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**Article**

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## MARKETING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The role of social group influences when intending to purchase premium alcohol<sup>1\*</sup>

Nicole Cunningham<sup>1\*</sup>

**Abstract:** This study investigates the effect that social group influences have on the purchase intention of premium alcohol by adapting the theory of planned behaviour. The moderating effect of the need to save face and conform to a social group's expectations on the purchase intention of premium alcohol is explored. Data was collected using questionnaires, with 251 responses analysed using the PLS-SEM. The results show that attitude and subjective norms have a positive and significant impact on the purchase intention of premium alcohol, while perceived behavioural control does not. Brand consciousness and status consumption were found to have an impact on attitude and subjective norms respectively, with status consumption revealing the strongest relationship. This study offers insight to both researchers by understanding the impact of social influences and to premium alcohol brands that would be able to further enhance their marketing strategies and resonate with consumers in a highly competitive environment.

**Subjects:** Consumer Behaviour; Marketing Management; Retail Marketing

**Keywords:** Premium alcohol; social influences; purchase intention; status

## 1. Introduction

When making purchase decisions, consumers are influenced by various factors, commonly referred to as internal or external factors (Wright, 2006). Internal factors refer to aspects like motivations, attitudes, and personality—the factors consumers consider without approaching anyone else—whereas external factors relate to external influences like family, friends (i.e., social group), culture, and class. Depending on the motivation for consumption, some products are greatly influenced by social or group influences, such as the need to conform to or meet a social group's expectations (Fernandes & Panda, 2019; Peighambari et al., 2016). Therefore, consumers who use or consume amongst their social groups choose to purchase products they believe will offer social acceptance with one of the products where this is prevalent being premium alcohol (Calvo-Porral, 2019; Gaspar, 2018). This is because the consumption of alcohol generally occurs predominantly within social settings (Calvo-Porral et al., 2018; Ferreira-Borges et al., 2016; Helaniemi, 2016) and consumers consume premium alcohol in an effort to uphold their status within their social groups (Galati et al., 2017; Koch & Sauerbronn, 2019) and obtain social acceptance (Cui et al., 2015; Goldsmith et al., 2012). Li et al. (2022) added that the need to obtain social acceptance is driven by peer pressure and has the ability to alter consumers' attitudes and decisions towards certain products—particularly amongst products that convey a particular image.

Consuming premium alcohol brands offer consumers the opportunity to enhance their image as they are not simply purchasing a general alcohol brand (Calvo-Porral & Levy-Mangin, 2019). By paying a premium price for products like alcohol, enhanced levels of product quality are inferred (Calvo-Porral et al., 2018). That is, when consumers purchase premium alcohol, which is usually

more expensive, the associations linked to the premium alcohol brand are associated with the consumers (Galati et al., 2017). For example, the suggestion of exclusivity, success, and sophistication contribute to the preference of purchasing premium alcohol (BevAlc Insights Team, 2022; Plata et al., 2022). These associated traits have also explained that although the World Health Organization has reported that the number of drinkers in the world has decreased by almost 5% since 2000 (Llana & Traub, 2018), consumers are choosing to spend their money on premium alcohol brands that provide higher quality (Betancur et al., 2020; Calvo-Porrall et al., 2018) and an increased opportunity to meet their social groups' expectations (Calvo-Porrall, 2019).

Several studies mention the influence that social groups have on alcohol consumption (e.g., Betancur et al., 2020; Calvo-Porrall, 2019; Calvo-Porrall et al., 2018). However, these studies have not tested the impact of social influences like the need to save face and conform to a group's expectations, and their impact on the purchase intention towards premium alcohol. Instead, extant research has loosely touched on the impact of alcohol consumption, without measuring the impact. Although the assumption of consumers purchasing premium alcohol brands because of their social groups' expectations is suggested due to the nature of premium alcohol (i.e., more prestigious, better quality), it cannot be assumed. With more alcohol brands introducing premium alcohol product lines (MarketLine, 2018), consumers demanding more premium alcohol due to the quality (Calvo-Porrall et al., 2018), and consumers choosing premium alcohol brands over standard alcohol brands (Calvo-Porrall, 2019; Walls et al., 2020), research on the degree to which social groups influence the purchase intention of premium alcohol brands is needed. The need to save face refers to consumers' need to protect their reputation, whilst group conformity focuses on the need to conform to the behaviour expected by the social group. Both social group influences play a role within the purchase of premium products (e.g., Le & Quy, 2020; Le Monkhouse et al., 2012; Pusvikasari, 2021; Siu et al., 2016). Nevertheless, no studies have concentrated on the alcohol industry, instead they have focused on luxury fashion brands and apparel.

