

Predictors of Student Beer Brand Choice at Institutions of Higher Learning: A Case Study of the Witwatersrand University

B Mhlophe

*School of Economic and Business Sciences,
University of the Witwatersrand*

R Chinomona

*School of Economic and Business Sciences,
University of the Witwatersrand*

Richard.Chinomona@wits.ac.za

ABSTRACT

In a quest to ascertain why students prefer specific beer brands over other beverages and what perceived benefits are associated with their preferred brands, the current study was established to investigate the key factors that drive student beer brand choices at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Wits University). Irrespective of the rich body of literature on this subject, the problem of what brands really mean to students and what antecedents influence brand choice still remain unanswered. Consecutively, another important line of research reveals that in spite of a plethora of studies on this issue, available literature still remains inconclusive and is greatly confined to developed countries. In light of these two research outlines, the current study aims to ascertain, firstly, which beer brand is the most preferred amongst students and to quantitatively establish the main factors prompting Wits students to prefer a specific beer brand over another. Through these and other objectives, this study managed to fill the lacuna that exists in current literature, particularly with regards to South Africa. To realise the objectives of this study, a conceptual model was formulated and from this model, hypotheses were derived and later tested using Path Modeling. A structured survey questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 273 students registered within the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management (CLM), at Wits University. Thereafter, the data was coded and analysed using SPSS 22 (for descriptive statistics) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) (for inferential statistics). AMOS 21 statistical software was used for SEM. The results suggested that Heineken was the most preferred beer brand in comparison with the fifteen listed brands and other brands that were specified by respondents. Brand advertising was found to be the key antecedent that influences student beer brand choices. The findings of the current research provided several theoretical and managerial implications and these will serve to boost and guide future research endeavours within the student beer brand domain. The contributions of this study will undoubtedly improve managerial practices in terms of effective branding strategies, while simultaneously and positively shaping policies relating to the field under study.

Keywords: Beer Brands, Wits Students, AMOS, Structural Equation Modeling

Student life is typically linked to a ‘culture of drunkenness’. Many students that enter tertiary institutions may be at a greater jeopardy of being initiated to ‘unhealthy’ behaviours and attitudes. A pattern of sensation or thrill seeking and impulsivity has been strongly linked to increased beer preferences amongst students (Baer, 2002; Johnson & Jacobs, 2010). University-specific social contexts represent factors that influence drinking at both individual and social levels. The pursuit of *intentional drunkenness* has turned out to be normalised within the typical student-cultural experience and the consequences that come as a result of beer consumption choices seem to have been overlooked by many students (Ballantyne et al, 2006; Ritter, 2008). Of late, it has been observed that there is an increasing number of university students that prefer beer beverages to soft drinks, owing to increased beer availability and affordability. Researchers have long been interested at unravelling the precursors of beer brand choices, yet a number of issues remain unresolved, despite this considerable research attention. Moreover, studies on beer brand preferences have paid less attention to the student market and hence this study represents an attempt to address this problem. Accordingly, the primary aim of this study was to determine the predictors of student beer brand choices at institutions of higher learning in South Africa, with specific reference to students at Wits University.

Beer is firmly entrenched in many student-centered environments and different brands are perceived to provide a certain amount of pleasure to those who consume it. As a psychoactive substance, beer is addictive, and prior studies have linked it to a number of negative health and social problems. In recent times, beer has become a fundamental aspect of student life and its centrality can be deduced from the frequency of consumption amongst students, i.e. heavy episodic drinking (or binge drinking) (Seaman & Ikegwonu, 2010). Many students find it hard to think of any alternatives to having beer in their social lives

and thus granting beer a monopoly position in improving their social activity. Students that make beer brand choices are more likely to consume the brands that resonate with them personally or socially among others.

Beer abuse remains a prevalent problem in many South African university campuses. According to a study by Kyei and Ramagoma (2013), 49% of the students at the University of Venda, in Limpopo, were found to abuse beer. Such irresponsible use of preferred beer brands often leads to fatal injuries and many deaths within the student population. For example, as a result of beer-related accidents and beer poisoning, many students are unintentionally injured or hurt while under the influence of alcohol. They find themselves being victims of devastating beer-related consequences, for instance, doing something they tend to regret afterwards, doing something they would not ordinarily do, missing classes as a result of e.g. hangover, failure to recall where they were and what they did (i.e. memory blackouts), performing poorly at university, engaging in unprotected or unplanned sexual activity (i.e. being at risk of sexual victimisation or sexual assault), vandalism or damage of university property, beer-fuelled riots and finding themselves in trouble with law enforcement agents while at the same time putting pressure on medical facilities due to beer-related illnesses (Wechsler, 1996; Perkins, 2002; White et al., 2000) as well as being victims of other deleterious effects linked to beer choices and use.

Given the high levels of continuous beer consumption choices by university students, irrespective of the well-known harmful effects of beer, it would be interesting to find out why students (i.e. individuals who are assumed to be well-informed about the undesirable effects of choosing to consume beer brands) continue to be *beer lovers*. Moreover, due to the seriousness of the effects of student beer drinking choices and the fact that different brands have different alcohol content, one

wonders why South African researchers have not given sufficient attention to the student beer market, bearing in mind the above consequences.

