brands and against the corporations (Fuller et al 2008); lobbyists create doppelganger brands (Thompson et al 2006), or anti-brand websites (Luedicke 2006), as well as individual resistance practices (Holt 2002).

Brand communities are significant because they examine consumer brand response on a group level, rather than on an individual level. However studies have tended to contain themselves within that community and have not extended the study beyond the boundaries of that community, and they have tended to study how the brand community operates together rather than how and why the brand perceptions are formed in the first place. And whilst the frame of influence of brand meaning was growing, these researchers still considered that the brand meaning was, primarily, determined by the marketers and that these interactions merely modified or refined the corporate intent. Whilst the consumers socialised around the brand they still regarded the brand as an object external to themselves (Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008), and thus the meaning of the brand to the consumer - brand image - was still very much an interpretative adaptation of the corporate message.

3.4 PLACE BRAND EVOLUTION

This section looks at how place branding has evolved from within the larger context of branding studies. Place branding has been developed from product and service branding, and owes much of its method to these branches. The main argument of this section is that, firstly, place should not be regarded as a 'product' and, secondly, rather than try to understand place by identifying – and, in marketing practice, isolating - key attributes, place should be understood in terms of meaning. The ultimate conclusion of the section is that whilst current place branding practices might be adequate for marketing purposes it is too narrow a focus to begin to answer the questions raised by the

study documented within this thesis, and thus a broader perspective of place is required.

3.4.1 Introduction to 'place' from a marketing perspective

The emotional factors between people and products that create brand associations and preferential choice (Albert et al 2008; Gobe 2001; Keller 1998; Travis 2000) also exist between people and places in the creation of preferred places (De Young 1999; Kaplan and Kaplan 1982). Factors influencing people's emotional attraction to places have been documented from several perspectives, including geography and human geography (Relph 1976; Tuan 2001), social, urban and architecture (Jacobs 1992; Lynch 1960; Norberg-Schultz 1979), psychology (Moser, Ratiu and Fleury-Bahi 2002) and anthropology (Auge 1995). However, there is currently still little research on the process of branding places (Hankinson 2001, 2004).

Work under the headings of place marketing (Ashworth and Voogd 1991; Kotler 1993) or tourism and leisure (Urry 1990) has tended to focus on the commodification of place and its selling (Voase 1999; Ward 1998) rather than "an honest acknowledgement of its cultural depth and complexity" (Ward 1998, p.5). Recent brand interventions in places general (Papadopoulos and Heslop 2002) or places specific such as New Zealand (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott 2002), would appear to confirm the capability of place to be branded.

However at the same time these programmes emphasise problems with the enactment of the brand in this realm (O'Shaugnessy 2000). In particular, the branding for Spain (Gilmore 2002) draws attention to specific variables that are either unique to place or are exaggerated in the condition of place; the product itself comprises a series of sub-products, each with their own benefits and interest groups; the consumers are broad in both demographic and psychographic profile; their expectations can be both diverse and contradictory; and, as Warnaby and Davies (1997) point out, the individual's requirements from the place can change based on circumstance and attitude.

The complexity of place

'Place' is a complex entity (Arefi, 1999; Seaton and Bennett 1996) and, has been noted in the case of Spain (Gilmore 2002), may be considered a category of products rather than a product in itself. It cannot therefore be assumed that one single model can cover all place brands. Hanna and Rowley (2008) report on a variety of studies that have applied branding concepts to various geographical entities, from towns to countries. What seems consistent between these disciplines is that they all highlight the complexities involved with branding the "multidimensional construct 'place' especially in relation to stakeholder engagement."(Hanna and Rowley 2008, p.61).

Why places can be seen as brands

Kavaratzis (2005) asks the questions “in what ways is a place a brand or [even] if a place can be seen as a brand” (p.335), and as a step towards an answers he quotes the definition of brands by David Aaker (1996, p.68): “a brand is a multidimensional assortment of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind” (cited in Kavaratzis 2005, p.335). Kavaratzis points to the symbolic values of a brand (Kavaratzis 2005) and how, in successful branding, they form the link to the consumers’ physical and psychological needs. He compares this to the way that places can be seen to satisfy the functional, emotional and symbolic needs of consumers (Rainisto 2003), and thus successful place branding can be seen as the process by which attributes of place that satisfy these needs can be integrated into a place’s unique proposition (Kavaratzis 2005).

3.4.2 The evolution of place branding

Place branding has emerged over recent years as a tool for both place marketers and place managers (Kavaratzis 2005) in response to a growing competitiveness between places. As Kavaratzis (2005) points out “it is vital for places, in all scales, to provide...an environment capable not only to attract new activity and place-users but also, and perhaps more importantly, to keep existing ones satisfied with their place”. (329)

Two trends formed the basis of place branding

Kavaratzis (2005) traces the history of place branding from marketing techniques that focused specifically on the promotion of place, and he identifies two specific trends that form the basis of the practice.

The first trend, a theoretical approach, was founded in Kotler and Levy's (1969) article "Broadening the Concept of Marketing" (Holbrook 1996), and expanded the marketing focus beyond "the traditional definition of goods and services" (Holbrook 1996, p.243). The theoretical emergence of place branding could be attributed, according to Ashworth and Voogd (1990), to three developments within the marketing discipline that resolved specific problems associated with transferring marketing knowledge from goods and services to place. These were the development of marketing in non-profit organizations, the development of social marketing, and, particularly, the development of image marketing, "all of which contributed to the liberation of traditional marketing thought from goals and practices attached to this initial field of application" (Kavaratzis 2005, p.330). As theory was established that supported the notion that places could be branded and marketed as readily as products or services, studies then investigated and developed the structures necessary for both place branding and marketing (Kavaratzis 2005).

The second contributing trend identified by Kavaratzis (2005) stems from city administrators who, in the late 1980's and early 1990's (Hannigan 2003),

faced a growing “urban crisis” (Kavaratzis 2005, p.330) that led to the decline of traditional urban economies. As Hannigan (2003) described it:

“...a fiscal crisis in cities across Europe and North America caused by the triple problems of de-industrialisation, a falling tax base and declining public expenditure had some serious implications for the city. Not only were factories closing and jobs disappearing but the mass industrial culture that had prevailed since the end of the Second World War was steadily weakening. During this same era, we witnessed...the rise of a new urban lifestyle in which visual images and myths were relentlessly packaged and presented (Goodwin 1993; 147-8). In combination, these forces provoked the emergence of a new ‘entrepreneurial’ (Harvey 1989) style of local economic development in which image promotion was privileged as being central by planners and politicians” (Hannigan 2003, p.353)

The resultant search for “new roles for cities and new ways of managing their problems (Barke 1999; p.486) led to local governments adopting the methods of business to run their cities, methods that included both promotion and profit motivations (Kavaratzis 2005). The focus of these efforts remained on marketing and the packaging the city for the marketplace (Barke 1999; Kotler et al 1999), which led to “a high degree of importance” being attributed to determining the marketing mix (Kavaratzis 2005, p.331). Several strategies were developed based on this approach; Ashworth and Voogd (1990), for example, suggested what they referred to as a “geographical marketing mix”

(p.31), and drew on a combination of instruments that included promotional measures, spatial-functional measures, organizational measures, and financial measures (Kavaratzis 2005). By way of contrast Kotler et al (1999) relied on a marketing mix suggested by general marketing, but identified four strategies applicable to place improvement which they claimed were the basis for building a competitive advantage (Kavaratzis 2005, p.331).

Place branding is a response to an increased competitiveness between places. (Kavaratzis 2005, p.329) and it has been observed that “it is vital for places, in all scales, to provide...an environment capable not only to attract new activity and place-users but also, and perhaps more importantly, to keep existing ones satisfied with their place” (Kavaratzis 2005, p.329).

Convergence of these trends

In parallel with the theoretical studies into the structure of place marketing, attempts were made to identify the actual methods that were appropriate to the marketing of places in general and cities in particular. (e.g. Hubbard and Hall 1998; Kavaratzis 2005). For example, the generic model of city governance developed by Hubbard and Hall (1998) imagined goals based on the re-imagining of specific locations and the “transformation of previously productive cities into spectacular cities of (and for) consumption” (Kavaratzis 2005, p.331); the pursuit of these goals was through a series of promotional efforts ranging from advertising and promotion, through large-scale physical

redevelopment, to cultural regeneration and public/private partnership (Kavaratzis 2005).

Both streams of activity – the study of theoretical structures for place marketing and the development of models for implementation – were forced to recognize that the marketing of place, and by implication the attraction of place, involved aspects and challenges unique to place that were not common to business or product marketing, and that whilst general marketing practices could provide the foundation for place marketing (Kotler et al 1999) there are particular problems unique to place that need to be identified and resolved in any successful model or strategy (Ashworth and Voogd 1990).

Branding practice – particularly product and services branding – had established the success of image marketing which led to the increasing use of branding in addition to or as well as marketing for places (Hauben et al 2002; Kavaratzis 2005; Rainisto 2003; Trueman et al 2004). The creation and packaging of a place image through branding techniques linked certain qualities – or perceptions – of place to consumer needs, desires and expectations, whilst at the same time shifting away from reliance on the physical product of place (Kavaratzis 2005). Recognition of the importance of image – and the ease by which it could be marketed – encouraged the development of place branding as the method by which such images could be identified or created through the packaging of symbolic attributes linking place image to consumer expectations (Kavaratzis 2005).

Efforts to link product branding, corporate branding and place branding

Places are complex in that they serve a wide range of users, both individuals and groups, and accommodate a broad range of activities (Kavaratzis 2005; Trueman et al 2004) under a variety of conditions. They generally have a broad stratum of stakeholders, and these stakeholders are frequently in disagreement about the meaning of that place; contestations of place and its evolution are common (Easthope 2004). Thus, from a brand or image perspective, places are more difficult to market than conventional product brands as they are open to alternative uses and thus alternative interpretations.

As a result Kerr (2006) claims that a location brand should be considered closer to a corporate brand than a product brand, a view shared by other scholars (e.g. Trueman et al 2004; Kavaratzis 2004; Rainisto 2003) who have claimed “significant similarities between corporate brands and place brands” (Kavaratzis 2005, p.335). One reason for this is that the corporate brand has a broad base construct that includes the actions of a variety of stakeholders “including employees, customers, investors, suppliers, partners, regulators, special interest groups and local communities” (Kerr 2006, p.279), a condition that has parallels in the conditions of place. Additionally – and in contrast to, say, product brand - the corporate brand leverages the corporate culture and vision as part of its marketing strategy and brand offer (Hatch and Schultz 2001). The argument from these scholars is that place branding needs to identify the unifying place culture that is greater than simply the sum of its physical attractions (Kerr 2006). The counter-argument is, of course, that the

place brand is unique unto itself and, whilst the process can be informed from other branding areas, it should be developed in response to the complexities of place and the unique demands such complexity puts upon efforts to market ‘place’.

3.4.3 Main foci of place branding studies

Kavaratzis (2005) identifies five distinct trends of place branding that are recurrent within the literature (table 3.2):

Table 3.2: Five trends of place branding

Trend	Author	Theme
place of origin branding	Kotler and Gertner 2002; Papadopoulos and Heslop 2002	Transferring the qualities, images and attributes of the products place of origin to the product brand
nations branding	Anholt 2002; Ham 2001; Gilmore 2002; O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy 2000; Endzina and Luneva 2004	Developing the national image usually for the benefit of tourism and the attraction of foreign investment
culture/entertainment branding	Evans 2001; Evans 2003; Florida 2002; Greenberg 2003; Hannigan 2004	Examining the effects, both positive and negative of cultural and entertainment branding on the physical,

		economic and social well-being of cities
destination branding	Morgan et al 2002; Brent-Ritchie and Ritchie 1998; Hankinson 2001; Hankinson 2004;	Most frequently researched for the marketing of tourist destinations, and from the perspective that places are consumed through a comparison of “prior images” with first-hand experience.
place/city branding	Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2005; Hankinson 2001; Hankinson 2004; Kavaratzis 2004; Trueman et al 2004;	Comparing central branding concepts with place brands, these studies either provide models to develop and manage place brands, or consider the suitability of particular branding tools for place branding

Based on Kavaratzis (2005)

In the case of ‘place of origin’ branding it can be argued that this is simply one aspect of the product brand; in this case ‘place brand’ is an attribute of the product, an existing external factor to benefit the development of the product brand rather than the focus of the branding exercise.

Place branding within tourism and destination marketing

Whilst place brand studies have engaged with a wide variety of subjects across a range of academic areas, it is in the arena of tourism and destination image where place branding has been most developed (Hankinson 2004). Studies on destination image as a branding concept could be seen as early as the mid-1970s "through Hunt's influential works of image in tourism development" (Hunt 1975, cited in Hanna and Rowley 2008, p.63). Practitioners' perspectives on destination branding remained with a primary focus on increasing tourism numbers and tourism spending, though 'destination' is considered just one "aspect within the conceptual entity 'place'" (ibid, p.63). However, Brent-Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) point out that a destination image can become a symbol for a wide range of community projects that fall outside of the tourism mandate, indicative of a broadening of the scope of place branding to encompass "economic, socio-political and historical prospects" (Hanna and Rowley 2008, p.64). This broadened position was summed up by Anholt (2005, cited in Kerr 2006) when he defined place branding as "the practice of applying brand strategy and other marketing techniques and disciplines to the economic, social, political and cultural developments of cities, regions and countries" (Kerr 2006, p 278).

Nevertheless tourism and destination marketing has dominated the literature of place branding; according to Hanna and Rowley (2008) place branding research has, in addition to leisure tourism, focused on four other principal areas; business tourism (Bradley et al 2002; Hankinson 2005; Ulaga et al

2002); culture including gastronomy (Roberts and Hall 2001; Sharples 2003; Telstrom et al 2006; Waragenau and Che); sports (Chalpin et al 2003; Smith 2005); and film, literature and music (Gibson and Davidson 2004; Hudson and Ritchie 2006; Johns and Mattsson 2005) (cited in Hanna and Rowley 2008, p.64)

3.4.4 The brand measurement of ‘contained’ place – the retail mall

The development of place branding has focused on ‘uncontained’ places - cities, districts, countries (Kavaratzis 2005; Hanna and Rowley 2008; Kerr 2006). In the retail arena, investigations into the brand image of individual stores and retail malls has generally been approached using methods more common to product branding or consumer research (e.g. Arnould 2005; Dennis et al 2002; Newman, Dennis and Shaman 2006; Sit, Merrilees and Birch 2003). Indeed, as Dennis et al (2002) point out “[the] term ‘image’ is more common than ‘brand’ in the context of shopping centres” (p.355).

Using product brand methods to measure (retail) place brand image

As discussed in section 3.2.2, the oft-cited Lindquist (1975) study used attributes to provide a description of retail brand image. Significantly, when discussing the implications for future research, he states that such research should “strive to identify key image dimensions”. In a more recent study based on key attribute identification and evaluation, Dennis et al (2002) utilize brand measurement techniques in the formulation of a method to measure the

consumer image of retail malls. The authors borrow from several brand measurement models, in particular the qualitative methods of de Chernatony and McDonald (1998) and the quantitative methods of Aaker (1991) and Butterfield and Haigh (1998) to measure retail mall image based on favourable or unfavourable responses to identified attributes of the mall. The outcome of their study, named the “‘Brunel Index’ attractiveness brand index scale” (Dennis et al 2002, p.365), “has been demonstrated to measure [brand image attractiveness]...for shopping centres” (ibid, p.368).

These studies follow a common branding discipline practice of reductionism, distilling a brand image down to a few key attributes (e.g. Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; de Chernatony 2001; de Chernatony and McDonald 1998; Keller 1998). Whilst such a simplification might have value in the marketing arena, a simple comparison with the Lindquist (1975) study shows the inability of such a scale to provide an holistic and complete description of the retail brand image. Equally, the omission of much of the description makes it unlikely that there is sufficient information to inform on the complex nature of consumer brand image development. Further, the Dennis et al (2002) study – as with the Lindquist (1975) study – considers each attribute in isolation; neither acknowledge any cumulative effect of these attributes, nor do they attempt to determine the process by which value is attached to them. The attaching of value, or meaning, to these attributes is the principle method by which place preference is created (Easthope 2004; Gustafson 2001); understanding the process by which this valuation occurs will contribute both

to the ability to create places more sensitive to the needs of people, as well as to the practices of building stronger place brands.

Attributes as signifiers of a higher order

In the studies under discussion ‘attributes’ refers to the positive attributes of a place brand; attributes that have been identified as being important components of the consumer’s belief about the brand (de Chernatony and McDonald 1998; Keller 1998). They are important (to marketers) because they have positive meaning for the consumer; they resonate with a personally-held value or desire on the part of the consumer (Keller 1993). On this basis it would seem that the brand attribute becomes a signifier of a “higher order” core value held by the consumer. The nature of this higher order is not clear; whether it is a broader, more abstract concept, or simply another, more general value – or indeed something quite different altogether, becomes a question that needs to be addressed in the proposed research in order to clarify this relationship between personal values and “the image” of place. However, this argument provides three significant points of reference for the research proposed in this paper. First, it puts the foundation of image squarely with consumer attitudes and the subsequent reflexive interaction with place, rather than with place and the subsequent reaction of the consumer, which thus positions the research within the paradigm of consumer behaviour - or consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005) - rather than the perspective of any place-making discipline. Second, it suggests that the factors that influence the image are those factors that communicate or illustrate the

values inherent in the place brand. Third, it suggests that consumers evaluate these factors by comparing them favourably or unfavourably with the personal values that they hold. This third supposition is further supported by the way in which place is used as a part of self-image construction (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell 1996); qualities are 'taken' from place to shape personal identity in a process akin to reflexive interaction. This looping process compares qualities and experiences of place with internal maps held in the consumer's memory. Such comparisons lead to favourable or unfavourable evaluations of the place or the adoption of qualities to modify the internal map in order to adapt to change (Arata 2002).

The inadequacies of attribute-based

Whilst these studies do not directly suggest the reliance of brand attributes on personally-held values, they do begin to question the ability of the place image construct to be described in such simple terms as a list of attributes. In particular the Lindquist (1975) study identifies nine attributes as broad categories that require description by a list of sub-attributes in order to be clearly understood (e.g. "merchandise" is described as having five attributes of "quality, selection or assortment, styling or fashion, guarantees, and pricing" (p.31)). Yet rather than clarifying the nine attributes, the categorisation bundles fundamental characteristics with more abstract concepts (e.g. lighting and air-conditioning with social class appeal and self-image congruency) and suggests a difficulty of describing the phenomenon of place in linear or singular terms. At the same time, however, it does imply the existence of a

more complex relationship structure between attributes, categories and concepts that is not fully explained or revealed in this study. And whilst the study can be criticised for grouping categorical attributes with conceptual attributes, it does serve to suggest that it is not the attributes but the interpretation of those attributes which create the place image which, in turn, provides the foundation for a more detailed investigation. The value of this study is that, by illustrating the existence of a broad range of qualities (both concrete and conceptual), it implies that there is a more complex and layered construction that is not confined simply to the image itself but that relies on its relationship with personal values in order to exist. In addition it can be argued that the inclusion of such relative values as 'quality' also requires reference to some value framework external to the object under description, leading to a notion of place image as a dynamic rather than a static concept (Easthope 2004; Massey 1994).

Whilst both the Lindquist (1975) and the Dennis et al (2002) studies would seem to provide a partial description of mall brand image, there is no way of knowing how complete that description is. In addition they do not attempt to explain how these images are constructed or the relevance that these images have to the consumer.

Other studies in the retail literature go one step further, by linking the retail image to some form of consumer behaviour (e.g consumer preferences and patronage (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Ruiz, 1999; Pessemier, 1980(80), frequency of visits (Haynes and Talpade, 1996; Howell and Rogers, 1980),

amount of money spent (Donovan and Rossiter, 1982), amount of purchase (Spies et al, 1997; Howell and Rogers, 1980), extending the stay (Wakefield and Baker, 1998), and re-patronage intention (Wakefield and Baker, 1998; Spies et al., 1997)) but, again, these tend to be causal studies that stop short of exploring the process by which the image is formed and the reasons for the attractions.

These studies provide information regarding the components of image and, in some cases, the effect that image might have on the consumer. They also, however, draw attention to the need for further, more in-depth research if a fuller understanding is required of the process by which image is formed. Nevertheless they do provide insight into the methods that the brand discipline adopts for measuring retail image, and show that models can be borrowed from the product, service and corporate branches of the branding discipline (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; de Chernatony and McDonald 1998; de Chernatony, Drury and Segal-Horn 2002) to identify attributes associated with retail place brand image. However these models are designed to identify key attributes of the image for the purpose of marketing rather than to fully describe the image, and, whilst they do produce a list of attributes, they provide no way of determining how comprehensive these lists might be. By pursuing a course of research that identifies higher-order core values held by the consumer this provides the opportunity to investigate the image from the perspective of the consumer. However, the practice of distillation to isolate the few key attributes of description or attraction that is essential to marketing

draws into question the ability of a purely brand/marketing perspective to adequately address the questions raised by the research.

3.4.5 The argument *against* attributes and *for* meaning

Lichrou et al (2008) claim there is growing support for research to respond to the environment holistically, rather than breaking it down into component parts, in order for us to make sense of it. They contest the treatment of place as a set of attributes and argue for a broader conceptualization of place in terms of the meaning each place holds for each consumer. In particular they argue that whilst place – in particular tourism destinations – has traditionally been framed as a product, it is more accurate and insightful to frame place as a consumer narrative (Lichrou et al 2008); a story or series of stories that consumers develop when they recall a particular place. Marketing approaches in general, and branding in particular, have developed from the underlying assumption that place should be treated as a product (e.g Ashworth and Voogd 1990; Buhalis 2000; Holbrook 1996; Kotler et al 1993; Murphy, Pritchard and Smith 2000). Yet given the complexity of place – the intertwining of historic, cultural, political and social influences (Easthope 2004) – Lichrou et al (2008) argue against *presenting* places as a set of attributes, in favour of *understanding* places as sites of meaning.

Place as list of attributes

According to Ashworth and Voogd (1990), place contains a set of facilities and products whilst, at the same time place itself can be regarded as a facility and a product. Acknowledging the complexity of place, Murphy, Pritchard and Smith (2000) develop Kotler, Bowen and Makens's (1996) product environment model to propose their own conceptual model which combines the place's macro-environments with the products and services found in the infrastructure, a model that essentially describes the assets of place that together create the tourist environment (Lichrou et al 2008). Such framing leads to a branding of place that concerns itself with selecting specific place attributes in order to position the place as a strong brand (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott 2002). According to Lichrou et al (2008) this approach draws on elements of physiography, history and culture in order to create attractive destination (place) images and to differentiate the place from its competitors. However the problem with treating these features as objective attributes is first that such an approach fundamentally assumes and creates a single rigid image of place and thus provides a limited response to the myriad of often conflicting consumer expectations. In addition, such a categorical and singular attribute-based place description cannot acknowledge contestations of place. Second, and related to the singular nature of the image being created through the isolation of so-called key attributes, Lichrou et al (2008) argue that this framing of place as a consumer product brings into play all the marketing tools relevant to consumer products. Thus, when faced with the problem of selecting which attributes are chosen as representative of the place image, of

the infinite number of possibilities offered by place, they are selected on the basis of those which are of appeal to the particular market segment deemed to be the most relevant target. This highlights one of the basic paradoxes related to place and destination marketing. Haywood (1990, cited in Lichrou et al 2008) draws attention to the fact that tourism is a community industry; it requires buy-in and actions from a wide range of stakeholders resident within the place community to deliver on the promises made to the tourists by the brand. In the efforts to attract and please tourists – or any outsiders to whom place is being promoted - it is easy to neglect the needs of segments of the community.

Attributes have significance, but as signifiers of meaning rather than meaning in themselves. To attempt to understand place by focusing on attributes assumes that all meaning is represented by an attribute and there is no evidence to support this. And if not all attributes are included in the study then the risk is high that a different, probably inaccurate understanding of place is created. And, finally, the collective influence of the attributes cannot be considered unless one is certain all attributes have been identified and accounted for; for just as a cake would taste quite different with more salt or less sugar, so places would appear quite different if particular attributes were missing from the evaluation.

Place as meaning

The key issue under debate is that branding places by selecting from a list of attributes creates both a rigid image of place and an image developed to appeal to a specific typology of people - or, in marketing jargon, market segment. In the context of this research such an approach favours the marketers' perspective rather than the consumers' perspective, and lacks the impartiality of investigation to begin to answer the research questions.

Lichrou et al (2008) propose a more flexible conceptualization of place; they argue that places should be branded based on the meanings they hold, or can provide, to interested stakeholders. They emphasise the dynamic and fluid nature of place (consistent with the arguments of, say, Massey (1994) or Easthope (2004)) and question how identities created from a list of attributes can respond to such shifts. By comparison, a narrative approach - which is a fundamental method by which we create meaning for ourselves in society (Bruner 1986, 1990; Escalas 2004) - is both more natural and more flexible. Further, it better accommodates for the contestations of place, providing a framework that can accommodate a variety of narratives without the exclusion of others.

The focus for Lichrou et al (2008) is on place as a site for the creation, negotiation, and exchange of meaning, a notion supported by the social construction perspective of place (Easthope 2004; Massey 1994; Stokowski 2002). They argue that framing places as products excludes the human

experience of place; it commodifies and freezes culture and history by extracting them as the place's assets, making interactivity difficult and denying the local community any development potential. This argument, whilst relatively new to place branding studies, has a well-established literature on other disciplines, such as sociology (Easthope 2004; Stokowski 2002; Gustafson 2001) or human geography (Cantor 1977, 1997; Massey 1994; Relph 1976). Place, from this perspective, can be seen as a process rather than an outcome (Easthope 2004; Lichrou et al 2008; Massey 1994) and thus the interaction of people and places – through which the consumption of place occurs (Urry 2007) – is part of the process that is continually shaping and reshaping places. An important part of this conceptualization is that meaning creation takes place both within the place (on-site) and outside of the place (off-site), and draws on knowledge, experiences and beliefs that are not limited to nor necessarily produced by the place (Easthope 2004; Massey 1994; Stokowski 2002)

Tourist places as narrative

Tourist destination studies offer good examples of the use of consumer narratives (e.g Hankinson 2001, 2004; Seaton and Bennett 1996). Within this field it has been suggested that the dreams and fantasies of consumers are a major part of the characteristics of tourism (Seaton and Bennett 1996). Tourist places become settings within which consumer narratives can be developed to match those dreams and fantasies; those narratives are extensions of the narratives that create personal and community identities, and therefore

the narratives of place cannot be viewed (or measured) without reference to the network of social activities and interactions that define our lives generally.

3.4.6 Limitations of the branding perspective for this study

Mommas (2003) states: “city branding is associated primarily with the economically inspired desire to position cities more positively in the midst of a scaled-up, more mobile and flooded market of locations and destinations” (Mommas 2003, cited in Kerr 2006, p.278). The focus of branding in general and place branding in particular is most often economically based, intent on producing a positive image, and seeking to differentiate one product of place from another (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Hankinson 2004; Kapferer 2004; Muhlbacher and Hemetsberger 2008). Thus, in marketing, the “why” is rarely of interest unless it can be seen to inform predictability for “how”. Simply put, marketing looks to isolate the key factors that will attract people to places; other disciplines seek to understand the full dynamic of people/place interaction. And whilst place branding is considered to apply “brand strategy and other marketing techniques and disciplines to the economic, social, political and cultural development of cities, regions and countries” (Kerr 2006, p.278) - i.e. it involves itself with broader issues of social and cultural development - it is still focused on improving the image of places for the purpose of attracting people and/or capital. In short, it focuses on the selling of places, with no broader remit to describe the phenomenon in its entirety. Seen in the context of the research study detailed in this thesis, such a focus seems unlikely to provide a broad enough investigative base to achieve the stated

research aim of identifying and explaining how consumers developed their image of the brand for a retail mall.

3.5 CONCLUSION OF BRANDING AND PLACE BRANDING STUDIES

The specific objective of this research was develop a theory as to how consumers developed their image of the brand for a retail mall. As such branding studies appear to be limited in their ability to inform and assist in achieving these aims. Branding studies do not aim to produce a holistic description or understanding of the consumer interaction with products or places but, rather, to explore ways to improve the consumer response to the brand in the context of the marketplace. They aim at producing an attractive brand identity which can be communicated to consumers to elicit a favorable response, generally with the intention of encouraging some kind of economic exchange (Keller 1998; Kotler et al 1993). This aim focuses on what is likely to make the brand attractive and what will differentiate this brand from its competitors. It generally does not concern itself with the process of how that attraction is formed or why the attraction is significant to the consumer.

The review of place branding suggests that it is more general to treat place as a product (Kavaratzis 2005). Further, place branding practice has tended to focus on the reductionist activity of isolating key attributes favourable to the consumer, with little investigation into understanding the creation of meaning that is inherent in the consumer use of brands (Arnould 2005; Lichrou et al 2008). Such an approach creates a rigid image of place, whereas describing

place in terms of meaning provides a richer, more flexible brand that is accessible to a broader range of consumers. However, whether attribute-based or meaning-based, the branding perspective aims to produce a positive/attractive image of place and to suppress, conceal or convert negative aspects; it does not produce an holistic description of the people/place dynamic but, rather, isolates the researcher from the wider range of consumer emotions and motivations. Lichrou et al (2008) specifically group shopping centres with leisure activities and tourist destinations, drawing attention to the concept of malls as places, and drawing attention to Langrehr's (1991) observation that consumers "buy so they can shop, not shop so they can buy" (p.428).

Thus, from this review of the literature, it is doubtful that the branding or marketing studies perspective offers the tools to explore the depth and breadth of the questions raised by this study. To borrow from Tucker (1974), approaching the research detailed in this thesis from a marketing or branding perspective is the equivalent to "the ways that fishermen study fish rather than as marine biologists study them" (Tucker 1974, p.31). In contrast, sociological and human geography studies investigate the holistic phenomena related to people and their interaction with places; these studies are primarily interested in understanding and describing the broader picture of how and why people interact with places (e.g. Auge 1995; Kaplan and Kaplan 1982; Norberg-Schultz 1979; Relph 1976; Tuan 2001). Thus the next chapter of this thesis reviews literature that takes a wider, more holistic investigation of the people/place dynamic. It reviews the literature on concepts of place and sense

of place, treating the mall experience as a place experience, and thus expanding the study context beyond the physical constraints of the mall. In particular it looks at the social aspects of the place experience and how this influences consumer cognitive constructions of image.

Chapter 4.0 PLACE STUDIES

“The concept of place is complex and has been the subject of much recent academic interest and debate” (Easthope 2004, p.128, citing Gieryn 2000 and Malpas 1999)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to identify and explain the process by which retail mall brand images develop in the mind of the consumer. This chapter considers studies that take a broader view of place than branding, in particular studies that explore the people/place dynamic as a holistic phenomenon, rather than the narrower perspective of branding and marketing.

Section 2 begins by clarifying the kind of place that a mall is, and then Section 3 provides definitions of various place-related conditions as they are used in this thesis. Within these definitions ‘sense of place’ is discussed as being a more informative perspective for this research rather than ‘place brand’. In Section 4 major models of place are then compared and in Section 5 the concept of ‘place as a node on a network of social interactions’ is discussed at length, as the concept of place most appropriate to this research. Finally Section 6 discusses Gustafson’s (2001) model of place in relation to the aims of this research.

4.2 THE MALL AS 'PLACE'

The retail mall can be considered as a category of place (Lichrou et al 2008; Meethan 2001), and therefore mall brand image can be considered a category of place brand image. A review of place studies reveals a broader set of investigations into people's associations with, and needs of, place than is provided by brand studies, and suggests that adopting a socially constructed place perspective for retail malls will open up avenues of influence not revealed in the branding studies.

There are significant differences between the retail mall as a place and, say, a city as a place. For one thing ownership is not in dispute in quite the same way; malls, for all they appear to be public spaces, are in fact private (Kunstler 1994). For a second, the nature of the mall can be changed easily to accommodate or adopt another identity, either permanently or temporarily. Third whilst the predominant function of the mall, to display and sell consumer goods, is not its only purpose, in the majority of cases this is its principle objective and the one that distinguishes this kind of place from other places. It is an objective that emphasizes the significance of consumption and consumer studies to this research; not only do malls, as places, provide the opportunity for meaning creation through the consumption of place (Urry 2007), but their relationship to the branded goods they sell provide further opportunity for the creation and negotiation of meaning (Han, Nunes and Dreze 2010)

This research is investigating the formation of the brand image by consumers of the retail mall; essentially the study of a dynamic relationship between people and place. And whilst marketing and branding studies consider ways to create and promote these relationships favourably, there are other disciplines that provide a broad range of studies that describe the many different aspects of these relationships phenomenon, particularly as they occur in social, cultural, political, and historical contexts (e.g. sociology (Easthope 2004; Stokowski 2002; Gustafson 2001); human geography (Relph 1976; Cantor 1977; Massey 1995); anthropology and psychology (Auge 1995; Kaplan and Kaplan 1982; philosophy (Castells 1983; Harvey 1991; Lefebvre 1992; Soja 1989). These studies are concerned with all aspects of the people/place dynamic including attractiveness, identity, and meaning, and result in more detailed descriptions of the people/place dynamic (place brand) as there is no limiting requirement 'for the purposes of marketing'. Thus these descriptions - and the subsequent models - result in richer descriptions of the people/place dynamic, and in the wider context of our whole life experience rather than simply in its marketplace/commodity context (Turner and Turner 2006; Massey 1995; Easthope 2004; Gustafson 2001; Stokowski 2002).

4.3 PLACE-RELATED DEFINITIONS

The notion of place is "Beguilingly simple, yet formidably complex" (Devine-Wright 2007, p6). It is the "cornerstone" of both environmental psychology studies (Bonnes and Secchiaroli 1995) and environmental behaviour studies (Sommer 2000). However, whilst its significance is generally accepted "there

is no unifying paradigm to study place in the environmental-behaviour field. Rather a plurality of approaches exist (Patterson and Williams 2005)" (Devine-Wright 2007, p6). This is evidenced by the range of descriptive terms used (e.g. sense of place, topophilia, rootedness, place attachment) and by the varying descriptions and definitions of these terms in different fields of study (Devine-Wright 2007). Thus for the sake of clarity the key terms referred to and used within this study - place, place attachment, place identity, sense of place - require clear definition.

Place: place "refers to a location or space that has gained special meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes" (Nanzer 2004, p.364). Interpretations of 'location' and 'space' are not restricted to geographic coordinates; location, for example, can refer to such entities as cultural location, historical location, or political location, as well as geographic location (Easthope 2004; Massey 1995)

The 'place' construct is considered to comprise three components; the physical form, the activities that take place there and, in particular, the subsequent meaning that is created there (Cantor 1977; Relph 1976; Ujang 2010). The physical forms associated with place are interpreted within a socially constructed framework of meaning (Easthope 2004; Massey 1994, 1995; Nanzer 2004). Through the interpretation of the physical properties and the activities that are carried out, place becomes a site for the creation, negotiation and exchange of meaning (Nanzer 2004).

Sense of place: The experiencing of place involves identifying ones surroundings in order to recognize place (Relph 1976) and identify qualities to make it distinctive from other places (Lynch 1960). The outcome of these experiences is regarded as 'sense of place' (Nanzer 2004). According to Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) sense of place research has focused on three constructs; place attachment, place dependence, and place identity.

Place attachment: place attachment has been defined as the affective bond between people and places (Hildago and Hernandez 2001). Riley (1992) relates this attachment to the experiences individuals have with place, a notion expanded by Gustafson (2001) when he links experiences to the creation of meaning within places; it is this meaning that creates the subsequent attachment to place.

Studies from the environmental behaviour school suggest that the meanings inherent within place attachment enrich people's lives by providing a sense of belonging and purpose (Buttimer 1980; Kyle, Absher and Graefe 2003; Low and Altman 1992; Tuan 1980). Schreyer, Jacob and White (1981), in the context of outdoor recreational facilities, proposed that place attachment was a result of a user's valuation of a recreational setting. This valuation comprised two dimensions of meaning; first functional meanings that relate to specific activity needs and, second, emotional and symbolic meanings. Empirical research by Williams and Roggenbuck (1989) produced results that corresponded with the two dimensions of Schreyer et al

(1981), together with a third dimension that incorporated the negative appraisals of place. Subsequent research showed that the first two dimensions of Williams and Roggenbuck (1989) - and by extension Schreyer et al (1981) - were found to be the most reliable across a range of samples (Moore and Graefe 1994; Moore and Scott 2000; Warzecha and Lime 2000).

It is not surprising then that retail places, as one of the products of place, should share these dimensions as discussed earlier (Lindquist 1975; Martineau 1958); what is significant is the depth of understanding that these studies offer in comparison to branding-based studies. More importantly, where branding studies are seeking to generate positive attributes and meanings, these studies are neutral – they seek to understand and describe the phenomenon for better or for worse. The valuation of place meaning, both a functional and symbolic, by the consumer will happen with or without the intervention of the marketers and, more significantly, they will almost inevitably occur beyond the boundaries controlled by the marketer. The research of Schreyer, Jacob and White (1981) and Williams and Roggenbuck (1989) link meaning to the evaluation of attributes which, as noted earlier (section 3.4.5), emphasise that it is the meaning rather than the attribute which is the ultimate description of the phenomenon. Equally it should be noted that whilst attributes might signify meaning it does not necessarily follow that all meaning has a signifying

attribute. Thus an understanding of the people/place dynamic requires the pursuit of meaning, not simply the pursuit of attributes.

Place dependence: Stokols & Shumaker (1981), in their research into sense of place, were amongst the first to recognize the concept of place dependency, which they defined as the ability of one place to satisfy the goals or needs of people better than another place (Nanzer 2004). That is, whilst place attachment is on a place-by-place basis, place dependency is more focused on the consumer's preference between places. Dependency occurs "when the occupants of a setting perceive that it supports their behavioral goals better than a known alternative" (Williams et al 1992, p. 31). Moore and Graefe (1994) went on to define place dependence as being "the degree to which occupants perceive themselves to be strongly associated with and dependent on a particular place" (p. 19).

Place identity: the development of self-identity is in part through "a complex interaction with the environment and the socio-cultural processes of life" (Nanzer 2004, p.365). The personal and often intense nature of experiences with place, and the memories that continue after the experiences, "magnify their importance in the development of an individual's self-identity" (Nanzer 2004, p.366). According to Lalli (1992) "place identity can be viewed as part of self-identity. Self-identity comprises specific and conscious convictions, interpretations

and evaluations of oneself. Therefore, place identity is an aspect of an individual's identity" (p. 287).

Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) adopted Breakwell's (1992) model of identity to describe the place identity construct as comprising four components; self-esteem, self-efficacy, distinctiveness, and continuity.

Sense of place is of particular importance to this research as it represents the way in which we relate to places and the emotional relationship we develop for them (Casey 2001; Easthope 2004; Massey 1995; Relph, 1976; Stokowski 2002; Tuan, 2001). Places are bestowed with meanings which are shared between particular communities. As noted above frequently (though not always) people develop attachment to places which, in turn, becomes an integral part of their identity (Nanzer 2004).

The definition of 'sense of place' is not consistent throughout the literature (Stedman 2003). It is often treated as being synonymous with other terms such as topophilia (Tuan 1974), rootedness (Chawla 1992; Tuan 1980), environmental embeddedness (Hummon 1992). Tuan, for example, distinguishes between 'rootedness' and 'sense of place; the former is "being at home in a unselfconscious way" (Easthope 2004, p.130), whereas 'sense of place' involves knowing through conscious effort (Tuan 1980).

Within this thesis 'sense of place' refers to the experiences place - of experiencing the physical forms, the activities, and both experiencing

meanings and creating meanings - that combine together to form 'sense of place' (Shamsuddin and Ujang 2008). As will be elaborated on later (section 4.4) these experiences of place may or may not be first-hand, and they may or may not occur within geographical locations.

Using sense of place rather than place brand in this research

This research aims to identify and explain the process by which retail mall brand images develop in the mind of the consumer. Brand images are, according to Keller (1998), created from the sum total of experiences with the brand which, superficially at least, seem to indicate a parallel between place brand image and sense of place. Place brand is the sum total of experiences with the place (Keller 1998) and sense of place is the combined experiences of place (Nanzer 2004; Shamsuddin and Ujang 2008).