By understanding how social groups influence the intention to purchase premium alcohol, brands will be in a better position to craft marketing strategies that resonate with their target audience. More specifically, by focusing on the potential influence that social factors like face-saving and group conformity have on the intention to purchase premium alcohol, premium alcohol marketers will be able to develop their marketing strategies accordingly (i.e., promoting acceptance of the premium alcohol brand in a social group) and more insight will be provided into the actual influence that social factors may have on the purchase intention of premium alcohol, instead of inferring the assumption that social influences must apply when alcohol is consumed in a social setting. Consequently, this research will assist in understanding the intention to consume premium alcohol and consumers' behaviour, which will be helpful in developing strategies (Silva et al., 2017).

## 2. Literature review

Although there are social issues associated with increased alcohol consumption, consumers are reportedly consuming less alcohol overall and are investing in premium alcohol instead (Mordor Intelligence, 2019; Nielsen, 2018). Premium alcohol is available across all categories (e.g., beer, wine, and spirits), with an increased demand in spirits being observed (Bernheim et al., 2016). Olivier et al. (2016) asserted that consumers are increasingly consuming premium alcohol in social settings due to cultural and social pressures. In addition, by purchasing premium alcohol, consumers aim to obtain social acceptance within social settings (Nielsen, 2018), where social approval is imperative (Wang & He, 2014). Premium alcohol offers social approval owing to its superior quality and exclusivity to consumers through rarity, image, price, packaging, and perceived value (MarketLine, 2018). The growth of this industry is expected to be evident across the world as more brands invest in premium product lines as a result of the increased consumer demand for higher-quality products (KPMG, 2019). Cavale and Landini (2021) found that the COVID-19 pandemic further encouraged consumers to use premium alcohol during the lockdown

periods, a trend that is expected to continue as consumers return to bars and restaurants. This is because premium alcohol is considered an affordable luxury (IWSR, 2021).

Alcohol brands increasingly face competition (Shand, 2017) and as a consequence continuously offer new products to entice consumers to purchase their alcohol brands. The most successful way of doing this has been to introduce more premium alcohol brands into the product mix (Haddad et al., 2016; Kellershohn & Russell, 2017). Alcohol is regarded as premium when it appears more prestigious in terms of its packaging attributes, positive association with the product image, perceived enhanced quality, and higher price (Calvo-Porrá, 2019; Calvo-Porrá et al., 2018). More consumers are demanding premium alcohol and 22.1% of all drink sales can be attributed to premium alcohol brands (KPMG, 2019). Hopkins (2019) affirmed that premium alcohol is expected to increase global alcohol consumption.

In his seminal work, Belk (1974) outlined that consumers' intentions to purchase depend on the associations they have made (relating to the product characteristics) and how those characteristics might impact the consumption situation. In a premium alcohol setting, this relates to a consumer's intention to purchase premium alcohol because of its potential to provide a positive consumption situation among a social group, whereby the premium alcohol's image, high levels of quality, and exclusivity could be transferred to the consumer (McAndrew et al., 2019). Since alcohol consumption is a social activity motivated by social acceptance (Calvo-Porrá, 2019), it is necessary to understand the social influence from a collective perspective. The collective perspective relates to the influence that a social group may have on behaviour. McAndrew et al. (2019) recommended that studies focusing on alcohol consumption determine the influence that the social group (collective) has on the consumption process.