After a careful analysis and identifying the problem, it became evident that there is a dearth of studies on beer brand preferences that focus on the South African student population. This paucity of studies is surprising and as a result warrants empirical investigation. However, there has been a surge of academic investigation on the antecedents of student beer brand preferences, especially in developed countries. Therefore, even though there is a plethora of studies in this field, it is equally disturbing to know that most of the foregoing research efforts are still confined to industrialised countries. Consequently, the current literature on beer brand choice is awash with empirical studies, but there is lack of attention of the student market, particularly in South Africa. Arguably, it is naive and ill-advised for individuals in developing countries to assume a priori that the research results from developed countries apply to their countries (Chinomona & Pretorius 2011). For this reason, an empirical validation or refutation of earlier conclusions from developed countries is indispensable, hence the requisite for this study.

Previously, research focus has been confined to other groups and the student population has been largely neglected. Rarely can one find studies that predominantly explore beer brand choices within the university market. Furthermore, it is ironic that within this extant literature, consensus regarding the predictors of student beer choices still remains scant (Orth et al 2004). Therefore, even though a vast majority of the studies have been conducted, they still remain inconclusive with respect to the key predictors of beer brand choices from students' perspective. Moreover, though there has been an over-abundance of studies exploring student beer drinking choices, some ambiguity still exists in the

quest for a complete comprehension of the reasons for such beer preferences. Understanding the aspects connected to student beer brand choices and problems thereof is crucial in filling the existing gap in literature as a result of the dearth of information. Hence, the current lacuna is deemed to deserve empirical investigation.

The effects of positive beer brand choices have also attracted far less research attention even though some students seem to be selecting the brands they drink for positive reinforcement i.e. the view that positive benefits (e.g. emotional, health) of beer consumption choices outweigh negative ones. Moreover, from a South African perspective, little is known about the specific types of beer beverages that university students choose to consume in order to create a beverage-specific profile. Thus, it can be claimed that literature specific to factors that motivate students to choose certain beer brands is still at its infancy in South Africa. Ascertaining the types of beverages that students choose to drink may perhaps contribute toward an enhanced understanding of the underlying factors that shape their drinking behaviour. This comprehension may also inform the formation of suitable beverage-specific policies, practical interventions and offer hints as to the specific aspects that influence student beer brand choices. Also, the fact that preferences for specific beer beverage types are linked with particular consumption patterns (Johansson & Leigh, 2011; Ritter, 2008) remains questionable. Hence, this study seeks to provide current evidence, when intending to make informed intervention measures, prevention strategies and marketing-related strategies.

Without question, it can be asserted that there are a myriad of factors that predict students' beer brand preferences. Unfortunately, one limitation from a research standpoint is that very few studies have been conducted on beer brand choices within the university market. To fill this unfortunate gap, a beer brand

preference study will be conducted, with Wits students being the target population. Therefore, based on the afore-mentioned research void, the empirical objectives of the study were to:

- establish the extent to which pricing negatively impact student beer brand choices
- find out whether emotional benefits positively affect student beer brand choices
- discover whether normative benefits positively affect student beer brand choices
- establish whether situational factors positively influence student beer brand choices
- ascertain whether beer advertising positively impact student beer brand choices

Rationale of the Study

Marketers continue to have an increasing interest in knowing why and how buyers' brand choices and/or preferences differ in their product classification. Undoubtedly, the findings of the current study will allow for interesting and fresh knowledge on the subject matter by highlighting notable aspects relating to reasons that propel students to choose certain beer brands over other beverages or alternative beer brands. Notably, the current study provides a comprehensive comprehension for such choice subtleties. Moreover, the findings of this study will go a long way in assisting marketers in formulating effective marketing strategies to position and segment their beer brands within the university market while providing them with a guideline to programmes that may develop overtime. The findings of this study will also be invaluable to policy makers and will thus help them in making sound and well-informed policy reforms that will certainly assist in tackling the problem of alcohol abuse at universities, as a result of 'bad' choices by

students. As a result, one can argue and say that this paper will be an invaluable addition to the South African body of knowledge with respect to student beer brand choices. By and large, this investigation is deemed to supplement the current scarce body of literature in South Africa. Moreover, the study will also form a reference point for marketing practitioners on issues of brand choice and preference and will be a useful guide for future research endeavours.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section contextualises the current study through background theory (theoretical evidence), a description and synthesis of key studies linked to the study variables (empirical investigation). A conceptual model was devised based on the empirical investigation, thereafter hypotheses were developed and stated based on the conceptual model and these will be tested at a later stage.

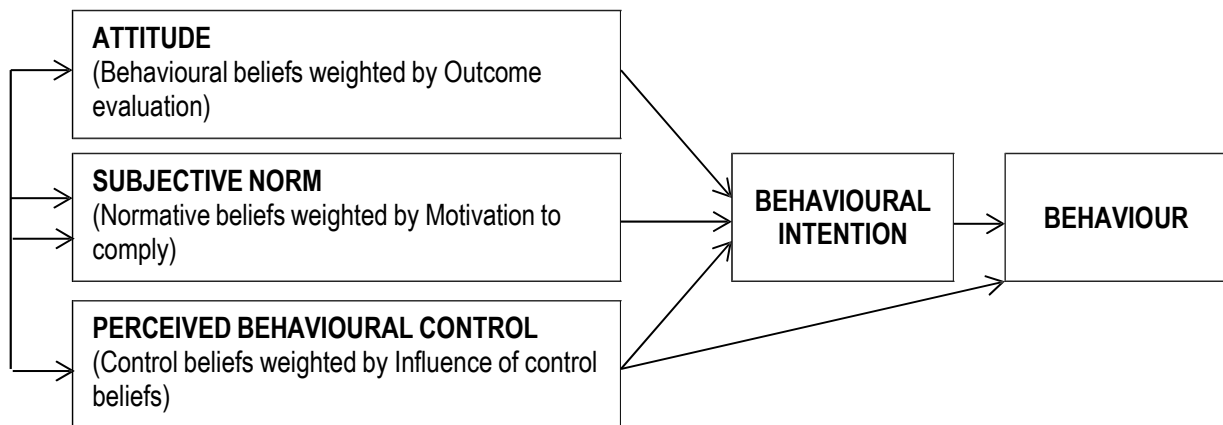
The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Ajzen (1991) developed a behavioural-intention model which has been widely used within the marketing context, particularly in predicting intentions that are used to ultimately estimate consumer behaviour. The simple postulation of the original TPB framework is that behavioural intention is significantly determined by three predictor variables of attitude towards behaviour, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991).