Place branding grew out of place marketing (Kavaratzis 2005); Anholt (2005) has described place branding as 'the practice of applying brand strategy and other marketing techniques and disciplines to the economic, social, political and cultural development of cities, regions and countries'. (Kerr 2006, p.278). Thus place brand image is the evaluation of what is primarily a marketing-constructed identity, which highlights the fundamental difference between place brand (originating from the place marketer) and sense of place (originating from the consumer). The immediate consequence is that the branding perspective is concerned with achieving positive images generally within an economic/transactional discipline. Sense of place on the other hand

explores the more holistic phenomenon of the people/place dynamic from a variety of study disciplines. And as has been illustrated in the literature review, the sense of place construct has been described in far greater depth and breadth than place brand (eg. Casey 2001; Gustafson 2001; Jorgensen and Stedman 2001; Massey 1995; Relph 1976; Shamsuddin and Ujang 2008; Stokowski 2002; Tuan 2001), in particular the role of place identity, place attachment, and place dependency within the 'sense of place' construct.

Place has been extensively researched from a variety of disciplines (Low and Altman 1992) yet the marketing field "has yet to investigate the profound meanings associated with place in respect to marketing activities" (Brocato 2006, p.8). Brocato (2006) further points out that whilst marketing studies have investigated the cues resident in the commercial environment for consumer evaluation, these studies generally "failed to look at the environment as a central object of attachment and experience" (ibid, p.8). This view was echoed by Sherry (2000) who lamented the lack of investigation into consumer's experience of places, and a lack of consideration for "the beliefs and rituals that consumers use to vivify their built environments" (Sherry 2000, p.278).

This research is particularly concerned with the consumer's experience of place, of retail place. It does not restrict itself simply to positive brand images, but focuses on the process by which the image - positive or negative - is formed. In particular it acknowledges the influences and complexities associated with socially constructed meanings and those beliefs and rituals

referred to by Sherry. Thus sense of place, rather than place brand image, would appear to offer a more encompassing theoretical foundation from which to pursue the research goals.

4.4 MODELS OF PLACE

Models of place have been developed through research from a variety of perspectives and from within a wide range of disciplines including geography and human geography (Harvey 1991; Relph 1976; Massey 1995; Soja 1989; Tuan 2001); social, urban and architecture (Easthope 2004; Gieryn 2000; Jacobs 1992; Lynch 1960; Norberg-Schultz 1979); psychology (Moser, Ratiu and Fleury-Bahi 2002); environmental psychology (de Young 1999; Kaplan and Kaplan 1982); anthropology (Auge 1995); philosophy (Casey 2001; Heidegger 1973; Malpas 1999). In contrast with the branding studies examined earlier, these social science studies tend towards broader conceptualisations of place, identifying categories rather than individual attributes. The following consider four significant models of place that illustrate these conceptualizations.

Place model 1: Relph (1976), in the field of human geography, discusses meanings of place as they occur in relationship with the physical realm and the activities that take place (Table X). He identifies three components of place; physical setting, activities, and meanings. He argued that whilst ‘meaning’ appears to be the most difficult concept to grasp it is the most important in the real world. Urban designers and architects who fail to recognize the meanings

places have for groups and individuals are in danger of damaging authentic places or, at the very least, producing inauthentic ones (Gustafson 2001).

Place model 2: Canter (1977), in the field of psychology, offered a similar model based on meanings of place and their relationships to activities and physicality of places. His model was derived from psychological studies, and proposed that place was derived from the relationships between actions, conceptions and physical attributes (Gustafson 2001). He drew particular attention to the influence that the physical qualities exercised on the psychological and behavioural processes and, significantly, emphasized that individuals held differing conceptualizations of place, thus introducing both individual and group 'sense of place' awareness (Gustafson 2001).

Place model 3: Agnew (1987) comes at it from the social science perspective, yet his model remains consistent with the earlier descriptions of Relph (1976) and Canter (1977). He again identifies three major components of the concept of place; 'locale', the arena where social interactivity takes place; 'location', the geographically-based area that contains the space for social (and economic) interaction; 'sense of place', which he describes as "the structure of feeling" (Agnew 1987, p.28). Perhaps his most significant contribution is the assertion that, whilst any one of these elements might predominate any given study it is the combination of them all that fully captures the sense of place. In addition, his dependency on social interaction for place meaning both reinforces and adds complexity to the concept of higher-order core values. Thus "meaningful places emerge in a social context and through social relations, they are

geographically located and at the same time related to their social, economic, cultural etc. surroundings, and they give individuals a sense of place, a 'subjective territorial identity' (Agnew, 1987)."(Gustafson 2001, p.6)

Place model 4: Canter (1997) later developed a more complex model based on four interrelated facets of place.; functional differentiation, aspects of design, place objectives, and scale of interaction (Gustafsen 2001). This was essentially an expansion of his earlier model to include individual, cultural and social aspects of place; functional differentiation followed the earlier theme of 'activities', whilst the 'aspects of design' focused on the physical properties of place. The 'place objectives' facet reflected the 'conceptions' of his earlier model yet provided substantial expansion to include both individual and social qualities of place, together with cultural aspects.

Whilst these studies are not primarily aimed at describing the place image, they do seek to identify that which is important about place to the consumer. In addition, they offer insight both as to why the place might be considered important by the consumer and how that importance is valued.

These models are important to this study in as much as they provide a foundation for understanding the place construct. Equally they offer a broader perspective than branding studies. However, whilst they identify the place construct, there are two aspects regarding the nature and behaviour of the elements that constitute this construct that are not fully explored. One is the social context in which place occurs – as opposed to the social context *within*

place – and the other is the dynamic acts that are occurring between the components of the place construct. These two aspects will be discussed in the following sections; firstly Section 4.5 discusses the social aspects of place and, in particular, Massey's (1995) notion of place as a node on a network of social interactivity (Easthope 2004). Secondly, Section 4.6 discusses Gustafson's (2001) model of place which maps the activity between the components of the place construct.

4.5 SOCIAL ASPECTS OF PLACE AND SENSE OF PLACE

As discussed in the previous section sense of place, in simple terms, refers to the manner in which people relate to places, and the emotional responses they elicit from those places (Nanzer 2004; Hummon 1992; Shumaker and Hankin 1984). Places are more than geographic coordinates on a map. As we experience places they take on, or are bestowed with, meanings; these meanings become shared values and beliefs, shared with the community that frequent or populate the place. Ultimately these meanings become the character of that place in the eyes of outsiders, and come to represent the characteristics of the people who reside within or frequent that place (Nanzer 2004). Frequently people develop a sense of belonging to that place that becomes an “anchor for his or her identity” (Hay 1998, p.6). And so whilst the earlier models of place (e.g. Agnew 1987; Canter 1977, 1997; Relph 1976) offered definitions that included physical properties, meaning, and social activities, the research focus of subsequent studies into place and sense of place favoured social activities.

Hidalgo et al (2001) noted that most studies on place focused on places as social environments only, to the exclusion of both the physical dimensions and its operationalisation. Their study of place attachment concluded that whilst social attachment was greater than physical attachment, the physical attachment remained a significant factor. Similarly Steadman's (2003) empirical research into sense of place, involving 1,000 property owner respondents, demonstrated that physical attributes of place matter a great deal in the construction of place meaning; these constructions are not exclusively social.

Place as a social construction

Easthope (2004) provides perhaps a more perceptive view of the role of the physical environment in creating a sense of place. She points out that defining place by its significance within social networks does not exclude the physical and local conditions but it does underline the need to recognise that these aspects of place are subject to interpretation within socially constructed value frameworks (Gieryn 2000; Harvey 1991). Place is in fact doubly constructed; on the one hand there is generally a physical element or at least conceptual framework which is open to interpretation (Massey and Jess 1995), and on the other hand places are also "interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined" (Gieryn, 2000, p.465).

Contestations of place and multiple identity

However not all socially constructed meaning is created equally, and it should be emphasized that the meanings attributed to place are frequently contested between stakeholders of place; and as meaning provides the framework to interpret, for example, the physical conditions of place then these contestations provide for varied and often conflicting interpretations of place. Harvey (1991), Easthope (2004) and Gieryn (2000) concur that whilst it is true to acknowledge there are physical conditions related to place this is not to say that the understanding or meaning of these physical conditions is fixed or indeed common across the community. Indeed, there is a problem with the simplistic identification of 'place' with 'community'; Massey (1995) first points out that communities can exist without being in the same place (religious communities, ethnic communities, for example), second that several and diverse communities can exist within the same place at the same time, and third that within any given community people can occupy different positions. Thus place can be seen to have either a series of identities, or that place identity is a complex mix of these various 'sub-identities' (Massey 1995). Within this paper however, the term 'community' will be used to describe the collective population of place.

Recognising the fluid nature of place

Thus a socially constructed view of place begins to challenge the notion of places with single identities – and, indeed, of being fixed and bounded.

Massey (1994, 1995) argues against single identities of place, based on history and tradition, and against the notion of places with defining boundaries drawn around them. Places are not isolated but "should be regarded in relation to the outside world" (Gustafson 2001, p.6) - their special nature could be due as much to their 'special' links to the outside world as to any intrinsic quality of the place itself. As these links to the outside are not static, the subsequent identity of place is not static; thus she describes place as a "process" rather than an "essence" (Gustafson 2001, p.6). If places are products of social interaction (Agnew 1987, Easthope 2004; Massey 1994) then social conflicts will lead to conflicts in place identity and place meaning.

These conflicts of place identity have been accelerated by what Harvey describes as the time-space compression, a product of the increasing pace of globalization. The world has become increasingly unsettled and uncertain, with a corresponding response from people trying to retain stable notions of place. Massey (1995) also points to the changing nature of the "social organization of space" and the influence this has on our concepts of place and attempts a new definition of place to accommodate these fluctuations. Suggesting that social relations are being expanded both locally, nationally and internationally places are losing their qualities of coherence and boundedness; whilst places still remain as social constructions they are created "not as bounded wholes, but as open nodal points within a larger set of interacting systems." (Easthope 2004, p.129).

Fluidity and the personal nature of place image

Massey (1994) in particular expands on the notion of place identity being reliant on relationships outside of its physical locality. While she acknowledges the notion of place concept being shaped by social interactions, she specifically emphasises the relation of place with the world outside of itself, and the subsequent influence this relationship is claimed to exert. Massey echoes the point earlier that the place construct can hold different meanings for different social groups and, further, that the place 'identity' or image is a fluctuating entity, based on the changing meanings ascribed by individuals and groups under different circumstances and time. Massey offers a more progressive concept of place, arguing that place by virtue of its dependency on the outside world is a constantly changing entity and therefore, rather than being considered an essence, should in fact be considered a process. This is more accurately a concept of place perception, or image, rather than of place itself, and highlights the ability of place perceptions to change based both on subjective interpretation and external influences. Further, these place perceptions do not necessarily mean the same thing to different people. So not only is Massey essentially portraying place as a fluid and changing entity, she is also suggesting a broad and diverse set of consumer images of place based on subjective interpretation. Such a view, of place "as an expanding and contracting social construct" (Easthope 2004, p.129), is a common description of place in the literature of social construction (e.g. Gieryn 2000; Soja 1989; Stokowski 2002; Zerubavel 1996). Place image not only might mean different things to different people, it might hold

different connotations to one person under different circumstances or on different days (Warnaby and Davies 1997). Warnaby and Davies (1997) reflect the same concept in a retail context by describing the mall offering as a “bundle of benefits” (p.206) from which consumers can draw upon, dependant upon their changing needs and desires. The changing typologies of shoppers have provided the foundation for several contemporary studies, comparing the different motivations of shoppers and the subsequent variation in their interpretation and evaluation of retail spaces (e.g. Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Guiry, Magi and Lutz 2006). These points are most significant within the research, as they raise an important note of caution; if place image is a personally-held vision then supposedly there is no one single, commonly-held vision. It would therefore be wrong to begin the research assuming that the factors that influence these images are necessarily common, or that the manner in which they exert their influence is necessarily common.

Nodes on a network

Massey’s (1994) view of place offers a rich and complex definition of place based on its significance as a “site of negotiated meaning within networks of social relationships, rather than simply in terms of qualities that exist within a physical locality” (Easthope, 2004). She views places as processes not entities; place - in addition to (often) being a geographically-defined location - can be defined as a node on a network of social interactions (Massey, 1995; Massey and Jess, 1995) and as such provides a far more flexible and accommodating description of place than, for example, the models of Relph (1976), Canter

(1977), and Agnew (1987). Within Massey's (1995) definition of place social exchanges play a critical role for imbuing place with meaning.

To explain her concept of place as a node on a network of social interactions, Massey (1994) asks us to imagine looking down on earth from a satellite, and to imagine we can see the communications taking place around the globe. We would be able to see the physical movement of peoples - business travelers, holiday-makers, migrants – we would see phone calls, faxes and emails; we would see cultural icons being transferred from one place to another. Ultimately we would recognize that the geographical approximations called 'places' were in fact intersections of a host of communications. We would come to recognize that places and their associated identities would be difficult to describe – if not impossible – without reference to these external links and, further, that it was to a great extent these external links that defined these 'places'. And this seething mass of activity creates an identity that is constantly in flux; never static, never fixed, but always moving. Viewing place as a 'node' within a social network emphasises the dynamic nature of place; social networks extend beyond the local and thus the influencers of place extend beyond the physical boundaries of place. Thus not only are places unbounded but they are also unsettled; they are fluid, dynamic centres where meanings and beliefs are exchanged through social interaction. This is what Massey describes as the geography of social relations; places are very much comprised of a wide variety of cultural – and associated physical – geographies (Massey 1994).

Relating branded products in the mall to nodes on a network

Massey's (1995) view of place, from the social construction perspective of a node on a network of social interactions, is a particularly appropriate perspective for the mall due, in part, to the complexity of commercial images that comprise the consumer offering that constitutes the mall. Branded goods within a mall brand contain their own images and meanings, and yet collectively they contribute to the image and meaning of the mall. The significance and interpretation of these images extends beyond the physical boundaries of the mall to include, amongst other things, marketing and advertising messages, and the opinions of friends and acquaintances.

4.6 A MODEL OF PLACE – MAPPING BETWEEN THE CONSTRUCTS

Where Massey's (1995) concept of place looked to the dynamic connectivity beyond individual place, Gustafson's (2001) model of place looks inward at the activity that connects the individual constructs of place. In his study of what makes places meaningful, Gustafson (2001) maps consumer actions and interests not only at and around the components of place but also between these components (Figure 4.1, p.114).

Gustafson (2001) focuses on the attribution of meaning through a series of semi-structured interviews. Unlike the brand methodology which sought out specific attributes, the respondents in this study, using lists of places from their own lives that they considered important, were asked to "describe what these

‘places’ of different spatial scale meant to them and why they were more or less attached to them” (p.9). In analysis, following a process of open coding

Figure 4.1: Gustafson’s (2001) model of place

This image has been removed due to third party copyright. The unabridged version of the thesis can be viewed at the Lanchester Library, Coventry University

Source: Gustafson 2001

and abstraction comparable with Strauss and Corbin (1990), descriptive codes were converted into broader categories and brought together into a tentative model; significantly, several themes did not fit into this model but “seemed to organize the attribution of meaning on a deeper level.” (p.9). This analysis provides a layering of meaning that goes beyond mere description of what the attributes were and begins to address the question of how these attributes

became to be considered meaningful i.e. it explains the relationship between attributes and meaning.

“Thus, the analysis of the interviews produced firstly a model mapping the meanings spontaneously attributed to places by the respondents, and secondly a number of underlying themes describing how the attribution of meaning occurred rather than what meanings were attributed.” (p.9)

This research accepts the notion that there are higher-order core values existing that the brand image measurement models discussed earlier do not identify and, further, that these core values can provide insight into the way in which the consumer evaluates the attributes of place brand image.

Gustafson’s (2001) study is significant to this research for two particular reasons. First it is significant to the complexity of the place construct. Gustafson’s study was not aimed at producing “statistical generalization” (p.9) but “to obtain, through the sampling procedure, a wide range of variation in the empirical data and then search for analytical categories, typologies and models that could capture this variation.” (p.9). In other words his research aimed at explaining the variations rather than reducing them, and providing a framework that would accommodate both individual values and the effect of multiple values working together. This approach acknowledges the complexity of the subject and is an approach that is in accord with the consumer culture theorists’ field of enquiry that is capable of generating and sustaining multiple theoretical conversations (Arnould and Thompson 2005).

Second, as three core categories emerge from the data – ‘self’, ‘environment’, and ‘others’ - he acknowledged that consumer meaning did not always reside unambiguously within any one single category. Rather, meaning was often situated in the relationship between the categories, and thus he constructed “a three-pole triangular model within which various meanings of place could be mapped - not only at the three poles, but also in between them” (p.9).

Gustafson emphasizes that his study mapped the respondent’s “spontaneous attribution of meaning” (p.12), and in so doing he created a model comprising three ‘poles’ around which the respondents’ expressions of meaning were grouped. In addition, what he described as “underlying dimensions of meaning” (p.12) emerged which did not readily fit within the 3-pole model as “they organize the attribution of meaning to places in more basic ways” (p.12). These underlying dimensions he labeled “distinction, valuation, continuity and change” (p.13). The presence of these dimensions supports this author’s earlier notion that results from the brand measurement model might be signifiers of a higher-order set of core values, as Gustafson’s model now comprises not only one layer of inter-related dimensions, but with at least one additional, ‘organizational’ layer. These additional dimensions – particularly ‘continuity’ and ‘change’ - hold additional significance in as much as they once again point to a non-stationary concept of place, and its consequential possibilities for multiple and concurrent consumer narratives as people form and re-form their personal images of place. On this basis any model proposed must acknowledge the volatility that these additional dimensions – and possibly

others not yet identified – provide, and must be capable of accommodating them. Gustafson’s model and its associated analytical application must be considered a tentative one, given the limited number of respondents and the broad spatial range of places discussed, yet it clearly begins to address the complexities associated with place construction in the mind of the consumer. Further the analytical application developed for the model data does more to suggest a method than to satisfactorily describe one as, by the author’s own admission, the tabulation that forms the analysis relies on a level of specific categorisation – potentially capable of excluding or concealing critical qualities - which the model was at pains to avoid.

4.7 CONCLUSION

As has been noted earlier current brand knowledge has focused on methods to identify key attributes of brand image, rather than to provide an holistic description of brand image or the process by which it is formed. The prevalence of material dealing with consumer, service and corporate brand image contrasts with the lack of material on space and place brand image (Hankinson 2001). There are works available on place marketing - Kotler (1993), Ashworth and Voogd (1991) - and tourist consumption of place (Urry 1990; Ward 1998), but such literature has as its objective the general marketing of these places, rather than producing an holistic description of the ‘place’ construct.

Broader conceptualisations of place from other disciplines have produced much theoretical research into place image construction (e.g. Canter 1997; Lindquist 1975), as well as several more empirically based models describing the place image construct (e.g. Gustafson 2001; Sixsmith 1986). In particular, Gustafson's (2001) model provides an excellent foundation that begins to describe the complexity of the place image construct. At the same time, Massey's (1994) provides a richly provocative description of individual place in relation to other places and, more significantly for this research, illustrates the complex network of relationships to, through, and beyond place that influence the nature, appearance, and character of that place as it might appear to the consumer.

The two most significant conclusions that can be drawn from this review then are, first, that the place image construct is both dynamic and complex, and intimately reliant on the external world (Massey 1994). Second, that the place image is a personal construct that relies on a process of social interactivity for its formation. This therefore implies that the place image varies between different people and yet, almost paradoxically, the literature consistently shows that these images are socially constructed, suggesting commonly-agreed values. Both branding literature (e.g. Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrmann 2005) and consumer culture studies (e.g. Schouten and McAlexander 1995) have shown the relationship between the individual and the group, particularly with regard to identity projects, and place studies have introduced the social networks of place within which the individuals and the group function. The literature provides insights into the conceptual

construction of brands and place; it provides some illumination into the engagements between the consumer, the brand, and the place, and it suggests some of the avenues that provide influences for the consumer image of place, and therefore for the consumer image of the retail mall. What is lacking is a clear theory as to how consumers developed this image; how do they develop their image of the brand for a retail mall, and this was the objective of this research.

The next chapter introduces grounded theory as the methodology used to achieve this research objective. It explains the reasons for choosing grounded theory; it provides a background to the development of grounded theory, and it details the way in which the methodology was applied in this study.

Chapter 5.0 Methodology

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The criteria for selecting a research methodology is that which best fits the objective driving the research (Arnould and Thompson 2005) which, in this study, was to develop a theory as to how consumers developed their brand image for a retail mall in Hong Kong. Based on the preliminary review of literature the proposed research assumes that a) retail mall brand image exists as personal perceptions in the mind of the consumer and b) that this image is learned or acquired through a process of symbolic interaction (Arata 2002; Kunkel and Berry 1968). On this basis the research is positioned within the interpretivist paradigm and has adopted grounded theory as its methodology. This chapter explains the reasons for this choice and outlines in detail this methodology and how it was used in this study.

In addition to this brief introduction (section 5.1), section 5.2 sets out the theoretical position of this study; it discusses the historical evolution of consumer research within the interpretivist paradigm and examines methodologies common to this paradigm. Section 5.3 provides a detailed explanation about grounded theory, its origins, disputes and key features, and distinguishes the Glaserian method - the method adopted for this study - from the Straussian method. Section 5.4 then explains the particular way in which grounded theory was applied to this study, the methods of data collection and the stages of analysis. Section 5.5 then details the framework adopted to

ensure credibility within this study, whilst section 5.6 attends to the ethical considerations requisite to the study. Finally, section 5.7 discusses the limitations of the study.

5.2 INTERPRETIVISM WITHIN CONSUMER RESEARCH

Introduction

“The conditions of labour and life, the sense of joy, anger, or frustration that lie behind the production of commodities, the states of mind of the producers, are all hidden from us as we exchange one object (money) for another (the commodity)” (Harvey 1991, p.101)

The progressive alienation of the labourer from the product, the dislocation of the producer from the pleasure and satisfaction of production, has led to the rise in consumption for reasons other than function and sustenance (Belk 1995; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Harvey 1991). Fordism and the production line labourer, whilst not solely responsible for changing consumer habits, certainly provides a clear milestone of change, as Ford’s “five-dollar, eight-hour day...[provided] workers with sufficient income and leisure time to consume the mass-produced products the corporations were about to turn out in ever vaster quantities” (Harvey 1991, p.126) . Given the shifting motives of consumption - from need and function towards what Marx described as the ‘fetishism of commodities’ (Marx 1964, cited in Harvey 1991, p.100) – it is not surprising to find a similar shift in patterns and methods of research into

consumer behaviour. Belk (1995) traces the changes in conceptualizations of the consumption process and the role of the consumer from the earlier part of the 20th century and in the process highlights the increasing adoption of the interpretivist paradigm over the positivist paradigm (Belk 1995; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). He describes a four-stage historical categorization of how these conceptualisations have evolved.

Evolving views of consumers by consumer researchers

Belk's (1995) first stage, in the 1920's and 1930's, sees consumers as need-driven; their motivations were driven by necessity and the provisioning of basic commodities rather than indulgent luxury goods. Their needs were construed as "innate rather than socially constructed" (Belk 1995, p.59) and thus research at this time saw consumers very much as "rational economic" agents (Belk 1995, p.59).

The second-stage conceptualization introduced psychoanalytical methods to explore the more emotional meanings inherent in consumer goods. Consumers were now recognized as having underlying motives that were linked to emotional relationships between themselves and the goods on offer. It was also considered that the consumer was not necessarily aware of, or would not acknowledge, their true motivations for desiring particular goods (Packard 2007). This style of research, referred to as motivational research, led to serious concerns regarding research that "had manipulative potential by tapping consumer's subconscious desires" (Belk 1995, p.59), which

undermined its academic respectability (Durgee 1991; Stern 1990, cited in Belk 1995).

The decline of motivational research was hastened by a shift towards scientific experimentation, and a return to the view of the consumer as an “information-processor” (Belk 1995, p.59). This was Belk’s third stage and, whilst consumer behaviour research of the period did attempt to incorporate topics such as culture, group processes and social classes, consumers were nevertheless still seen as rational, analytical procurers who were aware of their motives (Belk 1995).

The 1980’s saw a significant change in the way in which researchers viewed consumers; this was the beginning of Belk’s fourth stage and the rise of what he described as the “new consumer behaviour research” (Belk 1995, p.58). This perspective was most distinguished by the shift from a predominantly positivist perspective to an interpretivist perspective, a shift that embraces “a broader array of epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies” (Belk 1995, p.61) (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Comparing old and new consumer behaviour research

Old Consumer Behaviour Research	New Consumer Behaviour Research
Positivist:	Interpretivist
Experiments/Surveys	Ethnographies
Quantitative	Qualitative

A priori theory	Emergent theory
Economic/Psychological	Sociological/Anthropological
Micro/Managerial	Macro/Cultural
Focus on buying	Focus on consuming
Emphasis on cognitions	Emphasis on emotions
American	Multicultural

Adapted from Belk (1995)

Part of the reason for this shift in view point was that the marketing departments of many American universities began drawing on scholars from other disciplines (Belk 1995); these scholars brought with them a variety of diverse research methods and, with many of these researchers coming from a social science background, many of these methods were interpretivist. These methods “opened up a Pandora’s box of ‘new’ substantive questions to be investigated” (Belk 1995, p.64)

Positivist vs interpretivist epistemologies

Belk's ‘new consumer’ perspective can be understood from the perspective proposed by Firat and Venkatesh (1995) in their article "Liberatory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption". In contrast to the positivist/modernist view of consumption which assumed truth to be something external to the consumer and awaiting discovery, they argue from the postmodern perspective that proposes that 'truth' is a construction (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Gergen 1985, 1999). Whilst this thesis does not adopt a postmodern position, it does take the social constructionist view that there is

no single, absolute truth or reality, but rather a series of truths that are shaped through social, cultural, historic, and political influences (Gergen 1999). Equally, by this definition, these truths are fluid; they are neither fixed nor absolute, and can shift or change depending upon the application of these influences. This is not to say there is no external or independent realities; the philosopher John Searle (1998) distinguishes between “observer-independent and observer-dependent” (p.116) features of the world (brute facts vs institutional facts (Searle 1995)). Brute facts relate to such phenomena as “force, mass and photosynthesis” (Searle 1998, p.117) and are generally best accessed through the scientific methods of the natural sciences. Institutional facts – unstable facts arrived at through processes of social negotiation – best describe social phenomena and are the realm of social science (Searle 1995, 1998) and interpretivist methodologies (Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Gergen 1999). Thus within the interpretivist paradigm reality is no longer something waiting to be discovered but, rather, it is something that is created through interpretation by individuals and groups (Jafari 2008; Nealon and Girouz 2003).

Conceptual differences in research subjects between positivism and interpretivism

Weber (2004) argues that "many, if not all, of the alleged metatheoretical differences between positivism and interpretivism are spurious" (p.x). It is not the purpose of this chapter to debate the differences between the two paradigms; rather than ‘compare and contrast’ the two, the emphasis of this

section is to describe this researcher's beliefs about the interpretivist paradigm and his reasons for adopting it as his epistemological base. What is significant is that Weber does not debunk any of the claims of interpretivism, but rather claims that positivist researchers often share some of the interpretivists' positions.

The epistemological differences between the two paradigms create two quite polemic positions regarding the abilities and objectives of the research. Positivism, with its belief in a "grand narrative" or single objective reality, allows for the testing of hypotheses within a sample group that is assumed to be a fragment of the whole population, and the results legitimately applied to the larger population. In contrast, interpretivism makes no such assumption about the whole population but, rather, seeks to investigate the behaviour of individuals or groups within a given context (Hamilton 2005). This leads to positivists standing back and observing, practicing a detachment in order not to contaminate the research subjects or the environment. Interpretivist researchers, on the other hand, tend towards an immersive approach, freely interacting with their research subjects in the research environment (Hamilton 2005). Positivists seek to identify cause/effect relationships in comparison to the interpretivists objective of "understanding the world of the lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Locke, 2001, p.8, cited in Jafari 2008 p.137).

The interpretivist epistemology describes the contemporary consumer

Thus, according to Firat and Venkatesh (1995), consumption is viewed as “a complex human behaviour” (Jafari 2008) and one that is bound up with notions of “culture, language, aesthetics, narratives, symbolic modes, and literary expressions and meanings” (Firat and Venkatesh 1995, p.243, cited in Jafari 2008, p.136).

The productive nature of consumption – as noted by Arnould and Thompson (2005) and Firat and Venkatesh (1995) – highlights the social nature of consumer activity and the continuous negotiation of meaning that results from these activities (McCracken 1988; Slater 1997). It is a process of interpretation within a social context; its truths and realities are dynamic and often temporary in nature. Meaning is created, negotiated, and redefined continuously. The aims of this research focus on meaning construction of consumer images in a social context; it recognizes the instability of such images both to the individual and within the group and locates the study and the views of the consumer in the interpretivist paradigm.

The significance of interpretivism in defining the methodology

This research seeks to explain how consumers construct retail mall brand images in a specific context (Pacific Place Mall, Hong Kong). It adopts an interpretivist approach, recognizing the potential for multiple realities rather than an absolute truth, and seeks to understand people in their social context

(Fridani and Agbenyega 2011; Stern et al., 1982). It does not seek to test hypotheses, and thus considers a qualitative approach to be the most appropriate, for reasons outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000):

“The word *qualitative* [authors’ italics] implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researchers and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress *how* [authors’ italics] social experience is created and given meaning.”
(Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p.8)

Examples of methods/methodologies employed within the interpretivist paradigm

There is a broad range of qualitative methodologies (see Table 5.2 for examples) yet, whilst each has its own philosophy and strategy, there is a degree of overlapping in both how data is collected and the methods used in analyzing that data. The commonality is that much qualitative research aims at generating theory, in contrast to positivist research that is largely focused on theory testing (Goulding 2002)

Table 5.2: Examples of methodologies employed within the interpretivist paradigm

Methodology	Examples of use
Phenomenology	Thompson et al 1989, 1990 Thompson and Haytko, 1997 Churchill and Wertz, 1985 Fennell, 1987
Ethnography	Penaloza, 2001 Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994
Grounded theory	Goulding, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2005 Houston and Venkatesh, 1996
Narrative enquiry	Bruner 1986 Clandinin and Connelly, 2000 Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995
Discourse analysis	Auburn, Drake and Willig, 1995: Potter 1996 Potter and Wetherell (1987)
Literary criticism	Sherry and Schouten, 2002 Stern, 1989, 1994
Hermeneutics	Arnould and Fischer, 1994
Symbolic interactionism	Solomon 1983

Adapted from Gran (2010); Jafari (2008)

Of these methodologies, phenomenology and ethnography have often been compared methodologically with grounded theory (Goulding 2005). Phenomenology restricts itself to a single source of data, the experiences of the participants themselves who are selected “only if they have lived the

experience under study” (Goulding 2002, p.23) and thus the sampling is purposive. This was considered restrictive within this study as, at the onset, there was no certainty that these conditions could be met. Ethnography, on the other hand required that the researcher immerse himself/herself in the study setting for a long period (Van de Ven and Huber 1990), a condition to which this researcher was unable to commit. Grounded theory offered a more flexible and systematic approach to the research; whilst it shares many similarities with other qualitative methodologies it offers a clear set of procedures leading towards a high level of abstraction and theory generation (Goulding 2002).

This study aimed to identify and explain the process by which consumers developed brand images of a particular retail mall; these images are the product of meaning created through a range of experiences, many of them occurring in a social context. The changing nature of these images, and the recognition that these images are not universally identical between individuals, located the research within the interpretivist paradigm as it sought to explain lived experiences from the perspective of the consumer (Hamilton 2005). The emphasis was on *how* these images were formed and *why* they were significant to the consumer. The most appropriate form of investigation of such questions was through qualitative methodologies and, for reasons that will be elaborated upon in the next section the choice of methodology was grounded theory.

5.3 THE CHOICE OF METHODOLOGY: GROUNDED THEORY

5.3.1 Introduction

“[T]he first requirement of social science is fidelity to the phenomena under study, not to any set of Methodological principles” (Goulding 2002, p.16)

According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), one seeks a methodology that best fits the objectives that drive the research. Thus the choice of methodology is guided by the nature of the study aims and the research questions.

5.3.2 Rationale for choosing grounded theory for this study

Little available literature

With regard to the aim of this study - to generate theory regarding the process by which consumers develop retail mall brand images - the review of literature as detailed in Chapter 3 concluded that whilst much research had been done with regard to the development and management of brand identity (the brand as defined by the brand owner and positioned by the marketers) less had been done with regard to understanding the resultant brand image (the interpretation of the brand identity by the consumers) and even less to understand the processes by which these images developed. Grounded theory is recognized as being particularly appropriate as a methodology in areas where little current

literature exists (Flint et al 2002; Goulding 2002, Locke 2001). One of its particular strengths is its ability to “generate theory where little is already known, or to provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge” (Goulding 1999, p.867). Equally, Ger (2005) supports the use of grounded theory “in conducting research on fresh or understudied areas of CCT” (Jafari 2008) which, given the positioning of this study in two of the four areas of consumer research delineated by CCT, reinforces the choice of grounded theory for this study.

Suitable for studying processes in context

As was argued in Chapter 3, retail mall brand image is the sum total of a consumers’ impression of the mall (Keller 1998); whilst there are factors that influence this image in various ways, this study focuses on the meaning that emerges from this collective influence rather than from the influences of individual attributes themselves. As the philosopher John Searle (1998) observes "consciousness comes to us in a unified form" (p.74) - an experience has an act, a setting and a background and, whilst the act itself might be the focus, our brain binds it together with the context in which it occurs. Thus this research required a methodology that was considerate of the broader context of consumer activity in which the phenomenon under study occurred, in particular the consumer interactivities within social networks. A grounded theory approach was “most suited to efforts to understand the process by which actors construct meaning out of intersubjective experience.” (Suddaby 2006, p.634). Equally, grounded theory was considered particularly

appropriate “to the study of local interactions and meanings as related to the social context in which they actually occur” (Pidgeon 1996, p.75). Grounded theory recognizes concepts of sociality that were common to both pragmatism and symbolic interaction - that when realities are constructed in a social setting “a phenomenon can be several things at once” (Heath and Cowley 2004, p.142). However, whilst the fundamental aim of grounded theory is to produce theory that goes beyond thick description (Goulding 2002), it should be stressed that “the aim is not to discover *the* theory, but *a* theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation.” (authors’ italics) (Heath and Cowley 2004, p.149). Therefore the explorations of grounded theory are aimed at explaining both the basic social processes and illuminating the complex network of interactions that produce the rich variations within the process (Heath and Cowley 2004). These aims were well suited to this study to explain how consumers developed their image of the brand for a retail mall.

Matches the lack of predictability for the course of research

When this study began, the researcher was aware that there were many potential avenues that could lead to solutions for the research questions. For example, and as was apparent from the review of literature, what began in branding territory soon required the broader perspective of place studies in order to fully embrace the topic under study. So there was a need for the methodology to be capable of responding to discoveries made during data collection and analysis and, if necessary, to be capable of ‘changing direction’ as the research progressed. For example, at the onset of the study the focus

was very much on the physical realm itself and its collective role as an influence on the consumer; as the research progressed the focus quickly shifted to issues of personal and social significance with the physical realm becoming a secondary, or supporting, context. The ability to adjust to conditions that emerge from the research is accommodated within grounded theory in two particular areas. First, grounded theory's method of constant comparison allows for data to be analysed as it is obtained, rather than after all data has been collected. The results of one interview, for example, are compared to the results of the previous interview, and that comparison is used to guide further sampling. Thus there is no predetermined number of respondents – nor, indeed, any predetermined area for data collection. This leads to the process of 'theoretical' sampling, which is the second area where grounded theory was particularly suited to this study. This theoretical sampling is guided by the emerging categories and concepts within the data and is suitable when the researcher "cannot know in advance what to sample for" and where it will lead" (Goulding 2002, p.67), which was of particular importance for this study given the lack of literature available to guide the initial research. This progressive collection and analysis of data provided a reassurance to the researcher that the study had the ability – and the flexibility - if necessary to alter the direction of the investigation in response to data and the emerging theory. This reassurance fits with Goulding (2002) who cites Stern (1994) and Knafl (1994) when she claims that the choice of methodology is a "personal and reflective process...methods are personal, people think differently and have their own way of getting to some kind of truth" (p.35). In the case of this study this was related not only to this

researcher's philosophical beliefs (Annells 1996) but also to his beliefs as to how best to investigate consumer processes for brand development.

Generates theory, which is the aim of this research

The fundamental objective of this study was to generate theory. Grounded theory is a methodological procedure that derives theory from data through an iterative process, and it is this intention to generate theory that is the central feature of grounded theory (Glaser and Straus 1967; Goulding 2002). This point, plus the points made earlier in this section, made grounded theory the choice of methodology for this study.

By way of summary, grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for this investigation because of its specific strengths relevant to the research aims of this study. These strengths can be summarized as follows:

- It is a particularly appropriate methodology in areas where little current literature exists (Flint et al 2002; Goulding 2002, Locke 2001)
- It is suited to the study of interactions and meanings as related to the social context in which they occur (Pidgeon 1996)
- Grounded theory offered the flexibility to respond to discoveries that emerged from the data and, if necessary, adjust the direction of the investigation

- Its aim is to generate theory which was the principle aim of this study

The following section looks at the evolution, nature, and practice of grounded theory.

5.3.3 Origins of grounded theory

Symbolic interactionism

The roots of grounded theory are found in symbolic interaction which, in turn, was developed from pragmatism and in particular the work of George Herbert Mead and Charles Cooley (Heath and Cowley 2004). The term 'symbolic interactionism' was coined by Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead. The principle of symbolic interaction is that, rather than simply respond to the environment, people actively engage with it through a process of "reflexive interaction" (Goulding 2002, p.39). Blumer (1969) claimed that people make sense of the world around them by ascribing meaning to objects and actions through a process of symbolic interactionism, and that this process operates in accordance with three premises:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows

3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he /she encounters

(Blumer 1969, p.2)

Symbolic interaction can be seen as both a theory about human behaviour and as a method of enquiry into those behaviours at both an individual and a group level (Goulding 2002). Blumer's method of enquiry, as analysed by Hammersley (1989), involved comparing cases to each other as part of the process to evolve meaning and define the characteristics of relationships; this process of constant comparison is a core feature of Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory methodology (Heath and Cowley 2004).

Symbolic interactionism and empirical investigation

Symbolic interactionism considers the individual's world as socially enacted; it involves the exchange and interactivity through "significant gestures, symbols and systems of meanings" most particularly "embedded within a significant social context" (Pidgeon 1996, p.77). Thus, Blumer believed that symbolic interactionism should be approached empirically, on the basis that any theorizing about human interaction required first-hand observations of those interactions:

"Human groups of society exist in action and must be seen in terms of action...A cardinal principle of symbolic interactionism is that any

empirically oriented scheme of human society, however derived, must respect the fact that in the first and last instances human society consists of people engaging in action." (Blumer 1969, p. 7)

Blumer (1969) acknowledged that symbolic interaction occurred both within groups and within oneself. Individuals are capable of interacting with their self-image, by reflecting upon the constructed views of themselves. In what he referred to as "a process of communication with himself" (Blumer 1969, p.5) the individual engages in a symbolic interaction process of self-reflection.

The emergence of grounded theory

Grounded theory was the result of a collaboration of, on the one hand, Barney Glaser's positivistic quantitative schooling from Columbia University with, on the other hand, the "pragmatist philosophical study of process, action and meaning" (Charmaz 2003, p.512) of Ansel Strauss, a student of Herbert Blumer and the Chicago School (Thomas and James 2006).

Through their work together on terminally ill people in a Californian hospital, these two scholars took the principles of symbolic interactionism to develop a more rigorous method of collecting, analysing, and reporting qualitative data. Their resultant methodology not only resulted in the generation of new theory based on empirical data but, equally importantly as a response to the critics of qualitative methods, was supported by a prescribed process that allowed for close scrutiny of the research process.

At the time Glaser and Strauss were developing grounded theory the academic climate was one dominated by positivist researchers who viewed qualitative research with suspicion as lacking scientific rigor and, in contrast, favoured "reductionistic quantification" (Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan 2004, p.606). Glaser (1978, 1992) in particular was critical of the period as being one that "presented an elitist bias towards quantitative research in the generation of theory" (Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan 2004, p.606) and, later, claimed that "by virtue of its assumptive preconceptions in the choice of test variables, quantitative research tended predominantly to validate and verify theory rather than generate it" (Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan 2004, p.606). In comparison qualitative research was considered to generate, at best, abstract theory, in a subjective and unscientific manner and therefore qualitative research was considered as "preliminary to the 'real' methodologies of quantitative research" (Goulding 2002, p.41, citing Charmaz 1983). Glaser and Strauss's work was a reaction against what they saw as a prevalence of quantitative research that focused on testing existing, established theory and neglecting to explore for new, empirically-based theory

Thus Glaser and Strauss constructed the grounded theory methodology not only to generate theory but to do so in a manner that was systematic; a process where the data was collected, analysed and interpreted to a set of guidelines that could "track, check and validate" (Goulding 2002, p.41) the resultant theory and so be less open to criticism by the scientific community.