When measuring the influence a social group has on behaviour, the theory used should incorporate external influences. The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) was developed to understand human behaviour at social and psychological levels by examining causal relationships (Ajzen, 2016). More specifically, the TPB proposes the importance of external influences by including the "subjective norms" construct, thereby providing an understanding of how individuals' need to conform to their social groups' norms influence intention. Although the TPB includes external influences through the subjective norms construct, it has been criticised for its limited external-related constructs (Malhotra & McCort, 2001; Teah et al., 2015). To overcome this criticism, the TPB in this study has been modified to include face-saving and group conformity when attempting to understand the role that social groups play in the intention to engage in a certain behaviour (Son et al., 2013). Face-saving refers to the role that people's reputation and social worth play in their behaviour, while group conformity focuses on the role that group pressures have on behaviour (Jin & Kang, 2011; Son et al., 2013). Although research on the introduction of face-saving and group conformity has been applied within a cultural setting, alcohol consumption often takes place under the approval of cultural norms, suggesting it can be considered a collective behaviour (McAndrew et al., 2019). Therefore, including face-saving and group conformity as constructs would represent the role that social groups play in the intention to consume premium alcohol.

Further to the TPB's inclusion of an external variable (subjective norms) and its ability to include additional context-specific variables (Jain et al., 2017; Jin & Kang, 2011; Kaus, 2013), the TPB was regarded as a valid theory, which has proven its validity and predictability of behaviour (Luenendonk, 2017; Phau et al., 2015; Yazdanpanah & Forouzani, 2015). Cooke et al. (2016) stated that the TPB has proven successful in societal studies compared to other theoretical models, thus further motivating its use in this study. The TPB consists of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (PBC), which all have a direct relationship with intention (Rowe et al., 2016). Attitudes are regarded as a cornerstone to consumers' intentions to perform a specific behaviour. Understanding consumers' attitudes is typically the first step in understanding their behaviour, as consumers have been found to behave consistently depending on their attitudes (Ajzen, 2001; De Houwer et al., 2013). As mentioned, the subjective norms construct

represents the influence of external factors on the intention towards a specific behaviour. It relates to the specific pressures that consumers may experience or their motivation to comply with what their social groups deem the norm (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Due to the nature of alcohol consumption, additional external variables representing the external influences (i.e., face-saving and group conformity) were required in this study to fully represent the influence that social groups and their expectations have on consumers' behaviour. Lastly, the TPB includes the PBC construct, which represents the level of control that consumers have and how this control or the difficulties experienced influence their intentions (Armitage & Conner, 2001).

Although the TPB has been considered the most comprehensive model in predicting intention (Luenendonk, 2017; Yazdanpanah & Forouzani, 2015), researchers have been encouraged to include context-specific constructs to enhance the predictability of the model (Jin & Kang, 2011). Inconsequently, this study incorporated two additional constructs into the TPB. The first was brand consciousness as an antecedent to attitude. Brand consciousness is a context-specific construct due to its nature. If consumers display a high level of brand consciousness, they will purchase products and brands that emulate prestige and status (Kautish et al., 2021). The consumption of a particular brand of premium alcohol serves as consumers' need to express their social status or sophistication (Spence-Minott, 2020). Consequently, the level of brand consciousness is expected to influence the attitude towards the premium alcohol. The second additional construct was status consumption as an antecedent to subjective norms. Status consumption relates to consumers' need to purchase certain products to enhance or maintain their status within their social groups (Chan et al., 2015). As this would impact consumers' need to confirm with their social groups' norms, status consumption is expected to impact the premium alcohol that consumers intend to purchase to maintain their social standing. The next section discusses the hypotheses developed for the study.