Attitudes

Attitudes impact the intentions held by consumers and the more positive the attitude, the greater the intention to execute the behaviour (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005). Briefly stated, on the balance of all previous

FIGURE 1
The Theory of Planned Behaviour



Source: Ajzen (1991)

empirical findings, it seems as if the established outlook is that a positive relationship between attitudes and brand choices does exist. However, such a relationship has not remained unquestioned by previous scholars and hence the need for further scrutiny.

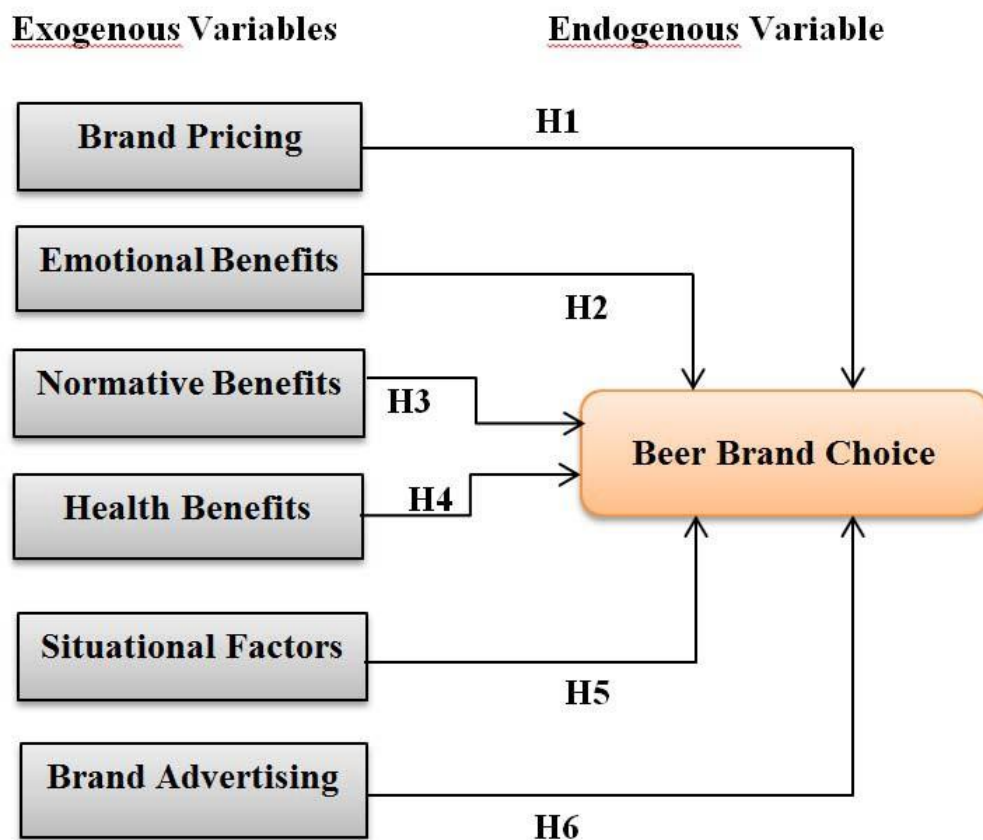
Subjective Norm

Subjective norm can be conceptualised as the internalised view about important individuals in the decision maker's life, making the decision maker to desire to act (or not act) in a certain way (Smith & Paladino, 2010). The construct of subjective norm is also regarded as the 'perceived social pressure' that an individual feels the necessity of performing a particular behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Increasing approval from reference groups like friends, family members and other important individuals may strengthen a person's intention to prefer a certain beer brand. However, there is an evident inconsistency in the literature regarding subjective norm being an antecedent of beer brand choice (Armitage & Conner, 1998; 2001, Holst & Iversen, 2011). This apparent discrepancy makes subjective norm to be a worthwhile construct to be further investigated.

Is Ajzen's TPB Still Relevant Today?

While Ajzen's TPB has been widely invalidated and criticised by a number of researchers or skeptics (Armitage & Conner, 1998; 2001), primarily for its so-called methodological flaws and the inability of the theory to take all plausible influencers on behavioural intention into account (Bagozzi, 1992; Sparks & Shepherd, 1992; Armitage & Conner, 1998), this theory has however remained popular amongst many researchers. More precisely, the critiques of the construct of attitude say that it partially determines intention (Armitage & Conner, 1998). Instead of being regarded as a complete theory, critics of the TPB argue that it is more plausible to view it as a theory of the "proximal determinant of behaviour" (Armitage & Conner, 1998:1432), as they maintain that it is 'too ignorant' of other variables influencing intention and behaviour (Bagozzi, 1992; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Moreover, despite the TPB's ability to account for a substantial amount of variance in consumer behaviour, a well-known drawback of the model is its failure to explain a sturdy correlation between historical and future behaviour. Despite the burgeoning criticism of this theory, its

FIGURE 2
Conceptual Model



A Model for Beer Brand Choice Among Wits Students

predictive power was deemed important in guiding the current study.