The presentation of grounded theory

Historically Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss are accepted as having ‘discovered’ grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002; Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan, 2004) which they presented in their book “The Discovery of Grounded Theory” (1967). In it they provided a clear and progressive set of procedures for generating theory from empirical data. It has been “a major – perhaps the major – contributor to the acceptance of the legitimacy of qualitative methods in applied social research” (Thomas and James 2006, p.767), and it came at a time when symbolic interactionism was under mounting pressure from, on the one side, positivist statistical methods and structural functionalism and, on the other side, ethnomethodology.

Grounded theory had a clear objective to generate theory from empirical data. According to Goulding (2009), this objective “was, and is, the generation of new theory that accounts for the relationship of the individual or collective experience to society, to history, the group or the organization.” (p.381). As these theories were, by the nature of the process, grounded in the actions revealed in the study Glaser and Strauss named the process 'grounded theory' (Goulding 2002).

The grounded theory process

As Glaser (1999) said about grounded theory, it is “a total methodological package. It provides a series of systematic, exact methods that start with

collecting data and takes the researcher to a theoretical piece that is publishable” (p.836). It is “a methodology that stresses the significance of social processes, or a concern with human beings in their relations to each other” (Goulding 2009 citing Parry, 1999).

Grounded theory provided a more procedural method than symbolic interactionism and therefore one that was more rigorous and provided the ability to validate findings – the lack of which, at that time, had been one of the key criticisms of qualitative methodologies in general. Also, whilst symbolic interactionism illuminated the nature of relationships by revealing the meanings within those relationships, grounded theory went one step further by developing theory from the procedural analysis of the data.

Grounded theory as a methodology has had a major significance within the interpretivist paradigm and one of the major contributors to establishing the legitimacy of qualitative methods (Thomas and James 2006). Over forty years later grounded theory continues to be used in a wide range of research areas, particularly education and health studies (Thomas and James 2006) and, despite criticisms and divergences in its applications (e.g. Charmaz 1983; Thomas and James 2006), grounded theory has become one of the most widely adopted qualitative framework in the social sciences (Denzin 1994). Throughout a wide range of disciplines it has become the ‘paradigm of choice’ (Thomas and James 2006 citing Miller and Fredericks 1999) for qualitative researchers.

5.3.4 Similarities and differences between grounded theory and other qualitative methodologies

Whilst grounded theory utilizes methods similar to other qualitative methodologies, it also provides some unique methods that characterize the grounded theory process.

Similarities

Grounded theory maintains the same epistemological base as other qualitative methodologies; it is interpretivist in its approach, believing that knowledge is constructed through social interaction. It shares many of the data sources of the majority of quantitative studies, as well as sharing methods of access to that data, the most common of which are interviews and observations (Goulding 2009). However grounded theory is open to a wide range of data sources (Goulding 2002, 2009; Glaser and Strauss 1967) allowing “for a much wider range of data including company reports, secondary data” (Goulding 2002, p.44) in comparison with, say, phenomenology which only allows “the words and actions of the informants as the source of data” (ibid p.44).

Differences

The major difference with grounded theory against other qualitative methodologies is the focus on generating theory. As Spiggle (1994) contends, qualitative researchers tend to stop short of identifying the causal and conceptual links that can result in integrated structures of explanation (Goulding 2009). In comparison, grounded theory “has conceptual density and meaningful variation and goes beyond thick description” (Goulding 2009, p.384)

Grounded theory strives for verification of its assumption during the research process, through the constant comparison of data during data collection and by staying in the field until no new evidence emerges (through the process of category saturation).

5.3.5 The nature of theory

Definition of theory

Morse (1994) provides an expanded definition of theory as:

“[A] theory provides the best comprehensive, coherent and simplest model for linking diverse and unrelated facts in a useful and pragmatic way. It is a way of revealing the obvious, the implicit, the unrecognized and the unknown. Theorizing is the process of constructing alternative

explanations until a 'best fit' that explains the data most simply is obtained. This involves asking questions of the data that will create links to established theory" (Morse 1994, p25-6).

For Glaser and Straus (1967) they saw theory in sociology as being "a strategy for handling data in research" and for "providing modes of conceptualization for describing and explaining" (p.3). They also make it conditional that the theory should be "readily understandable to sociologists of any viewpoint, to students and to significant laymen". (p.3) They go on to say that theory that meets these requirements must also fit the research situation, and "work when put into use" (p.3). By "fit" they mean the categories must be seen to applicable to and have emerged from (rather than forced from) the data, and that they must "work" in the sense that they are "able to explain the behavior under study" (p.3).

Glaser and Straus (1967) also go to lengths to differentiate between substantive and formal theory. Substantive theory refers to theory developed for a specific area of enquiry (for example "patient care, race relations, professional education" (Glaser and Straus 1967, p.32). In contrast formal theory is developed for conceptual areas of enquiry, such as "stigma, deviant behavior, formal organization" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p.32). The objective of this study is to

generate substantive theory regarding the development of consumer brand image.

The role of theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) are clear as to role of theory in sociology, and described it in five aims:

- To enable the prediction and explanation of behaviour
- To be useful in theoretically advancing sociology
- To be capable of application in practical situations
- To provide a clear perspective on behaviour
- To guide and provide a style for for research on particular areas of behaviour

(Glaser and Strauss 1967, p.3)

They go on to note that the theory needs to be clear enough in its categories and hypotheses that the crucial ones can be verified “in present and future research” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p.3)

5.3.6 Divisions within grounded theory

In the more than forty years since grounded theory was first proposed there have been various interpretations as to how grounded theory should be applied; most significantly has been the division between the two original

authors, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, which has resulted in two distinct versions of grounded theory being used (Goulding 2002). Indeed, in some fields researchers are obliged to clarify whether their application of grounded theory follows “the original 1967 Glaser and Strauss version, the 1990 Strauss and Corbin rendition, or the 1978 or 1992 Glaser interpretation” (Goulding 2002, p.47, citing Skodla Wilson and Ambler Hutchinson 1996).

Glaser vs. Strauss and Corbin

A comparison of the original “Discovery of Grounded Theory” (1967) with Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) “Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques” and Glaser’s (1992) “Basics of Grounded Theory: Emergence vs. Forcing” reveals what Goulding (2009) describes as “subtle but distinct differences in perceptions of the method between the two authors since its inception” (p.384). In particular Goulding considers that “Strauss’s version of the method has been reworked to incorporate a strict and complex process of systematic coding” (p.384). Glaser’s (1992) response to this process was that these were essentially predetermined categories into which, consequently, theory would be forced. The divide was now between the Strauss and Corbin highly prescriptive and formulaic route (Hall and Callery 2001; Suddaby 2006) and Glaser’s model which remained open to “unanticipated interpretations of data” (Goulding 2009, p.384). Melia (1996) shared the view that the Strauss and Corbin method was overly-complicated and formulaic, and echoed Glaser’s (1992) view that their process was oriented towards description rather than discovery (Goulding 2002). The result

of this argument has been the split of grounded theory into two distinct camps, some choosing the Glaserian approach (e.g. Goulding 1999, 2002, 2009; Kelle 2005; Heath and Cowley 2004) and others choosing the Straussian approach (e.g. Crook and Kumar 1998; Pandit 1996) - whilst some find fault with both approaches (e.g. Charmaz 2003; Thomas and James 2006). It remains with the individual researcher to determine which – if either - of these approaches fits their particular ontological and epistemological positions.

The version of grounded theory adopted for this research

This research follows the principles established in the original Glaser and Strauss (1967) description of the grounded theory process, with clarifications of the practical application as detailed by Goulding (2002); essentially, it is the Glaserian approach. The reason for this is a belief that the Straussian approach is overly complicated and, in consequence, diverts from the main aim of the research which is to develop a theory as to how consumers developed their brand image for a retail mall. As Heath and Cowley (2004, p. 149) advise “It is wise to remember...that the aim is not to discover *the* theory, but *a* theory that aids understanding and action in the area under investigation”. Glaser (1998) encourages researchers to stop discussing grounded theory and simply get on with doing it. His continued emphasis on allowing theory to emerge from the data is a subtle feature that distinguishes his approach to grounded theory from that of other researchers (Boychuk Duchscher and Morgan, 2004), and one with which this researcher concurs.

5.3.7 The main features of grounded theory

Key features of grounded theory

Whilst grounded theory shares features and methods found in other qualitative methodologies it has distinguishing procedures unique to itself. The main features are:

Theoretical sampling: A key feature of grounded theory is the principle that data collection and analysis take place simultaneously, with one driving the other through an iterative process. Grounded theory uses an analysis of preliminary data to inform the researcher where to look next for data, in a process referred to as theoretical sampling. Given that grounded theory is particularly appropriate in studies where little prior literature exists, this procedure allows the researcher the ability to respond to analyses of preliminary data in ways that were not anticipated at the onset of the investigation. Based on findings and “emergent questions” (Goulding 2009, p.383) the researcher is directed to other respondents and other contexts most likely to provide meaningful information based on the interpretation of data so far uncovered.

Theoretical sensitivity: Theoretical sensitivity – the awareness of other theories in the literature that might “conceptually connect to” (Goulding 2002, p. 71) the developing theory - is an integral part of the analytical process, and grounded theory makes constant use of literature throughout its process

(Glaser 1978). It aims to ensure that the researcher remains open to developing or emerging theory - the ability to be 'sensitive to theory' (Glaser and Strauss 1967). If the researcher becomes committed to one specific and preconceived theory then theoretical sensitivity is lost and they are unlikely to see new theory emerging from the data as the researcher fails to “see round...his pet theory” (Glaser and Straus 1967, p.46). Such theoretical sensitivity is enhanced by the literature; the researcher should “read for ideas and conceptually connect these to the developing theory” (Goulding 2002, p.71). Though Goulding (2002) also cautions about reviewing the literature “directly related to the field of study” (ibid, p.71) too early as this might introduce “preconceptions and expectations borrowed from the work of others” into the study.

Saturation: the design of a research study using grounded theory as its methodology does not prescribe the number or type of respondents; the researcher continues in the field the point at which no new evidence is being generated from the respondents. As the analysis proceeds and categories emerge, subsequent data needs to reinforce the validity of these categories and in consequence further support the emerging theory. This is referred to as theoretical saturation and, in addition to confirming that a particular line of investigation has been concluded, it provides what Goulding (2002) refers to as credibility.

Yet whilst category saturation “is one of the primary means of verification in grounded theory” (Suddaby 2006, p.636), equally there are no clear rules to

determine that saturation has been achieved. Rather it requires “tacit understanding” (Suddaby 2006, p.639); the criteria for ensuring saturation are “a combination of the empirical limits of the data, the integration and density of the theory, and the analyst’s theoretical sensitivity” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p.62). The signals indicating saturation included repeated confirmation of conceptual categories and the subsequent strengthening of the emerging theory (Suddaby 2006).

Constant comparison: whilst not the exclusive domain of grounded theory, constant comparison is a critical part of the process and informs, in part, the theoretical sampling. As the name implies, it is the procedure of comparing the analysis of one data source with the analysis of another; firstly identifying similarities and differences and, secondly, attempting to identify concepts that will link codes within the data together. It is the stage that moves the analysis from mere description to “explaining the relationship between and across incidents” (Goulding 2002, p.69) – from description to explanation.

The use of memos: within grounded theory the use of memos is a constant and central part of the entire research process. They are used to make observational notes or record thoughts after interviews; equally they can be used to record ideas that occur to the researcher any time during the study. Not only are they ideas that occur during the data collection stage but also ideas that might occur “away from the data and should be written down as the ideas strike” (Goulding 2002, p.65). They are also, according to Glaser (1978), useful guides for directions in theoretical sampling.

The fundamental stages of grounded theory application

One of the original appeals of grounded theory was that it prescribed a clear yet flexible procedure for the generating of theory from empirical data. As has been noted above these stages are not performed one after the other but as a series of iterative steps. The key stages, as described by Goulding (2002, 2009) are:

- Data collection: grounded theory is open to data from any sources including secondary data “to give context and factual substance to the analysis” (Goulding 2002, p. 56)
- Open coding: this is the preliminary breaking down of data into simple categories. Open coding often results in hundreds of codes being identified in what, at this stage, is an unstructured manner.
- Iteration: grounded theory is an iterative process that continually assesses, reassesses, and compares data through constant comparison of interim results.
- Axial coding: this step begins to draw together the potentially hundreds of codes identified in the open coding stage. It involves the development of concepts – explanatory rather than descriptive groupings that link codes – and then the grouping of these concepts under the banner of various higher-order sub-categories and categories.
- Selective coding: this stage “subsumes the data further into a core category which the researcher has to justify as the basis for the emergent theory” (Goulding 2009, p.383). At this point the researcher

should be able to write up the emergent theory and show its position within existing theoretical knowledge.

These stages are described in greater detail and in the context of this study in Section 4.4 Applying Grounded Theory in this Study.

Cautionary notes regarding the use of grounded theory

Mistaking code for theory: Grounded theorists caution about the dangers of mistaking categories of codes as theory, and of failing to explain how these codes relate to and inform each other (Goulding 2009; Glaser 1978, Stern 1994).

Recognition of the interpretive process: It should be noted that these coding processes, as qualitative methods of enquiry, are interpretative processes, and thus are influenced by the qualities of the researcher. Indeed, adopting the epistemological view that knowledge is socially constructed, it should be recognized that the emerging theory is a product of the interaction between the respondent and the researcher, rather than a ‘discovery’ of some internal condition.

Premature closure: Goulding (2002) draws attention to the dangers of premature closure. Citing Skodal-Wilson and Ambler-Hutchinson (1996) distinction is made between two types of premature closure. The first is leaving the field too early, without having gathered enough data to ensure

theoretical saturation. The second is failing to sufficiently interrogate the data to draw out the full depth and breadth of what is being told. In this case the result is often thick description without either a development of concepts or without the higher abstraction of codes linked to concepts or categories.

5.3.8 Misconceptions about and misuse of grounded theory

Since its introduction in 1967 grounded theory has been adopted and applied in many fields and in the process it would appear that the methodology “has become so pliant that management researchers appear to have accepted it as a situation of “anything goes” (Jones and Noble 2007). In part this is due to misconceptions about what grounded theory is and how it is supposed to be applied. In his editorial for the Academy of Management Journal (2006) Roy Suddaby details the six more common misconceptions about grounded theory:

- “Grounded theory is not an excuse to ignore the literature” (p.634): it is a common mistake to think that the grounded theory researcher enters the field with no knowledge of prior research in his field, or with a completely blank mind, or even without a specific research question. The concern of grounded theorists with ‘pre-knowledge’ is that it will form expectancy on the part of the researcher, that it will “force the researcher into testing hypotheses, either overtly or subconsciously” (p.635). One way to avoid this is to be aware of the real possibility of thinking being ‘contaminated’ by “preexisting conceptualizations” (p.635). But, as Goulding (2002) points out, one

should enter the research field with an open mind rather than a blank mind. Literature does also play a major role during the analysis stage to develop theoretical sensitivity, to guide theoretical sampling, and to develop conceptual categories between codes.

- It does not simply present raw data: often a study claiming to be grounded theory will conclude with findings that are simply thick description. The distinguishing feature between grounded theory and, say, phenomenology, is that the data is linked and explained through theory (Goulding 2005).
- Grounded theory does not test theory; grounded theory is not intended for producing “truth statements about reality” (p.636) but, rather, to understand socially constructed meanings generated in specific social phenomena. As such it “should not be used to test hypotheses about reality, but, rather, to make statements about how actors interpret reality” (p.636)
- Grounded theory is not simply the application of a formula to the data; the fact that grounded theory has a prescribed process does not reduce the fact that it is still an interpretivist one. Unlike the positivist stance that the researcher remains separate from the object of enquiry, grounded theory requires the researcher “to be an active element of the research process” (p.638). The result of this is that, rather than simply applying a formula and watching what comes out, the active participation of the grounded theorist makes “the act of research....creative” (p.638).

- The methodology is not perfect; possibly because of it offering a ‘process’ the expectation is that results are guaranteed. But this is not necessarily the case; in particular, the generation of theory is a matter of interpretation. Data can be misread, or the generation of hundreds of codes can lead to frustration to the point where the researcher gives up. And, very commonly, correctly identifying saturation in the data is difficult and “not always obvious, even to experienced researchers” (p.639).
- It is not an easy methodology; it requires sensitivities in a variety of areas including “research skills, individual experiences, personal characteristics, personal biases and world-views” (Jafari 2008, p. 145), not to mention, according to Suddaby (2206) the occasional “healthy dose of good luck” (p.639).

5.3.9 Criticisms and limitations of grounded theory

Some criticisms of grounded theory are the product of misconceptions about the methodology (see Section 5.3.8). However there are limitations to the methodology which, depending on the research context, can preclude the use of grounded theory as a methodology.

Adopting grounded theory has its risks. The process as presented, particularly by Strauss and Corbin (1990) give the impression that, if followed as prescribed, it would “automatically lead to the development of a theory” (Goulding 2002, p.156). This is not, however, always the case. Data sources,

for example, are not predetermined prior to beginning research, but become apparent during the preliminary analysis stage as theoretic sampling, and there is no predetermined end to the sampling. Thus researchers might give up, or run out of time, or “force interpretations from inadequate data” (Goulding 2002, p.156). Indeed, as Goulding (2002) points out, the researcher may not be able to formulate a theory to explain the data at all.

“Meaning is not always obvious” (Goulding 2002, p.157). The researcher needs to remain with the data until ‘the lights come on’. As Goulding (2009) observes it “may take months, but until it happens the end result may seem a lifetime away” (Goulding 2009, p.398). Much depends upon the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher and their ability to apply grounded theory. Glaser (1999) points to three essential characteristics of the grounded theory researcher:

- The ability to conceptualise data
- The ability to tolerate confusion
- The ability to tolerate the regression attendant to that confusion

For Glaser these characteristics are linked to the patience needed for the researcher to ‘wait’ for the theory to emerge from a sea of codes and data. For researchers who “cannot tolerate confusion and regression, and who need to continually feel cognitively in control, [they] fall by the wayside. They get fed up” (Glaser 1999, p.838)

Finally, and from a practical point of view, the need to live with the data until the theory emerges make it difficult to accurately predict the time frame for the research or the resources required.

5.4 APPLYING GROUNDED THEORY IN THIS STUDY

5.4.1 Introduction

It should be noted that whilst grounded theory is an iterative process that collects and analyses data simultaneously, it is described here in a linear fashion for clarity.

And whilst a preliminary literature review was carried out prior to beginning the field work, the predominant use of literature was after interviewing began, to refine and enrich the discovery process and to develop theoretical sensitivity (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002). In addition it is generally regarded as a method that avoids taking into the field “preconceptions and expectations borrowed from the work of others” in the early stages of the research (Goulding 2002, p.71).

5.4.2 Identifying the research aim and key question

This researcher is a part-time PhD candidate; in professional life the researcher specializes in the branding of places; usually large, mixed-use

developments and often with a large (in excess of 100,000 sq. m) retail component. These developments are both new and renovation projects. The application of in-depth, site-specific research is limited, and as a result the work often proceeds based on many assumptions about consumer activity and motivation. This researcher began to look closer at the projects; at the general process that creates the physical realm of these developments, and at the specific process that was applied to develop brands for these places.

Much of the branding process used by professionals was borrowed or adapted from product branding and, whilst there was a focus on identifying what the consumer wanted – and speculation on what he/she needed – there was a paucity of effort (within the professional processes) to understand why these wants and needs exist. Thus, when creating a brand, the process focused on what would appeal to the consumer but rarely why it would appeal. The branding process appeared to be considering only one section of consumer behaviour, which was their immediate and superficially-stated desires. It seemed obvious at the time that a better understanding of consumer motives could lead not only to more relevant brands but, ultimately, to the construction of better places, without sacrificing the economic requirements of commercial developments.

Thus it was from this background that the formulation of this study developed. The initial approach was to identify the factors that influenced retail mall brand image; this would firstly develop on the knowledge of “what the consumers want” by explaining “why they want it”. Secondly, with a fuller

understanding of how consumers formulate place image, valuable insight could be gained for the improvement of the process by which the built environment is designed.

The initial research question was “What are the factors that influence retail mall brand image?”, and the initial focus was towards the physical conditions that existed within the mall – very much an ‘architectural’ approach, and one suggested by current professional practices for assessing the effectiveness of the retail mall. However an initial literature review suggested that, whilst the physical realm was indeed a factor, there were more influential factors not linked to the physical realm. This was supported by the initial interviews which, perhaps more significantly, indicated that these influential factors were not all necessarily restricted to the research site.

As a direct result of these studies, our company working process has shifted from a focus on the conditions of the physical realm and the disciplines that shape it, to a focus on the consumer experience, and a broadening of the skill sets that we draw on in the execution of this work.

5.4.3 Sources of data

The sources of data for this study, and methods for data collection and analysis, followed closely those used by Goulding (2002) in her research to "explore the motivations and the nature of the experiences gained from visiting contemporary museums and heritage sites" (p.104). Her research into

consumer perceptions paralleled the research of this proposal in its exploration into expectations and experiences of retail mall consumers.

Preliminary sources

Two primary sources of data were identified; the owner of the mall (i.e. the mall chosen as the research sites), and a professional architectural design firm responsible for designing several of the owner's malls, and for carrying out improvement works at the chosen research site. The former was chosen in order to establish the owner's perspective; what brand meanings he intended to communicate and how, and what meanings he believed he had communicated (i.e. the development of the brand identity (e.g. Aaker 1996; de Chernatony 2001; Keller 1998)). The latter was chosen in order to gain insight into the methods used by the mall designers to understand the consumer requirements, and how such knowledge was applied to the design of the physical realm. Thus preliminary interviews were first carried out with representatives of the owner; one executive director, one director of marketing, and the marketing manager for the research site mall. Secondly, an interview was carried out with the principal of the architectural practice working with the owner on retail mall design.

Research site

The physical context of the study was the retail mall Pacific Place, in Hong Kong, and the focus of the study was consumers who knew of, and generally

frequented, this mall. Thus engagement with the consumers who were visiting the mall was a logical place to start, and to do so early on in the research process in accordance with the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002). Thus the first engagements between the researcher and respondents (after the preliminary interviews) took place by way of one-on-one semi-structured interviews on site. The researcher would ‘intercept’ a potential respondent, introduce himself and ask if the respondent would be prepared to take part in the interview (see Section 5.4.4 for details of interview protocol).

However, early on in the interviewing it became clear that there was no real necessity to carry out interviews on site and, indeed there were disadvantages, as follows:

- There was a reluctance by many people approached in the mall to spend the time necessary to be interviewed
- Hong Kong is a small territory (404 square miles (Tobin 1975)), and Pacific Place (the research site) is one of the landmark retail malls
- Most people in Hong Kong are familiar with the shopping centre and its reputation and thus have an image of the mall established in their mind
- Two of the interviews on site were curtailed early due to the respondents not having any further time available

- The type of respondent identified through theoretical sampling could be more accurately identified and invited for interview if they were held off-site.

Thus whilst the initial interviews were conducted on-site the later interviews were arranged away from the site. There was no discernable disadvantages to interviewing off-site.

Literature

In keeping with the grounded theory methodology there was extensive use of literature during the field interviews – a ‘return to literature’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002). This is generally regarded as a method aimed at further refining and enriching the discovery process through the development of theoretical sensitivity, and at avoiding taking into the field “preconceptions and expectations borrowed from the work of others” in the early stages of the research (Goulding 2002, p.71).

5.4.4 Accessing and collection of data

At the onset of study, data sources and collection methods were planned as interviews with consumers at the retail mall itself, observations of behaviour within the mall, focus group and continuous memoing.

Interview rationale

Given that the epistemological base of this study was symbolic interactionism, and the study objective was to develop a theory as to how consumers developed their brand image for a retail mall, interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection for reasons outlined by Lawler (2002):

“qualitative interviews...offer a means of exploring the ways in which social actors interpret the world, and their place within it. These interpretations are often extremely complex and nuanced, and would be difficult to access through other means” (Lawler 2002, p.242)

Interviews provide an effective way for the researcher to see the study phenomenon from the respondent’s perspective (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Interview method

The interviews were, in the tradition of grounded theory, “open-ended and discovery-oriented” (Flint et al 2002, p.104) or, as Goulding (2002) points out, “more realistically semi-structured, open-ended, ethnographic, in depth conversational interview” (p.59).

The preliminary interviews – with a representative of the mall owner, members of their marketing team, and an architect responsible for designing and modifying the malls themselves - provided valuable contextual data but,

perhaps more importantly, they allowed the interviewer to review and refine his own interview skills prior to embarking on the main consumer interviews.

The main body of consumer interviews began as on-site intercept interviews. This period proved to be more difficult and frustrating than had been anticipated. Obtaining cooperation of mall visitors was not as easy as had been expected; respondents who were approached were either not willing to be interviewed or would participate for too short a time for the interview to be of any use; later, through theoretical sampling much of the interviewing was pre-arranged either at the research site, or at off-site coffee shops or restaurants, or in some instances in the researcher's office. In addition, and notwithstanding the experience of the preliminary interviews, it took several interviews for the researcher to develop an effective interview technique; to be able to encourage the respondents without leading them or, indeed, to be able to perpetuate the interview long enough for the respondent to reveal their impressions and yield "thick" description (Geertz 1973) and thus be considered useable. Thus early on in the interview procedure there was a review of the interview techniques being used, which included a search of literature for insights into the methods of in-depth interviewing (e.g. Haytko and Baker 2004; Hermanowicz 2002; Johnson and Weller (2002); McCracken 1988; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). The combination of literature referencing and simply 'practicing by doing' made the subsequent interviews much more relaxed and, as a consequence, more productive.

Initial interviews with Chinese respondents were conducted with a second, tri-lingual (English, Cantonese, and Mandarin) assistant interviewer whose role was to overcome any language difficulties that respondents might have in trying to express themselves (the majority of respondents were anticipated to be either Hong Kong Chinese or mainland Chinese, with Cantonese or Mandarin as their first language and English as their second language). However, all the respondents proved to have a good command of the English language and were comfortable in that language so, after three interviews, the second interviewer was dropped.

The researcher was in every case the interviewer, and began by explaining the general aims of the research and drawing attention to the ethical issues involved in such research (Glaser and Strauss 1967) (see also section 5.6 Ethicality and the researcher role). Two copies of an ‘Ethics Protocol’ form was presented to the respondent (see Appendix 1); one was signed and returned to the interviewer and the other was kept by the respondent. (for a list of respondents see Appendix 5).

The interviews took the form of long, open-ended chats (Jafari 2008), and began with a general question “Tell me how you feel about Pacific Place?” or “How do you feel about Pacific Place?”. As far as possible thereafter the respondents were encouraged to explore their own feelings and thoughts relating to Pacific Place, with additional questions aimed at elaborating on topics raised by the respondent. For example, when one respondent observed “It feels very expensive”, the interviewer’s response was “In what way?” or

“What made you think that?”. When conversations waned, additional general questions were provided to provoke further descriptive comment. (for example “What is your impression about the people who frequent Pacific Place?” and “How does Pacific Place compare to [another Hong Kong mall]?”). Respondents were also encouraged to describe a particular visit to the mall, framed as a “grand tour” question (McCracken 1988; Spradley 1979). The overall objective was for this in-depth conversation to yield a “thick description” (Denzin 1989; Geertz 1973) of their response to Pacific Place.

The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and almost two hours. In all cases a digital audio recording of the interview was made with the prior approval of the respondent and then transcribed in full. Most transcriptions were carried out by the interviewer; in some cases employees of the researcher’s company carried out the transcriptions to ‘blind’ recordings, but these were later checked in their entirety by the interviewer. Transcription was a devastatingly slow process – averaging one hour to transcribe 5 minutes of interview – and often it was impossible to understand what was being said due to background or ambient noise. In all, 23 interviews were carried out, 21 of which were considered useable. Of these, 7 interviews were analysed on a line-by-line basis. By that time the major sub-categories were emerging and the researcher began looking to saturate these categories in the subsequent interviews. Thus whilst the transcripts were examined carefully for any new data to emerge, or negative cases, as well as adding to the identified categories, it was not felt necessary to carry out a line-by-line analysis of these later transcripts.

One particular fallibility of interviewing was observed. During the fourth interview it was noted that, in the latter stages of the interview, the respondent began contradicting their own explanation of motivations for visiting the mall, and for their expectations within the mall. They graciously consented to a follow-up interview, during which the same area of discussion was raised, without informing the respondent of their earlier contradiction. Their response concurred with their comments from the later stages of the first interview. After their response had been recorded they were informed of the earlier contradiction. A subsequent discussion on the topic suggested that, whilst responses given in the earlier stages of the interview were to the best of the respondent's ability, as the interview progressed she had the opportunity to more thoroughly consider her motives; only then did she become aware of alternative motives that previously she had not recognized. It thus became a policy of subsequent interviews therefore to revisit earlier parts of the interview discussion in the later stages of the interview to allow respondents to reconsider and possibly modify their responses.

Memos

Memos were an important part of the research process. Immediately after the interview a memo was written to record any first-impressions of the interviewer regarding the interview and the respondent (Goulding 2002; Glaser and Strauss 1967). These memos were intended to capture any feelings or moods, or to note significant body language or gestures that the interviewer observed that might not be apparent in the audio recording, and at the same

time note any thoughts or ideas that might have occurred to the interviewer in the course of the interview. An example of this type of memo is shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Example of memo made immediately after interviewing

Memo

There were frequent references to “pretentiousness”, and the respondent was very aware of the quality of clothes, the brand-name bags, of other patrons of Pacific Place. One wonders if there isn’t an underlying envy, or insecurity with the respondent. She seemed very (self) conscious about things to do with money and social status.

It was interesting also that, whilst she did seem envious of these people, she didn’t seem to aspire to their position. As if she wanted a part of what they had but not all. For example, perhaps she wanted their financial security/freedom but not their value set.

She also seemed to have clear roles or definitions of femininity, and these were elements that influenced her evaluation of malls. Her own battle with weight figured regularly in her conversation, ranging from factual statements (“I lost X lbs”) to governing preferences (“Zara has my size”) to possibly self-evaluation or maybe even envious remarks about the place being “full of small, thin women”

She criticises those who carry “lots of these carrier bags and fancy names” by comparing to “women selling cardboard along the street” – I wonder if this effort to claim social justice is really simply jealousy or resentment. Her own battle with weight seems to be up front in her mind during our conversation and indeed she uses it in comparison on several occasions.

The post-interview memos proved to be extremely useful when carrying out the line-by-line open coding of the transcript. Often it was difficult to fully understand or interpret the intent of the respondent; by referencing to the memo, and being reminded of impressions and attitudes during the interview, clarity and understanding was often added to the transcript.

A second kind of memo was used throughout the research process relating to ideas that came to the researcher regarding the direction of the research, possible categories or concepts, and any possible theories that might have been emerging. These memos were sometimes related to research activities (e.g. during literature searching) or simply moments of introspection. An example of this kind of memo is shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Example of a theory-related memo

<p>Memo</p> <p>Personal relationships with shop staff is a recurrent theme mentioned by most respondents. This can be viewed in at least two ways. Firstly, as an affectionate bond of friendship, and grouped within the category “Influence of Others”. Equally, based on the descriptions by the respondents, it can be seen as a pampering, as a boost to the ego, or that the respondents interpret this as ‘special treatment’, like they are special or privileged.</p>

During the many hours of sifting through the codes and categories, and the often futile attempts to discover links between concepts and categories, these memos frequently provided the impetus towards meaningful interpretation and linkage. On occasion, the memo proved to be a moment of illumination; once brought to the data it provided the next step of the analysis.

Constant comparison

Constant comparison is a basic feature of grounded theory and involves comparing coded data from different sources in an effort to identify

“differences and similarities across incidents” (Spiggle 1994, p.493). The process is key in identifying concepts by comparing open-coded data, which is generally descriptive, and finding concepts that have the power to explain what is happening in the data and, equally, explain the relationships “between and across incidents” (Goulding 2002, p.69). Relationship statements are made, according to Goulding (2002) at the more abstract level of concepts and not from raw data, and require the more sophisticated technique of axial coding (Goulding 2002).

Theoretical sampling

In accordance with the principals of grounded theory, data collection and analysis were carried out concurrently (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002). This on-going analysis was used, in part, to inform ‘theoretical sampling’, the act of selecting the next respondent based on the response from the previous respondent (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002). As more interviews were conducted and more data collected, the emerging categories and theory further informed the choice of respondent. Given an initial prevalence of references to such social issues as “the opinion of others”, and “fashion trends”, and the multicultural nature of the study setting (Hong Kong), informants were initially selected from a broad range of ethnicities to look for significant changes in responses. In some cases respondents introduced other informants for interview.

Observations

Once interviews were underway and preliminary coding was available for study it became increasingly clear that there would be little to be gained by observation. The researcher, on several occasions both on weekdays and at weekends, stayed at the research site for an hour or more observing the behaviour of the patrons, yet nothing was observed that contributed significantly to the data. Thus observation was dropped as a data collection method for this study.

Literature

Consistent with the principles of theoretical sensitivity (Glaser and Strauss 1967) literature was constantly referred to in response to the results of interviews. Indeed, it became apparent early on in the interviews that the literature in the field of branding was insufficient to explain much of what was going on with relationship between the respondents and the mall and, significantly, the dynamic of this relationship in a social context. Thus the ability to reconsider emerging concepts from alternative perspectives - e.g. human geography (Relph 1976; Massey 1995; Tuan 2001), environmental psychology (Kaplan and Kaplan 1982; de Young 1999), sociology (Easthope 2004) - became a valuable feature and reaffirmed the suitability of grounded theory as the methodology for this study.

5.4.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis and interpretation followed closely the three stages prescribed by Goulding (2002) based on the original process described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Table 5.3 details these stages as they were applied in this study.

Table 5.3: The Stages of Data Analysis and Interpretation Used in this Study

Stage	Activity	Outcome	Nature
<i>Open coding</i>	Line-by-line coding	Codes	Descriptive
	Compare and reduce codes	Groups of codes as meaningful units	Conceptual
	Develop concepts that relate units	Conceptual codes that relate and explain previous meaningful units and which have properties that can be dimensionalised	Explanatory
	Dimensionalise concepts	List of properties or characteristics of each concept	Meaning

<i>Axial coding</i>	Identify relationships between concepts	Sub-categories	Explanatory
<i>Selective coding</i>	Formalization of theory	Identification of core categories and development of theory	Theory

Stage 1: Open coding

Once an interview had been conducted and the audio recording transcribed, a line-by-line analysis of the transcript was applied, using open coding to break the data into “distinct units of meaning” (Jafari 2008). This resulted in a huge number of codes, all of which had the potential for providing meaning and relevance (Goulding 2002). The literature is not clear as to how ‘interpretive’ this first stage of coding should be; this researcher vacillated between feelings he was being either too literal or too interpretive with the data. To resolve this, a ‘three-column coding’ was employed; the first column contained the transcript, the second column held a descriptive summary code, and the third column an interpretive code. An example of this is shown in Figure 5.3 (p.174). This proved to be enormously valuable later during constant comparison between interviews; the dual coding provided a richer picture of

each interview, and the subsequent comparisons tended to clarify many uncertainties within the analyses.

Figure 5.3: Interview transcript extract – example of three-column coding

<p>Int: Any comparisons between the pretentiousness of Elements and the pretentiousness of Pacific Place? Or is it all the same kind of issue?</p> <p>Res: Um, I think it's the sense of issue but for some reason I prefer Pacific Place; But I also feel there's a lot of pretention Pacific Place, there's a lot of people, um, going back to the idea that they're belonging. They seem to be people who are Hong Kong citizens, I mean there are often tourists but I'd say it's more part of Hong Kong life? Whereas in Elements I feel as if everyone is a foreigner. I don't know if I really believe it but it does come into my mind that Elements feels very nouveau riche whereas Pacific Place feels like old money Very, very broad bushstrokes. Elements feels like a lot of people keen to be upwardly mobile whereas Pacific Place, feels like, well, more like me in that they're there for a reason or that they have [developed their lifestyle already]...but there's a brashness in Elements that I don't feel in Pacific Place. I feel Pacific Place isn't brash, whatever else it is.</p>	<p>Belonging – to HK, to PP</p> <p>PP as a part of HK life</p> <p>Nouveau riche vs old money</p> <p>Measuring the mall by the patrons</p> <p>PP as not brash</p>	<p>Sense of belonging</p> <p>Mall as a part of lifestyle</p> <p>Social positioning</p> <p>Economic positioning</p> <p>Compare by lifestyle</p> <p>Image of others</p> <p>Honest, authentic, established</p>
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To assist in the interrogation of the data, and to focus on interpretation rather than simply describing, this researcher kept three question pinned, literally, to the front of his computer; what is going on here? What is the situation? How is the person managing the situation? (Dick 1999). Whilst the coding did not

restrict itself only to these questions, they at least provided a useful impetus on the many occasions when the researcher could not make sense of the data.

Through the process of constant comparison of codes between different interviews these were reduced and grouped into meaningful units (Goulding 2002). These units were then compared, to identify the conceptual relationships between the units and to move beyond mere description by starting to identify concepts that have explanatory power (Spiggle 1994). These concepts should have be capable of being dimensionalised – of having distinct properties that are characteristic of the concept - but, as Goulding (2002) cautions, these dimensional properties should focus not “on quantitative values but on meaning” (p.121). It should also be noted that these concepts only “explain aspects of behaviour, but not the whole” (Goulding 2002, p.121).

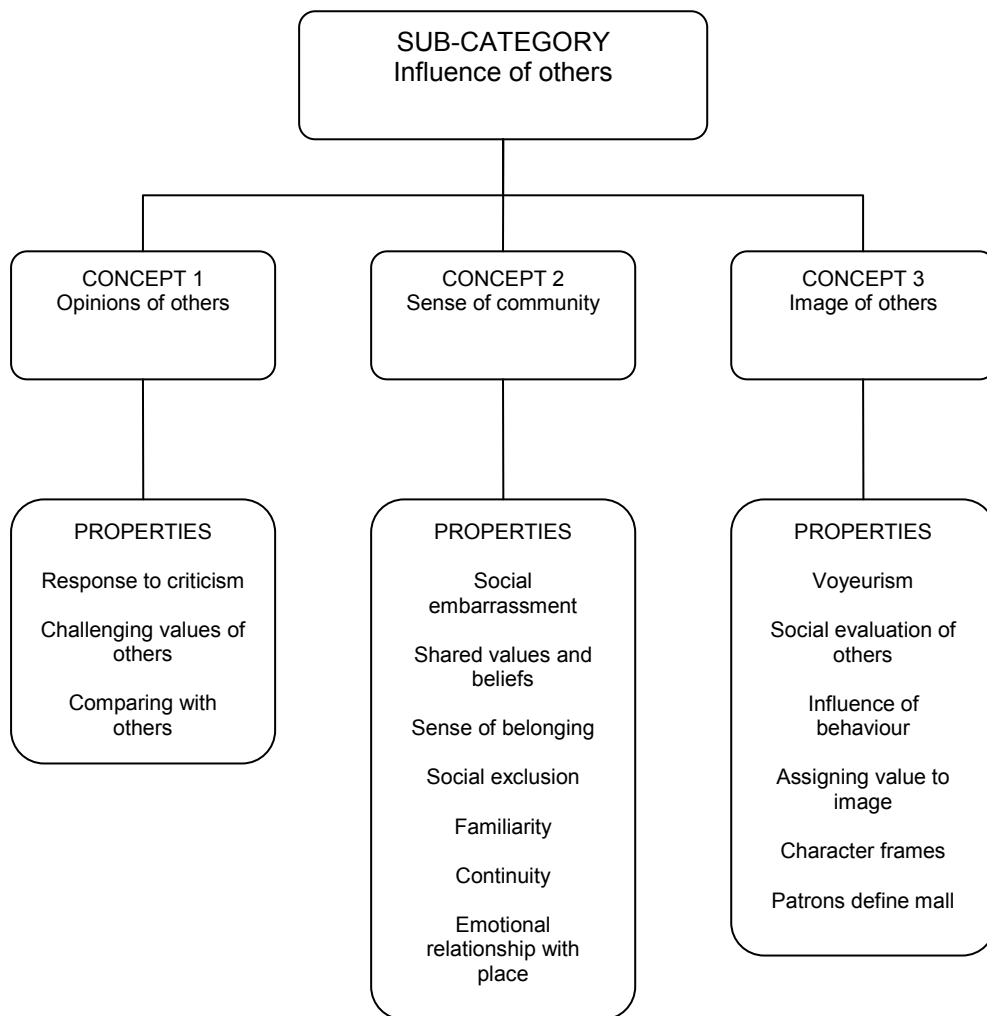
Stage 2: Axial coding

Axial coding seeks to “identify the relationships between the concepts” which in turn “paves the way for the gradual development of the theory” (Jafari 2008, p.172). It is the process of seeking out the interrelatedness between the properties of these concepts and leads to a further, and higher-level, abstraction and results in the development of categories. The analysis of concepts, and the development of categories, is an integral step in preparing for the construction of theory (Jezewski 1995); as Goulding (2002) observes:

“Using axial coding, the researcher develops a category by specifying the conditions that gave rise to it, the context in which it is embedded, and the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled” (Goulding 2002, p.78)

The open coding stage of this study had generated a huge number of codes and concepts which required sorting and relating (see Appendix 3 for an extract from a table used to develop axial codes from open codes); axial coding is, according to Goulding (2002) “the appreciation of concepts in terms of their dynamic interrelationships” (p.78). The identification of the relationship between concepts leads to “a higher level of abstraction” (Goulding 2002, p. 78) and the formation of sub-categories and categories (i.e. moving up in the analysis hierarchy). At the same time, further examination of the base codes reveals that the concepts themselves can be further sub-divided by way of their component properties (i.e. moving down in the analysis hierarchy). The relationship between sub-category, concepts, and properties is illustrated in Figure 5.4. With reference to Figure 5.4, the concepts of ‘Opinions of others’, ‘Sense of community’, and ‘Image of others’ can be unified under the sub-category of ‘Influence of others’. Equally, the concepts can be seen to comprise of a series of properties; in the case of ‘Opinions of others’, it has three properties that will be found in greater or

Figure 5.4: Example of axial coding



lesser degrees between different respondents. For example, one respondent might always look to compare favorably with others, whereas another respondent might actively look to be different to others. Such measurements are referred to as the ‘dimensional range’ of the concept (Goulding 2002). Thus an explanatory ‘network’ is developed with concepts grouped under sub-categories, and the sub-categories being subsumed under more abstracted categories. At this stage the analysis is reaching its final stage of theory building.