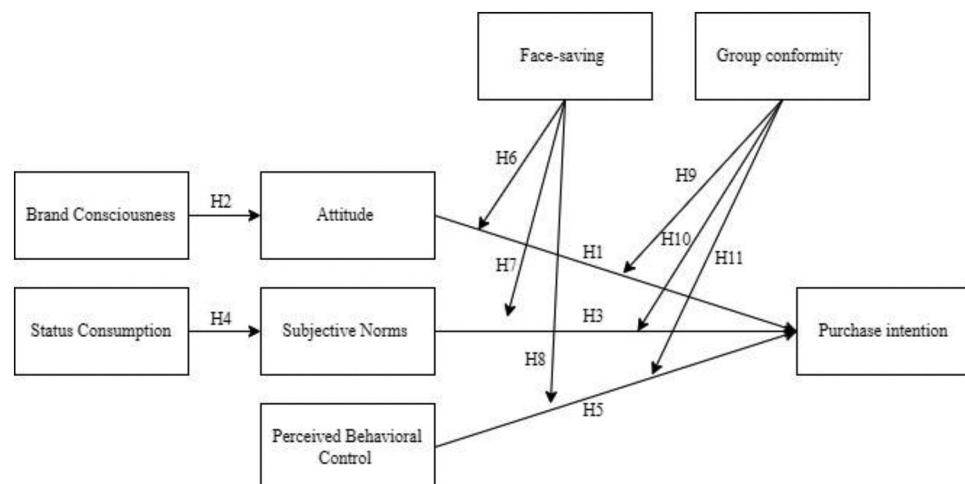
### 3. Hypotheses

Eleven hypotheses were designed to understand the role social factors play in the purchase intention towards premium alcohol. The conceptual model developed for the study is presented in Figure 1.

#### 3.1. Attitude and purchase intention

Consumers' attitudes towards a brand or product are positive or negative. The difference in attitude depends on the situational and environmental factors consumers face (DiBello et al., 2019). If consumers have a positive experience with a product or brand, they will likely form a positive attitude towards that product or brand, since attitude encapsulates emotion (Visser et al., 2016). As consumers behave fairly consistently based on their attitudes, understanding how

**Figure 1. Conceptual model.**



attitude influences purchase intention is important and can assist in predicting future behaviour (Ajzen, 2001). According to Zhang and Kim (2013), attitude is one of the strongest predictors of purchase intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H<sub>1</sub>*: Attitude has a significant and positive impact on the purchase intention of premium alcohol.

### **3.2. Brand consciousness and attitude**

Although the TPB is an accurate model for predicting behaviour, it is suggested that additional context-related constructs be added (Ajzen, 2002; Jin & Kang, 2011). Within the context of this study, brand consciousness has been identified as an antecedent to attitude, as the more mindful consumers are of their image, the more likely they are to purchase products that reflect that image (Nan & Heo, 2007). Yim et al. (2014) stated that consumers who are more brand-conscious have a more favourable attitude. This is especially important when purchasing expensive products, as consumers tend to buy these items to obtain social approval and will be more conscious of the brands they buy (Sharda & Bhat, 2018; Zhang & Kim, 2013). Consequently, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H<sub>2</sub>*: Brand consciousness has a significant and positive impact on the attitude towards premium alcohol

### **3.3. Subjective norms and purchase intention**

The subjective norms construct in the TPB is used to explain the impact that external influences have on consumers' purchase intentions (Kaushik et al., 2018). Generally, consumers are under pressure from their social groups to conform with expectations to obtain social acceptance (Ham et al., 2015). Hence, the greater the social pressure, the higher the chance subjective norms will influence their purchase intentions towards certain products (Phau et al., 2015). The social pressure is immense when buying premium alcohol, as consumers purchase the brand that will offer social acceptance (Kim & Jang, 2014). In addition, consumers trust their social groups' opinions and will purchase premium alcohol recommended by their groups (Shin & Hancer, 2016). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H<sub>3</sub>*: Subjective norms have a significant and positive impact on the purchase intention of premium alcohol.

### **3.4. Status consumption and subjective norms**

As with attitude, a context-specific antecedent to subjective norms was included in this study. Status consumption influences subjective norms, as it refers to the purchase of certain products to enhance status among consumers' social groups (Chan et al., 2015). Therefore, the more status-driven consumers are, the more likely they are to adhere to their social groups' expectations, which leads to social approval (Cronje et al., 2016). The same is applicable when purchasing premium alcohol, as consumers buy premium brands to enhance their status levels (Kim & Jang, 2014). Based on the aforementioned, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H<sub>4</sub>*: Status consumption has a significant and positive impact on the subjective norms towards premium alcohol

### **3.5. Perceived behavioural control and purchase intention**

The PBC construct measures the degree of difficulty a consumer faces when making purchase decisions (Armitage & Conner, 2001). The level of PBC makes consumers feel as though they are or are not in



control of the products they purchase (Quintal et al., 2015), which will influence their purchase intentions (Norman et al., 2018). When consumers intend to buy premium alcohol, they make a conscious decision and have significant control over their behaviour (Shin & Hancer, 2016). Bagheri (2014) reported that the greater the perceived control, the higher the purchase intention, making it an important construct to understand. Considering this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H<sub>5</sub>*: PBC has a significant and positive impact on the purchase intention of premium alcohol.