Conceptual Model and Hypothesis Development

In order to empirically test the relationships between the study variables, a conceptual model in Figure 2 below was developed premised on the reviewed literature on the antecedents of student beer brand choices, and it was drawn from the TPB. The model consists of six constructs: five exogenous (predictor) variables plus one endogenous (outcome) variable. It was assumed that the above predictor variables would consequently predict students' beer brand choices. Detailed accounts of the links between these constructs

are provided in the ensuing section on hypotheses developed from the model.

Hypothesis Development

Brand Pricing and Brand Choice

Growing empirical evidence attests to the fact that consumers derive certain value or perceptions based on the brand's pricing, which plays a prominent role in shaping consumer brand choices (Ritter, 2008; Sweeny & Soutar 2001). Drawing from the conventional wisdom, it has been found that consumers frequently associate a highly-priced brand with higher quality, and such an association is positively linked with brand choices (Craig & Engel, 1971). Additionally, consumers tend to want top brands at the finest price. According to Neeley et al. (2010), price

consciousness plays a paramount role in beer consumption decision. The study conducted by Hajdu et al. (2007), which assessed the Hungarian beer market, found that price was among the most significant factors affecting brand choice. However, researchers like Sweeney and Soutar (2001) are convinced that the quality-price correlation is *too naive*. Moreover, it is well known that a higher price for a particular brand often creates an additional perceived risk to consumers, which may discourage brand choice (Quester & Smart, 1998).

In line with Thompson & Thompson (2008), when beer price increases to a certain level, buyers feel they cannot afford to buy it, and for this reason, they are unlikely to choose beer brands. Likewise, other studies have also attested that when beer brands are on a price promotion, people are inspired to choose such brands (Elder et al., 2010; Rabinovich et al., 2009; Skidmore & Murphy, 2011). However, according to Thompson & Vourvachis (1995), pricing is an insignificant barrier that inhibits people from choosing beer brands. Similarly, Gruenewald, et al., (1993) argued that there is an inverse relationship between beer pricing and consumption choices. Moreover, a sizable number of studies seem to be supporting the inverse relationship between beer pricing and brand choice (Chaloupka et al. 2002; Österberg, 1995). This implies that as the price of beer escalates, brand preferences decline, and vice versa. Alternatively, Parson and Stephenson's (2013) study established that price had no statistically significant correlation with consumer preferences in New Zealand or Australia. Arguably, price remains one of the key issues in determining students' beer brand selection. Drawing from the preceding theoretical discussion and also in line with the empirical evidence on beer pricing and student beer brand choice, this study hypothesises that:

H1: There is a negative relationship between brand pricing and students' beer brand choices

Emotional Benefits and Brand Choice

Sometimes buyers can develop emotional benefits or attachments toward a specific brand (i.e. *brand love*) and such emotional feelings tend to have a huge impact on their consumption choices (Puth et al. 1999). Amounting evidence has revealed that emotions result in an interaction with the brand on a personal level (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). If consumers derive emotional benefits from a beer brand, this may predict their willingness to pay price premiums, persuading them to end up choosing the brand, notwithstanding its high price. Consumers may also motivate others to choose their preferred brand through word of mouth (WOM). As a result, consumers' emotional attachment to a brand can be a significant predictor of their pledge and preparedness to make sacrifices in order to get the chosen brand (Thompson et al. 2005). Consequently, drawing from the above discussion and past empirical evidence, the current study hypothesises that:

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between emotional benefits and students' beer brand choices

Normative Benefits and Brand Choice

Normative benefits have an influence on brands that buyers choose. The effect of normative benefits on brands shows that it affects consumers' decision making. Normative benefits can be a principal driver of brand selection. A positive link between normative benefits and brand choice has been supported by foregoing literature like Seaman and Ikegwonu, (2010). Collins et al. (2003) further posits that youngsters get exposed to group-think mind-sets and the 'inevitable' peer-pressure which compels them to end up choosing to consume beer brands similar to that of their peers. In a study by Perkins (2002), the findings revealed that peer influence was a much stronger predictor of

beer choice than other contextual factors like parents' attitudes, religion and values. Linked to normative benefits are normative beliefs, which appear to have a mediational role in explaining the association between social norms and beer choice (Maddocka & Glanz, 2005). Moreover, Maddocka and Glanz (2005) highlighted a consistent and strong mediation role of the social norms pathway to beer choice for university students. This supported the assumption by Fishbein's Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) that normative beliefs are an important pathway for behavioural control and subjective norms (Montano et al., 2002; Fishbein, 1967). Accordingly, premised on the empirical evidence and forgoing discussion, it is expected that normative benefits are positively linked to student beer brand choice. As a result, the current study hypothesises that:

H3: There is a positive relationship between normative benefits and students' beer brand choices

Situational Factors and Brand Choice

The relationship between situational factors and brand choice has been extensively researched in marketing literature (Orth, 2005; Ritter, 2008, Vazquez et al., 2002; Yang et al., 2002). The benefits that consumers seek out when choosing beer-related brands seem to vary based on the environment they are in and emphasis has been placed on the fact that consumer preferences vary in accordance to their setting (Quester & Smart, 1998; Yang et al., 2002). Moreover, Yang et al. (2002) posits that beer brand selection is regarded as an action that can happen in distinctive locations. Furthermore, prior research studies have established that situational influences can be better predictors of consumer brand choices and a positive relationship has been found (Ritter, 2008; Christian & Sunday, 2013). The findings that brand choice can be significantly influenced by situational factors suggest that it is vital for brand managers to understand

situations where brands are effective (Quester & Smart, 1998; Yang et al. 2002; Orth, 2005; Vazquez et al., 2002). Hence, brand choice has been found to be positively influenced by consumers' situational variation. Likewise, deducing from the above-mentioned discussion and empirical backing, it is anticipated that situational factors will be positively linked to student beer brand choice. For this reason, it can be posited that:

H4: There is a positive relationship between situational factors and students' beer brand choices

Advertising and Brand Choice

Extensive research efforts on the relationship between advertising and brand choices show that such a relationship exists and is positive (Ritter, 2008, Gentile et al, 2001; Martin et al, 2002). Furthermore, it has been established that the university market exhibits low brand loyalties and this may discredit the point of marketing to students (Ritter, 2008). However, advertising can be credited for creating brand recognition and top of the mind awareness (TOMA). Both Gentile et al. (2001) and Martin et al. (2002) suggested that advertisements on diverse mediums are significant predictors of beer brand choice, especially among the underage youth. According to a study by Van der Spuy (2011), the results showed that there is no clear relationship between beer advertising, its regulation, and either consumption choices or problems among the youth. Similarly, such a relationship has also been rejected by prior empirical researchers who found that advertising has no effect on brand choice (Tellis, 1987). However, such a study may be out-dated and thus its findings may no longer apply to the current market situations. Furthermore, this unsubstantial empirical evidence has rejected the positive linkage between advertising and brand choice. Nonetheless, when drawing from the above-mentioned arguments which are grounded on

empirical evidence, this study hypothesises that:

H5: There is a positive relationship between brand advertising and students' beer brand choices

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

The data for the current study was collected from students at Wits University and the sample included students within CLM. The study used a researcher-administered data collection strategy and the collection point was West Campus – where CLM is found.

The main data collection method or tool was a survey questionnaire, where inquiry forms were handed out, completed and returned by respondents to the researcher. This method was chosen because it was deemed to be inexpensive and was very useful as the literacy rates of respondents were very high and most of them were very co-operative. Moreover, the outside cover of the questionnaire stated that confidentiality and anonymity of participants was guaranteed and that the collected data was to be used purely for academic purposes.

The survey questionnaires were distributed at differing times, for example, respondents were approached during lecture times (i.e. prior to the start of lectures, during the 15 minute in-between lecture breaks), after the lecture, during lunch times, in the evening (in case of part-time students), at the library and in any convenient locations where many students gathered, for example, at the Wits Towers and/or law lawns. The respondents completed them immediately, as most of them were excited to provide their beer brand-related responses. The researcher distributed 319

questionnaires, where 273 of them were usable, yielding a response rate of 85.6%.

Measurement Instrument Development

The scales of the current study were operationalised primarily on the basis of the work from previous scholars. Minor alterations were done to make the items fit the purpose and context of the current study. A four-to-five item scale was adapted from Ritter (2008) and these instruments were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The degree of agreement ranged between 1= *Strongly Disagree* and 5= *Strongly Agree*.

DATA ANALYSIS

The study results revealed that the majority of the students chose Brandhouse's Heineken as their most preferred brand (with a brand preference score of 17.6%). This may be due to high brand awareness and the fact that Heineken is a premium brand. However, Grolsch, Peroni and Miller Genuine Draft, among others, are also premium brands, hence making the brand's premiumness not to be a solid reason for preference. The other brands that made it to the top 3 included, at 2nd place, SAB's Castle Lite (with a total of 13.9% brand preference), while SAB's Carling Black Label came 3rd (with a total of 12.5% brand preference). Table 1 below is a representation of the sample demographic characteristics.

The descriptive statistics shown in Table 1 above shows the gender, age, home language and year of study of surveyed respondents. The summary statistics displays that 63% of the students who participated in this study were male and the remainder were female. The majority and the most active group of the respondents, (i.e. 96.3% of the respondents) were aged between 18 and 25 while the rest

TABLE 1
Sample Demographic Characteristics (Wits Students)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	172	63	< 18	0	0.0
Female	101	37	18-25	263	96.3
			26-35	7	2.6
			36-45	1	0.4
			46-55	2	0.7
			≥ 56	0	0.0
Total	273	100.0	Total	273	100.0
'Home Language	Frequency	Percentage (%)	YOS	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Afrikaans	16	5.9	Fresher	109	39.9
English	86	31.5	Second	46	16.8
Ndebele	3	1.1	Third	84	30.8
Northern Sotho	18	6.6	Post Grad	34	12.5
Southern Sotho	14	5.1			
Swazi	8	2.9			
Tsonga	17	6.2			
Tswana	26	9.5			
Venda	6	2.2			
Xhosa	21	7.7			
Zulu	37	13.6			
Other Languages	21	7.7			
Total	273	100.0	Total	273	100.0

Note: YOS= Year of Study

were between 26 and 55. This can be due to the fact that a number of respondents were in their year of study. Interestingly, this may mean that many first year students finish their high school at the age of at least 17 years, making them to be at least 18 when doing their first year of study. Conversely, this can also mean that these *freshers* may have left high school at the age of at least 16 years and may be repeating their first year of study.

Moreover, there were no students aged below 18 and above 55 years. Close to 40% of the respondents were first year students and the rest were second, third or post-graduate students. The calculated percentage of undergraduate constituted 87.8%, while the remainder was for post-graduate respondents. This can be explained by the fact that by and large, the percentage of registered undergraduate students is more than that of post-graduate students.