Stage 3: Selective coding: Selecting Core Categories and Theory Building

By identifying the interrelatedness between concepts and establishing sub-categories, higher level categories are established, and it is at this stage - the final stage of theory development - that the researcher develops a core category. A core category “pulls together all the strands in order to offer an explanation of the behaviour under study” (Goulding 2002, p.88). Such a category is based on “the assumption that a full interrogation of the data has been conducted, and negative cases, where found, have been...accounted for” (ibid, p.88). Glaser (1978) is specific that a core category must meet certain criteria, including:

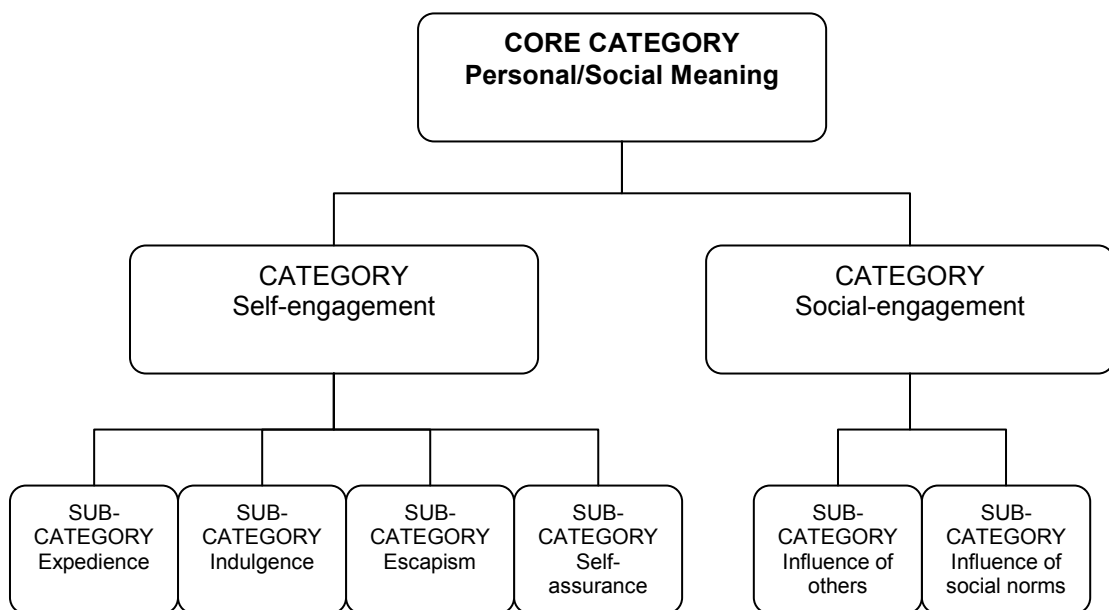
- It must be central to all other categories
- It should account for a large proportion of behaviour
- It must be based on reoccurrence in the data
- It should take longer to saturate than other categories/concepts
- It must relate meaningfully to other categories
- It should have clear implications for the development of formal theory
- The theoretical analysis should be based on the core category
- It should be highly variable and modifiable

(Goulding 2002, p.89)

The outcome of this study structure is illustrated in Figure 5.5. Six sub-categories emerged to explain the behaviour of the respondents. These were then grouped under two categories labeled ‘Self-engagement’ and ‘Social-

engagement’. Revisiting both the data and the criteria specified by Glaser (1978) led to the recognition of ‘Personal/social meaning’ as the core category which bound together the categories, sub-categories and concepts, and established the foundation for the emergent theory.

Figure 5.5: The structure of the study outcomes



A detailed explanation of these categories, sub-categories and concepts is provided in Chapter 6: Findings.

5.4.6 Ensuring theoretical sensitivity and saturation

Throughout this study this researcher made constant comparison with the literature and other theories in order to interpret and explain categories and concepts emerging from the data. As the categories emerged from the data subsequent interviews were examined and compared for evidence to support or contradict these categories, and for evidence of any new concepts; the

interviews continued until no significant new evidence was emerging and, further, until it was evident that the categories that had emerged were fully supported in the data. The combination of the ability to link the categories theoretically, the constant support for the theory from the data (and from literature), and the recurrence within the data of similar concepts indicated theoretical saturation, and at that point the research was concluded.

5.4.7 Inter-rater reliability and member checking

In accordance with the literature (Riley and Hawe 2005), this researcher invited another reviewer to review the coding process and preliminary interpretations to enhance the credibility of the findings (inter-rater reliability). In addition, and as suggested by Goulding (2002), three of the respondents were approached for their opinions on preliminary findings (member checking), though prior to the beginning of the abstraction process.

5.5 CREDIBILITY

Within the positivist paradigm, the measures of quantitative research are validity and reliability; within the interpretivist paradigm Cutcliffe and McKenna (1999) argue that qualitative research “should be tested for credibility or accuracy using terms and criteria that have been developed exclusively for this very approach” (p.375). As Leinenger (1994) states “[w]e must develop and use criteria that fit the qualitative paradigm, rather than use quantitative criteria for qualitative studies” (p.97). This research adopts Miles

and Huberman's (1994) measure of accuracy for qualitative research, namely 'trustworthiness', in addition to applying the grounded theory measures of validity (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002).

5.5.1 Trustworthiness

Miles and Huberman (1994) propose four categories to guide accuracy within qualitative research, namely confirmability, dependability, credibility, and transferability. Whilst there is considerable overlap, taken together they build trustworthiness or what Bruner (1986) refers to as 'believability' within the research (Gran 2010).

Confirmability

This question asks whether the study can be replicated by others; are the procedures, methodology clearly stated, is the analysis and the path to the conclusion sufficiently clear that another researcher can repeat the work.

Each step of the process within this study was carefully documented with the clear objective of providing a transparent record of the way the work has executed, the results of the work, and, in particular, the basis upon which decisions were made by the researcher. This thesis, its chapters and appendices, provide that record.

Dependability

This refers to the “care and consistency” (Gran 2010, p.79) with which the research was carried out.

This study has followed meticulously the grounded theory process as set out by Goulding (2002), in accordance with the principles of Glaser and Strauss (1967). From the formulation of the research question and its subsequent refinement, through the iterative steps of the process – theoretical sampling, and sensitivity, the constant comparison of data, the development of theoretical sensitivity, through abstraction and dimensionalising of concepts – the study was conducted in a fashion consistent with the methodology, and a record of each step made. The researcher’s background and role is clearly stated, and inter-rater reliability testing (Gran 2010) was introduced in the early stages of the data analysis.

Credibility

This question is focused on the outcomes of the study – do the findings make sense, in themselves, to the people they study and to the reader? And most importantly do they provide an “authentic portrait” (Gran 2010) of the phenomenon under study?

Care was taken to develop “thick description” (Geertz 1973) within the interviews and with additional memos after the interviews. In addition, as far

as possible the interview transcripts and, in some cases, preliminary interpretations of those interviews was returned to the respondents for comments. Care was taken in ensuring that concepts developed were strong in their ability to explain, rather than simply describe, relationships within the data and that the source and nature of this explanatory power was clearly documented. Finally care was taken to provide a clear description of the context of the study for the reader; the background and motivation of the researcher, the development of the study sites not only from the respondents' perspective but from the owner's and the designer's perspective, and to ensure that the cosmopolitan, multi-lingual context of Hong Kong within which the study was conducted was clearly outlined.

5.5.2 Grounded theory's strategies for validation

Grounded theory offers two central measures that aim at credibility. The first is by adhering to the grounded theory process and continual transparency of the analytic progress (Goulding 2002; Locke 2001). As noted above (5.5.1 Trustworthiness: Credibility) this study consistently strived to follow closely the procedures as laid down by Goulding (2002) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) and, further, to document them in a clear and transparent manner.

The second way in which grounded theory provides its own credibility check – what Goulding (2002) refers to as its “built-in mandate to strive towards verification” (p.44) – is through the process of category saturation. In the case of this study interviews and analysis continued iteratively, the latter providing

concepts and the former providing further support for those concepts, until no new concepts were occurring and the related categories appeared to be well-saturated. These stages were carefully documented; the results, and sample interviews and analyses, are included as an essential part of this thesis.

5.6 ETHICALITY

At the onset of this research study the researcher submitted an “Ethical Approval Form” to the University of Wolverhampton; this form outlined the nature of the study, the methodology, a description of the types of respondents to be approached, and the methods of approach and engagement with these respondents. Based on that information the university gave its ethical approval to the study. The subsequent work within the study has not deviated significantly from that originally outlined.

Prior to starting any interview, the purpose and outcome of the study was explained to the individual respondent and, in particular, their attention was drawn to six points:

- Their participation in the interview was entirely voluntary
- They would be free to refuse to answer any question at any time
- They were free to withdraw from the interview at any time
- The interview would be kept strictly confidential and would be available only to members of the research team

- Excerpts of this interview might be made part of the final research thesis or academic papers related to the study but under no circumstances would their name or identifying characteristics be included in the report. Pseudonyms would be used.
- It was preferred to digitally record the interview and their approval was requested.

Respondents were then provided with the “Ethics Protocol” form and the “Interview Details” form for record (see Appendix 1 and 2). One copy was given to the researcher, one copy retained by the respondent.

Throughout the study, all data, recordings and writings were kept on two password-protected computers; back-ups of all work was done on a regular basis, the data recorded on disc and those discs kept in a locked filing cabinet.

The involvement of inter-rater reliability checking was carried out on transcripts identified only by the respondent’s pseudonym.

5.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As a professional who works on a wide variety of building types, it is clear to see that the research site represented only a narrow band of retail mall type. It represented only two strata of consumer (middle- to upper-income); it had a very specific trade mix common only to very few malls in Hong Kong (high-end); and, by reputation, the site is considered unique in the marketplace.

The limitations of interviewing as a technique were noted in ‘Section 5.4.4 Accessing and collection of data: Interviews’. Whilst the respondents appeared to be sincere in their involvement, interviewing relies to a degree upon the respondents knowing their own motives and, indeed, being able to express these motives. As was noted in one particular interview, the respondent discovered a little about themselves during the course of the interview which led them, in all apparent innocence, giving contradicting statements. It is possible that interpretation can accommodate this anomaly but nevertheless it is necessary to recognize the limitations of consumer opinion.

Finally, and to echo Glaser (1992) and Goulding (2002), theory cannot be conceptualized beyond the data. As noted in the first paragraph of Limitations, this is a very narrow study area with a very particular consumer group in a unique context. Yet whilst this is a limitation of the study, equally it would appear to open the door to further studies in other related areas, with alternative profiles of consumers in different social and cultural contexts.

5.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter explained the methodology for this study. It discussed the increase of consumer research from within the interpretivist paradigm, and looked at examples of research methodologies within this paradigm. It then focussed on grounded theory and the rationale for choosing this methodology for this research. After an overview of grounded theory, its origins and key features the chapter concluded by a detailed account of the grounded theory

process as it was applied to this study. The next chapter details the findings of the study; it presents and explains the substantive theory, and the three stage process of that theory. It then expands on the core categories and categories generated by the study, and discusses the application of the theory.

Chapter 6.0 FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports on the findings of the study. The objective of this study was to develop a theory that could explain how consumers developed their image of the brand for a retail mall in Hong Kong. The specific objectives were to identify and explain the process by which this brand image was developed. From these study objectives three specific research questions were formulated:

- What are the factors that influence and inform the brand image?
- How are these factors interpreted and evaluated?
- How are these images used by the consumer?

The outcome of the research is represented as a top-down hierarchy of categories, sub-categories, and concepts; it is a complex hierarchy and therefore for clarity the structure of this chapter is slightly different from other chapters. The sequence of reporting and the structure of this chapter is arranged in six sections; for clarity each section begins on a separate page with a bold heading and a diagram of the overall hierarchy that highlights the section of the hierarchy detailed in that section. The six sections are summarised below as bullet points:

- Section 1: this provides an overall description of the substantive theory that emerged from the research analysis. This description is presented in a storyline form for clarity. In addition this section outlines the 3-stage process of the theory, which comprises a development stage, an articulation stage, and a response stage.
- Section 2 presents the core category (Personal/social meaning) as the top of the analysis hierarchy and explains its overall significance to the theory generated by this research. It also discusses the findings in relation to the major theoretical areas identified in Chapters 2, 3, and 4.
- Sections 3 and 4 then provide the substance of the findings hierarchy under the core category. These sections are structured to describe and discuss in detail the two categories (Personal Engagement and Social Engagement) that form the basis of the theory, and then to progressively explain in detail the hierarchy of categories, sub-categories, and concepts. It explains the interpretations that led to these divisions, and provides examples from the data to support those assumptions.
- Section 5: this section considers the application and flexibility of the theoretical framework. Further, it discusses how the theoretical framework answers the three research questions.
- Section 6: this section summarises the chapter; it details the main propositions inherent to the theory, and concludes the chapter.

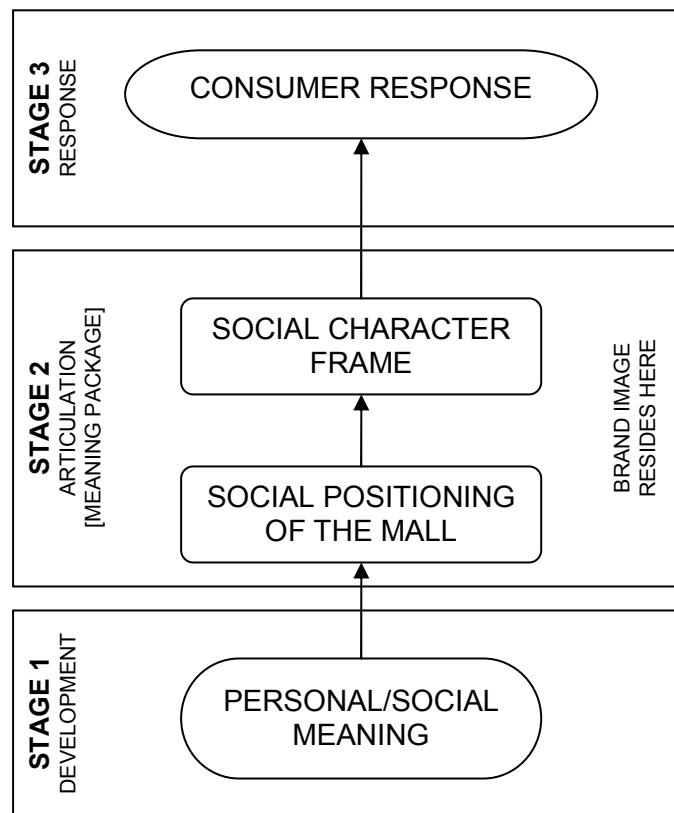
SECTION ONE – AN OVERALL DESCRIPTION OF THE THEORY

6.1.1 AN ESSENTIAL DESCRIPTION OF THE SUBSTANTIVE THEORY AS A STORYLINE

This study has generated a substantive theory of consumer retail mall brand image creation. This theory proposes that consumers' retail mall brand image is formed by developing personal and social meaning associated with the mall. This takes place, for example, through interpretation of the actions and appearances of mall patrons, through evaluating personal requirements, and by responding to the holistic impressions of the physical realm. Consumers then uses that meaning to position the mall socially – i.e. identifying the mall as providing services to a particular social structure and at a particular level within that social structure.

The consumer evaluates the mall as catering to particular strata of society; thus certain actions, behaviours, and appearances relevant to those strata are considered appropriate within the mall. These associations of actions, behaviours, and appearances have been labeled “character frames”; a character frame is a dynamic set of parameters that allows consumers to adopt a variety of identities - they can be real, aspired to, or assumed identities - which are socially acceptable within the mall's assigned social position. The retail mall brand image thus is predominantly a socially defined “meaning package” that comprises both the social position and the associated character frame (see Figure 6.1, p.191)

Figure 6.1: Theory framework



Within the group of respondents interviewed for this study, their responses to this meaning package were varied, generally reflecting some kind of acceptance/approval or rejection/disapproval. This is not to suggest a clearly dichotomous choice, as these responses included such conditions as aspire/desire, insecurity/rejection of values, and dislike; thus the range of responses would appear to be more complex than a simple continuum between two poles (see 'consumer response' in Figure 6.1). It should also be stressed that these categorizations or classifications refer to consumer behaviour rather than any attempt at a consumer typology.

For clarity the diagram of the process that the theory describes is shown as Figure 6.1 and is referred to throughout this thesis as the ‘theory framework’.

6.1.2 THE THREE-STAGE CYCLE OF THE THEORY

The theory of consumer retail mall brand image creation can be seen as a process that comprises of three stages, with each stage serving a specific function (see Figure 6.1).

6.1.2.1 Stage 1: Development

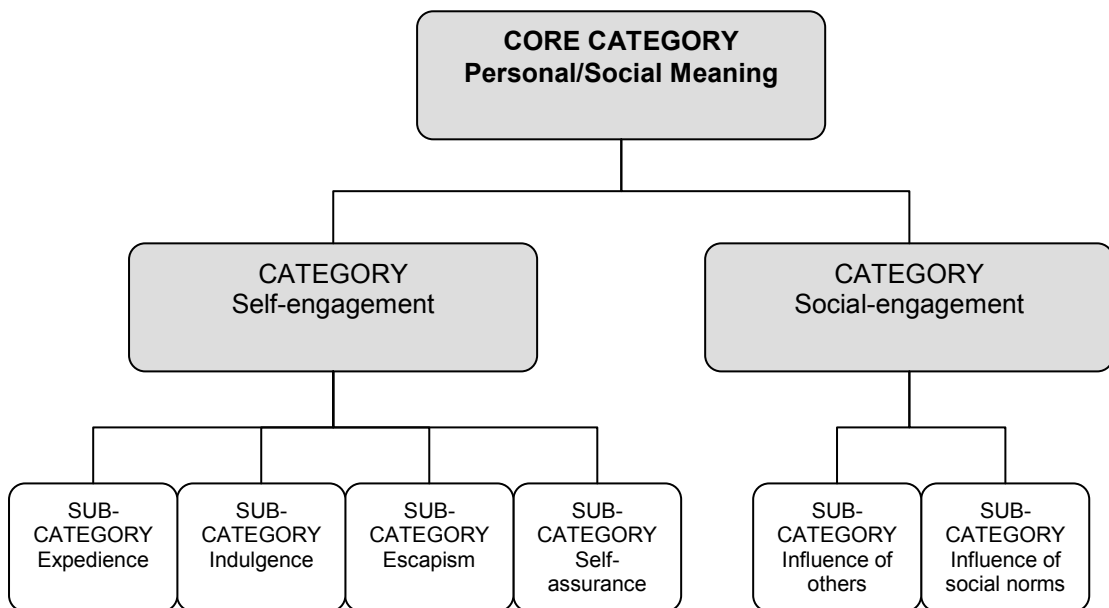
The first stage – development of personal and social meaning – is the process by which the consumer gains knowledge about the mall, how they interpret that knowledge and, finally, develop specific personally- and socially-relevant meaning about the mall. It is the foundation upon which the brand image is articulated, and is the core of the theory of consumer retail mall brand image creation.

The consumer seeks to position the mall in relation to their own needs and desires and to do this they evaluate the mall from two perspectives; a personal perspective and a social perspective. The personal perspective has been labeled “Self-engagement”; consumers look to their immediate or personal experiences related to the mall. What is their current and personal response to the stimulation around them? The social perspective has been labeled “Social-

engagement”; how are the actions of the consumer, their looks, their desires, interpreted/influenced by others in a social context?

The two perspectives involve a series of evaluations on several levels; for the sake of clarity the overall process leading to the development of personal/social meaning is introduced here (see Figure 6.2); Sections 2, 3, and 4 will look at each part in detail.

Figure 6.2: Personal/social meaning development



6.1.2.2 Stage 2: Articulation

The second stage – articulation of the brand image – is the creation of a significant image that represents this meaning. The research indicates that this is an image of ‘social position’; the consumer determines where, within the

social world that they inhabit, this mall fits. What level of society does the mall serve and to which members of society. This image of the mall locates the mall socially; based on this social positioning the consumer then develops an associated “character frame”. This is essentially a set of socially-determined factors of behaviour, of appearance, and of belief that are considered acceptable at the determined social position. These factors create the parameters of the character frame, and allow the consumer to construct a variety of personal and social identities that will be acceptable at the determined social position.

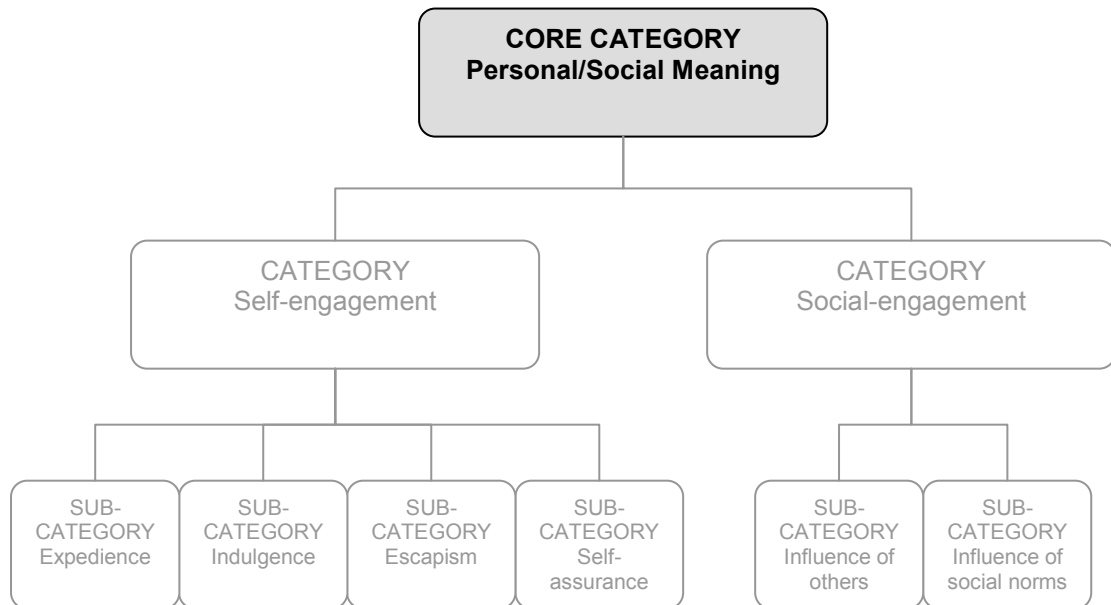
6.1.2.3 Stage 3: Response

The third stage of the cycle can be seen as the evaluation and response stage. The consumer evaluates the brand image, considers the identities available within the character frame and determines their appropriateness or desirability to themselves. At this stage the consumer determines whether or not they wish to engage – or continue to engage – with the mall based on a process of self- and social-engagement evaluation that is the foundation of the stage one development.

Whilst the findings of this research are presented in a linear and sequential fashion, it is more likely that it is an iterative process of overlapping development/articulation/evaluation. The following three sections (Sections 2, 3, and 4) detail the development and nature of categories that form the core of the theory.

SECTION TWO – CORE CATEGORY “PERSONAL/SOCIAL MEANING”

Figure 6.3: The core category “Personal/social meaning”



6.2.1 INTRODUCTION

Personal/social meaning is presented as a core category; that is, a category that can summarise a particular pattern of behaviour (Glaser 1978). A core category, according to Goulding (2002), “pulls together all the strands in order to offer an explanation of the behaviour under study” (p.88) and, in particular, “it must be explained in relation to its relevance to other categories” (Goulding 2002, p.88). Throughout the interviews, from the very beginning, it was very clear that the actions and beliefs of the respondents were constantly being considered in some form of social context and, further, much of what appeared to be personal choice was in fact governed by the social implications of any

given decision. For example, Eric (51, manufacturer) when asked to describe his impression of retail malls in Hong Kong chose to compare two malls, Festival Walk located in Kowloon, and the study site Pacific Place, located on Hong Kong island:

“Modern, spacious...I would describe them as modern and spacious. But even Festival Walk and Pacific Place both are spacious, the class...I mean...of course the Pacific Place is higher class than Festival Walk”

Whilst his description begins with a more design-oriented view, his comparison of the two malls is based on his personal interpretation of inherent social meaning, and serves to introduce the core category of ‘Personal/social meaning’. This core category, as will be illustrated in the following sections, is the outcome of a complex framework of negotiations that the respondents went through in order to develop an understanding of the retail mall. This ‘understanding’ was in fact interpretations of a series of symbolic meanings – understanding what the mall meant to the respondent on a personal level and what it represented on a social level. In short, the respondents developed personal and social meaning in relation to the mall.

The development of self- and social-identity

The search for and application of meaning operates in two contrasting directions; “outward in constructing the social world – social symbolism – and

inward towards constructing our self-identity: self-symbolism” (Elliott 1997, p.287). Yet the distinction between this outward/inward, of personal and social meaning, within this research was not clearly delineated and much of the personal meaning was developed within a social context and with a desired social outcome (e.g. acceptance to a particular social group; the development of socially-applicable identities; the identification of personally meaningful symbols to be used in social communication). The inter-relationship between personal and social identity is recognised by both social identity theory and social categorization theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner 1985; White and Dahl 2007). Identity is a constant negotiation between personal identity - deriving from a sense of self - and social identity - that which derives from community memberships (White and Dahl 2007). And with the erosion of traditional social roles (Arnould 2005) consumption practices can play a role in producing “one’s self, self-image, and community membership” (Arnould 2005, p.89); indeed, CCT, according to Arnould (2005), emphasizes that shopping is one avenue that consumers explore to realize such projects of identity creation. Arnould’s (2005) observations regarding personal identity and community membership are reflected in the findings of this study; the overlapping of self- and social-engagement provides a strategy for developing both personal and social meaning which, in turn, is applied firstly for interpreting the retail environment and secondly for positioning themselves favourably or unfavourably in relation to that interpretation.

Community membership

The development of meaning from community membership could be seen in several forms throughout the interviews; from brand communities (e.g. Algesheimer et al 2005; Cova and Pace 2006; Davidson et al 2007) described by respondents Eric and Michelle, to the social communities (e.g. Stutzman 2006; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner 1985, 1999) described by respondents Mei Ling and Kurt, through to differences in ethnic communities ((e.g. Phinney et al 2002; Nagel 1994) characterised by what some respondents considered to be unacceptable public behaviour. Susan (38, accountant) saw a strong social difference between herself and the mainland Chinese, regarding them as socially inferior whilst at the same time acknowledging that the visitors to Hong Kong often have a much higher spending power than she does:

“It’s really different, you know....mainlanders are so.....you see them and they’re different. Always noisy, especially the groups. Pacific Place you don’t see them or if you do they’re not so noisy. But you can always recognise them – they think they got money so it’s OK, you know?”

Several of the respondents who were Hong Kong residents associated the same meaning with mainland Chinese. Kenneth (45, Marketer):

“I really don’t like it where the China tourists shop. It always seems like a battle. It just makes me feel...I don’t like that.”

Personal appearance and the significance of fashion

Examples of meaning creation and the juxtaposition between personal meaning and, as noted in the literature (e.g. Holman 1980; Mick 1986), social meaning was particularly referred to in relation to fashion and fashion-related items, and not surprisingly in relation to high-end brands such as Gucci, Louis Vitton, and Ferragamo. Rebecca (34, sales executive), when asked her impressions of Pacific Place:

“R: Impressions?... it is an upscale mall with all the shopping store brands, all that upscale brands, famous brands, all those kinda brands and good restaurants there.

Int: What makes you think it’s upscale?

R: Expensive. Famous brands. You can find all those kind of brands like LV Gucci and even some things that I have never shopped...yeah you find it over there.”

She associated a great deal of importance to the meaning of brands; for her the international brands signified that the mall was positioned higher:

“[It has] Zara yeah. The European brands. But not much of the local brands except for, like I think they do have Bosini or something. I

don't know I'm not sure. But not much local brands. Zara or maybe H&M, that's all European brands. Yeah I think the focus, the target customer is some middle and high level people.”

Rebecca (34, sales executive) was, for the interview, dressed immaculately; very stylish, her hair looking like it had recently been styled, her nails a complicated pattern of resins and inset jewellery. When asked about her clothes, her style, she claimed a very introspective position:

“Ummm... I shop I mean I dress not to just please my boyfriend - I want myself to be happy so I just want to look at myself and think oh I look good...yeah of course I want my boyfriend saying oh you look nice today but I think the first thing is I want to make myself happier.”

In this instance Rebecca emphasises the importance that appearance has to her and believes she acts in accordance with personal preference. Throughout the interviewing procedure many respondents made reference to appearance, both of themselves and of others; how people presented themselves held significant meaning for the respondents. There was evidence that respondents exhibited a “subjective unhappiness with some aspect of one's appearance” (Lawler and Nixon 2011, p.59); this was reflected as both an internalized personal concern and as an externalized social concern. Anna (47, housewife) talked about how she and her friends presented themselves when they went out:

“It’s not that we need to dress up, but I guess it just makes us feel good to...you know....look smart. And, like if my friends dress nicely I want to dress nicely too otherwise you don’t feel like you’re together. So yeah, I guess appearance is important”

In this case clearly her choice of clothes and accessories has significant meaning to Anna as it could influence the opinion of her friends and the associated social acceptance by her friends. The social meaning associated with fashion and fashion-related items was evident when she was asked about using fake brand-name goods ¹ compared to carrying genuine brand-name goods:

“This bag is a genuine [Louis Vuitton] bag. I wouldn’t feel the same if it was a fake. You know, we Hong Kong people, we can see [recognise] the fake bags, so I carry it, everyone sees I’m not real. Why should I do that? I like the real thing.”

Again she sees her actions in the light of social acceptance through meaning transfer (McCracken 1988). If she carries a fake bag she will be regarded by her peers as a fake person; the opinions of others and the resultant social acceptance/rejection dictates her use of fashion items.

¹ Whilst fake goods are no longer easy to obtain in Hong Kong they are readily available over the border with China in Shenzhen.

Finding personal distinction within in-groups

Whilst Pacific Place offered a place where the respondents could signal community alliances through the social meanings associated with fashion it also provided the opportunity for them to distinguish themselves from their contemporaries. As Michelle (46, office manager) finds:

“[if I have a special need] then I will definitely go to Pacific Place. For example I got a function, I got Christmas ball coming up. I want to out dress my friends then I probably go to Pacific Place. Find something unique and accessories so that I won’t clash with other people.”

Whilst Michelle is looking for “something unique”, her reference to accessories suggests a willingness to participate in her own fashion statement. Similar to the concept of ‘co-design’, where “a product’s design is based on the customer’s selections from a range of design feature offerings” (Fiore et al 2004, p.835), Michelle is searching for a uniqueness yet within the social ‘character frame’ provided by Pacific Place.

The meaning of social appearance

For Michelle Pacific Place meant a distinctive quality both within the mall and within the neighbouring hotels:

“[Pacific Place is] a different class of network. From middle/upper class they offer the same range and variety but everything more expensive. We eat in the hotel. We eat in Zen [a contemporary Chinese restaurant]. Movies. Cinema. Shop.”

In this case the meaning associated with ‘expensive’ was interpreted to also mean ‘quality’ (Brucks et al 2000; Dodds et al 1991), a quality to which Michelle and her family associated and which formed a part of their social activity.

Mei Ling (36, housewife) made a distinction about the mall similar to Michelle; while she also used the mall as a part of her social life she was more direct about using it to develop and project her own social identity. To her Pacific Place provided a social marker, meaning that those who frequented the place benefited from associated social meaning:

“Pacific Place definitely got much more personality and higher class. Even though the class of that in Manila is equal to [Pacific Place], [Pacific Place] is definitely more...a better place to go. It’s stylish. Got its own style. But it’s a subtle one. It’s not in your face flashing the gold and ..suddenly rich types of guys. Its stylish. And sort of educated....type of subtle class.”

Reaction against mainstream consumption still relies on social identity (out-groups)

Even in cases where the respondents were clearly against malls and mainstream consumption, their actions could still be accounted for in the same personal/social meaning creation process. Jenny (28, advertising executive) was quite scathing in her criticism of mainstream mall patrons:

“I go for specialty stores because I'm the kind of person who goes for some...character....of the shops, rather than....because branch chain stores always have the general image to attract general people. They don't have the guts to have some too uncommon image in their products. I would go to the mall in summer because it's too hot outside and if I go to Pacific Place or Festival Walk it's because I want to go to some tidy and clean place. That's the only reason I would go to FW.”

She saw herself as different, as not ‘average’, and viewed a liking for mainstream commercialism as a weakness. She distained popular brands and the act of shopping as a leisure activity, and by way of contrast cited a government-sponsored art/bazaar facility as somewhere she enjoys frequenting:

“There's a place I really like....an old abattoir they've changed into a kind of Fringe Club...it is established in an old district, and it makes

you feel that you have just gone to another world. They have free rooms for any activities. Some people will make sculpture there, it's just so free, and you can have some drink outside every little building. You can have your own stall....lay your cloth and start selling your stuff.....”

Jenny’s reaction against the retail mall and, in particular, her enthusiasm for the alternative fringe-style facility (that still offers goods for sale) was rich in data about her attitudes, her personal beliefs and values, and the role she sees – and seeks – for herself. Yet the point to be made here is that her activities are still responding to the same kind of social positioning as, say, Eric. Jenny is responding to her interpretation of the brand image/social positioning of the mall and the associated meaning transfer (McCracken 1988); she sees users of Pacific Place as a particular group whose self-identity has appropriated meaning from the mall, meaning which she rejects on both a personal and social level in favour of the meaning she finds in an alternative group (Escalas and Bettman 2005). She sees herself very much as an individual and yet clearly relates to communities of ‘like-minded’ people. So whilst her preferred leisure place is quite different to, say, Mei Ling (36, housewife), her process of meaning creation and evaluation is the same and based on her developed personal/social meaning.

Interpreting social position

For Kurt (45, interior designer) activities related to Pacific Place clearly embodied aspirational high-end personal and social meaning:

“I think it’s been positioned that way. I think actually always been positioned that way. Accessible but still quite cliquey. You know what I mean if you visit the office, right, you know one end you’ve got Grappers and you’ve got you know Lane Crawford [at] the other end. You’ve got what’s that the French restaurant there and there was another it may have changed recently but there was a kind of restaurant bar at the other end and you know there’s a lot of gwai-los [Westerners] going there.”

Kurt derived a great deal of social meaning from his interpretation of the patrons and the way they acted and dressed:

“Well I mean you know the kinda high end office workers, the guys that are pulling down high salaries and their wives you know maybe at [expatriate international clubs] and that’s where they go you know...Grappers, China Club....I think its position, I think that whole thing about Pacific Place, you know, is position.”

During the interview Kurt saw himself as a dispassionate observer, seeing actions and appearances within the mall environment and of its patrons as

“signifiers in a semiotic system of social representations” (Duveen and Lloyd 1986, p.219). Yet his observations echoed the same process of social categorisation observed in other interviews. And, as has been argued by both Tajfel (1972) and Turner (1985), the act of social categorisation of subjects creates a social positioning and a social identity for them (Turner 1999). These assessments are based on meaning being inferred by the respondent, and this meaning being used as the basis for social categorisation and positioning. This meaning is referred to as both personal and social; yet it should be emphasised that it is a fallacy to view them “as denoting separate entities given in nature” (Duveen and Lloyd 1986); the construction of the two categories is linked closely to “the particular systems of values, ideas and practices of different societies” (Duveen and Lloyd 1986, p.219) and they can be considered in a state of constant and dynamic iterative exchange, rather than two independent conditions.

The analysis of data within this research, as detailed in the following sections, illustrates two things; firstly that there is an introspective assessment by the respondents that both evaluates and modifies personal beliefs, and that, equally, there is a social assessment that evaluates these beliefs within certain social groups with whom the respondents might engage. Secondly, that these two apparently separate activities are in fact overlapping, and it is an iterative process that continually compares personal beliefs with social beliefs and results in modification of these beliefs with the objective of positioning oneself in relation to one or more social groups. In keeping with the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2002) it is important

to review the proposed theory in relation to existing literature, to find support for the theory and to identify gaps in the literature that the theory can address. The following sections discuss the theory in the light of existing literature.

6.2.1.1 The self-social relationship

The findings point to two major areas of activity for the respondents; on the one hand, personal activities (categorized as ‘Self-engagement’) and, on the other hand, social activities (categorized as ‘Social-engagement’). Together these result in the development of personal and social meaning, grouped under the core category of ‘Personal/social meaning’. The self-social is not a matter of division, it is a continual iterative exchange, as meaning creation as a mental process is both “intrapersonal and interpersonal. Thinking is not only an Individual - Personal activity but also a Social – Public one.” (Harré 2008, p.28). As Vygotsky (1978) so famously proposed “all higher order mental processes exist twice; once in the relevant group, influenced by culture and history, and then in the mind of the individual’ (Harré 2004, p.28, citing Vygotsky 1978).

The prevalence of references to and concerns with social relationships permeates every interview in this study, and as a general category far outweighs all others. The literature abounds with studies that explore the relations between personal and social relations and identities (e.g. Arnould 2005; Harré 2004; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner 1985; Vygotsky 1978; White and Dahl 2007); two such strands of research that offer direct support to

these findings would be social comparison theory (Festinger 1954) and (social) positioning theory, in particular the work of Rom Harré (e.g. 2004, 2008; Harré and Langehove 1998).

In the first instance, social comparison theory proposes that individuals look outside of themselves to evaluate the beliefs and values they may hold and, in particular, they look to those in the society around them. Of particular relevance to this research, the individuals draw reference not only from the people around them but also from the environment around them in order to evaluate or develop their own beliefs. The substantive theory presented in this thesis is based on the notion that the respondents evaluate their own personally-developed beliefs with others/with their environment in a socially-relevant context.

The emergence of the core category “Personal/social meaning” has resonance with social positioning theory, which proposes that meaning is created through a series of symbolic interactions (Harré 2004) which is evident in the development stage of the study outcomes. Social positioning theory further proposes that people take up certain positions “within discourses that allow the presentation of a certain identity, or certain aspects of an identity in a particular context or situation” (Zelle 2009, p.2). This study illustrates the link between these two activities; the development of (personal/social) meaning can be seen as a series of internal and external discourses that result in a social positioning which, in turn, determines a series of ‘acceptable’ identities. These identities are resident within the character frame defined by this study.

The following sections revisit the discoveries of the literature reviewed in this study (Chapters 2, 3, and 4) and evaluate them in the light of the research findings. In particular it discusses the congruence and incongruence of the findings with theories from within the disciplines of consumer culture theory, branding, and place studies.