### **3.6. Face-saving and group conformity as moderators**

Although the subjective norms construct measures external influences, it does not measure their influence comprehensively (Lee, 1991). Therefore, to understand the influence of the need to meet the social group's expectations and norms, two additional constructs should be incorporated into the TPB: face-saving and group conformity. Face-saving refers to consumers' positions in their social groups based on their reputation and social worth (Jin & Kang, 2011), whereas group conformity refers to how consumers' actions differ depending on the group pressure felt (Son et al., 2013). Face-saving and group conformity were tested in a study by Lee (1991), where both constructs were included in the TPB to enhance the understanding of external influences on intentions. These constructs are important to measure as consumers regard the opinions of their social groups highly (Burger et al., 2015). Lee (1991) originally tested the constructs as antecedents to attitude and behavioural intention. However, more recent literature (i.e., Jones et al., 2010; Sabiote et al., 2012) suggests that variables like face-saving and group conformity should be used as moderators, as they depict how the constructs interact with relationships. Lee et al. (2006) added that by using the two variables as moderators, the predictability of the TPB model is enhanced.

The relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention relates to the social pressure and influence that individuals' social groups have towards making a purchase (Phau et al., 2015). As face-saving and group conformity relate to social aspects (e.g., the need to save face and conform), understanding the moderating effect will demonstrate the impact of the social pressure. The relationship between PBC and purchase intention relates to the impact that people's perceptions of control have on their intentions to make a purchase (Norman et al., 2018). According to Pantano (2021), the purchase of premium brands is driven by the need to convey a certain image amongst a consumer's social group. This suggests that although consumers may feel in control of their general purchases, when buying premium brands, they refer the control back to their social groups, who might be more conscious about the product (Dutta & Hwang, 2021). Lastly, the relationship between attitude and purchase intention relates to the influence of individuals' positive or negative attitude on their purchase intentions (DiBello et al., 2019). Face-saving and group conformity have the ability to further develop consumers' attitudes, which is usually influenced by their social groups' attitudes towards the product (Ruan et al., 2022; Sardana et al., 2021).

With previous research (e.g., Long & Aziz, 2022) emphasising the influence that these social influences have on the key TPB constructs (e.g., attitude, subjective norms, and PBC), this study aims to measure face-saving and group conformity as moderators to the key relationships in the TPB: attitude, subjective norms, PBC, and purchase intention. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H<sub>6</sub>*: Face-saving moderates the relationship between attitude and the purchase intention of premium alcohol.

*H<sub>7</sub>*: Face-saving moderates the relationship between subjective norms and the purchase intention of premium alcohol.



$H_8$ : Face-saving moderates the relationship between PBC and the purchase intention of premium alcohol.

$H_9$ : Group conformity moderates the relationship between attitude and the purchase intention of premium alcohol.

$H_{10}$ : Group conformity moderates the relationship between subjective norms and the purchase intention of premium alcohol.

$H_{11}$ : Group conformity moderates the relationship between PBC and the purchase intention of premium alcohol.

#### 4. Methodology

The study adopted a positivistic paradigm as hypotheses (based on theory) were presented, thus indicating that the study was measurable and quantifiable. In addition, the study aimed to test a conceptual model and confirm theory that motivates the deductive approach (Saunders et al., 2016). The study was descriptive, as it allowed customers' behaviour to be described (Burns & Bush, 2010). A quantitative research approach was deemed the most applicable, as a theoretical model and hypotheses were being examined (Zikmund & Babin, 2013). Data was collected online (via Google Forms) using a questionnaire that was developed based on previous scales (i.e., Ajzen, 1991; Hagger et al., 2001; Jain & Khan, 2017; Soh et al., 2017).