Assessing the Instruments of the Measurement Model

The measurement model was estimated prior to examining the relationships of the structural model, and this two-step approach was suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1998). All the constructs (except health benefits) were displayed as linked first-order factors, which corresponded with the number of measuring instruments, per construct. In estimating the model, Amos 22 statistical software was used.

Table 2 below represents the results of the measurement model, together with the results for reliability checks (Cronbach alpha and CR values) as well as validity checks (AVE values). The factor loadings per measurement item are also displayed.

TABLE 2
Measurement Instruments

Research Constructs	Research Items Used	Mean	Standard Deviation	Corrected Item to Total	Cronbach Alpha Value	CR Value	AVE Value	Factor Loadings
BP	BP1	3.66	0.984	0.630	0.772	0.797	0.527	0.696
	BP2	3.62	0.960	0.622				0.771
	BP3	3.80	0.887	0.580				0.727
	BP4	3.19	1.081	0.548				0.533
EB	EB1	4.01	0.895	0.547	0.812	0.799	0.525	0.637
	EB2	3.72	0.968	0.670				0.749
	EB3	3.53	1.085	0.670				0.772
	EB4	3.58	1.001	0.642				0.733
NB	NB1	2.74	1.144	0.702	0.886	0.799	0.664	0.752
	NB2	2.59	1.194	0.742				0.790
	NB3	2.47	1.115	0.765				0.846
	NB4	2.63	1.169	0.798				0.868
SF	SF2	4.05	1.236	0.671	0.803	0.655	0.683	0.742
	SF3	4.05	1.199	0.671				0.903
ADV	ADV1	2.76	1.191	0.790	0.897	0.833	0.639	0.864
	ADV2	2.77	1.234	0.779				0.852
	ADV3	2.59	1.121	0.766				0.819
	ADV4	3.05	1.213	0.716				0.740
	ADV5	2.93	1.140	0.681				0.710
RBC	RBC3	3.24	1.234	0.569	0.725	0.667	0.569	
	RBC5	3.00	1.217	0.569				

*Note: BP = Brand Pricing; EB = Emotional Benefits; NB = Normative Benefits; HB = Health Benefits; SF = Situational Factors; ADV = Brand Advertising; RBC = Brand Choice; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Reliability. *Scales: 1 – Strongly Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 5 – Strongly Agree

Evidence of internal consistency is represented by the coefficient of alpha and composite reliability values. The coefficient of alpha values ranged between 0.725 to 0.897 and as a result all the study constructs surpassed the threshold of 0.7 as recommended by Byrne (2006). All the constructs had a CR value that was above 0.6, with constructs like Situational Factors and Brand Choice having a CR value of 0.665 and 0.667 respectively. Other constructs had a CR value that was above 0.7 as represented in Table 2 above. Overall, these constructs surpassed the threshold recommended by Hulland (1999) and this means that they had a marginally acceptable reliability score. Table 2 above also show values for average variance extracted (AVE) which essentially examines the amount of variance that is taken into account by a

construct's measure in relation to measurement error and links between the unobserved constructs within the model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), AVE estimates of 0.5 or above show that the construct is a valid measure. As per Table 2 above, all the constructs met this requirement. Moreover, some the factor loadings were significant at ($p < 0.01$), and ranged between 0.547 and 0.798. This means that all item-to-total values for the variables under study were above the threshold of 0.5, as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). This may also indicate that there was convergent validity as more than 50% of every item's variance was shared within the corresponding variables. Discriminant validity was checked by squaring the parameter estimates between the two variables, which

TABLE 3
Inter-Constructs Correlation Matrix

Research Constructs	RBC	BP	EB	NB	HB	SF	ADV
Brand Choice (RBC)	1.000						
Brand Pricing (BP)	0.111	1.000					
Emotional Benefits (EB)	0.361	0.364	1.000				
Normative Benefits (NB)	0.292	0.112	0.355	1.000			
Health Benefits (HB)	0.200	0.093	0.283	0.209	1.000		
Situational Factors (SF)	0.184	0.191	0.346	0.203	0.094	1.000	
Brand Advertising (ADV)	0.495	0.149	0.311	0.425	0.237	0.182	1.000

($p < 0.01$; Sample size = 273)

were found to be less than the AVE estimates between the two constructs, and this met the suggestion by Fornel and Larcker (1981). Furthermore, the researcher checked whether the values within the correlation matrix were below 0.8, as values above 0.8 may suggest that there is multi-collinearity between constructs. The researcher found that these values met the criteria specified by Hulland (1999) and overall, they were deemed marginally acceptable. Table 3 above is a representation of the correlation matrix. The model was found to be fairly acceptable with regard to the overall model fit measures. This study managed to meet some of the thresholds as recommended to be acceptable thresholds by Bentler, (1990), Browne & Cudeck, (1993) and Marsh et al. (1996). The results of the model fit are represented in Table 4 below. Only the GFI and NFI measures slightly fell below the minimum recommended threshold. However, these two indices do not suggest an

implausible representation of the primary empirical data structures. They may suggest that indices in the model fairly converged with the data. Hence, the model was *provisionally accepted* due to the fact that it had a close fit to the observed data.