6.2.1.2 Consumer culture theory

During the course of the interviews it was not immediately apparent that personal identity projects were a concern of the respondents. Yet the subsequent analysis indicated that identity – in particular social identity represented by symbolic actions, behaviours and appearances (Tajfel 1972; Turner 1985; Turner et al 1987) – was a major factor in the establishing of mall image. Arnould (2005) draws attention to the role consumption can play in producing "one's self, self-image, and community membership" (p.89). CCT, according to Arnould (2005), emphasises that shopping is one avenue that consumers explore to realise such projects of identity creation. The findings of this research, the overlapping self- and social-engagement, reflect Arnold's observations regarding personal identity and community membership; the respondents used these as a strategy firstly for interpreting the retail environment through the actions of others and secondly for positioning themselves favourably or unfavourably in relation to that interpretation. As Margaret (57, lecturer) observed:

“...some of them look as if they spend lots and lots of money there – obviously I’m not one of them [laughs]”

The respondents in this study did not directly refer to ‘identity’, and at first this researcher failed to recognize the significance of ‘identifying’ others - which, within this study, meant categorizing them socially. Only as the analysis progressed, as the hundreds of open codes were related through concepts and those concepts subsumed into categories, did the symbolic content of the data begin to suggest the significance of identity as a consumer strategy. This is wholly consistent with the consumer culture theorists' claim (e.g. Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk 1995; Holt 2002) that the consumers draw symbolic meaning from the market place to create personal meaning. It leads directly into Arnould and Thompson's (2005) claim that "the market produces certain kinds of consumer positions that consumers can chose to inhabit" (p.871). The result of this, and one of the outcomes of this study, is what this researcher refers to as the 'character frame'; a fluid and flexible framework offering a variety of identities relevant to the social position occupied by the mall.

6.2.1.3 Manifestations of brand

Lichrou et al (2008), as noted in the literature review p.64, argue for place as meaning or a series of meanings, rather than a set of attributes and this argument is supported by this research. The most notable example of this is the respondents’ response to the physical realm; the research clearly shows

that the respondents rarely broke down the physical realm into specific attributes related, for example, to issues of interior design or architecture, or colours or textures. Rather, they responded to the realm as an holistic entity, preferring to describe it in terms of feelings and overall impressions, as this comment from Pamela (63, educational trainer) illustrates:

“I think IFC has done a very good job of developing a presence...and quite an exciting presence...”

Lichrou et al (2008) argue in favour of understanding places as sites of meaning and meaning creation, with the focus more on collective effect than individual attribute. This research supports that position.

In addition, the responses within this study to the physical realm can be seen to concur with concepts of emplacement and brandscape (Sherry 1998a); the setting - including the physical realm - creates an environment that encourages the consumer “performance of negotiated meanings” (Sherry 1998a, p.112). So whilst the respondents in this study do not focus on aspects of the built environment directly they clearly evaluate the holistic impression of the physical context within a framework of social positioning (Easthope 2004).

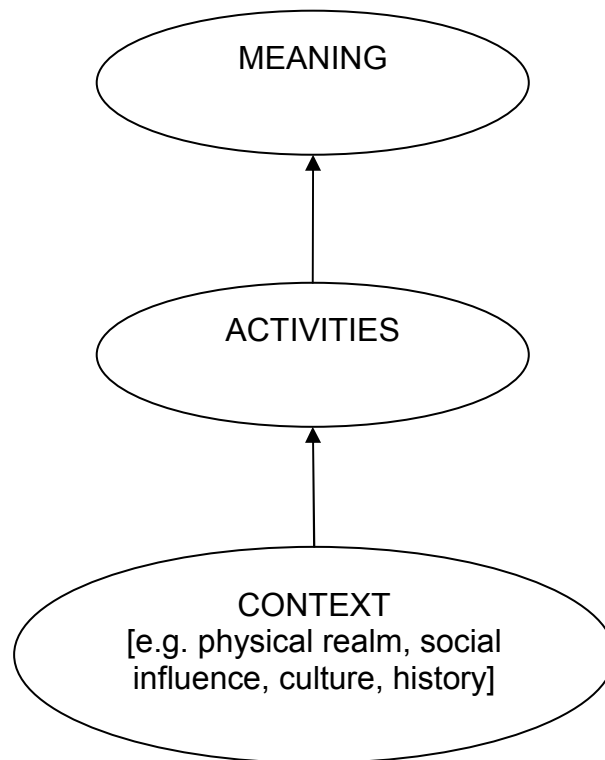
6.2.1.4 Manifestations of place

A good explanation of the relationship between self-engagement and social-engagement related to place in general and retail mall place in particular can

be found in Easthope (2004), as discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Easthope (2004) observes that whilst definitions of place are informed by a wide range of factors including personal beliefs and values, and aspects of the physical realm and local conditions, these factors are still interpreted within a value framework that is socially constructed (Gieryn 2000; Harvey 1991). This observation thus helps to explain - and support - the substantive theory generated by this research. Firstly, it concurs with the 'self vs social' conclusion and, importantly, provides illumination of the relationship between them by explaining why there is so much overlap between the two categories. The substantive theory is presented in this thesis as clearly-delineated boxes of data; this is more for clarity in explaining the theory, as in reality these boxes have fluid and overlapping properties when the theory is operationalised.

The results of this research have similarities with Gustafson (2001) in the creation of meaning in relation to place. He identified three core categories - self, environment and others. Significantly, and in contrast to the place models of Relph 1976, Canter 1977, Agnew 1987 and Gustafson 2001, this research does not support the dependency on the physical realm in quite the same way as those earlier models suggest. Self and others interact within a framework of social, cultural, historic, and physical, but they are not equal components. What is consistent is the apposition of self/social, and, through continuous comparison and evaluation between group beliefs and personal values, meaning is generated *in relation* to place i.e. place is the context within which activities occur and *from which* meaning evolves (see Figure 6.4, p.214). In accordance with the substantive theory of this thesis, this meaning is used to

Figure 6.4: The generation of meaning



establish a character frame wherein reside a host of available identities that the consumer can adopt. And it is ultimately the social positioning of meaning - meaning in a social context - that provides the consumer image of the mall.

6.2.2 CONCLUSION

The core category ‘Personal/social meaning’ is presented as an outcome of a series of engagements by the respondents with other people, environments, activities and behaviours associated with the retail mall. Further it should be acknowledged that these engagements take place within a larger context that embraces cultural, historic, and political influences, as this comment from Jenny (28, advertising executive) suggests:

“It's unique but it's not HK people's taste, it can attract only children I think, just like Planet Hollywood, it's just not Hong Kong people's taste.”

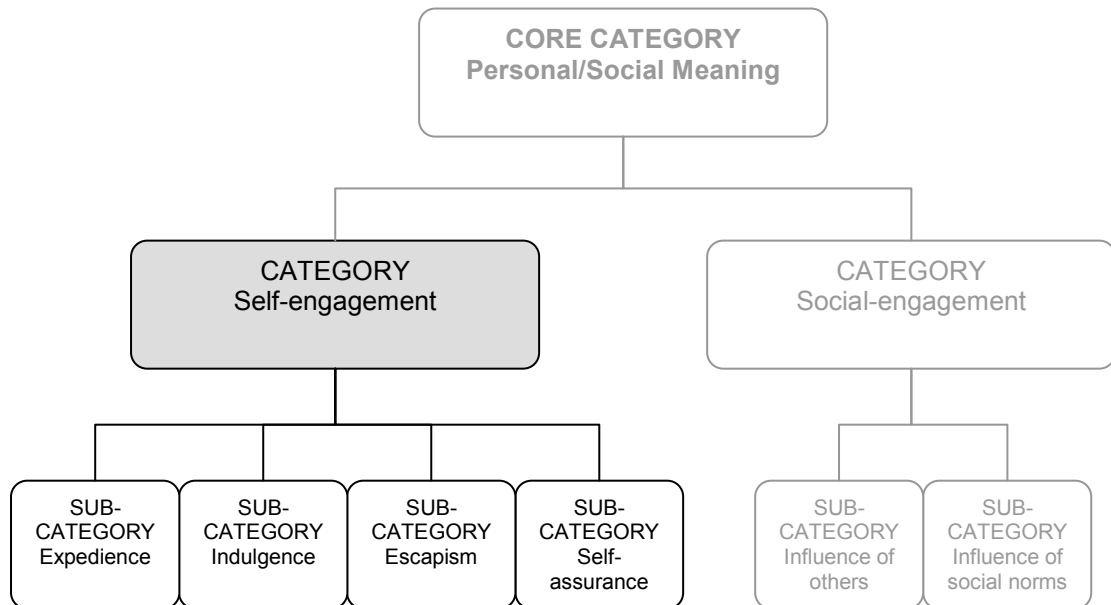
Jenny makes assumptions about broader cultural behaviours which, whilst she herself is Hong Kong Chinese, are of questionable accuracy. But the point is that the engagements described in this research should be considered to be taking place in a context that goes beyond concerns contained simply within the retail mall; as Massey (1995) has pointed out, places are nodes on networks of social interaction (Easthope 2004) and therefore rely very much on influences outside of themselves to develop their identities of place.

The core category of ‘Personal/social meaning’ brings together the respondents concerns with issues of self and issues of self-in-social. Ellemers et al (2002) point out that the use of personal self as a framework for explaining social behaviour “dominates theoretical accounts and empirical work” even when the object of study are “group processes and intergroup relations” (Ellemers et al 2002, p.162). And so, whilst recognizing that both personal and social concerns were voiced by respondents in this study, it should be remembered that these two conditions are continually influencing each other and thus what is important is the effects of these influences rather than which of the two is the most important (Ellemers et al 2002).

With that in mind, the following sections look in detail at the two categories that support the core category of ‘Personal/social meaning’, namely ‘Self-engagement’ and ‘Social-engagement’.

SECTION THREE – CATEGORY “SELF-ENGAGEMENT”

Figure 6.5: The category “Self-engagement”



6.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Self-engagement is one of two categories within the theoretical framework supporting the core category of ‘Personal/social meaning’. It groups together concerns that the respondents’ had for personal issues that ranged from comfort and convenience, to issues of practicality and choice. Essentially this category could be seen as one of introspection and self-reflexivity, and yet, as has been mentioned earlier, it is not possible to view these engagements in complete isolation from social influence.

Personal motivations have been noted in the literature; Tauber (1972) highlights recreational diversions and self-gratification, for example; Buttle and Coates (1996) identified the act of shopping as a reflexive response to temperament and mood; and shopping as an act of self-giving has been noted by several authors (e.g. Mick et al 1992; Mick and DeMoss 1990). Most authors however acknowledge the social as well as the personal nature of mall patronage (Woodruffe-Burton et al 2002). So whilst this section deals with the category “Self-engagement” it is not to suggest that self- and social-engagements are acts independent of each other.

It was not uncommon amongst the respondents to make quite personal/emotional statements in regard to the retail mall experience as, for example, is illustrated by Pamela’s (63, educational trainer) immediate response to being asked her opinion of Pacific Place (the study site):

“I love Pacific Place...I love Pacific Place not just for shopping...I mean, Pacific Place for me is a kind of anchor...it's my anchor in Central, in town.”

And a similar response from Victoria (58, company director):

“I, I really love Pacific Place. I really do. I like the whole place.”

Expressions of love and hate for aspects of the mall were common amongst the respondents, and whilst many could be considered figures of speech rather

than declarations of undying affection (as in the cases of Pamela and Victoria above) there were several examples of logical responses being compared with emotional responses and, generally, the emotional response would dominate. Margaret (57, lecturer), for example, went to great lengths to explain the pretentiousness that she felt was prevalent at Pacific Place and how that went against her personal values and then admitted to frequently visiting and enjoying Pacific Place:

“Well, obviously despite my feelings of pretentiousness, I go there and I do like it. So, this is a contradiction...”

This emotional response culminating in what, to Margaret, was a contradiction has been theorized in the literature. Gergen (1991), for example, described a condition he termed ‘multiphrenia’ which refers to the wide opportunities of choice offered for consumption which bring with them “a “vertigo of the valued” where the expansion of “wants” reduces our choice to “want not”, a multiplicity of competing values and beliefs which make “the very idea of rational choice become meaningless”” (Elliott 1997, p.289). Such unlimited choices allow for both irrationality and emotion to play major roles in driving consumption choices.

Whilst these emotional responses are not isolated from social influence they are expressions of personal beliefs and values developed by the respondents, and are reflections of the category ‘Self-engagement’, which focuses on “the

interpersonal level of self which differentiates the individual as unique from others” (Nario-Redmond et al 2004, p.143).

Self-engagement involves the consumer with four specific concerns which are grouped under the sub-categories of the ‘Expedience’, ‘Indulgence’, ‘Escapism’, and ‘Self-assurance’:

- Expedience; issues of convenience and practicality. Expedience can be described in terms of two concepts; effort(lessness), and practicality.
- Indulgence; self-engagement encompasses desires for indulgence, which can be broken down into three concepts; choice, pampering, and reward.
- Escapism; the need or desire to simply step outside of life temporarily. Two concepts of escapism have been identified within this research; firstly dreams/aspirations, which involve consumer desires, be they attainable or not, and secondly avoid/forget, which involve pure consumer escapism – for them to be removed if only momentarily with ‘this’ point in time and ‘these’ circumstances.
- Self-assurance; this essentially encompasses consumer concerns with self confidence. Two concepts were identified in this research; self-image (and the engagement with self-identity projects), and reassurance (for example self-confidence, safety, security).

These four sub-categories are discussed in detail below.

6.3.1.1 Sub-Category: Expedience

It is interesting to note that almost every interview began by focusing on issues of expedience, issues which could be easily explained through some form of 'convenience'. This could have been because these issues were uppermost in the mind of the respondent; equally, it could have been because they were considered to be obvious to all (i.e. 'common sense') and therefore provided a response reasonably safe from criticism by the interviewer. Nevertheless, and not surprisingly, these issues repeatedly arose in all interviews, though were far more pronounced in the earlier part of interviews rather than later.

Expedience in this context refers to consumer concerns of a more pragmatic rather than idealistic type, conditions that are often of a predominantly functional nature. It focuses on practical issues and issues of convenience. 'Convenience' as "one of the evaluative criteria composing retail image" (Grossbart and Rammohan 1981, p.130) has much support in the literature, particularly earlier retail studies (e.g. Kelley 1958; Downs 1961; Kunkel and Berry 1968; Lindquist 1975). These studies tended to focus on particular aspects of convenience (e.g. travel convenience, Kelley 1958; parking convenience, Downs 1961); Cox (1959) coined the term 'aggregate convenience' to describe "the ease with which consumers come into physical

contact...with a large variety of goods and services” (Grossbart and Rammohan 1981).

In some ways ‘Expedience’ can be seen to be responding to what has been described in consumer/marketing terms as ‘expected level’ attributes (Keller 1998) which refers to the “characteristics that buyers normally expect” (Keller 1998, p. 3) when they engage with a product or service. If consumers were buying, for example, an air-conditioner then expected level attributes would include “at least two cooling speeds, expandable plastic side panels, adjustable louvers” (Keller 1998, p.4); when engaging with a mall the consumers might expect reasonable lighting levels, adequate temperature control, and (in Hong Kong at least) on-site car parking. The significance of these attributes is that whilst their presence does not attract consumers, their absence would deter consumers.

The two concepts that emerged within the sub-category ‘Expedience’ were ‘Effort/less’ – the amount of exertion the consumer needs to expend in order to engage with the mall or activities within the mall – and ‘Practical’ referring to functional issues that are expected or desired to be available in the mall engagement. Both these concepts are explained in greater detail below. The word ‘convenience’ appeared repeatedly in the transcripts; at one stage of the analysis this was considered a concept but later, due to the many varying uses of the word (see Table 6.1), it was subsumed across several sub-categories and concepts. However it provides a clear link between the concepts ‘effort/less’ and ‘practical’ and thus adds credibility to the overall theoretical framework.

Table 6.1: Varying interpretations of ‘Convenience’

	Interpretation	Sub-category	Concept
Convenience	lazy	Expedience	effort/less
	easy	Expedience	effort/less
	practical	Expedience	practical
	Choice/variety	Expedience Indulgence	practical
	Geographic proximity	Expedience	effort/less practical

The consumer response to the physical realm was an eye-opener in the research. Anticipated to be a major point of discussion, in reality it was rarely mentioned or, quite commonly, it was described in holistic terms (e.g. “...feels spacious...” or “...a comfortable feeling...”). When it was specifically referred to, the majority of comments could be grouped under three headings; issues of comfort (e.g. air conditioning, cleanliness); issues of legibility (e.g. developing a mental map of the facility, understanding the configuration of shops); issues of social reference (e.g. quality of interior finishes suggesting a particular social standing or position). These responses can be explained within the theoretical framework. For example, issues of comfort are explained within the sub-category ‘Expedience’ – the effortless comfort of not having to walk too far, or the practical comfort of efficient air conditioning. More ambient issues, such as sky-lights providing natural daylight, could be explained within the sub-category ‘Indulgence’. Issues of legibility, of being

able to ‘read’ the mall, can on the one hand be considered within ‘Expedience’ – the practical requirement to know where you are, where you are going, and how to get there – or, on the other hand, can be viewed within the sub-category ‘Self-assurance’, as such legibility provides both confidence and reassurance to the consumer.

6.3.1.1.1 Concept: Effort/less

This concept refers to the amount of effort required by the consumer in their activities related to the mall – how easy it was to engage with the mall. ‘Effort’ was not an absolute, rather it was evaluated in relation to the return – generally hedonistic – that the effort generated. In other words, if there were good things to be found, or good experiences to be had, the consumer was prepared to put extra effort into finding and enjoying them. Many of the respondents’ opinions related to expedience focused on actions aimed at making their lives easier. In all cases there was a clear section in the consumer evaluation of the mall image that was concerned with the amount of effort they needed to make in order to engage with the mall. Visits to the mall were seen not as traditional shopping – the acquisition of necessities – but as a leisure activity (Howard 2007; Millan and Howard 2007) which would help explain the desire of respondents for an effortless engagement; leisure is about relaxation, reduction of stress and, in general, minimum effort for maximum return (Vermeir and Van Kenhove 2005), and thus one concept of Expedience is seen as ‘effort’. Dimensionally, effort is seen not as an absolute but as an action relative to the return (of pleasure) that it produces. Thus whilst

generally more effort is regarded as a negative attribute and less effort is regarded as a positive attribute, both are tempered by the amount of pleasure they generate (or, in some cases, the amount of displeasure they avoid).

A common and clear example of effort vs return could be seen when discussing the physical size of the malls. In some cases the respondent was attracted by the size; in the case of Jenny (38, advertising executive), discussing the Festival Walk mall ²:

“I don't like it because it's big but I like it because it's big (laughs). It's like a huge kingdom. Pacific Place you can look through at the end and the starting, it's not too big. You feel like you can spend more time at Festival Walk. Yes, and you always get lost there. That makes you feel excited - for me. Even I've been so many times I still get lost in Festival Walk. In Festival Walk you get lost in a very comfortable space, you don't mind getting lost - right? Because you enjoy the space?”

The ease of customer movement is fundamental to customer convenience (Grossbart and Rammohan 1981; Kunkel and Berry 1968), and in this case Jenny equates size with choice, and with the opportunity for so much variety of offerings she sees assumes it will require little effort to get from one place of interest to the next. In essence, her journey around the mall is a series of

² Festival Walk is another Hong Kong retail mall, owned by the same company that owns Pacific Place, that caters to a slightly lower (middle-class) target audience.

mini-journeys from one potentially interesting (shop) destination to the next, with each one potentially a fresh and surprising discovery.

In other cases, the physical size of the mall became problematic. In the case of Olivia (42, therapist), when asked her opinion of ifc2 mall in Hong Kong ³:

“I don't like it. Maybe I didn't go so often...it's so messy; you don't know where to go. Last time when I visited [friends in] tower 1 it took me like 20 or more minutes to find. And it's so difficult to find the shop that you have [previously visited] unless you remember the number. I don't like the layout of it. I've been there less than 10 times. Sometimes it's good to have big shopping malls but other times it's a draw back. When it's too big it's difficult to find your favorite thing and you lost your interest to wander around. It depends.”

One of Olivia's concerns relates to familiarity, a recurring theme in the interviews. In this case it is a lack of familiarity that requires her to expend additional effort to find her preferred shops which, in turn, leads to frustration and disorientation. It draws her attention to the size of the mall, and her realization of the number of unfamiliar directions, shops and offerings she needs to mentally and physically sort through in order to find her destination. As a consequence, she is clearly aware of the effort required to orientate herself and reach her destination once she has discovered its location. Unlike Jenny, who imagines her journey to be a continuous series of experience, of

³ ifc2 (International Finance Centre 2) is a Hong Kong office and retail complex that is aimed at a similar target audience as Pacific Place.

interest and discovery, Olivia's journey is envisaged as one long and irritating slog to a single destination, and with no certainty of arriving at her destination. Ultimately, in the effort vs return equation, she compares the effort of finding her favourite store in Pacific Place (low effort) with the effort of finding her store at ifc2 (high effort) and determines which mall she prefers.

Other recurrent examples of 'effort/less' were, for example, the convenience of geographic proximity (close to home/close to work), the expedience of one-stop shopping – or at least of having a broad enough selection of outlets to enable several tasks to be completed in a single visit, and a mall layout that allowed for the creation and retention of a simple 'mind map' to ease orientation and wayfinding.

The analysis suggested that the concept of effort/less has associated properties that add breadth and depth to the concept (see Appendix 4 for a full breakdown of categories, sub-categories, concepts, and properties). These properties are:

- *Easy*: consumers looked for activities that required the least effort for the maximum return.
- *Lazy*: consumers sought out ways of engaging that required little work.
- *Distractions*: the desire for activities that took the mind off day-to-day concerns, or diverted from the efforts of engagement with the mall.

- *Economy of space*: as has been seen in the earlier examples, there was a distinct desire to have the most activity within the least space. This is a little misleading in the sense that several respondents referred to the need for large enough spaces – as one respondent remarked “big enough to breathe, small enough to walk” (Pamela; 63, educational trainer). As with most qualities it was a balance; too little space was claustrophobic, too much space required effort to negotiate.
- *Familiarity*: this was a recurrent concern of respondents within the concept ‘Effort/less’ and relates both to familiarity with the physical realm, with the stores and products, and with the sales staff.

At one stage in the analysis this was labeled ‘laziness’; later it was amended to ‘effort/less’ on the basis that avoidance of exertion, whilst often a product of idleness, could also be explained by other motivations – a lack of available time or physical restrictions, for example. What remained constant in such interpretations was the need to reduce the output of effort.

6.3.1.1.2 Concept: Practical

Whilst this research produced much to suggest deep and meaningful motives in consumer behaviour, it also clearly demonstrated that there remains a part of that behaviour that is influenced by practical, or functional, considerations. As a concept within the sub-category ‘Expedience’, ‘practical’ refers to

consumer concerns that are considered functionally essential or physically convenient or, at the very least, meet some operational need.

A common response cited convenience of location, as can be noted from this comment from Rebecca (34, sales executive) in response to being asked how often she frequented Pacific Place:

“Actually not too often. Like once in a few months. Not much. ‘Cause it is not too convenient for me because of where I live. And because of the brands - you can find those brand in Causeway Bay and I work in Wan Chai so you know Causeway Bay is always closer.”

Her argument of not frequenting Pacific Place because of the distance from her home is an argument common to several respondents yet given the size of Hong Kong as a territory and the extremely efficient MTR system⁴ which offers direct access to most major shopping centres it does not seem likely to be a major factor against patronising the mall. However, the perceived convenience of location appears to be a real concern in the mind of the respondents (Downs 1961; Grossbart and Rammohan 1981) Indeed, Pamela (63, educational trainer) claims that ease of access is one reason she frequents Pacific Place:

⁴ Hong Kong's MTR (Mass Transit Railway) is a highly-efficient (mostly) underground transport system and most of the major retail centres are located either directly above the MTR stations or are linked by underground tunnels.

“If I can I will buy anything I need at Pacific Place because it's so convenient to get there”

What is significant is that Pamela actually lives a long way from Pacific Place; there are several malls closer to her home and her office and, as a regular driver (rather than user of the mass transit railway), she can access many malls of similar standing with the same degree of effort. Yet she perceives it as “convenient to get there”. As noted earlier in this chapter, this remark was made in the first few minutes of the interview; as the interview progressed Pamela revealed what seemed to be deeper and more binding motives for her attraction to Pacific Place.

A more credible claim to convenience of location – accessibility - appears when related to place of work. Frequenting the mall, particularly at lunchtimes and after work, is frequently cited in the transcripts and appears to be regularly acted upon. As noted by Olivia (42, therapist) when asked why she frequents Pacific Place:

“Because it's just next to the Lippo Centre, right; and usually when I was working for Hong Kong Electric it was just downstairs, about ten minutes; sometimes I'd take lunch with some of my friends. It's convenient, it's close to the MTR, and it's next to the company...close to my working place...quite a lot of variety of food and shops.”

In this scenario there are two key properties within the concept 'Practical'. The first is accessibility; being 'on the door step' it makes it a logical choice for browsing or for necessary (and unnecessary) purchases, assuming always that the mall fulfils various other conditions of, for example, choice and variety. The second property, and very much linked, is economy of time. Using the mall in this fashion – particularly during a lunch break - requires a practical economy of time. Whilst proximity to the work place provides a part of this condition, obviously there are other factors (such as an easily-understood layout, or familiarity with the mall) that either increase or decrease the economy of time.

Two other major and repetitive issues of practical consideration related to car parking and cost – both the cost of car parking and the cost of goods in general. The availability of car parking was less of an issue, as there are very few major malls in Hong Kong without carparking facilities, but the comparative pricing between malls (Grossbart and Rammohan 1981; Kunkel and Berry 1968) for parking was cited on several occasions by different respondents. In particular, reference was made to the validation processes common throughout the car parks of retail centres in Hong Kong⁵. One respondent compared Pacific Place, giving one hour free for purchases over HK\$200, with another mall that gave a free hour with purchases over HK\$2,000. At this level, the costs associated with car parking move beyond practical concerns and start to become markers of social status.

⁵ Car parks in Hong Kong generally charge by the hour; retail mall car parks generally offer periods of free parking if purchases are made in the mall over a certain sum.

Cost in itself became a complex reference within the research. On a more practical level respondents talked about cost and value, and how, generally, Pacific Place was seen as offering good value for money, as this extract from Christy (46, teacher) illustrates:

“You got some concept stores several level and very affordable right and very fashionable. And that attracted me because it’s fashionable and affordable and like you say shopping these days change - you don’t look for durable stuff anymore you look for trendy stuff because you know even you can still wear it but its outdated next year so you giving out to somebody else. You don’t want to spend million dollars to buy things to wear few times and then find it out dated.”

At the other end of the scale, cost was seen as a marker of social standing, a signifier of the status of place, and a means of creating social division, as this example from Eric (51, manufacturer) illustrates:

“You can see, in Landmark there’s less Philipinas, You know they can shop for the whole day... they will not leave the place... they need to eat something. In Landmark they have restaurants but it’s very expensive; just a coffee costs \$50.”

Thus cost as ‘affordability’ can be categorized both as a practical expediency and as a symbol of social (or more accurately socio-economic) status.

As has been illustrated, the concept ‘practical’ has the properties of value for money and affordability, together with accessibility and economy of time. A further property is ‘comfort’. Comfort is a property that can be attributed to more than one concept in more than one sub-category, most notably ‘Indulgence’. Within the current sub-category of ‘Expedience’, environmental comfort (e.g. air conditioning, adequate lighting) can be regarded as concerns of a practical nature.

There were, in summary, four properties identified within the concept of “Practical”:

- *Value for money*: this represented opportunities whereby the respondents considered the practical worth of the service or goods obtained to merit the price paid
- *Affordable*: affordability, whilst maintaining some of the characteristics of ‘Value for money’, invoked notions of socio-economic standing and ability
- *Economy of time*: this property related not only to the respondents availability of time – whether they had sufficient time to visit the mall – but also whether their time spent in the mall was considered worthwhile
- *Accessibility*: a commonly-cited yet sometimes misleading concern, describing the ease by which the respondents could reach the mall, measured by time or by distance.

6.3.1.2 Sub-category: Indulgence

Indulgence was a sub-category that emerged early in the research and, once identified, could be repeatedly and clearly seen through all interviews. As has been noted earlier, it shares common traits with other concepts - or has overlapping characteristics - the most recurrent being 'comfort'.

Indulgence refers to the respondents' pursuit of personal pleasures that they considered to be 'out of the ordinary', of treating themselves to gifts or pleasurable activities.

Indulgence can be seen to be closely connected to the sub-category 'Escapism', in the sense that certain acts of aspiration, or avoidance of reality (concepts of 'escapism'), could be considered acts of indulgence if acted upon in the full knowledge that such indulgence was of a temporary nature. The literature notes two distinct patterns of indulgence; firstly, indulgence that yields to "hedonic temptations, referred to as "myopia"" (Kivetz and Simonson 2002, p.200), which is linked to a lack of self-control (Schelling 1984, 1992). The second pattern of indulgence is considered reaction against being too focused on necessities; in certain situations consumers may consider they "do not have enough fun" (Kivetz and Simonson 2002, p.202) and thus deliberately indulge themselves to "ensure that they do not end up...spending all their resources on necessities" (Kivetz and Simonson 2002, p.202).

The sub-category 'Indulgence' was seen to have three concepts; choice, in the sense that excessive choice became indulgent; pampering, or treating oneself luxuriously; and reward, where one justified the act of indulgence. These concepts are explained in detail below.

6.3.1.2.1 Concept: Choice

Choice – the power to choose - refers to the number of relevant opportunities provided to the consumer for products, shops, and activities, and was one of the strongest concepts in the self-engagement category. It is not simply product choice but what Warnaby and Davies (1997) refer to a “bundle of benefits” (p.206) and is illustrated in a remark by Pamela (63, educational trainer) observed:

“I think the fact of the three hotels being part of PP makes quite a significant difference to how I perceive PP. When I go into PP there's enough change in the shops to keep me interested, it's big enough not to be claustrophobic, they're very wide-open spaces there, it's very bright - everything is accessible I don't have to walk for miles and miles, if I forget to go to one place I don't mind walking back to go back to it.”

It is not only the variety of shops that attracts Pamela but also the variety of activities – shopping, the hotels for dining and socializing, for example.

Choice in itself – products on offer, for example – was in itself an oft-cited requirement, it was also a requirement that these choices were reasonably easy to find; it was also considered advantageous if they were concentrated together. Olivia (42, therapist) remarked:

“...they are more concentrated in the same mall...there are different shops but when one will be on sale they will all be on sale and then you can get a lot of variety. No need to go to a lot of different places to find what you want. You can also compare prices.”

Whilst choice could be construed as a practical consideration, Susan (38, accountant) makes it clear that, to her, it can be an indulgence:

“But I can have so many choices because I live in Hong Kong island, I can have so many choices.”

Then there is the need for change; Tracy (27, marketer) recognizes her need for choice and limits her visits to the mall in order to maintain a sense of newness and variety:

“I get bored very easy...so it's like I come like once...every....few weeks, something like that, five-six times a month maximum...I get very bored.”

Change was positioned in both a positive and a negative light by respondents. On the one hand it interfered with existing mind maps and disrupted familiarity – particularly if it was a favourite store or activity that was being changed or removed. On the other hand, change was a vehicle for introducing new products and activities – in short, introducing a new set of choices and, by its very act, creating variety.

Choice was a concept similar to ‘convenience’, in that it was on the one hand clearly and regularly referred to in the interviews yet, on the other hand, it was an activity that could be recognized in many of the evolving concepts. Ultimately it was seen more as a definitive action within an explanatory concept – unlike convenience which could be described by other concepts – and thus it merited its place in the theoretical framework.

‘Choice’ as an activity can be seen throughout most of this framework; the reason it is linked to indulgence is to differentiate ‘choice’ as a consumer benefit from ‘choice’ as an impartial activity. It is the benefits that arise from the luxury of choice that influence the consumer towards the mall – or against the mall if such indulgent choices are denied them.

The concept of choice had five major properties:

- *Variety*: this property related to both tenant mix and product variety, and offered the respondents on the one hand a broader

selection of goods and, on the other hand, the ability to compare prices and products

- *Change*: change was seen as bad when it disrupted familiar patterns of behaviour, yet good when it introduced new products or activities. In both cases it evoked conditions of difference and surprise
- *Complexity*: this property refers to the offering of a range of activities, rather than simply a range of products or tenants (e.g. the inclusion of hotels, cinemas, and ice rinks in the development area)
- *Uniqueness*: uniqueness was frequently referred to as an element of attraction, in particular unique shops selling different types products

6.3.1.2.2 Concept: Pampering

At one stage ‘Pampering’ was initially identified as a sub-category by virtue of its predominance in the transcripts. It was expressed in a variety of ways, from plying oneself with indulgent treats to seeking special attention from sales staff. Later however, and through the process of constant comparison, pampering came to be seen as just one concept within the larger sub-category ‘Indulgence’.

Pampering refers to the consumer desire to spoil themselves; to treat themselves in a better-than-normal way, and to allow them to ‘indulge’ in

luxuries outside of their normal lifestyle. It can be seen as a gift to oneself and as a “sincere personal attempt to rectify the persistent urge to say ‘no’ to ourselves in daily life” (Mick 1996, p.116). Pampering refers not only to acts by the consumer but also to acts done to the consumer - in particular being treated deferentially by shop staff. Whilst pampering as a concept appeared in all interviews, in the case of Victoria (58, company director) it was clearly one of her main concerns, as this memo written after her interview reflects:

“Service, the attentiveness and friendliness of the sales staff is obviously a significant factor affecting the degree of pleasure for this respondent...all her conversation suggests a desire to be treated well, her pleasure at being served, [and] of receiving service ‘out of the ordinary’”

Pampering was, in many cases, linked to personal attention from the sales staff, and several of the respondents referred to this aspect of pampering:

“[I like] Lane Crawford, because you can shop there freely, nobody will disturb you. I'm a regular customer there and I'm familiar with waiter so I enjoy shopping there And they're really friendly. So I go there a lot” (Eric, 51, manufacturer)

For one respondent, Victoria (58, company director), friendliness and personal attention by the sales staff was central to her patronage of the mall:

“Oh I don’t like Landmark, I’ve never liked Landmark. Why do I never liked Landmark? Now, they have all these, what do you call, brand name shops? Now we do have in, in Pacific Place, but somehow in Pacific Place, they look more... friendly. I mean, they are not friendly in [Landmark or Princes’ Building], but [in Pacific Place] there are places, shops where the people, I mean the service, I...I like. And that’s why I enjoy visiting this place.”

The requirement of friendliness for Victoria is important, but to her it is necessary that the friendliness is linked to services that make her feel special:

“You see, Hong Kong people are so busy if you can actually get them to a shopping mall and manage in one way or another and get all the things that this person wants that I want for example and I don’t have to shop round, I don’t have the time to move from one shopping mall to another. So let’s say if I like a jacket and they don’t have my size and they say like there’s a shop in Times Square....I would say right, have it delivered here to Pacific Place and then I’ll come pick it up, I don’t really want to make that special trip to other shopping mall so a shopping mall needs to have all the things that a person needs.”

Victoria obviously revels in this personal attention for a variety of reasons; there is a convenience which overlaps with the sub-category ‘Expedience’; there are feelings of self-importance which overlap with the sub-category

‘Self-image’. But the strongest emotion of all, based on her responses, would appear to be pampering and being made to feel ‘special’. This attitude was echoed by Catherine (38, design manager) in terms of service enjoyed from the sales staff:

“Ever since the casinos came [to Macau] the service has changed. So I’ve come to expect being looked after when I buy things. I don’t mind paying extra, you know....I don’t have a lot of time, it’s OK, I’ll pay for service.”

But it is Victoria who really seems to maximize the relationship. She seeks – and receives – extended services from the sales girls:

“You know, you look at this, you look at that...you can’t really make up your mind, you see, and then you talk to the girls, They are very friendly, they know me, and then I can say, I’m not going to take this back with me, I’ll leave them with [the sales staff] and then I’ll come and pick them up xt week, and then I forget and then they will call me.”

The fact that she can quite literally forget about her purchases and the girls will call her shows both the extended personal and privileged relationship she enjoys (that they have her phone number) and she is now imaging the girls as her own personal assistants, and indulging in the personal attention that this

shop in this mall is prepared to extend to her. She cements the relationship by reciprocating the personal recognition and buying the staff treats in return:

“Sometimes I go there and just look and see what they have in stock... and [the sales staff] are really nice...I’ll buy them cookies you know pastries and so on and nice feeling” is also because I know the girls.”

Such bonding within the retail environment has been noted in the literature (e.g. Arnould 2005; Holt 1995; Kozinets et al 2004); this includes bonding with shop assistants, other patrons “as well as interacting with peer strangers” (Arnould 2005, p.90). Such activity, it is claimed, leads to the accrual of both social and identity resources (Arnould 2005). In Victoria’s case there was a tone of such warm satisfaction in her response to suggest that the acquisition of social equity through these encounters was very much a part of her identity as an ‘in charge person’, a company director.

Within the research there is evidence that the act of pampering and indulgence is a premeditated motivation for the mall; in a discussion regarding promotional materials for the mall, Pamela (63, educational trainer) remarked:

“In the walkway between Admiralty and MTR; I always think those posters are great, I think they're wonderful - every time I see them I think yeah, of course, that's why I'm here, you know - the food looks gorgeous, the clothes, everything, lovely.”

In this conversation Pamela begins by noting how “gorgeous” everything appears; she later suggests that these are items beyond her normal range of acquisition; and while she cannot or will not make the effort to acquire these goods seems to be making efforts to acquire them mentally.

This desire to be treated as someone special is illustrated not only through positive engagements but also through negative engagements, also noted by Margaret (57, lecturer):

“I know there's some kind of fountain there but basically the guards spend most of their time telling you, you know, don't sit down here...”

Her attitude seems to be that as a patron of the mall she should be treated with more respect and be allowed more freedom to do as she pleases.

Thus it can be seen that there are three main properties for the concept ‘Pampering’:

- *Feeling special*: this relates to acts and actions that lift the respondents above their normal status.
- *Personal attention*: feelings that the respondent had personal relationships, particularly with the sales staff, that would distinguish them from the ‘normal’ shoppers.

- *Privilege*: the notion that not only would the respondents receive special and personal attention, but that somehow they were deserving of that attention.

6.3.1.2.3 Concept: Reward

Reward as a concept can be seen as a type of pampering, yet the important distinction comes from the ways in which the consumer perceives and uses the retail mall. Using elements within the mall to pamper one-self is essentially recognizing the goods and services offered as ‘special’ and utilizing them to indulge

Reward is seen as a return for some act of good or outstanding behaviour. Pampering and reward share similarities in that they both are indulgences that one allows oneself; reward adds the dimension of ‘return’.

Reward is linked to the act of recognizing, believing, or pretending that one has made some significant achievement and has earned the right to unusually good things. By association, in order for respondents to use mall-related activities as the reward need to regard the mall in high-enough esteem for it to qualify as a reward. Self-reward requires that the recipient convinces themselves that they ‘deserve’ the indulgence (Mukhopadhyay and Johar 2009), a condition not required for the act of pampering. Reward therefore can be regarded as ‘justified indulgence’, and pampering as ‘unjustified indulgence’. As noted by Mukhopadhyay and Johar (2009) “the act of

subsequently rewarding themselves with a gift that was usually hedonic in nature was a conscious process propelled by the ability to justify the indulgence” (p.2-3).

The significance of reward rather than simply indulgence is rooted in the act of justification (Mukhopadhyay and Johar 2009); whether the justification is real or simply make-believe the consumer gains additional self-satisfaction believing they have in some ways earned the treat as a reward. The subtlety of the association between pampering and reward can be seen in the comments from Margaret (57, lecturer):

“I suppose me going to Pacific Place means... not routine, not everyday... put in the box of the finer things of life...Um...because the things that I buy are treats, not essential... I don't have to have it... that's all because the last time I was in Southhampton and I discovered what propolis was, and then idly one time in Watson's when I was in Pacific Place, I saw the toothpaste and then thought "Wow! I have to have it" you know...”

In this extract she begins by acknowledging that Pacific Place, as a collective offering, represents “the finer things of life”. Her elaboration of buying things as “treats” is somewhat ambiguous; they could be simple indulgences or they could be rewards. However the tone of her following comments led [this researcher] to record the following in his memo following the interview:

“[Margaret] seemed quite determined that she deserved to spoil herself; she seemed convinced that she deserved these things, like she had somehow earned them, like they were a reward for something she had done – or a reward for some social suffering she had endured.”