The target population used for this study included consumers residing in South Africa who were 18 years and older (i.e., South Africa's legal drinking age) and had purchased premium alcohol in a social setting in the past six months. As no sampling frame was available, non-probability, purposive, convenience sampling was used. Purposive sampling was used to ensure the respondents met the target population parameters. Regarding convenience sampling, the online questionnaire link was shared via various social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp). The questionnaire consisted of four sections. In the first section, the preamble, the respondents were informed of the study's purpose and that their responses would remain anonymous. Respondents were also notified that they could stop their involvement at any time. Two screening questions were included, ensuring that respondents conformed with the target population criteria. The second section obtained the respondents' demographic information (gender, education, employment status, age, and disposable income levels) using close-ended, nominal scales. The third section obtained the respondents' patronage habits of premium alcohol (type of premium spirit and average spend) using nominal and ordinal scales. The last section assessed the respondents' level of agreement with the constructs and their corresponding items: attitude (five items), brand consciousness (six items), subjective norms (four items), status consumption (four items), PBC (10 items), purchase intention (three items), face-saving (three items), and group conformity (three items). These constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 5 indicated "strongly agree".

#### 5. Analysis and findings

A total of 251 completed questionnaires were analysed using partial least square structural equation modelling via SmartPLS, version 3.11. A significance level of 0.05 was used to assess the hypotheses ( $H_1$ – $H_{11}$ ). The subsections that follow explain how the measurement and structural model assessment were conducted.

##### 5.1. Measurement model assessment

The measurement model assessed the model's reliability and validity. To assess the reliability, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) were used. Although the Cronbach's alpha values are regarded as a sufficient indication of reliability, they assume that all items used to measure a particular construct are equal in their reliability. Therefore, the CR values should be used, as they are not limited to the assumption of equal indicator loadings (Hair et al., 2017; Peterson & Kim,

2013). The Cronbach's alpha values are deemed reliable if they meet the 0.7 threshold, as proposed by Hair et al. (2013); while the CR values should range between 0 and 1, whereby the higher the value, the greater the reliability (Hair et al., 2017). However, Hair et al. (2010) suggested that the values should be 0.7 or higher.

To assess the validity, the convergent and discriminant validity values were assessed. When assessing the convergent validity, the factor loadings, the average variance extracted (AVE) values, and the CR values are used. The AVE values indicate the overall amount of variance of a particular construct. The recommended threshold is 0.65 for the factor loadings and 0.5 for the AVE values (Hair et al., 2014). When determining discriminant validity, the Fornell and Larcker method is commonly used (Farrell, 2010). Through this method, the square root of the AVE is compared to the AVE values if the square root of the AVE is higher than the AVE values (Hair et al., 2017, 2014), as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Based on the assessment of reliability and validity, shown in Tables 1 and 2, the data was deemed reliable and valid. Subsequently, the structural model was assessed.

### 5.2. Structural model assessment

Using the SmartPLS 3.11 bootstrapping output, the relationships between the proposed constructs were examined and the hypotheses were tested. To assess the hypotheses, the regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ) was used to determine the strength of the relationship, and the  $p$ -value was used to determine the significance of the relationships. Table 3 reveals the path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) and significance levels for all hypothesised relationships.

The results in Table 3 reveal that attitude has a positive and significant impact on the purchase intention of premium alcohol ( $H_1$ ) ( $\beta = 0.483$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). As the antecedent to attitude, brand consciousness was found to have a positive and significant impact on the purchase intention of premium alcohol ( $H_2$ ) ( $\beta = 0.562$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Concerning  $H_3$ , the impact of subjective norms on the purchase intention of premium alcohol was also found to be positive and significant ( $\beta = 0.268$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), and the antecedent (status consumption) to subjective norms revealed a positive and significant impact on the purchase intention of premium alcohol ( $H_4$ ) ( $\beta = 0.677$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Moreover, the relationship between PBC and the purchase intention of premium alcohol was found to be positive yet insignificant ( $H_5$ ) ( $\beta = 0.141$ ;  $p = 0.068$ ). Based on these results,  $H_1$ – $H_4$  were accepted and  $H_5$  was rejected. Regarding the moderation of face-saving and group conformity on the key relationships within the model (i.e., attitude, subjective norms, and PBC towards purchase intention), all relationships were found to be insignificant, resulting in  $H_6$ – $H_{11}$  being rejected.