Results of the Structural Model

As a fairly acceptable measurement model was found under CFA, the next phase was to check model fit once more before checking the structural fit of the model as well as hypothesis testing, through path Modeling. The results for the model fit indices under path modeling demonstrated a fairly acceptable fit. However, in contrast with the CFA model fit results, the model fit results from path modeling indicated that only a few indices reached the minimum acceptable threshold as recommended by Bentler, (1990), Browne & Cudeck, (1993)

TABLE 4:
Model Fit Summary

Model Fit Indices	Acceptable Threshold	Study Threshold	Met / Not Met
Chi-Square Value: $\chi^2/(df)$	<3	2.116	Met
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	- > 0.900	0.929	Met
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	> 0.900	0.885	Not Met
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	> 0.900	0.930	Met
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	> 0.900	0.875	Not Met
Tucker Lewis Index (TLI)	> 0.900	0.914	Met
Random Measure of Standard Error Approximation (RMSEA)	< 0.08	0.064	Met

and Marsh et al. (1996). The rest of the indices fell below the minimum acceptable threshold and recorded a poor fit as compared to the results from CFA. Therefore, the model fit of the current study remains questionable and this may suggest an implausible representation of the primary empirical data structures. Even though structural model fit analysis did not attain the recommended or the minimum acceptable thresholds, in order to complete the process, the researcher proceeded to the next stage, which was to test the structural paths of the hypothesised model. The results of hypothesis testing are represented in Table 5 below.

The results presented in Table above support all of the five hypotheses of the study. The first hypothesis (H1) postulated that there is a negative relationship between brand pricing and brand choice. In line with H1, an inverse or negative relationship between brand pricing and student beer brand choices is supported by results of the current study. The second posited hypothesis tested the relationship between emotional benefits and brand choice and it was postulated that this link is significantly positive. Support is provided for hypothesis 2 (H2) as the results show that higher levels of emotional benefits are linked with the high probability of brand choice. The third hypothesis (H3) stated that there was a positive relationship between normative benefits (NB) and brand choice (RBC). The standardised coefficient of brand choice for normative benefits is positive and insignificant; hence the hypothesis was

supported by the findings of this study. The fourth hypothesis (H4) posited that there is a positive relationship between situational variation (SF) and brand choice (RBC). Since a positive relationship was discovered, this implies that H4 is also consistent with the prediction of the current study and hence it cannot be rejected. The last postulation – hypothesis five (H5) claimed that there is a positive relationship between brand advertising (ADV) and brand choice (RBC). The results show a positive relationship between ADV and RBC. This finding supports the reasoning that an increase in brand advertising is likely to positively affect the selection of the advertised brand. Notably, this study found that this relationship is not only positive, but was also significant as well. Interestingly, brand advertising offered the most significant results when compared to the other significant variable – emotional benefits. Therefore, consistent with H5, evidence exists to support the earlier claim that there is a positive relationship between ADV and RBC, and most importantly, based on the results, this linkage was found to be significant.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The current study aimed at quantitatively establishing the main factors prompting Wits students to prefer a specific beer brand over another. In this endeavour, the current study examined the influence of brand pricing, emotional benefits, normative benefits, health benefits, situational factors and brand advertising on brand choice. TPB provided a

TABLE 5
Results of Structural Equation Modeling Analysis

Proposed Hypotheses	Hypothesis	Factor Loading	Rejected/Supported
RBC → BP	-H1	-0.045	Supported
RBC → EB	+H2	0.36 ***	Supported
RBC → NB	+H3	0.025	Supported
RBC → SF	+H4	0.047	Supported
RBC → ADV	+H5	0.433***	Supported

Note: RBC = Brand Choice; BP = Brand Pricing; EB = Emotional Benefits; NB = Nominal Benefits; SF = Situational Factors; ADV = Brand Advertising; ***p<0.01

theoretical foundation for the conceptualised framework. Data was collected from students within CLM at Wits University. In order to test the proposed hypotheses derived from the conceptual model, SEM (path modeling) through AMOS software was used. Drawing from the findings of the current study, Heineken was the most preferred beer brand and the empirical findings showed that all the claimed research hypotheses were supported (except one – health benefits, which was removed from the study), with emotional benefits and brand pricing being supported in a significant way. Essentially, this means that most of the hypotheses were specified appropriately.

Academic or Theoretical Ramifications and Contributions

From the theoretical side, this study provides a substantial contribution to the literature by thoroughly examining the predictors of student beer brand choice at Wits University – an internationally recognised South African institution of higher learning. On the whole, the findings of this study provide additional empirical evidence to the beer brand management literature. Therefore, the current study is projected to further increase the prospects of our understanding of beer-brand management issues that have sparked a lot of controversy and attention, within the university market. Additionally, a successful endeavour was made to apply the TPB to the current study with the aim of explaining the significance of the study variables. Arguably, the TPB is still relevant to the current situation and when used appropriately, it will continue to serve as an important guide to related studies. Hence, this study illuminated the role of the TPB in guiding current research and it is hoped that the original theory will continue to guide future studies, if not slightly modified to fit the context of these studies.

Managerial or Practical Ramifications and Contributions

From the practitioners' perspective, the current study is, by and large, expected to provide valuable strategic implications for beer brand marketers. Based on the relationship between ADV and RBC and given that the findings of this study provided robust evidence and support for brand advertising as the most significant predictor of beer brand choice within the student population, beer brand managers are encouraged to pay a lot of attention on this variable. Furthermore, fostering consumers' emotional attachment toward a specific brand is another crucial aspect that beer brand marketers should concentrate on. These two variables, particularly brand advertising, were found to be the best predictors of student beer brand choice and thus played an influential role on students' beer preferences. Accordingly, this study succumbs to the fact that beer brand managers can benefit from the conclusions of these findings. A broad observation drawn from the results of the current study is that when consumers are emotionally attached to a brand, they are likely to re-purchase the same brand, and pay less attention to the other advertised brands and this ultimately contributes to an increase in the company's profitability. However, marketers need to be mindful of the fact that advertising comes first, hence before consumers can derive emotional benefits from a brand, they need to be fully aware of the brand – i.e. TOMA. Therefore, for beer brand marketers to foster consumer-brand attachment, they ought to put much devotion in executing effective strategies that foster such benefits for consumers e.g. nurturing consumer-brand satisfaction.