Margaret’s interview was a rich mine of personal interactions with the social side of the mall, as if she was ricocheting from one social catastrophe to another, and many of her observations will be used to illustrate the sub-categories of ‘Social engagement’. However, at this point in the reporting the focus is on ‘rewards’; what Margaret’s interview suggests is, firstly, that rewards is indeed a consumer concern and, secondly, that not only do we reward ourselves for doing something well but we also might reward ourselves for enduring some unjust situation – in Margaret’s case a social injustice. (ref social injustice)

On a far more simple level, Sandra (51, housewife) uses facilities associated with the mall – rather than products – as a direct reward:

“I sometimes go to the hotels there [at Pacific Place] – I meet my friends for coffee, we say “today, no Starbucks” and we head for the Shangrila or the Conrad. I mean, we deserve it sometimes, I think.”

Similarly Pamela (63, educational trainer) used the hotels as a reward:

“Oh I will often tell myself like...“It’s been a tough week....you survived....you deserve this” then I’ll check myself into the Marriott or the Shangrila and sit in the bath with a margarita”

In this case it is a simple matter of using the mall facilities as a reward for enduring a hard week; in terms of establishing an image for the mall it would be an important factor to Pamela whether or not a mall could provide such emotional and physical support. Pamela’s use of the hotels to reward herself will also be shown, in the sub-category ‘Escapism’, to illustrate the concepts of ‘Dream/aspire’ and ‘Avoid/forget’. In that extract she uses the word ‘refuge’ to describe her patronage of the hotels. Clearly, as is seen recurrently throughout this research, the behaviour of respondents can be accounted for in more than one way, and thus becomes a measure of how robust the theoretical framework is to accommodate these alternative interpretations.

Reward as a concept can be seen to reflect properties similar to those of pampering; these would include treats and feeling special. Properties that emerged that are more unique to the concept ‘Rewards’, and that echo Mukhopadhyay and Johar’s (2009) conditions of reward, were:

- *Deserving*: one of the key conditions to reward is the notion that one ‘deserves’ it rather than one simply ‘wants’ it.
- *Earning*: often the justification for treating oneself to a reward is to believe one has earned it, either through some act of

achievement or simply through having 'survived' a particularly challenging time.

6.3.1.3 Sub-category: Escapism

Escapism refers to the consumer desire to step out of their normal role or reality, and find a temporary refuge in a make-believe reality. In the context of this research it refers to the ways in which the respondents used the retail mall to support these temporary realities through various consumption practices. As noted by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), consumption "has begun to be seen as involving a steady flow of fantasies" (p.132) and this was observed in the research. The act of 'Escape' in a consumer context can be seen in what have been termed 'consumption visions' (Christensen et al 2004); these refer to consumers using positive and pleasurable mental images of engagements with products or places. Such images can be used to escape from reality or as a device to help consumers cope (Christensen et al 2004). Escape in the context of mall visits can be seen as engaging with such consumption visions, or as the physical extension of such visions; according to Poole and O'Cass (2001) "the shopping experience is more about escape, fantasy and those aspects which bring about heightened arousal and pleasurable feelings" (p.1), conditions also recognised by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982).

The respondents in this research can be seen to use techniques of escapism to effect a break with their normal social environment; escapism became a method to refocus attention from this normality to a (generally) self-

constructed set of fantasies or unrealities (Labrecque, Grzeskowiak, and Krishen 2008). Escapism helps to explain in part the complex nature of shopping as a series of interlinked activities and experiences rather than the simple acquisition of goods (Arnold and Reynolds 2003) for, as Sherry (1990) observed, the pursuit of such experiences “is often far more significant than the mere acquisition of products” (p.27). This pursuit can be illustrated in this comment from Mei Ling (36, housewife):

“If I meet my friends for lunch, maybe at the Conrad [hotel], I might wander round the mall first. I’m not looking for anything but sometimes I’ll buy if I like something. You know... after lunch we’ll walk together, see what new arrivals there are. That’s the nice thing...it’s what I think I like about Pacific Place...but I suppose I could do it at ifc2 as well...”

As was noted from most of the respondents, shopping as an activity is a complex collection of activities; the acquisition of goods is neither certain nor essential.

Within this research respondents used two main techniques to effect their social escape. The first was through the creation of fantasies and the second through assuming alternative social roles.

Two clear concepts within the sub-category of ‘Escapism’ emerged from this research; firstly, escaping through dreams and aspirations, where the consumer

looks for temporary identities that they can either role-play or simply aspire towards and, secondly, the more pragmatic escape from reality by avoiding or forgetting about reality if only temporarily. These two concepts are discussed in detail below.

6.3.1.3.3 Concept: Dream/aspire

Within this research, the concept ‘Dream/aspire’ mainly grouped respondents concerns with social aspirations and lifestyle activities. Respondents would use the mall to identify products or activities, or observe behaviours, that they might desire to own or participate in; equally they were seen to be identifying social groups to which they might aspire. In this context, ‘Dream/aspire’ offers aspects of fantasy, in particular the freedom for the consumer to engage their imagination, to be adventurous and try new things; to attempt things without consequence or fear (Christensen et al 2004).

Part of their activity might be focused on learning the characteristics of the group and part of the activity might be aspiring to, or imitating, that group. And whilst these actions might be covert rather than overt – respondents not totally aware of their own motivations – they can provide insights into some of the interview responses. In an observation from Eric (51, manufacturer) he makes a clear connection between the ‘celebrity’, the mall, and social positioning:

“You know I saw... um... Anson Chan [second-highest government official in HK] shopping here many times. Even Sundays, holidays, and week days. And I saw the head of Nam Fung Development, Mr. Chen, Chen Kit Wah and his bodyguard - I stood with him on the same escalator one Saturday. So it's the kind of place attract those significant rich people. It's not easy to see this kind of thing happening at North Point, Taikoo Shing – attracts mostly families on Sundays or public holidays. It's rare to see Mr Chan or developers shopping there.”

Whilst his main point seems to be to establish the social ‘superiority’ of Pacific Place over other, less high-profile retail malls, he did make it clear as the interview progressed that this was the place he felt most comfortable, and that was because he felt ‘at home’ with this calibre of person. With some of the mall patrons he could be considered their social equal; with others – Anson Chan and Chen Kit Wah, for example – he is in a position of aspiring to that social level. His comment about standing on the escalator with Chen Kit Wah, for example, could be an innocent anecdote; on the other hand it could be a reflection of his desire to be seen as a member of that social group.

Pamela (63, educational trainer) provided an insight into the complexity of mall engagement when she described her use of the hotels that are a part of the Pacific Place complex:

“For me it's a kind of refuge, because if you really didn't want to do anything else you could book into one of the hotels, right; I mean, to me that's part of what Pacific Place offers, that level of possible comfort.”

In the first instance she is clearly using the hotel as an escape – a “refuge”. This can be seen immediately as belonging more under the concept ‘Avoid/forget’ which subsequent conversations with Pamela confirmed. Yet Pamela frequently checks into hotels rather than go home, not because going home is too far or too difficult, but simply because she enjoys the hotels. Often she uses them as an aspirational indulgence; she treats herself and at once is pampered and allows herself to feel important, special – elevated above her normal status. She uses this activity as a reward when she feels she has done something particularly well, or as a consolation when things have gone badly. So as can be seen with many of the responses no one single explanation is necessarily accurate; often a response can be attributed to several of the categories within the theoretical framework. In this instance, when Pamela was asked directly (in a follow-up informal interview) whether she thought this comment was escapist or indulgent she thought for a moment and then responded “Probably both”. The one point to note in all forms of escapism is that it is a two-way process, which in part explains Pamela’s comments. Consumers not only escape ‘to’ somewhere more pleasant or desirable, but they also escape ‘from’ some lesser attractive condition. The process results in “a sense of relaxation and peace” (Christensen et al 2004, p.130).

As has been mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, Margaret's (57, lecturer) interview was characterised by a great deal of social insecurity on her part. Whilst she enjoyed visiting Pacific Place she felt intimidated by many of the patrons – the rich, elegant-looking women in particular. At one stage of her interview she began to describe the art exhibitions that were often held at Pacific Place and became quite animated, as she regularly attended these and obviously enjoyed them. What was significant was that she suggested it was not a common activity amongst the majority of mall-goers to view the exhibitions and, by implication, began to down-grade those patrons who so intimidated her. In relation to the concept 'Dream/aspire' Margaret can be seen on the one hand to aspire to be seen as an art aficionado and, therefore, aspires to a position that is equal to, but not the same as, her social nemesis.

The properties for the concept 'Dream/aspire' revolved around role-playing, and three key properties were identified:

- *Assuming roles*: the main property of 'Dream/aspire' relates to the ability by the respondents to assume roles other than their everyday role.
- *Social aspirations*: this property aimed at principally providing a role related to social positioning; that role could either be acted out as a temporary fantasy and/or provide a genuine life goal. The mall provided both the place to practice the role and a site to learn – through observation – about the goal and its associated behaviours.

- *Celebrity association*: celebrity association was mentioned on several occasions and provides both reinforcement for social positioning of the mall and a scenario for fantasy role play.

6.3.1.3.4 Concept: Avoid/forget

The second concept that emerged within the sub-category ‘Escapism’ was that of ‘Avoid/forget’. Avoidance refers to the act of evading or delaying attending to some other, less desirable activity; ‘forget’ in this context refers to finding pleasurable activities to suppress the memory of less pleasurable activities. In this context ‘Avoid/forget’ becomes a ‘coping’ strategy, allowing consumers to be ‘elsewhere’ in times of stress, or as a temporary respite (Christensen et al 2004). The most common behaviour observed in this study was the act of visiting the mall after work as a method of unwinding after the day, and as a technique to help the respondent forget the troubles of the day.

Many scholars (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Labrecque, Grzeskowiak, and Krishen 2008; Lifton (2010) have concluded that consumers do use the act of escapism “as a way of refocusing one’s attention as a means to create fantasies or constructed “unrealities”” (Labrecque, Grzeskowiak, and Krishen 2008, p.465). Shopping in particular has been seen as an experiential form of escapism (Arnold and Reynolds 2003). Such activity was a common part of Olivia’s (42, therapist) day:

“After work I would walk slowly around the shopping arcade and look around, just to relax, nothing special...about ten or fifteen minutes...I would not go straight to the MTR and get on the bus unless I was really rushed to go home but otherwise I would wander around the shopping arcade. [sometimes] I would change the route - sometimes this way, sometimes that way and as I said before, about 15 minutes. Because if I go straight from the office to the MTR or bus station it takes less than 5 minutes but usually I will take 15 minutes.”

For Olivia it was her way of unwinding after the day, both relaxing and escaping from her normal working day. And these avoid/forget tactics are not restricted to the end of the day; in the case of Pamela (63, educational trainer) she used a similar technique to begin her day:

“[Starting the day in Pacific Place] really makes a huge difference to me. In fact, yeah, I do that quite often and there's one of the security guards down there he always waves to me, as soon as he sees me, he waves and he smiles. OK, it costs me \$20 added on to whatever I'm doing but it is \$20 well-worth it in my mind because I can chose...when I get in I can chose; I can go to Starbucks on the ground floor, have a cup of tea; I can go up to the fourth floor if I want a mug, right? I can go into McDonald's, have something for breakfast...McCafe or McDonald's...or I can go up to this lovely little tiny place on the fifth floor which is the Island Shangri-la which has breakfast from 7.30 in the morning, you can have a piece of toast if

you want to. And I can go in there and I can pick...I spend maybe...35 minutes, and I go through my diary for the day; maybe I make a telephone call or not; I have some...I pump up my Octopus card; I maybe go to the ATM...there's a nice set of ATMs there for my bank; go there, pay bills, sort out things and so forth; and I leave there at maybe 2 or 3 minutes to 8; 10 to 8, something like that. And I feel as if I've had a refreshing start to the day. And I look around and I think, you know, it's nice, maybe I'll do this on Sunday too, just so I can enjoy this place when it's quiet, right?"

It might seem odd that Pamela began her day with an 'avoid/forget/' activity yet it can be seen as an effective strategy to 'get her head straight' for the day ahead. Rather than the cold, abrupt start to the working day heralded by entering the office and sitting at the desk, Pamela chose to avoid this by beginning her day in an atmosphere and environment far more pleasant; she justifies it as work by engaging in essential activities – the payment of bills, withdrawing money, checking her day's schedule, yet doing them in an environment that avoids the normal tedium of the office. Indeed, her gestures, comments and body language as she described the personal connection with the security guard suggested that she also enjoys the mild fantasy of the business mogul having a working breakfast on a sunlit terrace.

The concept 'Avoid/forget' exhibited two key properties:

- *Escape from normality*: respondents used the mall to temporarily escape from the pressures or boredom of their daily routines
- *Wind/unwind*: the mall was used as both a prelude to the day – beginning with a pleasurable ritual in preparation for the day ahead – or as a method to physically and mentally unwind after a working day.

6.3.1.4 Sub-category: Self-assurance

The final sub-category under Self-engagement is ‘self-assurance’, and clusters consumer concepts related to maintaining confidence and dispelling apprehensions in relation to engagement with the mall. Self assurance is important for developing and maintaining self-efficacy, and confidence in their ability to deal with events and circumstances in their lives (Bandura 1994). Self-assurance provides the consumer with the ability to approach tasks and events “as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided” (Bandura 1994, p.71) which in the mall context is seen as leading to a positive attitude to encounters within the retail environment.

Concerns with self-assurance appeared in quite diverse areas, from feelings of being “threatened” by the physical realm, to identity crises in response to the look of other mall patrons, even to finding (possibly temporary) reassurance in the homogeneity of malls. It includes self-criticism, a concept that factored high in the interview results. This sub-category also draw in aspects of self-

image and self-identity, as the development of such images have a relevance to self-confidence, self-esteem and self-assurance – as Locander (1979) suggested, confirmation of self-image is one strategy to bolster an uncertainty in ones' social competitiveness; it is therefore reasonable to assume that not only confirmation of image takes place but also the development and improvement of image. It should be stressed that this sub-category does not seek to explain or contain all the consumer concerns with self-identity but, rather, acknowledges that elements of self-identity are contained within this category.

Collectively the sub-category determines whether or not the respondents have 'peace of mind' in their engagement with the retail mall. A key component is introspection as the respondents seek confirmation that their self-image satisfies their needs – either to identify with or group or in opposition to a group.

This sub-category has two concepts within, the first of which is 'self-image'. This involves the respondents with such consumer-concerns as the search for uniqueness and self-awareness studies. The second concept is 'Reassurance' which is principally concerned with the respondents negotiations with the physical realm of the mall and any other insecurities that do not fall within the concept of 'Self-image'.

6.3.1.4.1 Concept: Self-image

The concept 'self-image' refers to concerns that the respondents had regarding their own image. These concerns were quite broad, ranging from self-awareness and appraisal activities to activities related to assessing products, activities and behaviours for use in building, modifying and communicating self-image. Within this theoretical framework the concept of self-image embraces not only issues of appearance but also issues of behaviour and, as a concept under self-assurance is more focused on introverted reflection than on extrovert comparison. The linking of retail activities to concepts of image is noted in the literature; Arnould (2000) for example, notes that "Britons use shopping centers to discover, refine and express gender, ethnic, and class identities" (p.105), reflecting the complexity of both the process of identity construction and the act of shopping. This concept can also be seen in relation to the self-identity projects of consumer culture theory (e.g. Arnould 2005; Arnould and Thompson 2005, 2007; Belk 1995).

Some respondents were quite casual in their references to self-image though, as Patricia (43, composer) illustrates, they still manage to make a powerful point:

"Do I care about my image? [laughs] I don't know....I would say no but.....I think we all care about how we are...what people think of us."

Tracy (27, marketer) has a simple impression of her own self-image, yet she still positions herself in relation to others:

“I'm not a typical person who goes to shop like crazy; I just go like to spend time with my friends, I like to relax”

In her short sentence Tracy acknowledges her image of herself, positions herself socially, and at the same time manages to present ‘non-typical’ in a positive, if not enviable, light.

What became clear as the interviews and analyses progressed was that whilst there was a good deal of evidence to show consumer awareness of and concern with ones’ own image, there was very little reflection on the personal act of image development or image building. There was however evidence that respondents were aware of image manipulation through the use of branded goods, and the communication value of brands as symbols of status (Bhat and Reddy 1998; O’Cass and Frost 2002; O’Cass and McEwen 2004). Brands – be they product brands or place brands – are recognized as tools to develop and support self-image (e.g. Escalas and Bettman 2003; Graeff 1996; Shau and Muniz 2002), leading to personal identification with brands referred to as image congruence (Graeff 1996; Jamal and Goode 2001) and a subsequent development of an on-going brand loyalty (Kressman et al 2006). Jenny (28, advertising executive), whilst professing a distain for mainstream consumption, shopping as a leisure activity, and the assumed value of branded goods in general, was quite clear in the way that brands featured in personal identity projects:

“...many teenagers in Mong Kok still look for something to make themselves higher rank, they will go to IT [fashion store] to buy some expensive brand clothes to make themselves look more high class...they can spend more money on it...a whole salary to buy an LV [designer handbag].”

This perception of the use of branded goods to develop self-image noted by several respondents; Michelle (46, office manager) observed:

“So it seems Langham Place is trying to establish a niche between the high-end brands and the cheap marketplace of Mong Kok, but they haven't quite established that yet and it upset both segments - the real Mong Kok people find it too 'ma fan' [troublesome] for treasure hunting in there - I prefer to hunt in my real world - and the high end OL [office lady] feels it weakens her image so you only capture the in-between don't-know-who-I-am type of people..”

Clearly for these respondents there was an obvious link between the acquisition of goods and the development of personal image, yet whilst they highlighted this activity in others they seemed to avoid putting themselves in a similar category. Michelle even has a short-hand for categorizing people linked both to their occupation and their appearance; when she used the term ‘OL’, for ‘office lady’, it is intended to caricature both a career group and a personal identity image.

Perceptions of self were strong, with respondents showing an awareness of their own self-image together with a desire to maintain that awareness. This led to consumers continually assessing their image and, within the concept of 'Self-image' continual assessment of self was the most referenced property. Terms continually appearing in the coding and analysis were self-appraisal, self-criticism, self-examination, and self-reflection and, in parallel vein, issues relating to the questioning of self-motives.

There was an external aspect to this continual assessment of self in that the respondents used their engagement with the mall to learn about available identities (through assessment of products in the shops, through the appearance of other patrons, and by the actions and behaviours of other patrons). The respondents learned from the external stimulations and applied what they learned to their introverted processes of self-assessment.

Self-image concerns involved a great deal of self-examination and evaluation (Duval and Wicklund 1972) and this is reflected in the properties of the concept 'Self-image' (self-awareness, uniqueness, self-assessment, satisfaction). This evaluation essentially compares one's expectations of or aspirations for self with what one considers to be the current self. If the current self matches or exceeds those expectations this results in positive effects; if the current self fails to meet these expectations then negative effects are produced, resulting in either efforts to reduce the deficit or to hide from further self-evaluation (Pyszczynski and Greenberg 1987). The mall and retail environments in general provided several strategies for dealing with these

issues (e.g. the use of branded goods (respondents Eric, Michelle); the use of fake goods (respondents Margaret, Rebecca); the rejection of mainstream consumption values (respondent Jenny).

The importance of self-image was remarked on by several respondents and, through several discussions, it seemed that respondents who were satisfied with their self-image gained both self-confidence and self-contentment from the image; those who had dissatisfaction with their image experience an increase in personal insecurity. Such confidence/insecurity manifested itself more through social engagement as consumers interacted with other mall patrons and compared aspects of their self-image to assumptions they made about the other patrons. This is discussed more fully in the section on Social Engagement. However, Margaret's (57, lecturer) interview revealed an escalating dissatisfaction with her own self-image and an extended insecurity when confronted by the more 'well-to-do' patrons of Pacific Place. She presented a moral argument by way of defense which, whilst technically plausible, did not resonate as her true reason as the interview progressed:

“the people I work with, you know... the people who aren't in the champagne bracket would just go to Shenzhen and buy [imitation designer] bags there... I don't want anything from Chanel and Dior and that kind of stuff. The fact that you do have people in Pacific Place who obviously have that sort of lifestyle; well, on the case of the women, I didn't know it meant so much, they're very thin, very beautiful, very well dressed, clutching lots of these carrier bags and

fancy names ?????. Then you go to Wan Chai and there are women selling cardboard along the street.”

Margaret provides a rich and candid insight into self-image by drawing attention to issues of wealth (what she wants to do but can't afford), to issues of personal condition (being over-weight in a town full of slim women), and the inextricable bond between these conditions and interpretations of social standing. Deeper in the interview she acknowledges the importance that image projection has for her:

“I have a very feminine household, my husband is generally not here, so we've got my two daughters, my helper and me; and we're all very girly, and when we go out we get dressed up, it's important somehow for us to look nice.”

Directly or indirectly most respondents acknowledged the ways that retail activity could influence self-image. And whilst few referred directly to self-image development, as noted earlier, Eric (51, manufacturer) was one of the few respondents who happily acknowledged the advantages to his self-image by shopping at Pacific Place:

“One of the things I want to tell you, why PP is successful – PP is under the management of Swire Properties, I have found most of the properties under the management of Swire Properties have a good image when it comes to wayfinding, signage, architectural feature,

decoration, they are very good design. So I think shopping in this place upgrades my...I will personally be upgraded.”

His interview continued with him clearly extolling the values of branded goods as a reflection of status, of good taste, and of intelligent choice.

It should be emphasised that self-image is not only about the way we look it is also about the way we act; that is, it includes the image of our behaviour, as this extract from Olivia’s (42, therapist) interview suggests:

“...usually when I go shopping I have to buy something. Every time I go shopping I'd need to buy something back home back, no matter what, anything, just anything in order to pay off the time that I spend shopping.”

She needs to provide a reason for spending time in the mall – even if it is only to herself – to avoid seeing that time spent as wasted. The act of ‘attendance’ at the mall is, to Olivia, not considered sufficient justification.

These interview extracts illustrate some of the properties of the self-image concept. By way of summary, this concept exhibited four key properties, as follows:

- *self-awareness*: respondents generally showed that they had some perception of their own image and, as illustrated in the

interview extract above with Michelle, they recognized the significance of that image as an influencing factor in mall evaluation and patronage.

- *uniqueness*: there was a general expression of interest in things unique – shops, products, acts – and for a self-image that had unique characteristics. This should be seen in conjunction with a similar desire for reassurance of group belonging.
- *self-assessment*: acts of self-criticism, self-examination, self-reflection frequently appeared in the respondents accounts of their engagement with the mall. In addition, products, environments, and behaviours that communicated image were consistently being assessed and evaluated.
- *satisfaction*: the higher the level of satisfaction with self-image then the higher the degree of self-confidence and contentment displayed by the consumer. A low degree of satisfaction can lower confidence and lead to personal insecurity.

6.3.1.4.2 Concept: Reassurance

The previous concept ('Self-image') was concerned with issues of personal appearance and behaviour, and focused on personal confidence both internally, unto oneself, and in anticipation of external interactions with others. In contrast, reassurance tends to focus on negotiations between the individual and the overall context of the mall; this might relate to the physical environment or the social environment. It groups together any situations that

create insecurity or uncertainty for the respondents which are not dealt with under the concept 'Self-image'. The majority of those concerns relate to the physical realm and the ability of the respondents to confidently orientate and navigate within that realm. In part this has been attributed to poor directional and orientation signals (Passini 1996), the growing homogeneity of malls (a proliferation of the same stores or similar products) (Wakefield and Baker 1998), and a growing concern on the part of consumers to make the most use of their time at the mall (Chebat et al 2003).

The most frequently referenced concern for the respondents related to their abilities to understand the layout of the retail mall; if they could not make sense of the layout and thereby easily find the shops they were looking for then they became frustrated. Not only did this cause irritation, but it seemed to draw attention to the physical size of the mall. Malls that they could not easily 'read' seemed larger and they became more aware of the distances they needed to walk to reach their destination. Victoria (58, company director) commented on her impressions of ifc2 mall:

“It’s too big. I think that it’s the spatial thing, some things I can’t manage you know. I walk and walk and walk and I am so tired. With Pacific Place it’s something that you can manage and you know where the shops are so you skip from one shop to another. With IFC I don’t know the place that well because it’s new. Maybe I would get to like the place but I don’t know. But it’s too big a place.”

The two malls have similarities, yet Pacific Place has clearer sight lines that allow you to ‘read’ the layout easier. It is not possible with the data at hand to determine whether Victoria’s problems are because the layout is genuinely harder to read or whether, as she speculates, it is because she is less familiar with ifc2; but either way this lack of legibility leads to both frustration and an awareness of the size of the mall. Olivia (42, therapist) makes a similar observation about the same, ifc2, mall, but adds the quality ‘messy’ to her assessment:

“I just think that's its too...messy, just don't know which way to go. Maybe it's not enough signage...or maybe I'm not familiar with the place. Maybe. And the first time I go there I was looking for the office in Tower 2 and I went to Tower 1 and they made me go all the way back. After that I have that kind of feeling that it's kind of messy. Compared to computer - it's not so user-friendly as Pacific Place; you need to familiarize yourself before you go inside. IFC is a similar level as PP. But I just think it's more scattered around, not so concentrated as Pacific Place.”

This concern can be viewed from the perspective of the conditions that contribute to ‘preferred place’ (de Young 1999) which are described as legibility, coherence, complexity, and mystery. People need to be able to ‘read’ places, to understand the component parts of the place (legibility). From this they need to feel that these parts are logical and complementary to each other (coherence). The place needs sufficient variety to provide and maintain

interest (complexity), and a degree of yet-to-be-discovered events (mystery) to provide adventure. However, it is important that the element of mystery should allow the consumer to explore with a confidence that they will not get lost – which relates back to legibility and coherence. In both respondents' cases – Victoria and Olivia – one feels that whilst the complexity and mystery is present they both lack the confidence of legibility. Olivia makes similar speculations as Victoria regarding familiarity but, ultimately, lays the blame for her frustration on the layout of the mall. In terms of physical conditions such frustrations have been attributed to design failings of the mall itself, or poor directional information, or poor product 'depth' (d'Astous 2000) but whatever the cause, what is illustrated here is the need that the respondents have to feel they can find what they want without effort.

The search for logic in the physical realm can to some degree be seen as the need to remain in control; to know where you are, where you are going, and be able to get there without assistance. In these situations the respondents endeavoured to develop some form of simple mind map to orientate themselves and aid navigation. Pamela (63, educational trainer) made an interesting observation regarding boundaries:

“IFC is still a space. It's got some interesting things there, but for me it's not well-defined it also doesn't have edges. There are too many people rushing through...it was like being in the middle of a...a...street. Pacific Place you're not in the middle of the street you're at a destination, you're actually at a destination, and it has an enclosure

but the enclosure's not claustrophobic, the enclosure's just the right size.”

The establishing of boundaries seem to offer Pamela two things. It offered her security – she was not “in the middle of a street” but in an enclosure. Secondly it offered her an element of control; she knew where she was in relation to all around her, she knew the limits of this almost personal space, and thus she could remain or remove herself reasonably easily. A similar intrusive interference with personal control was noted by Catherine (38, design manager):

“...the way they lay out the mall, I mean....it’s like, what I can do to make it hard....look at Megabox⁶, I have no idea what’s going on....you have no idea where you are or how to get anywhere, it’s like they want to drive you somewhere and you don’t know where. And suddenly you’re in the big space. I mean... I shouldn’t be treated like that.”

Whilst this response can be linked to other concepts (e.g. Effort/less; Practical; Pampering) it can also be seen as a loss of control on Catherine’s part, as she believes her freedom to navigate the mall is being threatened; and her movements through the mall are being controlled by others.

⁶ Megabox is a retail centre aimed at low- to mid-income audience and located in what used to be an industrial area of Hong Kong.

In most cases, respondents described the mall in holistic terms; rather than commenting on individual features of the mall, for example the lighting or the design or the decoration they chose to describe it in terms of the overall mood it inspired in them. The term ‘home’ was used by respondents in reference to the mall, though for different reasons:

“Festival Walk is a little bit strange for me.....Pacific Place feels like home.” Margaret (57, lecturer)

“[in Pacific Place] we get some place where we can pass some time, you know, like with your friends...and the atmosphere is really nice like, you feel a little bit like home.” Tracy (27, marketer)

In Tracy’s case the company of her friends, and presence of particular shops, reminded her of home; for Pamela it was more to do with the fact that the mall offered her a series of comforts and facilities that made her feel ‘at home’. The significance is, however, that both interpretations resulted in an affectionate bond with the mall.

The value of past experiences proved to be a factor that was capable of providing reassurance to respondents. One relevant aspect of past experiences was familiarity, and whilst familiarity as a generality has resonance with other concepts – for example ‘Effort/less’ or ‘Sense of community’ – it was also seen to be a contributing property to this concept. Familiarity could be seen,

for example, to remove orientation discomforts, as this extract from Christy (46, teacher) illustrates:

“[ifc2 is] OK I suppose....it’s kind of up-market but I’m just not that....I’m not comfortable really. Maybe I just know Pacific Place, I’ve been there so many times, I just feel comfortable...relaxed, I suppose.”

Victoria (58, company director) emphasizes the point by stressing the consequences of poor familiarity:

“...and then, unless you know the place, where you go from one shop to another, where the washrooms are, where all exits, taxi stands and so on, you find a shopping mall unmanageable.”

In this case familiarity is one tool that respondents used to provide the logic for the physical realm. But as was noted earlier, respondents did not always appear willing to spend the time gaining that familiarity (e.g. with ifc2) when they had alternative choices with which they were already familiar (e.g. Pacific Place).

Another, oft-cited value of past experiences can be seen through comparative experiences. Respondents frequently made or emphasized a point about one mall by comparing it to another; this provided them a basic analytical framework based on ‘better than/worse than’. These comparisons were used in

a variety of ways by different respondents. Kenneth (45, marketer), for example, differentiated by trade mix:

“Well, Times Square, I go there with my family, they have those kind of shops. Lots of stuff all over the place, something for everyone. Pacific Place is much more.....focussed...my kids are bored in Pacific Place, it’s too formal.”

In this case Kenneth uses comparison of the retail shops between the malls to distinguish between user groups and, somewhat indirectly, to suggest a social hierarchy between them. An alternative application of the comparison framework was provided by Tracy (27, marketer) who appeared less concerned with the trade mix and more focused on the overall ‘feeling’:

“...and the atmosphere is really nice like, you feel a little bit like home....yeah, I feel a little bit like Madrid. Well the thing is there are so many malls like this one, like Pacific Place, so it's like very similar. Very much the same. I mean, shops are shops, anywhere.”

In Tracy’s case, whilst her comparison still provided her a basic ‘better than/worse than’ evaluation, she gained more of a sense of association and reassurance-through-familiarity as the mall now was reminiscent of home (Madrid) and much less of a strange/unknown place.

In addition to seeking reassurance within the physical realm respondents also displayed recognition of and concern with brand-driven product reassurance (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Bhat and Reddy 1998; Keller 1998; O’Cass and Frost 2002). Some respondents emphasized their need for the actual product reassurance, in particular Eric (51, manufacturer) who was adamant about the value inherent in international brand-name products:

“Quality. Really. It is my experience [that brand names provide quality]. Of course I’m not a fan of brand names but I do appreciate the quality.”

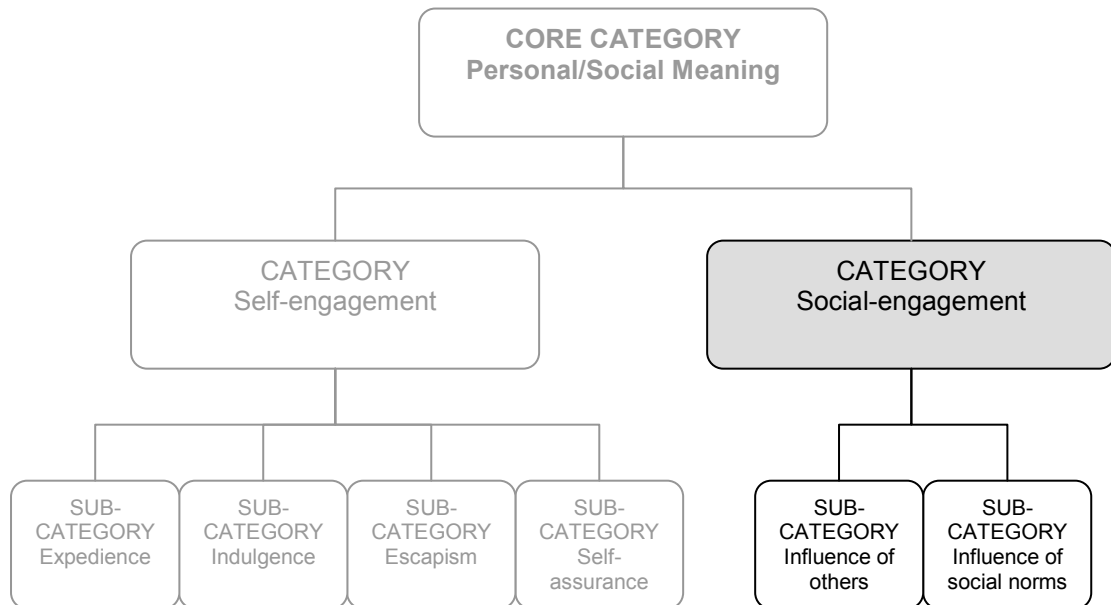
At the same time that Eric extolled his belief in the quality that resided within these brands, he also associated the presence of brand-name shops with the quality of the mall. Most respondents shared a similar point of view regarding this latter point; the presence of brand-name shops suggested a higher-level retail mall. Whilst the significance of brand-name shops and products to the image of the mall has been noted elsewhere in this thesis, it is mentioned here in the context of reassurance; the presence of brand-name shops suggested a certain level of reassurance to the respondents with regard to what they might expect within the mall.

From within the research four major properties emerged relating to the concept ‘Reassurance’:

- *Search for logic in the physical realm*: the need to feel capable of moving around without getting lost, yet whilst maintaining a sense of discovery
- *Insecurity*: this property manifested itself in several ways; there was the need to feel one was in control – at least not under someone else’s control; the need to feel safe and not threatened; the need for product reassurance through recognized brand names.
- *Affectionate bonding*: feelings of positive emotional connection, both towards the environment and towards the other patrons.
- *Value of past experiences*: this property relates to feelings of familiarity and positive past associations.

SECTION FOUR – CATEGORY “SOCIAL-ENGAGEMENT”

Figure 6.6: The category “Self-engagement”



6.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Social engagement, as a category within the theoretical framework, reflects the ways in which consumers deal with their interaction with the mall and its patrons. In the context of this research it was the most referenced category and in many ways the most extensive category in that it embraced a wide range of consumer concerns. Much of the engagement took place by way of comparison, as the consumers compared aspects of the mall – for example the interior finishes, the trade mix, the presence or lack of presence of brand-name store – with assumptions and opinions they brought to the mall. Whilst this research did not identify the source of such assumptions – such investigations

being outside of the scope of the stated research objectives – the implication was, based on comments made during the interviews, that these opinions were the product of continual and on-going social interactions, as well as historical, political, economic, and cultural influences. This is consistent with the seminal work of Berger and Luckman (1966) regarding the social construction of reality, and also suggests that whatever assumptions the respondents brought to the mall, such assumptions were open to modification and change. In contrast to the previous category of ‘Self-engagement’, the category ‘Social-engagement’ focuses on interactions the respondents engaged in with others; i.e. social-engagement focuses on “the social identity level of self whereby the individual is identified by his or her group memberships” (Nario-Redmond et al 2004).

Identification by group membership was not restricted to groups the respondents belonged to but all groups that they could identify; social categorization (Tajfel 1972; Turner 1985) was the most prevalent response throughout the interviews. This categorization - and the resultant social positioning (Turner 1999) – took place with people, with products, even with holistic impressions of the places themselves. One common and recurrent assumption – and one well-documented in the literature (e.g. Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Bhat and Reddy 1998; Keller 1998; O’Cass and Frost 2002) - was that brand-name stores and brand-name products signify high social status. Eric (51, manufacturer) made frequent mention of brand-names, and using them as a measure of the status of the shopping centre – and, in many cases, the status of other mall patrons:

“Eric: Festival Walk and Pacific Place, they are both modern, spacious but the class...I mean...of course the Pacific Place is higher than Festival Walk

Interviewer: In what way?

Eric: The class of the shops and brand names they sell. For example Swank and Joyce in Pacific Place but there is no Swank and Joyce in Festival Walk”

In Eric’s case, he came to the mall with the preconception that brands are the markers of status. Therefore the presence of brand goods stores is an indication of a high-status mall; the absence of such shops lowers the status in Eric’s eyes.

As has been noted above the notion of social engagement as an act of comparison is supported in the literature by social comparison theory (Festinger 1954); social engagement as a process of social learning is supported by Blumer’s 1969 theory of social interaction which proposes three key thoughts:

- that people respond to each other and their environment based on the meanings these ‘others’ have for them
- this meaning is created through the process of interaction with such others

- that the meaning is constantly being interpreted, modified, amended, and adjusted based on further interactions with others

Within the analysis it can be seen that many of the respondents were behaving in this fashion, and the creation of meaning is indeed the core category that has emerged from the research. The social engagement activities described in this thesis reflect both Blumer's ideas of symbolic interactivity – as a method of engagement – as well as ideas of social positioning theory (e.g Festinger 1954; Harré 2004, 2008; Harré and van Langenhove 1999) which provide insights into the reasons behind such activities. This research also shows the interactivity, whereby people can learn from each other and modify their views, beliefs, or values based on the result of the interaction. Margaret (57, lecturer), for example, draws certain conclusions from observing the patrons at two different malls:

“People look more purposeful... New Town Plaza⁷, people tend to speak more loudly and they're more intrusive I suppose; they seem like peasants from the country side wondering open mouthed at the lights of the city, that's what it feels like in New Town Plaza. I'm sure a lot of people are not like that at all but that's the feeling. Whereas in Pacific Place, it looks like they belong.”

⁷ Shatin New Town Plaza is located in Shatin New Town, a suburban development in the north-east area of Hong Kong's New Territories, in what used to be a purely agricultural valley. It caters to a low-to mid-income audience.

In her case she ‘learns’ that certain behaviour is prevalent at certain malls, which she compares with her own preferred behaviour. She then concludes that either it does not agree with her beliefs, and she will avoid that place, or that it echoes her beliefs and she will frequent that place. She might also conclude that, whilst this type of behaviour is not her normal behaviour, there are aspects of the behaviour she likes or the returns from such behaviour appeal to her, and she might then modify her behaviour accordingly. This extract also illustrates that consumers bring certain preconceptions with them; the way in which peasants might behave in the city, or what constitutes behaviour that makes people look “like they belong”.

Social-engagement involves the consumer with two specific concerns which are grouped under the sub-categories of the ‘Influence of Others’ and the ‘Influence of Social Norms:

- Influence of Others; this deals with how consumers respond to interactions with other people. In this context it can be seen to have three major concepts; opinions of others (how they respond to direct interaction with others e.g. criticism), sense of community (how they align themselves within social groups), and image of others (how they interpret other people by their appearance or by their actions).
- Influence of social norms; this sub-category deals with how consumers modify their views and opinions in response to the rules and norms of the larger social context. Three concepts were identified from the data; social distinctions (categorizing people, actions, objects socially),

social symbols (identifying objects and actions that were used to communicate symbolically with the social group), and pretentiousness (identifying the need to “falsify” ones’ image in order to qualify for a particular social position)

These two sub-categories, and the concepts relating to them, are discussed in detail below.

6.4.1.1 Sub-category: Influence of others

‘Influence of others’ was a consumer concern that figured highly in the analysis and, at one stage, was considered a category in its own right. It refers to the different ways in which the consumer interacts with others and the resultant influences that these interactions have on the consumer. These interactions can be direct, for example through social activity, conversation, electronic or traditional written communications, or they can be indirect, for example through observing others, through television and film, through posters, magazines and other printed matter.

The ‘influence of others’ relies on communication between the consumer and the source of influence; within this study much of this communication was symbolic (e.g. Danesi 1999; Eco 1979; Mick 1986) and took place through language (e.g. Cassirer 1957; Chomsky 2002; Fromm 1951), through behaviour (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; McCracken 1986) and through appearance (Michon et al 2008; Zhao and Belk 2007). Various interpreted

forms of social and socially-related behaviour were particularly apparent in the data of this study, and such behaviour was seen as linked to ritualistic behaviour and social rituals in particular (Baudrillard 1998; Schouten 1991). These served the function of both communicating the 'rules of engagement' with a particular social group as well as establishing the social standards for that group. Symbolic communication is of particular significance within consumer behaviour (Elliott 1997; Wallendorf and Arnold 1991), as Wattanasuwan (2005) points out:

“In consumer culture, consumption is central to the meaningful practice of our everyday life. That is, we make our consumption choices not only from the products utilities but also from their symbolic meanings. Basically we employ consumption symbolically not only to create and sustain the self but also to locate us in society.”
(p.179)

Symbolic consumption and communication have particular relevance within this research as the retail mall offers one of the best sites for obtaining products high in social symbolism, most notable being branded goods (Argo et al 2005; Elliott and Leonard 2004; Thompson and Haytko 1997; Vigneron and Johnson 1999).