When evaluating the constructs' coefficient of determination, the results showed that attitude explained 55.6% ( $R^2 = 0.556$ ) of the variance in the purchase intention construct, while the brand consciousness antecedent explained 33.3% ( $R^2 = 0.333$ ) of the variance in the attitude towards premium alcohol. The status consumption antecedent represented 45.6% ( $R^2 = 0.456$ ) of the variance in the subjective norms construct. Concerning the  $Q^2$  values, the study reported a value of 0.451 for purchase intention, 0.304 for attitude, and 0.411 for subjective norms.

## 6. Discussion

The positive and significant relationship between attitude and purchase intention within an alcohol context was confirmed in a study by Rivaroli et al. (2019), who found that attitude positively and significantly impacted consumers purchasing craft beer. The same scholars found that their hypotheses were partially supported for the relationships subjective norms and PBC had with purchase intention. As the study examined both the German and Italian markets, the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention in Germany was supported, but not in Italy, and vice versa with the relationship between PBC and the purchase intention of craft beer. Within an emerging market, the current study demonstrates that the

**Table 1. Results of measurement model**

Constructs	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
<b>Attitude</b>		0.912	0.935	0.743
Purchasing premium alcohol is very desirable.	0.826			
I feel good about purchasing premium alcohol.	0.915			
I feel positive about purchasing premium alcohol.	0.917			
I feel that it is worthwhile purchasing premium alcohol.	0.821			
I feel that it is beneficial to purchase premium alcohol.	0.826			
<b>Subjective norms</b>		0.776	0.875	0.700
Most people who are important to me think that I should purchase premium alcohol.	0.786			
Many people around me purchase premium alcohol.	0.871			
I feel social pressure to purchase premium alcohol.	0.851			
The people who I listen to could influence me to purchase premium alcohol.	0.912			
<b>PBC</b>		0.913	0.915	0.683
I am confident that I could purchase the correct brand of premium alcohol.	0.839			
Purchasing premium alcohol is easy.	0.819			
If I wanted to, I could easily purchase premium alcohol.	0.848			
I am certain that I can purchase premium alcohol.	0.861			
I have the ability to purchase premium alcohol	0.763			

(Continued)

**Table 1. (Continued)**

Constructs	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
<b>Purchase intention</b>		0.831	0.901	0.752
I intend to buy premium alcohol regularly.	0.824			
I will buy premium alcohol in the near future.	0.903			
Whenever I buy alcohol, it is very likely that I will purchase premium alcohol.	0.872			
<b>Brand consciousness</b>		0.897	0.908	0.664
I pay attention to the brand names of the premium alcohol brands I buy.	0.854			
Brand names tell me something about the quality of the alcohol brands.	0.828			
Brand names tell me something about how "cool" an alcohol brand is.	0.758			
Sometimes I am willing to pay more money for an alcohol brand because of its brand name.	0.856			
Brand-named alcohol that costs a lot of money is good quality.	0.780			
I pay attention to the brand names of most of the products I buy.	0.849			
<b>Status consumption</b>		0.973	0.965	0.932
I would buy premium alcohol because it shows status.	0.966			
I use premium alcohol to improve my status among my social group.	0.964			
I would pay more for premium alcohol if it indicates status.	0.817			
Premium alcohol is more valuable to me if it has some snob appeal.	0.768			

(Continued)

Constructs	Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	CR	AVE
<b>Face-saving</b>		0.929	0.956	0.915
My decision to buy premium alcohol would be influenced by whether drinking it would enhance my reputation with people who are important to me.	0.961			
My decision to buy premium alcohol would be influenced by whether I feel ashamed when people who are important to me see me drinking premium alcohol.	0.952			
<b>Group conformity</b>		0.944	0.964	0.899
I feel that most people around me expect me to comply with their decision to buy premium alcohol.	0.940			
My decision to buy premium alcohol would be influenced by knowing that many other people would also buy premium alcohol.	0.955			
My decision to buy premium alcohol would be influenced by whether drinking the premium alcohol would help me fit in.	0.950			

need to comply with a social group's expectations and attitudes towards premium alcohol influences the purchase intention. This notion is confirmed by McAndrew et al. (2019), who stated that social groups' expectations not only motivate behaviour, but may also influence attitudes in a positive or negative manner. This demonstrates the importance of the social group's influence on the intention to purchase premium alcohol. While the results show the relationship between PBC and purchase intention is insignificant, this could be explained by the fact that consumers disregard their ability to purchase (i.e., choice of correct premium alcohol brand, amount to spend) and their intention to purchase premium alcohol, as they are motivated by their social groups' expectations and rely on these to drive their purchase choices. Thus, the decision may be considered to be outside of consumers' control.