Beer brand managers should also be mindful of other variables that provided a positive relationship when linked with brand choice and thus were also supported by the findings of this study. Perhaps, too, the positive outcome of these variables may potentially act

as noteworthy findings, as these constructs may also be relevant precursors for a different sample of students. Given the fact that all the variables were supported in the current study, except health benefits which was eliminated for yielding abnormal factor loadings, brand marketers are, likewise, encouraged to consider all the five constructs that were tested in the study so as to effectively facilitate brand choice.

Above and beyond, it is also vital that policy makers accordingly alter, for instance, their regulations on the basis of the findings of the current study. They must develop policies that are specific to the requirements of the university market – i.e. those that foster a good teaching and learning environment, while lessening the likelihoods of irresponsible beer consumption choices. As highlighted in the current study, if policy makers want to discourage students from choosing beer over other beverages, they must limit its advertising. It is confirmed in this study that beer brand advertising increases a brand's exposure and hence becomes an important antecedent for students' brand choices. There was the preponderance of evidence provided in this study to support this notion.

The most notable recommendation is that that all marketing campaigns should endorse the "Drink responsibly or sensibly" communications and no promotions should appeal to individuals below the age of 18.

Limitations

Despite the fact that the current study provides noteworthy ramifications and contributions to both to the academic world and marketing practice, it is not immune to certain limitations, which open up ways for additional research. First and most significantly, the present research was conducted from the perspective of Wits students only. In addition, the research sampling frame of the current study was confined to CLM, despite the fact

that there are five faculties at Wits University. Within CLM, only the School of Economic and Business Science, School of Law, School of Accountancy were considered, and hence ignoring other schools, for example, WitsPlus and Wits School of Governance and Wits Business School. Perhaps if data was collected from students at all schools within CLM and also across different universities, i.e. if a comparative study was done, then insightful findings regarding student beer brand choices may have been found. Hence, ensuing research efforts should consider replicating the same study to other universities across South Africa, and utilise a broader sample and compare the findings with those of the current study. Perhaps, in future, a longitudinal research is ideal, as it is expected that it will be more informative in determining how the variables under study are linked over time. Specifically, repetitive assessments of student beer use, costs (problems or effects), and successive beer use may provide a better way of Modeling the connections among the study variables. In this regard, a daily diary methodology may be particularly useful. This methodology may perhaps contribute immensely and effectively to the body of beer brand management literature on the student market in South Africa

To further limit the study, not all beer beverages were studied, but the specific brands chosen for this research were either premium or mainstream brands and hence this excluded sorghum beer, like the traditional and most popular South African beer – umqombothi. This study may lack generalisability in this regard as discussed below.

It was found that the research findings may be less generalisable to other contexts based on the choice of the sampling frame and other related methodologies. However, insightful findings were found, and this study remains an invaluable basis for future research endeavours.

The limitations of the current study provide avenues for further research. Extending the current study to other settings or universities within the country, may possibly enhance the probability of providing better results or conclusions, while using this study as a useful background. Fundamentally, future research endeavours on student-beer brand choices in other environments ought to increase its repertoire so as to seek out a balanced view from students in different backgrounds and contexts. Supplementary research is necessary when using other methods (e.g. qualitative data collection methods) and other populations (i.e. students from other universities) so as to validate or reject the findings of the current study. Qualitative research which, specifically, examines the multidimensional interaction of diverse individual, social and situational aspects may perhaps be of great significance to future studies. Furthermore, replication of the current study (with additional indicators like reasons for choosing a specific brand, additional constructs like taste and actual beer buying behaviour, taste, expectations) should be considered, while incorporating respondents from different universities across South Africa. Thus, forthcoming research endeavours should concentrate on other antecedents and their likely effect on brand choice. By and large, this would improve the generalisability of the findings, which was noted to be lacking in the current study.

The design of the current study appears to have restricted the capacity to make appropriate causal or contributory extrapolations, for instance, in case of health benefits. In future, a longitudinal research is suggested, as it is expected that it will be more informative in determining how the variables under study are linked over time. Specifically, repetitive assessments of student beer use, costs (problems or effects), and successive beer use may provide a better way of modelling the connections among the study variables. In this regard, a daily diary methodology may be particularly useful. Moreover, future studies should also examine

both positive and negative consequences of student beer choices and consumption thereof, in order to get a balanced viewpoint.

In brief, it appears as if future studies ought to integrate more multifaceted research design strategies and include other measures to comprehensively assess the predictors of student beer consumption and take into account measures that explicitly ask respondents about beer use. One more vital future direction is the need to further study and draw a parallel between drinking problems and after graduation alcohol use (when ex-students get to venture into the world of work and assume new responsibilities). This area appears to have limited research as many researchers tend to deliberately avoid it.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted the importance of brand advertising as well as emotional benefits in effectively predicting student beer brand choices. It is hoped that the findings of the current study will go a long way in improving marketing strategies, enhance policy making as well as university intervention measures within the domain of beer brand choice within the university market.

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