Within the sub-category of 'Influence of others' three concepts emerged from the analysis of the data. The first was 'Opinions of others', and groups the respondents concerns with feedback given to them by others, usually in the

form of verbal comments; the second concept focuses on ‘Sense of community’, or how the respondents associated with – or against – particular social groups, and, thirdly, ‘Image of others’, a concept that deals principally with the respondents impressions of other patrons of mall, generally impressions that are gained simply through interpretive viewing of the clothes they wore or things they carried, or their mode of behaviour. These three concepts are described in detail below.

6.4.1.1.1 Concept: Opinions of others

The concept ‘Opinions of others’ deals with how the respondents react to opinions and criticism of people around them. Often consumers would seek the opinion of friends or relatives, or refer to web-based consumer groups for advice on purchases (Bearden and Etzel 1982; West and Broniarczyk 1998). Such advice and criticism could take place away from or within the retail environment and, certainly in the case of advice-seeking, is seen as a consumer strategy to “reduce...uncertainty as the perceived risk associated with a purchase increases” West and Broniarczyk 1998, p.38). In the case of criticism, some respondents would respond positively towards that criticism, others would react against it. In the case of Olivia (42, therapist) she found such criticism totally spoiled the act of shopping:

“Most of the time [I go shopping] on my own. I like shopping by myself because I have a problem that most of the time when I am shopping with people and I like something and they say no I will

hesitate and not buy but then I regret it; and after I go back they've sold out. It happens quite a lot of times and also the one that you go with is really important because if I go with my sister she will go for very fashionable [choices], and when I look at things she says 'err, very old-fashioned' and it spoils my interest therefore I prefer to go by myself. And when I go with Dickey - my husband - he is not so patient and he will chase me because he wants me to finish the shopping as soon as possible and therefore everything is 'ah, good, good, good...buy it' and then I will buy a lot of things which are useless.”

It would appear that Olivia would prefer the company of others, but she seeks like-minded companions rather than critical ones. It also suggests a lack of confidence on her part but, nonetheless, the opinions of others obviously have a profound effect on her to the point where she would rather avoid the opinions of others than to receive negative or insincere comments. Victoria (58, company director) reflects a similar attitude:

“I mean why do I have to shop with people? (laugh) I never, I never, never. I mean, I suppose in a way I never say, something like ‘let’s go shopping’, uh, ‘together’. Now that might start something! OK, maybe let’s go and have a drink and talk talk talk But the thought of asking a friend along to go shopping,...I mean, we all have different tastes...I don’t need that.”

Her comment “we all have different tastes....I don’t need that” reflects the personal nature of her engagement with shopping; for her it is not a social activity due to the conflict tastes and values. Yet, unlike Olivia who came across as regretting the fact that she had to shop alone, Victoria gave the impression that for her shopping was a very personal act that she genuinely preferred to do alone. As will be shown in within the concept ‘Sense of community’, Victoria seems to create her own private community between herself (private/external) and the sales staff (public/external).

The ‘Opinion of others’ as a concept extends beyond personal criticism and choice; for example, it is applied in the form of recommendations. When asked her opinion of a rival retail mall, ifc2, Michelle (46, office manager) commented:

“I expected it to be more elegant in lot of things. And....I know the office is very good, I've been there, but the shopping mall is not as high class as the offices. You feel it isn't as high-class as the office, because the office is really nice, nice view and interior. Or maybe because of the expensive rental, you expect something really first-class. A lot of people had been talking about it, saying this and that, but I didn't think so.”

In this case Michelle disagreed with the opinions of others regarding their assessment of that particular mall, yet it is easy to see how easily such

opinions would at least weight on side of an argument in favour of, or against, a particular place, and thus contribute to the shaping of personal opinions.

The concept ‘Opinions of others’ exhibited three main properties; these properties were:

- *Response to criticism*: this property dealt with how the respondents handled direct criticism of themselves or their actions.
- *Challenging/accepting values of others*: this was how the respondents positioned themselves in relation to other peoples’ value sets.
- *Comparing with others*: the third property was the act of ‘comparing with others’; in some cases it overlapped with other properties (e.g. by comparing values prior to challenging/accepting), whereas in other cases it was related to achievements or material possessions (e.g. noting that some people appeared to be more successful or wealthy than them).

6.4.1.1.2 Concept: Sense of community

The concept ‘Sense of community’ encapsulates the respondents concerns with not simply observing the actions of others but recognizing social groups and identifying with or against those groups. In some cases these explorations of social groupings could be seen as relating to the brand communities

described by scholars such as Luedicke (2006), McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002), or Muniz and Guinn (2001). Eric (51, manufacturer)], for example,

“When the visitor from China will travel to Star Avenue, they will automatically go to New World Centre⁸ to shop there. It’s part of their visit, not Pacific Place. And the local people who go New World Centre, um... they are below middle class. There’s no more of the brand name shop except the Swank shop. It’s not attractive; it might be my old-age but for me I prefer to shop at Pacific Place. It is quite different; different grade, different image, different shoppers”

In this case he is identifying with his brand image of Pacific Place, an image that is to a great deal influenced or represented by the branded goods on offer there. But in so doing Eric is separating himself from two particular social groups; the less-than-middle- class locals, and the visitors from China⁹. A similar social distinction was made by Anna (47, housewife) when comparing The Landmark¹⁰ with Pacific Place:

“Pacific Place people are more civilized and less flashy than the Landmark ones. This is very interesting I somehow feel the

⁸ New World Centre is a low- to mid-income mall on the Kowloon peninsula that attracts many tourists from mainland China.

⁹ Throughout the interviews, many references were made towards the mainland China tourists. They were generally described as noisy and as lacking in the behaviours common to Hong Kong locals.

¹⁰ The Landmark is one of Hong Kong's original high-end shopping centres locating in the heart of the Central Business District.

Pacific Place people, the shoppers are more...cultivated...more civilized, what is the word to use?"

Anna has a clear image of the type of person who frequents Pacific Place – the Pacific Place community – and clearly identifies herself with them.

Sense of community has been described by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith the members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.” (Blanchard and Markus 2002, p.2). From this they have identified four dimensions – feelings of membership; feelings of influence; integration and fulfillment of needs; shared emotional connection - which are supported by the comments by respondents in this study. The respondents were looking for groups of like-minded individuals with whom they could relate, either through similar beliefs and values, or through some common interest in an activity or product. In the cases of Eric and Anna above they are content to observe, assign a particular set of values, and then effectively align themselves to that social group. A more complex relationship was observed in the behaviour of Victoria (58, company director). As was noted in the previous section, Victoria claimed she preferred to shop alone and she clearly identified with Pacific Place:

“I, I really love Pacific Place. I really do. I like the whole place. And I love to shop (laugh)”

Whilst the previous respondents identified with Pacific Place, Victoria actually began to shape her relationship with the mall to construct her own little private community. She established close personal relationships with the sales girls, whereby she could leave her bags with them while she went shopping elsewhere. If she forgot to return for them, the salesgirls had her private telephone number and they would call her to remind her. They would bring products from other stores in different retail malls to Pacific Place for her. And, in return, she would buy them cakes and candies on occasions to show her appreciation and reinforce a relationship that went beyond normal retail relationships.

“I love to shop because you see, I mean you can’t really establish any kind of liking of place unless you actually go to shops and you know the people. I actually know the people. You know when you’re tired, you go in...let’s say you have been carrying a lot of shopping bags, right? And then, you know, you put all the bags there, you know, and you do more shopping then you pick up the stuff later. And you don’t have to pay for anything (laugh) And then trying to stop, you know, put all the bags there, you know. I think it still is the best shopping center in Hong Kong... Or maybe I’m prejudiced.” Victoria (58, company director)

Victoria’s attitude reflects both dimensions of ‘feelings of influence’ and ‘the integration and fulfillment of needs’ (Blanchard and Markus 2002; McMillan and Chavis 1986). Within the basic environment (Pacific Place) Victoria

builds her own personal community comprising herself and a network of shop girls. So, contrary to her claim that she likes to shop alone, Victoria in fact loves to shop within a community of people that she knows will not disagree with her, will not disapprove of her purchase choices, and will provide additional services to make the act of shopping that much easier and that much more convenient. She has created her own sense of belonging.

The above interview extracts suggest a distinct social position for Pacific Place and, within that social position, distinct patterns of behaviour that obviously resonate with Victoria. Such a strong image, whilst generating the sense of belonging exhibited by Eric, Anna, and Victoria, can in some cases create feelings of social exclusion and in others generate a rejection of the ideals that appear to be an intrinsic part of the Pacific Place 'community'. Such exclusion and rejection suggest the negative side of the dimension 'feelings of membership' (Blanchard and Markus 2002; McMillan and Chavis 1986); of being excluded from some group or club Margaret (57, lecturer), for example, whilst enjoying the overall 'ambience' of Pacific Place, found herself intimidated:

“Mostly because of costs, we couldn't afford HK Island...the first time we went out, we do what we normally do which is get dressed, try and make things match and... We just felt like we were aliens.”

In Margaret's case she seemed to be struggling with a dislike of the superficial values of Pacific Place (money and personal 'looks') yet not wanting to totally

condemn the place because she felt at home with the general ambience of Pacific Place:

“Pacific Place is more... feminine in a way, it's very neutrally coloured, a sort of creamy colour. Pacific Place is trying to be more earnest and specific....and the fact that [it] is curved, this makes much a softer experience.”

Margaret's obvious liking for Pacific Place was on the one hand strong yet, on the other hand, her own personal insecurity – seemingly a product of not being rich and at the same time considering herself to be physically unattractive – destroyed any complete sense of belonging that she could have experienced.

In contrast, an alternative response to the Pacific Place ‘community’ was one of rejection; a rejection of the values and beliefs that were seen to belong to the Pacific Place image. Jenny (28, advertising executive) was particularly antagonistic towards mainstream retailing in general and Pacific Place in particular:

“HK people are very smart. They can compare, like, why should I go to the mall if I can have a nicer place to visit or if I can have somewhere else, say, in Mong Kok. Why should I go there, why should I spend more time to go to the upper level to go that shop if I can have it somewhere else. They cannot fool us because the advertising.”

In her interview Jenny had a very strong “us-and-them” attitude. She certainly saw the retailers as manipulative and purveyors of things-not-worthy. And she considered consumption as typified by mall activity to be disdainful. In the above extract she aligns herself with the greater ‘people’ community, claiming Hong Kong people (of which she implies she is one) to be smart; smart enough to reject the mall as being an unworthy leisure activity, and smart enough not to be taken in by the wiles of the advertisers. Later in the interview she aligned herself with a much smaller, more fringe community which she felt had a more valuable set of beliefs. She clearly believed that there was a mainstream set of values which, to her, were shallow and involved activities that had little to offer in the way of true substance. In contrast to the retail mall activity – and shopping as a mainstay leisure activity – she believed in artistic pursuits and favoured activities that encouraged personal exploration and expression. She even rejected the community of the Hong Kong Fringe Club¹¹ believing this also to be lacking in authenticity:

“I don't like Fringe Club. It seems quite clique-y. There's too many limitations in the existing [Hong Kong] Arts Centre or in that kind of Fringe Club” Jenny (28, advertising executive)

She had a favourite place, a set of old buildings called Castle Farm in the Tokwawan district of Hong Kong that the government had given to the community for artistic endeavors:

¹¹ The Hong Kong Fringe Club is a subsidised arts centre that caters to performances and exhibitions for budding local artists.

“[Castle Farm is] a really free area where you can do a lot of things. It’s the only place you are free to express. There's no other place make you feel like that, even in the Art's Centre you cannot feel like that. The whole area can keep the image of the raw and the free...freedom...that's the only place. I think the [Castle Farm actors] [would say] the Fringe Club people are there just to show off and we're the real down to earth artists.”

Jenny had a clear sense of herself as an artist, and that the ideals and beliefs she developed through those activities could not be replicated through what she considered to be ‘mindless consumption’. Yet whilst she is clearly in opposition to all that Pacific Place offers, her actions are not dissimilar to those of Eric, Victoria, or Anna. Only the decisions made are different. She exhibits both strong ‘feelings of membership and ‘shared emotional connection’ (Blanchard and Markus 2002; McMillan and Chavis 1986); she exhibits these in a negative fashion towards Pacific Place, and in a positive fashion towards Castle Farm. She has a strong sense of belonging to a community that offers similar values and beliefs that she holds, and she actively excludes herself socially from a community without those values. Her actions can be explained within the theoretical framework; her process of evaluation, her development of meaning; the symbolic creation of a representative mental image and, finally, the construction of and response to a character frame with a choice of consumer identities. In the case of Eric, Victoria, and Anna they find an identity that suits them within the Pacific

Place character frame and thus they accept the image as suitable to them; in Jenny's case, she doesn't like the images offered by the Pacific Place character frame and thus rejects those images as one not matching her belief system.

The concept 'Sense of community' exhibited three key properties:

- *Sense of belonging*: this property provided an overall feeling of membership to the group; it included feelings of familiarity and in some cases continuity.
- *Shared values and beliefs*: this relates to whether there is commonality between the respondent and other members of the community in terms of the values they hold and the things in which they believe.
- *Social inclusion/exclusion*: in many cases the 'communities' were evaluated in terms of the social position of the members and that position compared to either the actual or the aspired position of the respondent.

6.4.1.1.3 Concept: Image of others

The third concept in the sub-category of 'Influence of others' is 'Image of others' and groups together consumer concerns with and responses to the look, behaviour, and activities of people they observe. Unlike the concept 'Opinions of others', which focused principally on direct or active engagement (e.g. conversations, joint activities), the concept 'Image of others' dealt with

indirect or passive engagement (e.g. voyeurism and the influence of appearances).

All respondents interviewed included references to other mall patrons; in particular how they ‘appeared’ – the kinds of clothes they wore, the things they carried, the activities in which they engaged. The majority of these reference involved some kind of social comparison, be it direct, as in ‘appeared high-class’, or indirect as in ‘seemed rich’ which in many cases was synonymous with high social status. These results are supported by previous studies of personal observation (e.g. Brewer 1988; Fiske and Neuberg 1990; Stangor et al 1992) which propose that “category-based judgments represent the default mode of person perception” (Stangor et al 1992, p.215). Such observation are socially-focussed as “the social category memberships of others are spontaneously attended to and remembered, even in the absence of explicit instructions to do so, and thus it is not surprising that they play such an important role in social judgments and social behavior” (Stangor et al 1992, p.215).

The most common response during the interviews was a direct observation of other mall patrons, and either the allocation of a particular social position to that patron or some direct personal comparison to self. As Jasmin (44, stewardess) observed:

“Well, apart from obvious tourists from the mainland, they all look as if they belong in terms that they're better dressed, their behaviour is

more discrete... um, they look as if they can afford to go shopping there”

Jasmin was clear in making a distinction between China mainland tourists and ‘others’ who she felt ‘belonged’ in Pacific Place. Several respondents made reference to visitors from the China mainland, and generally the inference was that these visitors were less sophisticated than Hong Kong people. Jasmin immediately excluded those visitors as a group from her assessment of who belongs, and then made her assumptions of ‘belonging’ from the other patrons, based on their appearance, their clothes, and the way in which they behave. In essence, their outward appearance provided the stimulus for making social distinctions.

Pamela (63, educational trainer]) drew a very clear distinction between social classes based on appearance and behaviour:

“My perception would be then that frankly the people who shop at Pacific Place are probably a little better off. They're probably...a little more sophisticated...at East Point City¹² you do see Grandma and Grandpa, you know, coming in their shorts and their flip flops, just came out of the wet market and want to come in to have a look at what's the bargain on the ground floor, right, whereas in Pacific Place you don't, I mean, basically you see...I mean, because of those three

¹² East Point City is a suburban mall located in a new town development in the south-east area of the Hong Kong New Territories.

hotels you tend to see very middle class, upper-middle-class, people, so it's maybe less interesting and less diverse as a mix of customers but you probably have a level of comfort with those other people around that's greater than a level of comfort where you're being elbowed aside by somebody.”

The visual presentation of others, and their behaviour, provides suggestions as to their social position which provides stimulation for two courses of action on the part of the respondent. Firstly, it suggests the social positioning of the mall and, secondly, it allows the respondent to assess whether or not it is to their personal taste, and whether or not to continue the engagement.

Margaret’s interview referred constantly to both her lack of wealth and issues related to her weight. She mentioned that she had recently lost five stones, yet based on her remarks she still felt she was significantly overweight. As was noted in an earlier extract, she made several comments about the “very thin, very beautiful, very well dressed” women who frequented Pacific Place. An extract from the post-interview memo written by this researcher remarked on this:

“[Margaret] also seemed to have clear roles or definitions of femininity, and these were elements that influenced her evaluation of malls. Her own battle with weight figured regularly in her conversation, ranging from factual statements (“I lost 10 lbs”) to governing preferences (“Zara has my size”) to possibly self-evaluation

or maybe even envious remarks about “Full of small thin women””

[extract from Margaret’s post-interview memo]

She was obviously intimidated by the appearance of these other patrons and by the conclusions she drew based on those appearances. Much of what she concluded was supported by knowing that the brand shops were in Pacific place and knowing that they were indeed very expensive. But clearly she did not feel empathy with the other mall patrons. For Sandra (51, housewife) on the other hand it was important to feel some kind of bond with other patrons:

“Of course most times it's the price, and the kinds of goods you're going to buy. But the type of people there is important....for me it's just.... just felt comfortable when you walk inside.”

Sandra made assumptions again based simply on the look of the people and their behaviour, yet she was more comfortable in a mall where she felt she related to the other patrons in terms of similar social position. This can be seen in part as an act of self-categorisation, we categorise ourselves just as we categorise others (Turner et al 1987); it is a process of depersonalization that makes group behaviour possible (and the recognition of group/social behaviour in others) (Hogg 2001). In this conceptualization we conceive of ourselves prototypically and our behaviour “conforms to the relevant ingroup prototype in terms of attitudes, feelings and actions” (Hogg 2001, p.61). Behaviour of the patrons was a key element in these assessments; generally

the quieter, more restrained the behaviour then the assumptions of respondents tended towards a higher social group. As Olivia (42, therapist) observed:

“Like if I want to shop with Tiffany [her daughter] she didn't have the patience in Pacific place because it's too office-like. A little cool compared with Times Square and Cityplaza¹³. It's cool and quiet - more high-class, something like that. But kids they like to make noise, running around, screaming, the kids like that kind of environment. But if she screams in Pacific Place I will 'shh' her - that kind of behavior seems to be a little bit....you have to be quite behaved.”

While in this example Olivia was referring to her 11years old daughter, the point is clear. The ambience at Pacific Place suggested a certain type of behaviour and this ambience was generally based on a consumer response to an holistic impression of the place, an impression that embraced the physical realm, the other patrons, the shops, and the products on offer. As Kenneth (45, marketer) pointed out:

“I don't know...it's my feeling, Pacific Place is - my impression – is a shopping mall for those sophisticated HK consumers who look for quality.”

¹³ Times Square is an office and retail complex in one of the busiest (Causeway Bay) areas of Hong Kong island. Cityplaza is located in the eastern side of Hong Kong island and is owned by the same company that owns Pacific Place. Both centres cater to the middle-income audience.

And a similar observation regarding the holistic impression was made by Anna (47, housewife):

“And I think, you know, if you were talking to [my friend] she'd probably be saying the same things that I am - that it feels good. it's the right size, it's the right kind of level of shops, it has variety...it just feels good.”

So the 'Image of others' is key to the consumer positioning and evaluation and positioning of the mall, and yet the image can be one of clarity – that person looks sophisticated – or it can be a more 'sensed' image – this place just feels right. And of course such observations can in themselves become a part of the pleasure of engaging with the mall when the voyeurism becomes overt rather than covert:

“[Pacific Place is] a good place to meet because there's so many places where you can sit down, and you can have a cup of tea, and you can...you can...if you want, watch the people go by, right.” Pamela (63, educational trainer)

The frequency of respondents' comments evaluating the appearance of other patrons and positioning them socially or economically suggested the notion of a 'character frame' that was somehow an extension of the image of the mall. By observing the patrons and other mall activities the consumers began to paint their personal portrait of the mall – develop their own interpretation of

the image of the mall which, in turn, created a series of associated images that were almost caricatures of credible mall patrons. Eric (51, manufacturer) had a very clear image of Pacific Place patrons:

“Um, a shopping mall for those uh... middle class, or above, for those educated. The image they deliver is something like that. Educated or for people who look like they have a quality life; they deliver such a message. That's what I think.”

It should be stressed that whilst there was evidence that the environment placed restrictions on what might be considered appropriate behaviour and image – for example, Olivia’s earlier comments regarding the acceptable behaviour of children in the mall – there was no evidence to suggest a definitive number of identities were available. Rather than the mall image suggesting certain images, the mall image defines a set of criteria – a frame – within which identities could be created at will by the consumers, which in this study has been labelled as the ‘character frame’..

Much of the evaluation of patrons was carried out by way of compartmentalising; patrons were assessed within one or several categories or compartments. The main ‘compartments’ were social, economic, and age, although in most cases ‘economic’ was taken as an indicator of social status – if one looked like one had money then it was assumed one was of a higher social status.

In many instances the appearance and behaviour of other mall patrons defined the image of the mall, or contributed enormously to that image. Respondents assigned value to the 'Image of others', generally economic or social, yet economic wealth was often interpreted as being a reflection of social status. Overall the symbols that drove social evaluation – clothes, the things carried, behaviour – provided the basis for the development of a character frame for the mall from which consumers could construct personal identities that would be socially acceptable within the mall.

The number of people in the mall – the 'crowd' – produced quite contrary opinions amongst the respondents. In general, a large number of people – if the mall was considered crowded – led most respondents to down-grade the social image of the mall. Yet if there were few people in the mall the respondents made one of two observations; either the mall was of a higher social status or that it was not popular and thus, by association, not particularly good in terms of either quality, trade mix, or variety of goods on offer. Olivia (42, therapist) observed:

“It depends also on my mood. Sometimes I want quieter when you need to think. Even when you're shopping around you are thinking not just shopping around and if I need to think about something, some problem I will just walk around and in that case I'll go to PP because it's more sophisticated, not that much people and I can think easier.”

She felt that crowded places – she cited Times Square – stimulated the desire to shop and to buy but because of the high energy made it impossible to think. So the only purpose of going there would be to shop rather than to relax. Somewhat contradictorily Olivia considered that shopping centres with fewer people were “low energy” and not stimulating. Margaret (57, lecturer) drew a similar conclusion from the opposite case:

I don't know; [Pacific Place] is quieter. New Town Plaza people tend to speak more loudly and they're more intrusive I suppose; and it is a lot more crowded, I mean sometimes in the weekend, well I avoid going there at the weekend, only go if I have to because it's so crowded.”

Her opinion of New Town Plaza was that it was lower quality than Pacific Place, an opinion based mainly on the numbers of people there and the level of noise she experienced. For her, explicit social behaviour implied social distinctions.

The concept ‘Image of others’ very much revolves around the social evaluation of others. The key properties were:

- *Voyeurism*: perhaps the most frequent comments from respondents involved comments about the appearance of other mall patrons

- *Social evaluation of others*: generally through the voyeurism, assumptions were made about the social position of other mall patrons. Often this evaluation of others would be accompanied by a comparison between the respondent and the other patrons. This was one of the main contributing factors to the development of the notion of ‘character frames’ as a part of the mall brand image development.
- *Influence of behaviour*: the way in which other patrons behaved contributed to their social evaluation by respondents.

6.4.1.2 Sub-category: Influence of social norms

‘Influence of social norms’ is the context in which the previous sub-category ‘Influence of others’ is carried out. It refers to the influence that particular rules of behaviour or expectations of behaviour by members of the social group(s) relevant to the retail mall have on the consumer. These expectations are based on common values and beliefs held by the group. On one end of the scale consumers might attempt to match member expectations by ‘playing by the social rules’ in order to establish an affinity with the group; on the other end of the scale consumers might reject outright the expectations of the group and seek affinity elsewhere with a different group.

The ‘Influence of social norms’ relies, first and foremost, on consumers identifying what are the social groups and what are the social norms relating to those groups. Based on the respondents’ interviews in this research, much of

this is done through comparison of stimulants associated with the retail mall with preconceptions of social worth that the respondents bring to the mall. These preconceptions can be viewed in the light of (self) categorization theory (Turner 1985; Turner et al 1987) and Tajfel's (1972) notion of social identity which theorises how people relate to social groups. According to Hogg (2001) it is through a series of social categorizations that consumers create and define their own place in society and align with specific social groups. These social groups exist "in relation to other groups" (Hogg 2001, p.186) and thus gain their social meaning "in relation to these other groups" (Hogg 2001, p.186). Hogg (2001) goes on to assert that social categorisation "segments the social world into ingroups and outgroups that are cognitively represented as prototypes" (p.187). These prototypes are retained in the consumers' memory to be applied "in a particular context to guide perception, self-conception, and action" (p.187). It is suggested therefore that it is through the comparison of these prototypes that the consumer is able to position the mall socially and in so doing establish his/her own relationship to that position.

Three concepts emerged from the data under the sub-category 'Influence of social norms'. The first was 'Social distinctions', a concept that grouped consumer concerns with categorizing stimulus from the mall into particular social groups; making social sense of the images and actions around them. The second concept was 'Social symbols' which was the way in which the respondents identified, used, and responded to various symbols of social significance. The third concept was 'Pretensions'; this concept focused on what could be considered false social statements and involved actions and

objects that were intentionally employed to create an artificially-high image of social standing. These three concepts are described in detail below.

6.4.1.2.1 Concept: Social distinctions

This concept embraced respondents' activities that were aimed at distinguishing between social groups. It focused on behaviour of respondents that attempted to categorise elements and activities related to the mall into specific social groups. In the process, these activities not only allow the respondents to make social distinctions but also provided the respondents with learning opportunities related to the evolution of social rules and norms. The most obvious of these was with fashion and fashion-related goods, as noted by Olivia (42, therapist):

“I would walk around the arcade and at the cosmetics, fashion.... I would wander around and look around the fashion, how they're changing, and also looking for new shops.”

Her exposure to the mall allowed her to stay current with fashions; not only by looking at the products in the shops but also by looking at the people in the mall, the way they dress, the choices they make, and their behaviour in general. The mall became her barometer of fashion, a learning opportunity for what was current and what was changing within her chosen social group. It also allowed her to begin social categorization of other patrons based on their choice of clothing styles (Stangor et al 1992).

Social distinctions are often made by identifying the ‘rules’ of individual groups, by recognizing and categorizing through social norms (Hogg 2001). In a process referred to as ‘referent informational influence’ (Hogg and Turner 1987; Turner 1985) members and non-members of a particular social group learn from ‘in-group members’ about the established and expected norms of the group. A simple example could be seen in the earlier example from Olivia ((42, therapist) who felt it necessary to restrain the actions of her daughter in Pacific Place because she felt “that kind of [noisy] behavior” inappropriate within Pacific Place.

In order to draw social distinctions it is necessary to make social judgments. Throughout the respondents’ interviews this was perhaps the most saturated topic and appeared in the coding alternatively as social distinction, social judgment, social positioning, or social stereotyping. Much of this was done by comparison – either to self and self-values or to other groups (Hogg 2001) – as the boundaries of such groups were marked “in terms of perceived and/or actual differences in what people think, feel, and do” (Hogg 2001, p.56). Jasmin (44, stewardess) compared two Hong Kong malls, The Elements and Pacific Place, by social stereotyping:

“In Elements I feel as if everyone is a foreigner. I don't know if I really believe it but it does come into my mind that Elements feels very nouveau riche whereas Pacific Place feels like old money. Very, very broad bushstrokes. Elements feels like a lot of people keen to be

upwardly mobile whereas Pacific Place, feels like, well, more like me in that they're there for a reason or that they have developed their lifestyle already...but there's a brashness in Elements that I don't feel in Pacific Place. I feel Pacific Place isn't brash, whatever else it is."

These "broad brushstroke" descriptions that relied on social positioning were common throughout the interviews, yet social positioning and distinctions were apparent in more subtle, indirect events. In the case of Victoria (58, company director) she showed concern that her patronage of Tiffany's might alienate her socially from her work colleagues:

"[Victoria] Tiffany [style] is quiet. I don't know how to describe, I don't like things that are too fancy...I mean sometimes I buy brand names, bags and so on, but in general I don't like flashy things and Tiffany is not. I could wear Tiffany and nobody would know. My colleagues perhaps they would not know because they don't buy things in Tiffany. And I would prefer that they don't know.

[Interviewer] Why would you prefer that they don't know?

[Victoria] Why? Because you see, let's say Christian Dior, Fendi and so on, these are things they are very familiar with, but Tiffany they are not. I just don't want to show off, so that's me. That's the reason."

Victoria recognized that there was a social aspect to patronizing Tiffany's. It is not a brand that is widely recognized in Hong Kong, and is considered exclusively expensive and a style for the more mature, successful woman.

Victoria recognized the distinction and down-played her patronage – and implied higher social status – from her work colleagues.

And in the case of Margaret, as has been mentioned before, she felt that she was socially equal and yet somehow she couldn't compete on the terms that were the norm for Hong Kong. She felt capable intellectually and she felt she had an adequate – if not superior – level of sophistication and yet the social norm for Hong Kong, as she interpreted it, emphasised physical appearance as a primary source of social distinction. She felt she was socially excluded because she was over-weight compared to the other patrons and she believed their clothes and their accessories distinguished them as rich and her as poor. Her interpretation of the social norms of Hong Kong made a clear social distinction between her and other patrons of Pacific Place.

While much of the respondents' observations revolved around the social status of products and places, several respondents took a stance against mainstream retail consumption as a whole, regarding the pursuit of brand goods as social snobbery. These attempts at social stigmatization remain within the theoretical framework of social categorization for, as Hogg (2001) observes, “[g]roups exist by virtue of there being outgroups” (Hogg 2001, p.56. To Sandra (51, housewife), for example, she made several expressions of dislike of retail malls, implying that there was a social stigma attached to anyone who enjoyed frequenting retail malls:

“I mean I don’t.... you know as a sort of wide generalisation I don't like shopping malls, I’d rather go in the desert...or some small town where it's all little individual shops, and there's not a chain store in sight; and every little shop has its own personality and atmosphere, whatever they sell or do. That's my idea of the best sort of shopping, not this dehumanizing city mall.”

This attitude was observed with Jenny and remarked on earlier, though her attitude took the disdain one step further. Sandra disliked the homogeneity of the urban mall though showed no dislike with the act of hedonistic shopping. Jenny, on the other hand, condemns the act of shopping, implying it is not a worthwhile leisure pursuit. By way of alternative she extols art and art-related leisure activities yet, even with this, she draws further distinctions and draws clear lines between the groups who frequent ‘normal’ arts centres and fringe clubs and the groups – her groups - who form extreme arts communities. Yet simply by rejecting the actions of these other groups Jenny is nevertheless following the same process by first making the social distinctions and then acting on them by comparing her own set of values with the values of those groups.

It is worth repeating here that much of the respondents’ actions were based on holistic impressions of aspects of the mall. As was noted in Chapter 2 there have been many studies that measured particular aspects of retail spaces, or that identified or measured specific attributes (e.g. Brunner and Mason 1968; Bucklin 1967; Cox and Cooke 1970; Feinberg 1991; Jarboe and McDaniel

1987; Roy 1994; Wakefield and Baker 1998), yet this research suggests that the respondents reacted to an overall, or holistic, impression of the mall either instead of or before evaluating individual aspects. In some cases and with some elements – the image of other patrons, for example – there was an individual focus but still the holistic impression was clearly a major factor in the respondents' evaluation and positioning of the mall. For Tracy (27, marketer), the holistic impression was nostalgic, and reminiscent of home:

“...normally I come with another friend so we see different shops, and then...sometimes we do a little shopping, we might buy something for my mother...and the atmosphere is really nice like, you feel a little bit like home....yeah, I feel a little bit like Madrid.”

Michelle (46, office manager]) responds to the overall impression, acknowledging that she doesn't quite know why it appeals to her:

“You feel comfortable walking [at Festival Walk] and you don't feel comfortable in Langham Place¹⁴ and you don't know quite why. But the whole environment makes you feel comfortable, and that is important.”

For Pamela (63, educational trainer) she ascribes certain emotional, and ultimately social, values to her holistic impression of the entrance to the mall:

¹⁴ Langham Place is a hotel, office, and retail complex in the busy Mongkok area of the Kowloon peninsula. It caters to the low- to middle-income audience.

“One of the interesting things about Pacific Place is that that entrance level coming up from the MTR seems to me to be a focal point of interest, you come up the escalator....and immediately you're there, there's this huge wide open space and usually something going on, right, usually something in the centre - at the least there's somebody playing the piano – and it's all very grand and...like you're a special person in a special place.”

She continued in the interview to describe her activities in Pacific Place; the overall impression she gave was that the ambience and the service that she received there made her feel important – as she said, like a “special person”.

The concept ‘Social distinctions’ has three key properties:

- *Comparison to social norms*: respondents would compare appearances (e.g. of aspects of the physical realm, of the other patrons) to what they considered to be social norms.
- *Social judgment*: respondents continually made judgments and those judgments were often by way of social comparison
- *Holistic interpretation*: a great deal of the respondents' evaluations were holistic, rather than through evaluation of individual components or attributes. This was particularly true of the physical realm.

6.4.1.2.2 Concept: Social symbols

'Social symbols' emerged as a concept embracing a broad range of consumer concerns. It was primarily concerned with social signaling, of communicating statements about social status or social positioning, and the act of communication employed a wide range of objects, activities, and behaviour. Shopping malls have been noted as "part of a process by which goods communicate and are communicated as social relationships" (Arnould 2000, p.104), for once "the functional value of consumption and acquisition is attained then consumption enters "the realm of the symbolic"" (Elliott 1997, p. 286) and it is this "symbolic meaning that is used in the search for the meaning of existence" (ibid, p.286).

In this context social symbols are often thought of as brand-name goods, but the symbols of consumption encompass more than simply the look of the goods. Jasmin (44, stewardess), for example, drew attention to various symbols of meaning:

"Well, there's the scented atmosphere, which you get in places and shops like Shanghai Tang, many shops, you can get that smell. The fact that you've got people with obviously lots of money, wandering around with shopping bags from Chanel, and the fact that that's also obviously important for a lot of people, says a lot about the place."

For her the scented atmosphere signaled the upmarket nature of the shop; the brand names on the shopping bags were one of the symbols that led her to assume these people were rich, and her remark about it being “obviously important for a lot of people” illustrated that she recognized acts of communication that were going on.

The role of consumption for social signaling has long been recognized, being the foundation for Veblen’s (1899, 1979) concept of conspicuous consumption. As Shipman (2004) perhaps sadly points out, the symbolic dimension of consumption “rescues large areas of economic activity from the charge of being unproductive” (Shipman 2004, p.277)

Brands names on shopping bags are now a common practice which goes beyond simple promotion for the shop or the products. It is a device for the consumer to signal his/her preferences and through so doing communicate his/her allegiance to one or more community group (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000; Grossman and Shapiro 1988). Equally the presence – or lack of – brand shops signals a change of perception of the mall, as noted by Eric (51, manufacturer) when comparing Festival Walk with Pacific Place:

“Festival Walk and Pacific Place both are modern and spacious but the class...I mean...of course the Pacific Place is higher than Festival Walk....the class of the shops and brand names they sell. For example Swank and Joyce are in Pacific Place but there is no Swank or Joyce in Festival Walk.”

This example illustrated another outcome of the analysis which recurred through the interviews, and that was the notion of ‘social image transfer’. Similar to Mcracken’s (1989) concept of meaning transfer, where the symbolic meaning of a celebrity (i.e. what that celebrity represents to the consumer) is transferred to the endorsed product and, once purchased by the consumer, the transfer process is complete (Gwinner and Eaton 1999) A good deal of the retail mall image was a product of the image of the shops within the mall. As could be seen in the example above, the fact that two high-end brand shops were present in Pacific Place suggested that Pacific Place was high-end; that these shops were not present in Festival Walk down-graded its image. The concept of image transfer extends beyond this basic brand association and can be found in accounts by respondents expressing affection for the mall because it housed one of their favourite shops. Tracy (27, marketer) remarked:

“I come fairly often because I like, for example, the stuff like Mango and...Esprit...those are the ones I like the most. And Zara. They're opening now...they're going to open it now in Pacific Place.”

So both brand names and ‘favourite shops’ acted as symbols for the respondents, and appeared to have the ability to transfer whatever they represented – be it social status, economic ability, or affectionate preference – to the mall in which they were located.

Within this research, respondents indicated that social symbols were not restricted to brands, or products or objects but extended to actions and behaviour. Eric (51, manufacturer) described a well-established Hong Kong tradition which illustrates the symbolic nature of social behaviour:

“This woman is afternoon shopping, [then having] afternoon tea; this different lifestyle, like those people who shop in the Kowloon Peninsula Hotel¹⁵. It reflects your lifestyle, [it means] you don’t have to work. The whole day you have to shop, then afternoon you have high tea. That represents another kind of style. So when you tell people you have afternoon tea in the Peninsula, that’s means that you don’t have to work every day. Mostly it describes those rich females, the tai tais. So when we say, have tea time with friends at the Peninsula Hotel – that already told you about the lifestyle, it’s nothing to do with tea time.”

Thus the social symbol became the act of taking tea during the day at the Peninsula Hotel. Communication could be word of mouth or it could be visual, seeing and being seen. It involved artefacts, places and actions, their individual meaning subverted to the collective meaning which, in turn, was “dependent upon [their] selection and combination with other components” (Mick 1986 p.204). In essence ‘tea at the Peninsula’ took the form of ritualistic consumption (Cova 1997; McCracken 1986; Wallendorf and

¹⁵ The Peninsula Hotel, located at the tip of the Kowloon peninsula, is one of Hong Kong's oldest and most reputable 5-star hotels.

Arnould 1991); it provided both a spirit of mutual bonding with the participants as well as signalling social status to observers (Arnould 2001).

The concept 'Social symbols' was perhaps the most expected within the retail mall, particularly a high-end, brand-driven mall such as Pacific Place. In terms of the ways in which this concept manifested itself with the respondents of this study the key properties were:

- *Signalling with objects*: this involved the use of goods to communicate social status, values, or beliefs
- *Signalling by behaviour*: not only the things one carried but the way in which one carried oneself was a method of social communication. As the example of the afternoon tea set illustrated, not only was it symbolic to partake of afternoon tea at the Peninsula, but the fact that one had the time to do so became a social symbol.
- *Image transfer*: the effectiveness of the social symbolism was by way of image transfer; the social or economic value considered contained within the object or act was transferred to those who held or performed it.

6.4.1.2.3 Concept: Pretensions

The third concept under 'Influence of social norms' is 'Pretensions'. It groups respondents' statements that relate to perceptions of false social status; thoses

who assumed, claimed or acted out social positions to which it was considered they had no claim.

Pretensions can be linked to social aspirations, yet whilst it can be seen as “the striving for social advancement” (Hickey 2001, p.351), pretension goes beyond aspiration when the consumer begins to act out a role that others consider he/she does not merit. In this research pretension extended to include both the acts of consumers and the appearance of the mall. As Anna (47, housewife) observed:

“I’ve recently discovered Elements which again, wants to be superb and posh... but they don’t have the atmosphere, and the people just don’t have the style”

A similar point is made by Victoria (58, company director) in relation to the ifc2 mall in Hong Kong:

“It’s too big, again. I suppose, I think that it’s the spacial thing, some things I can’t manage you know. I walk and walk and walk and I am so tired. It seems to be trying, you know, to be many things...many different things, and it can’t do it. With Pacific Place it’s something that you can manage and it seems to know what it is. But ifc...I find it very frustrating?”

Victoria's description illustrated an almost innocent pretension, of a mall trying to achieve certain standards but failing. Yet it still gave the impression that it claimed a social position it couldn't or didn't achieve. From the respondents point of view however the result is a mall that created a set of expectations but failed to deliver on them. Margaret (57, lecturer) echoed Anna's feelings about the Elements mall:

“I went there because my colleague at work thought she liked Elements. So we wondered around and umm, and I managed to buy a 180 dollar scarf. Um, but I don't like the atmosphere at all, there's no particular reason to go there at all, and I felt it was extremely pretentious. It may be brand new, but much less comfortable than Pacific Place”

Interestingly enough Margaret acted as if the pretentiousness of the mall was a personal assault on her senses, yet her indignation was focused wholly on the mall. She made no mention of the people, as if her entire impression was generated by the physical mall itself.

These acts of pretension can be seen in the light of Veblen's (1899) notion of 'haves and have-nots', as the 'have nots' appeared to imitate the 'haves'. Han et al (2010) expand Veblen's two-tier view of society by categorising consumers into four classes; proletarians (less affluent or less status-conscious consumers); poseurs (those who desire authentic luxury goods but lack the economic means, yet want to distinguish themselves from the proletarians);

parvenus (those with significant wealth but lack “the connoisseurship necessary to interpret the subtle signals” (Han et al 2010, p.17)); patricians (those with significant wealth who will “pay a premium for inconspicuously branded products that serve as a *horizontal* signal to other patricians” (Han et al 2010, p.17) (authors’ italics). Comments from respondents in this study can be compared to this taxonomy; Margaret (57, lecturer), for example:

“But it seems a lot of people being someone they’re not, that’s the feeling anyway...yet it can be quite intimidating....”

Margaret saw these people as ‘poseurs’; people mimicking a socio-economic position that they were not (in her opinion) entitled to, either because they lacked true social position or they lacked economic resources. At the same time she positioned herself in the role of proletarian, as someone who, whether she wanted to or not, was unable to achieve a similar (real or assumed) position. Equally Jenny’s (28, advertising executive) comments regarding the Hong Kong Fringe Club patrons could be interpreted in a similar vein:

“what art means to me...it should be for everyone, that anyone can do, but you cannot feel [that you could] have an exhibition in Fringe Club because...they think they’re real artists and you’re not....I’m not of that rank, but art should not be like that, art should be open to anyone.”

She saw those patrons as adopting an artistic posture to the exclusion of others outside of their group and that they did not necessarily merit that pose. She

clearly positioned some of the patrons within the ‘poseur’ category; interestingly enough, and in contrast to Margaret, whilst she positioned herself in the proletarian category, she adopted the role of ‘less-status conscious’ – that is, she was capable of achieving the position but chose not to. The observed actions are seen by Margaret and Jenny as ‘pretensions to authenticity’; equally they can be referred to as a desire for authenticity and a reaction against lack of authenticity.

The concept ‘Pretensions’ plays a small but significant role in the theory framework. It appears to be one mechanism that allows access to social positions by those not considered qualified for those positions. As such there were three key properties to this concept:

- *Social aspirations*: for those who had aspirations for social progress, pretentious behaviour provided one avenue to explore or anticipate higher social goals.
- *Dealing with social insecurity*: for those who were intimidated in certain social situations or amongst particular social groups pretension appeared to offer a defensive (or survival) mode of behaviour.
- *Authenticity*: this can be seen as the opposite side of the coin to pretentiousness; there are those who are content in acts of pretension to authenticity, and there are those who oppose pretension for its lack of authenticity.

SECTION FIVE – APPLICATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

6.5.1 OPERATIONAL ISSUES WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEANING

6.5.1.1 Dimensions

Dimensions can be used to determine the presence or absence of a concept in subsequent data (Goulding 2002). In the theory framework presented in this thesis the concept dimensions can be seen to work in one of two ways, either by ‘greater or lesser degree’ or by ‘acceptance/rejection/avoidance’. Once again it should be stressed that these functions are not always clearly defined in the data; situations can be ‘reluctantly’ accepted (suggesting a degree of flexibility between just acceptance or rejection), or a concept may be present to such a ‘greater’ degree to appear as a simple present/not present situation. Examples of these actions are discussed below:

6.5.1.1.1 Greater or lesser degree

This dimensional range can be seen to apply particularly to the sub-categories and concepts within the category of ‘Self-engagement’. The presence of a concept tends to be evaluated on a ‘greater or lesser degree’. For example, the concept ‘Practical’ under the sub-category ‘Expedience’ is evaluated on a scale from very practical to not practical – it is a question of degree relative to the respondent and the situation under review. As an example, Pamela (63, educational trainer) considers the practicality of functional purposes:

“I don't like shopping malls that don't seem to have any connection to the real things you need to do in life. Now in Pacific Place I can buy a newspaper, I can buy a book, I can buy bandages...band-aids, you know....I can buy vitamin supplements, I can buy groceries, right, from downstairs - or right across - I mean, I see Pacific Place as kind of connected to that Queensway/Admiralty thing, so if I need to hop over there to Park'n'Shop I can go around that corner...I still perceive myself to be in Pacific Place.”

Equally, when the store Marks and Spencers closed in Pacific Place, Pamela saw this as a drop in the level of practicality offered by the mall:

“If I need something, you know, suddenly, to take home for the family or something of that nature then I can buy those things there too, at Pacific Place. And I have to say, for that reason I mourn the closing of Marks and Spencer in Pacific Place because if you're in urgent need of....a pair of knickers or something...you hop into Marks and Spencer and off you go, right?”

6.5.1.1.2 Acceptance/rejection/avoidance

In contrast to the ‘greater or lesser degree’, some concepts function on an acceptance/rejection/avoidance basis. This dimensional range can be seen to apply more to the sub-categories and concepts of the category ‘Social-engagement’. Under this function respondents were more likely to make

absolute decisions based on whether they liked or disliked a particular action. A good example can be seen from Olivia (42, therapist), with regard to the concept of ‘Opinions of others’ under the sub-category ‘Influence of others:

“[If] I go with my sister she will go for very fashionable one, and when I look at things she says 'err, very old-fashioned' and it spoils my interest therefore I prefer to go by myself.”

For Olivia the negative criticism ruins the pleasure of shopping, and her answer therefore is simply to remove herself from the circumstances producing such criticism – i.e. rejection - rather than deal with the criticism.

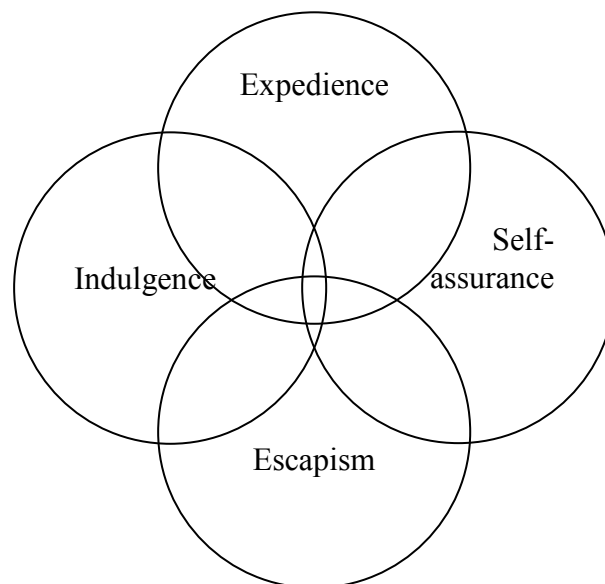
6.5.1.2 Caveats regarding ‘absolute’ vs ‘integrated’ categories, concepts, and dimensions

6.5.1.2.1 ‘Soft’ vs ‘hard’ boundaries within the framework

The framework presented in this thesis which describes the process by which the substantive theory works is, for clarity, presented as a clear and distinct set of categories, sub-categories, concepts, and dimensions, which I shall refer to collectively as ‘divisions’. As has been remarked upon within this thesis, these divisions do not work in isolation or independently of each other but, rather, they overlap each other constantly and, it would appear, unevenly. Respondents concerns can be accounted for in differing degrees by more than one concept, for example, or in part by several concepts. What was required in

the framework, and the continuous evaluation of this framework, was that the consumer responses could be accommodated *somewhere* within the framework. As has been noted both in consumer culture theory (e.g. Arnould and Thompson 2005) and in place theory (e.g. Easthope 2004; Massey 1994), consumer activities are fluid, the conversations often conflicting, and interpretations rarely constant. The production of consumer meaning is a complex process, under constant influence from a variety of dynamic sources.

Figure 6.7: The soft boundaries between sub-categories



Thus the framework needs to have ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ boundaries, and accept that the production of meaning might bleed from one part of the framework to the next. The notion of this process as being in a state of constant flux, and not necessarily understood by the consumers themselves, is reflected in the voices of the respondents. Margaret (57, lecturer), when asked to clarify a seemingly contradictory comment, observed:

“Well, I don't know either... Um... No I mean I haven't thought about it that way... I haven't thought about it before so I mean, talking to you is a sort of exploration of what I think. On the one hand I'm aware I'm saying the unity is annoying, because it's against the idea of individuality There are actually some unities that I actually like.”

A similar contradiction was recorded in the interview with Olivia (42, therapist); early on in the interview she remarked that most times she shopped in the mall with a purpose; towards the end of the interview she remarked that “most times I just browse”.

These apparent confusions on the part of the respondents are not necessarily unexpected; one assumes they are rarely asked to articulate their actions to the degree of detail of these interviews and so it does not seem unusual that they would need their own time to contemplate their motives and formulate the answers. It does however reinforce the less-than-absolute nature of qualitative enquiry in general, and the need for any outcomes of such enquiries to allow for such fluctuations.

6.5.1.2.2 Overlapping concepts

It should also be emphasised that, in the course of the data analysis, several concepts emerged that could be regarded – or interpreted – as belonging in more than one sub-category. An example of this is given in Section 6.3.1.1.

Expedience, Table 6.1, to explain the concept ‘convenience’. Ultimately ‘convenience’ was subsumed as a property within several concepts. This provides two benefits to the final framework. Firstly, it adds depth and richness to the properties of these concepts, and provides better explanatory power. Secondly, it better reflects the ‘bleed’ of concepts and categories as mentioned in the previous section. Examples of other ‘subsumed concepts’ were:

- Comfort; used by respondents in a variety of ways to reflect practicality, effortlessness, pampering, or reassurance.
- Familiarity; the notion of familiarity recurred frequently amongst the respondents. It can particularly be seen to relate to practicality, reassurance, and sense of community.
- Response to the physical realm; comments that invoked the physical realm were centred around a) orientation and wayfinding, b) overall (holistic) impressions of the mall, c) and physical comfort. Aesthetic reflections by the respondents were, surprisingly, rare. These responses could be subsumed into such concepts as reassurance, practicality, and social distinctions.
- Cost; the word was used frequently by respondents in a variety of ways. Principally it appeared to refer to affordability, value, and social status, thus could be seen as a property of practicality, and social distinctions.

6.5.1.3 Accommodating conflicting attitudes and situations

Within the research, the respondent Jenny (28, advertising executive) was at first regarded as a 'negative case' because she rejected outright the practice of mainstream consumption and retail shopping as a leisure activity. Yet as the theory emerged and the theory framework took shape it could be seen that, rather than being a negative case, Jenny's responses could be accommodated within the framework, though generally at the opposite end of the dimensional spectrum to the other respondents. Within the three-stage cycle, Jenny followed the same process of evaluation as all respondents through Stage 1: Development; however the personal and social meanings she developed were generally in opposition to those of other respondents. Whilst this led her to construct a similar brand image and character frame as other respondents in Stage 2: Articulation, it led her to a negative response in Stage 3: Response where she essentially rejected the identities available at the mall in favour of identities available from other places and activities.

6.5.1.4 Support from the literature

Within the text of this chapter reference has been made as to how the substantive theory responds to conclusions drawn from the review of literature (Chapters 2, 3, and 4). To avoid repetition, yet for the sake of clarity, those issues and responses can be found as follows.

6.5.2.4 What are the factors that influence and inform the mall brand image?

The findings of the study suggest that the fundamental influences to mall brand image formation are symbols of personal and social significance. Within this research specific conditions emerged (e.g. the appearance and behaviour of other patrons, elements of the physical realm, the crowdedness of the mall), yet whilst these conditions are a part of the process by which consumers construct brand image it was necessary to look past these conditions to the significance that they had for the respondents. It would have been wrong to conclude the findings with only these conditions for three reasons. First it would have run the risk of ignoring – or overlooking – other conditions not revealed by this study that might provide influence. Second it would have assumed that each respondent is influenced by the same conditions, and there is no evidence to support such an assumption. Third, and most significantly, these conditions in themselves are not the motivation for consumers but, rather, it is the meaning that these conditions represent to the individual that influences the image. Thus it is necessary to look beyond these conditions to discover the significant factors, which these conditions are used to inform, that influence brand image. What emerged from the research, from the manner in which the respondents interpreted these conditions, was that it is the personal and social significance – meaning – associated with the mall that influences the consumer mall brand image. This meaning is informed by consumers engaging with the mall personally, through introspection (self-engagement), and through engaging with the mall socially (social-engagement). It is also not

restricted or contained within the mall; the mall is evaluated in the broader context of its social, cultural and historical setting.

6.5.2.5 How are these factors interpreted and evaluated?

The personal and social engagements with the mall provide the consumer with information concerning appearances, behaviours and activities relating to the mall. This information is then processed within the first stage of the theory framework (Figure 6.1, p.191); it is interpreted and evaluated through the sub-categories and concepts that development personal and social meaning (Figure 6.2, p.193) in relation to the consumers' existing personal and social beliefs and aspirations. Interpretations by the consumer of meanings inherent in the information is then processed either by the level of attraction (to a greater or lesser degree) or by accepting, rejecting, or avoiding this meaning.

Through the process of self-engagement and social-engagement the outcome of this evaluation is a 'positioning of self' in relation to a social positioning of the mall. This meaning has been labeled 'personal/social meaning.

6.5.2.6 How are these images used by the consumer?

The brand image is essentially the collected impression that the consumer has developed from the stage 1 evaluation. Whilst the relationship of 'positioning of self' to 'positioning of mall' represents the consumer meaning, it is from

the positioning of the mall that the consumer refines the brand image for the mall. Within this research the respondents, when asked their impression of Pacific Place mall, generally opened with generic statements often related to price and the high-profile branded tenants (e.g. “it’s an upscale mall with all the shopping store brands all that upscale brands famous brands all those kinda brands” Rebecca (34, sales executive)). Yet during the course of the interview their description of the mall was expanded greatly to include feelings for the place, impressions of other patrons, and implications about wealth and social statement. So whilst the brand is often described in a short statement, it is in fact the complex network of the consumers’ total impressions of the mall (Keller 1998). Thus the term ‘brand’ refers to a broad set of values and activities that allow the consumer to know where the mall is located socially. This social positioning suggests a series of parameters, of social boundaries, that in turn suggest appropriate appearances, behaviours, and activities. These parameters create a ‘character frame’ within which the consumer is able to adopt or create personal identities appropriate to the social position occupied by the mall. The flexibility of the character frame – as a series of limitations rather than fixed identities – accommodates the consumer need for multiple and changing identities (Arnould 2005).

Thus the purpose of the brand image is, firstly, to allow the consumer to understand the mall in a social context. Secondly, through the use of an associated ‘character frame’, it provides a limiting framework for the construction of social identities that are relevant to and acceptable within the mall and the associated social stratum. Finally, the consumer can then develop

their relationship with the positions and identities available within the character frame and, based on their desire to accept or reject the available identities, they can determine whether they wish to continue engaging with the mall on the self-/social-engagement level.

SECTION SIX – SUMMARY

6.6.1 SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSITIONS INHERENT TO THE THEORY

The theory of consumer retail mall brand image creation can be summarised as a series of propositions that relate to the theory itself and to the theory framework.

6.6.1.1 Related to the Theory

There are three main propositions that summarise the theory:

- Consumers evaluate the retail mall through a series of engagements; the outcome of these engagements is that the consumer positions the retail mall as belonging to, or serving, particular strata of society.
- The social positioning of the retail mall establishes a series of appropriate behaviours, appearances, and activities deemed appropriate to occur within those strata of society.
- Consumers compare themselves, their actual and aspirational selves to the social position of the mall and determine whether they wish engage with those positions.

6.6.1.2 Related to the theory framework

There are four main propositions that summarise the theory framework:

- There are two principle types of engagement; the first is on a personal, introspective level, and has been labeled ‘self-engagement’. The second is in relation to how ‘self’ engages with its social context; this has been labeled ‘social-engagement’.
- Whilst these two categories have been consistently presented as distinct and separate entities throughout this thesis, the reality is they are entities that overlap. The boundaries between them are loose and in consequence concepts can be regarded as ‘mainly self-engagement’ or ‘mostly social-engagement’. The resultant interpretation of meaning should not be affected by this ‘bleeding’, as it is a vagary of the label rather than a vagary of process.
- The process defined by the theory framework applies not only to those who support retail mall culture, but also to those who oppose, or decry, the culture.
- Stage 3 of the framework defines the brand image; within this stage a ‘character frame’ is constructed by the consumer. This frame has as its parameters the elements of behaviour, appearance, and activity appropriate to the social strata, and from within this frame consumers can construct a variety of identities that would be conducive to the social position represented by the retail mall. Consumers thus consider the possible identities available within this character frame in

comparison to their actual and aspirational selves in order to determine whether or not they wish to engage with the retail mall.

6.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the findings for this study. It has stated and explained the substantive theory of consumer retail mall brand image creation, and illustrated how this theory operates through a 3-stage process of development, articulation, and response. The complex hierarchy that leads to the core category “Personal/social meaning” was then described in detail.

The chapter then discussed the findings in relation to the literature reviewed; in accordance with the principles of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1966; Goulding 2002) it applied the literature as data to support the findings and, in particular, highlighted the areas where this research provided new knowledge to address gaps in the existing literature. The chapter then explained specifically how the findings answered the research questions.

The following, and final, chapter provides an overall summary of the study. In particular it emphasizes the value of this research and its contribution to knowledge, and the findings for theory and practice. It then summarises the opportunity for further research.

Chapter 7.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This final chapter provides an overall summary of the research detailed in this thesis and discusses its implications for theory, practice, and further research.

In addition to this brief introduction, Section 2 outlines the substantive theory generated by this research, and the associated consumer process. Section 3 provides a summary of the research process from which the theory emerged. Section 4 discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the research, while Section 5 summarises the opportunities for further research. Section 6 provides a brief reflective epilogue.

7.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY RESULTS/THEORY GENERATED BY THIS STUDY

The substantive theory of retail mall brand image construction proposes that consumers associate the retail mall with a particular stratum of society, through a series of interpretive processes that attach personal and social meaning to the mall. The resultant 'brand image' conceptualizes the mall as an integral and representative part of that social stratum, and in consequence there is an associated series of actions, behaviours, and appearances deemed to be expected and appropriate for that mall.

Based on this conceptualization there is a resultant ‘character frame’ - a set of socially acceptable parameters governing appearance and behaviour – from which a variety of identities can be adopted or assumed that are considered appropriate to the brand image. Consumers can then determine whether these available identities resonate with their own personal values – either through simple compatibility or through more aspirational desires - and thus whether they accept or reject the positioning of the mall as ‘suitable’ to themselves.

The theory comprises a three-stage process. Stage 1 (Development) involves the evaluation of a series of conditions linked to the mall and results in the formulation of personal and social meaning; stage 2 (Articulation) involves the construction of the brand image and the associated character frame based on those meanings; stage 3 (Response) involves the comparison of the various identities available within the character frame to personal values, and a decision regarding the desirability or not of the mall to meet personal requirements. The consumer actions in relation to the mall then become a direct response to the social position of the mall.

The foundation for the brand image construction is stage 1, the formulation of personal and social meaning in relation to the mall. This is achieved through evaluations of conditions in two main categories:

- Self-engagement: this describes the respondents’ concerns for personal issues, and can essentially be seen as one of introspection and self-reflexivity.

- Social engagement: this reflects the way in which the consumers manage their interactions with the mall, with other patrons, and with other aspects of their ‘selves’ in a social context.

Whilst these are presented as two distinct categories, in reality there is not always a clear distinction between ‘self’ and ‘social’ motivations; what might be considered a purely personal desire can and often is influenced by the desire to be socially acceptable.

These two categories are unified under the core category of Personal/social meaning, a category that describes the resultant set of ‘significant beliefs’ held by the consumer about the particular retail mall.

7.3 THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

7.3.1 General contributions

Immediately the research can be seen to provide new knowledge about Pacific Place (the research site), and about consumer perceptions of this mall. In so doing the study positions the mall on the Hong Kong social skyline, and provides insight into its function in the consumption process of contemporary Hong Kong society. And whilst this explanation of the brand construction process provides insight and application within the field of branding and marketing, more importantly it provides a deeper explanation of the

significance to the consumers of the brand image within a social context. And, while it should be stressed that it was never the intention of this study to generate theory which could be generalized beyond the immediate study population, nevertheless the nature of the enquiry, the methods employed, and the outcomes should “allow these stories to resonate with other contexts with which readers may be familiar” (Johnston 1997, p.668).

7.3.2 Theoretical contributions within the fields of branding and marketing

As was discussed in Chapter 2, ‘brand’ has been studied principally from the perspective of the marketer with a particular focus on how owners and marketers could construct strong brands (e.g. Aaker 1996; Keller 1998). And whilst such studies cover the brand construct (e.g. de Chernatony 1998; Keller 2003) and consumer response to the brand (e.g. Hankinson 2004; Muniz and O’Guinn 2001), little work had taken place with regard to explaining the processes by which consumers developed their own image of the brand. This study provides a theory to explain this process with regard to retail mall brands. Further it provides a framework that describes this process; the framework articulates the links between the consumer, social influences and the resultant brand image that can explain the underlying motives on the part of the consumer for developing the brand image in the first place. It should be noted that the link between ‘brand’ and social significance is noted in the literature (e.g. Du et al 2007; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Holt 2002;); the contribution of this study is first its illumination of the importance of the mall brand not as a site-specific entity in isolation but for its dependence on and use

within a social context. Second, the study contributes to the literature by its articulation of the consumer process of evaluation and meaning construction in relation to a place-based brand.

This study further contributes to the liberation of ‘brand’ from the restrictions of marketing in as much as the results show that the brand image exists with or without the intervention of owners, marketers, or advertisers. The literature already clearly regards the boundaries of the brand to extend beyond marketing and the economy of the marketplace (e.g. Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann 2005; Hogg, Cox, and Keeling 2000; Holt 2002) and this study further adds to this body of knowledge. In particular this study shifts the emphasis from brand as an end in itself to brand as part of an ongoing series of consumer negotiations within a social context. Thus ‘brand image’ can be interpreted as a consumer ‘short-hand’ representing a set of complex links within a network of social activity

This does not exclude the use of this framework as a tool of (place) marketing but rather it provides the foundation for developing a deeper understanding of consumer motivations. Thus by virtue of the more extensive description of consumer behaviour, the framework provides additional resources for a more focused marketing effort.

This study makes specific contributions to the area of place branding. Chapter 3 of this thesis discussed firstly how, with regard to branding and marketing, there was little in the literature relating to place brand image (Hankinson

2001) – in comparison to product, corporate or service branding – and, secondly, how the focus of these studies concentrated predominantly on ‘uncontained’ place – cities, regions, countries, for example (Kavaratzis 2005; Hanna and Rowley 2008; Kerr 2006). This study advances both areas of study; it provides new insights into consumer interpretations and formulations of ‘contained’ place brands (the retail mall) which, in consequence will add to the broader body of knowledge related to ‘place’ in general. The study not only lends significant support to Lichrou et al’s (2008) argument that place should be considered holistically rather than being broken down into component parts, but provides empirical evidence to illustrate their argument that place should be conceived as a series of meanings relative to the consumer rather than a set of attributes. The data of this study consistently showed that the respondents viewed the mall holistically, particularly with regard to the physical realm, and that ultimately the significance of the mall was measured in terms of the meaning it held for the consumer.

7.3.3 Theoretical contributions in other fields

7.3.3.1 Bridging of disciplines

The major criticism of the brand/marketing perspective leveled during the literature review (Chapter 3) was its limited focus, principally on the marketplace and economic exchange. The framework generated within this study focuses on consumers and their context rather than any specific discipline, and the theory of positioning brand image socially does not limit

the framework to the branding or marketing discipline but is relevant to a broader-based set of studies without allegiance to any one discipline.

7.3.3.2 Consumer culture theory

The outcome of this study can be seen to enrich Sherry's (1998a) concept of brandscape, a concept that illustrated how consumers' responded to environmental cues holistically and then used their interpretation of these cues to imbue that context with meaning. This study elaborates this concept by explaining the social aspect of this engagement; the environmental cues within the mall are interpreted as symbols of social significance, allowing the consumers to position the mall in a social context.

This study also builds on consumer culture research into the relationship between social practice and retail exchanges. Sandikci and Holt (1998) argued that that consumers' used retail places "as a locus for particular forms of social rather than exchange practices" (p.332). The results of this study suggest that, rather than these acts being alternative practices, they are inextricably linked as social recognition plays an integral role in identification, evaluation and acquisition of consumer goods.

The study framework articulates the link between brand image, social position, and consumer behaviour and can be seen to contribute to two of the four areas of theoretical interest to consumer culture theorists (Arnould and Thompson 2005). These are, firstly, the area of mass-mediated marketplace ideologies

and consumers' interpretive strategies; this study illuminates how social influences can shape these ideologies whilst at the same time provides a framework to explain these interpretive strategies in a particular context, that is a Hong Kong retail mall.

The second area of theoretical interest, as identified in the literature review, is in the field of consumer identity projects. This study illuminates a particular aspect of the dynamic interplay between consumption and identity; specifically how individual identities are shaped by, and in turn shape, the identity of the mall. The study highlights the use to which the consumer puts the mall identity particularly in the realm of social communication and social identity.

7.3.3.3 Place studies

This study makes contributions to the field of place studies. Whilst the study results validate the arguments presented within Chapter 4 of this thesis related to the significance of meaning to the consumers' perceptions and constructions of place (e.g. Agnew 1987; Canter 1997; Gustafson 2001; Relph 1976; Massey 1994), they also suggest modifications to certain of the models of place discussed (e.g. Agnew 1987; Canter 1997; Relph 1976). These models of place present the physical realm, (consumer) activities, and meaning as the components of place; this study positions these components in a clear framework that provides not only description but explanation (see Figure 6.4, p.214). Based on the theory framework, the physical realm is one of many

contextual elements within which consumer activities take place; the outcome of this activity is personal/social meaning. Thus this study makes a significant contribution to providing explanatory power to these models of place.

Equally the theory framework can be seen to advance Massey's (1995) notions of place as a node on a network of social interactions (Easthope 2004) by providing some explanation as to how those interactions are operationalised by people. The nature of the framework reflects and accommodates both the fluid nature of place and the multiple identities of place (consistent with the arguments of Massey (1995) and Easthope (2004)). Its reliance on the generation of personal and social meaning through the interpretation of a series of non-static engagements effectively creates its own network of reflexive dependencies that are capable of responding to contextual changes. Equally, as the framework can be regarded as an iterative cycle of interpretation/meaning creation it provides some illumination of the contestations of place that develop as different people adopt different value sets and apply these as their individual personal/social meaning.

7.3.4 Implications for professional practice

The results of this study provide implications for two principle areas of professional practice. Firstly, they can be seen to benefit the marketing of places and place-related products. Secondly, they have the capability to inform and thus improve the design quality of the built environment.

In both cases the theory framework provides the foundation for a deeper understanding of the consumers' motivations with regard to places, their expectations of place, and their preferences of place. Whilst currently the results of this study are presented as a theoretical framework, the knowledge it can provide in relation to individuals, communities, and their requirements from the built environment is valuable to the professional disciplines that shape the built environment, with the potential of making these environments more responsive to the needs and requirements of the consumer.

7.4 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY PROCESS

7.4.1 Summary of the study process

The background of this study resides in this researcher's professional work which relates to the designing of the built environment. In the course of this work questions of 'consumer satisfaction' arose; were people comfortable in the places being designed, and which places were preferred? Yet whilst there were processes to determine answers to these questions there was little done to determine the reason for these responses, to answer the question "Why is this place preferred?". So whilst it was possible to ascertain which the preferred places were, there seemed to be little practical work done to ascertain why one place was preferred over another, seemingly identical, place. Equally a review of the literature revealed little by way of answering this question; whilst several studies had evaluated specific aspects of one place compared to another, no study could be found that offered a comprehensive framework to

explain the influences and the way in which they acted on consumer decisions of preference with regard to place. From the rather broad question of preferred place, a more focused question concentrating on image of place was developed, with what was considered the achievable objective of explaining how consumers developed their image of the brand for place.

As this researcher was approaching this study as a professional with commercial clients, the 'places' being discussed were typically residential, office, and retail developments being built and marketed by the researcher's clients. This therefore initially positioned the study in the field of marketing and consumer behaviour.

Given the marketing context that stimulated this research the initial aim of this study was to understand how consumers formulated brand images of these places. The study was designed to develop an understanding of the motivations and influences that drove the consumers and then, based on this understanding, provide an explanation for how these were used by consumers to construct their brand images of place.

Even within the confines of this researcher's professional practice, the categories of residential place, office place, and retail place collectively were considered too broad a set of subjects for this study. Thus the study was limited to the retail mall as a category of commercial place specifically because such places typically offered strong brand identity and a complex set of offerings that suggested a rich and diverse collection of influences.

Ultimately the Hong Kong mall 'Pacific Place' was selected as the research site for the following reasons:

- It has a very high profile in Hong Kong and throughout the Asian region
- It has a strong brand image
- This researcher has a close relationship with the owners of this mall thus making access easy.

7.4.2 The research aim and questions

With this background, this research study was designed to specifically develop a theory that could explain the ways in which consumer's developed their brand image for the retail mall.

The main research objective was articulated thus:

The objective of this study was to develop a theory that could explain how consumers developed their image of the brand for a retail mall in Hong Kong. The specific objectives were to identify and explain the process by which this brand image was developed.

From these study objectives three specific research questions were formulated:

- What are the factors that influence and inform the brand image?
- How are these factors interpreted and evaluated?
- How are these images used by the consumer?

7.4.3 Research and analysis

The choice of methodology was driven principally by the lack of literature relating to the research questions. Thus an inductive grounded-theory methodology, based on the meta-theory of symbolic interaction, was adopted, with the research questions providing the guiding basis for a series of semi-structured interviews.

In the first instance pilot interviews were carried out with executives from Swire Properties Limited, the owners of the study site, Pacific Place. Further interviews were carried out with representatives of an architectural practice engaged in work on the owner's malls. These interviews served two purposes; firstly to provide background data about the mall itself and the intentions of the owners and designers and, secondly, to allow this researcher to rehearse his interview style for future interviews.

The main interviews began 'on site', with the researcher intercepting visitors and requesting they provide an interview. Using theoretical sampling in accordance with Goulding (2002) interviews continued off-site. Interviewees included both males and females ranging in age from 28 to 63 years old, and a broad range of occupations that included professionals, business people, and

housewives. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews and all interviews were recorded with the approval of the respondents. Immediately after each interview memos were made by the researcher recording any specific impressions that were made, and noting any specific body language or innuendo that might provide further insight into the respondent's meaning. As each interview was completed the recording was transcribed and a line-by-line analysis applied to the transcript in the process of open coding. These codes were then compared to previous interview codings, which laid the foundation for the development of preliminary concept groupings. As these concepts began to suggest higher-order groupings axial coding was then applied to identify emerging key categories and, later, to begin exploring the relationships between these categories.

Ultimately two categories emerged above all others which were capable of unifying and explaining the analysis that preceded them, and a core category was identified that tied these two categories together and related all categories, sub-categories and concepts together in a unified framework that had the power to explain the data from the interviews.

7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

7.5.1 Limited to a high-end mall

The study dealt with a narrow band of retail mall type, and a correspondingly narrow strata of consumer – namely, middle- to upper-income positioning. At

the time of the study there was possibly only one other mall in Hong Kong of a comparable trade mix and target market (ifc2). Therefore there is no indication from this study whether the same consumer responses would apply in, say, a lower-end mall.

7.5.2 A multi-cultural environment

Hong Kong, with its recent colonial past and strong current ties to mainland China, has a unique blend of cultures and a consequential uniqueness in its values, beliefs, and behaviours. Whether the same process of brand image development is exercised in a less diverse or monocultural context was not explored.

7.5.3 Language limitations

It should be noted that whilst Hong Kong is regarded as a bilingual society yet, while all of the respondents were interviewed in English, for most of them this was their second language (their first being Cantonese or Mandarin). Thus it is possible that the study was deprived of other concepts that might have enriched the findings.

7.5.4 Brand 'bleed'

The study was focused on the retail mall brand yet, within the mall, were many high-profile international brands (e.g. Dunhill; Bulgari; Cartier; Chanel;

Dior; Gucci; Hermes; Louis Vuitton; Prada; Tiffany). These brands played a significant role in the respondents' interpretation of the mall. What was not included in the study was any specific attempt to discern the relationship between influence of these brands on the consumer's perception and their perception of the mall brand overall.

7.6 OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

7.6.1 Research to support or advance the study theory

Given the limitations of the study, there is value in further research to support and advance this theory and its associated framework, in the following areas:

- Research conducted in retail malls that cater to a different strata of consumer; such research can be carried out from respondents from a range of social groups
- Research conducted in other cultural environments; these could be similar cultural environments (e.g. mainland China; Singapore; Macau) or quite different environments (e.g. U.K.; North America; Middle East). The opportunities for comparative research between diverse cultures is particularly challenging; a previous longitudinal retail study carried out between American and Chinese shoppers concluded that “these two cultural groups have dramatically different shopping practices” (Ackerman and Tellis 2001, p. 57). The research detailed in this thesis could provide the basis for extending the Ackerman and Tellis (2001) study.

- Research using alternative methodologies or from different perspectives. There is also many obvious opportunities to test this theory in a broader range of circumstances; this could be through studies into other target groups with other malls – lower-income targets for example. Equally there would be potential benefit from testing the framework in other cultural environments – in North American or European malls, for example.

7.6.2 To determine the relationship between mall brand and tenant brand

The relationship between the mall brand and the cumulative effect of the tenant brands is far from clear. Whether they are indeed two (groups of) identities, or one identity is a product of or dependent upon the other, has implications for marketing and branding studies, for mall operators, for brand owners, and indeed for the consumers themselves. As such this is an area that merits further research.

7.6.3 Consumer responses to other ‘places’

This emergent theory advances knowledge regarding consumers’ construction of ‘retail place’ brand image. This opens the door to questions regarding its applicability to other ‘place products’ – e.g. residential communities; tourist destinations – and thus suggests research that considers the effectiveness of this theoretical framework when applied to an alternative range of places

7.6.4 Development of a professional ‘tool’

The product of this research is the theory framework. Whilst it has value as an explanatory process it also suggests the foundation of a model or process that can have application for professional practice. Therefore there is merit to further developing this framework, through empirical study and tests, in search of an operational process that can provide assessment and site/community-specific research at the onset of development projects. In relation to this, a major international property consultancy, one of whose directors was kind enough to provide background data on the evolution of the Hong Kong retail industry for this study, has expressed interest in the results of the study and they are requesting a presentation to their directors of the findings (and its implications). Their objectives are marketing-based, aimed at improving their understanding of consumer needs and how that understanding can benefit the design and marketing of the built environment.

7.6.5 Investigating ‘place’ and ‘sense of place’

During the course of this research a clear – and unanswered - question developed in the mind of this researcher which was “what is the difference between ‘place’ and ‘sense of place’”? Based on the evidence from the literature review – and the lack of empirical evidence to the contrary within this study - it can be argued that these are two descriptions of the same condition, rather than two separate conditions. Given the prevalent use of these terms in the literature across several disciplines it seems that this is a

question that merits further exploration in search of a satisfactory answer. To this end, this researcher has presented a paper at a conference in U.C. Berkeley in May, 2011, on this topic, and considers it an area of study prompted by this current research, and one that merits further investigation.

7.7 CONCLUSION

The research documented in this thesis provides insight into how consumers construct brand images of 'place'. The study addresses gaps in the literature of marketing and branding, and makes contributions to knowledge in the fields of consumer culture and place studies. Yet whilst it has relevance to these fields, this researcher is of the opinion that the findings offer the most value to the area of the built environment. The way in which we construct the 'places' around us has, like all our endeavors, room for improvement, yet the quality of these places impacts directly on the quality of our lives (Tuan 2001). Ultimately it is to this area of knowledge that this theory should provide the most benefit.

APPENDIX 1: Ethics protocol form

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research project.

My name is Dave Osborne and I am engaged in PhD research entitled “Establishing a model to explain the phenomenon of retail mall brand”. This project is under the supervision of Professor Philip Dawes of the Department of Marketing at the University of Wolverhampton, England. Interviews in Pacific Place are being conducted with the full knowledge and approval of the mall owner Swire Properties Limited.

Just before we start the interview I would like to reassure you of several issues:

- Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary
- You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time
- You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time
- This interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team
- Excerpts of this interview may be made part of the final research thesis but under no circumstances will your name or identifying characteristics be included in this report.

I would be grateful if you would sign this form to show that I have read you its contents.

Signed

Name

Date

Researcher Contact Details:

Dave Osborne
Tung Sun Comm Bldg, 6/F
194-200 Lockhart Road
Wanchai
Hong Kong
Tel: (852)2511-1318
e-mail: dro@graphibrands.com

APPENDIX 2: Interview details

Bio:

Name _____

Nationality _____

Gender _____

Resident/visitor/other _____

Residential Area _____

Age _____

Occupation _____

Income range (HK\$ pm) Below 12,000 | 12-25,000 | 26-40,000 | over 40,000

(US\$ pm) Below 1,500 | 1,5-3,000 | 3-5,000 | over 5,000

Married Status Married | Single

Contact address/tel/e-mail _____

Interview:

Ref _____

Date _____

Time _____

Place _____

Present _____

APPENDIX 3: Extract from table to develop categories and concepts

Category/Concept	Alternative Concepts	Properties/Dimensions	Victoria	Margaret	Pamela
INDULGENT					
Pampering					
INDULGENT Pampering Choices Reward	Pampering Desire to be served Feelings of being special, important Personal attention Indulgence Personal treat		Privileged visitor Convenience on call Pampered shopping The need for shopping to be made easy Problem-free shopping Mall as personal place Personal attention Personal attention Receiving favours from staff Less personal association (Princes Bldg) less attractive	Frustrated at inconsiderate layout Pampering Reaction against authoritarian management Attitude of mall staff Helpfulness of staff Frustration at lack of control	Desire for physical convenience Pampering Choices Pampering oneself Visit to PP as treat
	Lack of pampering Lack of indulgence				Negative influence of authoritarian management
	Pampering Personal service Privilege Personal attention		Personal friendships Feeling special	Trust	Developing personal relationships with staff Personal service Pampering
	Pampering Special place Indulgent Personal treats				Here for 'gorgeous' things The mall as a personal treat, a reward The mall as reward, as personal pampering

APPENDIX 4: Table of categories, sub-categories, concepts and properties

PERSONAL/SOCIAL MEANING												
Core category					Core category							
SELF-ENGAGEMENT					SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT							
Category					Category							
Expedience		Indulgence		Escapism		Self-assurance		Influence of others		Influence of social norms		
<u>Sub-category</u>		<u>Sub-category</u>		<u>Sub-category</u>		<u>Sub-category</u>		<u>Sub-category</u>		<u>Sub-category</u>		
Effortless	Practical	Choice	Pampering	Dream/aspire	Avoid/forget	Self-image	Re-assurance	Opinions of others	Image of others	Social distinctions	Preferred signs	
Concept	Concept	Concept	Concept	Concept	Concept	Concept	Concept	Concept	Concept	Concept	Concept	
easy lazy distractions economy of space familiarity	value for money affordable economy of time accessibility	variety change complexity uniqueness	feeling special personal attention privilege	deserving Earning assuming roles social aspirations celebrity association	escape from normality wind/unwind	self-awareness uniqueness self-assessment satisfaction	search for logic in the physical realm insecurity affectionate bonding value of past experience	response to criticism challenging the values of others comparing with others	sense of belonging shared values and beliefs social exclusion	voyeurism social evaluation of others influence of behaviour	Comparison to norms social judgement holistic interpretation	social aspirations dealing with Social insecurity authenticity

APPENDIX 5: List of respondents

Pseudonym	Age	Nationality	Occupation
Jenny	28	HKC	Advertising exec
Olivia	42	HKC	Therapist
Pamela	63	Canadian	Educational trainer
Amy	35	British	Tourist
Tracy	27	Spanish	Marketer
Eric	51	HKC	Manufacturer
Victoria	58	HKC	Company director
Margaret	57	British	Lecturer
Michelle	46	HKC	Office manager
Kurt	45	NZ	Int Designer
Rebecca	34	HKC	Sales exec
Jackie	29	HKC	Consultant
Anna	47	Philippina	Housewife
Sandra	51	Vietnamese	Housewife
Jasmin	44	Taiwanese	Stewardess
Susan	38	HKC	Accountant
Kenneth	45	HKC	Marketer
Christy	46	Philippina	Teacher
Patricia	43	Korean	Composer
Mei Ling	36	MLC	Housewife
Catherine	38	Macanese	Design manager
Roger	34	HKC	Financial manager
Carmen	39	HKC	Administrator

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