Table 2. Discriminant validity of measurement model									
Constructs	ATT	BC	FS	GC	PBC	PI	SC	SN	
Attitude (ATT)	0.862								
Brand consciousness (BC)	0.562	0.815							
Face-saving (FS)	0.302	0.409	0.956						
Group conformity (GC)	0.258	0.395	0.850	0.948					
PBC	0.443	0.358	0.033	0.081	0.827				
Purchase intention (PI)	0.697	0.613	0.271	0.227	0.508	0.867			
Status consumption (SC)	0.219	0.383	0.813	0.859	0.135	0.206	0.965		
Subjective norms (SN)	0.423	0.470	0.688	0.711	0.050	0.391	0.677	0.836	

**Table 3. Path coefficients, t-statistics, and significance levels**

Path analysis	$\theta$	t-statistic	p-value	Outcome	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
Attitude—purchase intention	0.483	7.290	0.000	Accept	55.6%	0.451
Brand consciousness—attitude	0.562	10.340	0.000	Accept	33.3%	0.304
Status consumption—subjective norms	0.677	16.655	0.000	Accept	45.6%	0.411
Subjective norms—purchase intention	0.268	5.124	0.000	Accept		
PBC—purchase intention	0.141	1.829	0.068	Reject		
Face-saving moderating attitude—purchase intention	−0.028	0.293	0.770	Reject		
Face-saving moderating subjective norms—purchase intention	0.151	1.454	0.146	Reject		
Face-saving moderating PBC—purchase intention	−0.009	0.106	0.915	Reject		
Group conformity moderating attitude—purchase intention	−0.108	0.950	0.342	Reject		
Group conformity moderating subjective norms—purchase intention	−0.095	0.786	0.432	Reject		
Group conformity moderating PBC—purchase intention	0.111	1.065	0.287	Reject		



Brand consciousness was introduced as an antecedent to the attitude towards premium alcohol due to the social aspect of this study. As premium brands are used to indicate prestige (Kautish et al., 2021), the level of brand consciousness was expected to impact the attitude formulated towards attitudes formed on premium alcohol. More brand-conscious consumers are likelier to have a positive attitude towards premium alcohol. This finding demonstrates that consumers are familiar with the types of premium alcohol brands, as the more aware they are, the more likely they are to be conscious (Ye et al., 2012). As per the study's results, the status consumption antecedent to subjective norms has the strongest relationship with purchase intention of premium alcohol ( $\beta = 0.677$ ), revealing that the need to use premium alcohol to provide or enhance status is very important to meeting the social groups' expectations. Status-driven consumers are more likely to have the necessity to meet their social groups' expectations, because status is a signal of wealth and enhances the possibility of social acceptance (Truong, 2008).

The moderation of face-saving and group conformity on the key relationships in the model reveal that the need to uphold reputation and conform to groups do not have a significant effect on consumers' attitudes, subjective norms, or PBC towards the intention to purchase premium alcohol. The results concerning attitude and subjective norms and their relationships with purchase intention could be explained by the fact that consumers may already consider their reputation and the need to conform with their groups when formulating their attitudes and social groups' expectations. This indicates that the social influence has already been considered. This is supported by Calvo-Porrà and Levy-Mangin (2019) and McAndrew et al. (2019), who confirmed that the social element leads to the adoption of a positive or negative attitude and that alcoholic beverage consumption is influenced by their need for social acceptance.

## 7. Managerial and practical implications

The study's results provide a unique perspective to the understanding that social influences have on consumers' intentions to purchase premium alcohol. Previous studies have not focused on the social influence specifically and asserted the assumption that social influences played a role; this study confirms the role. Further to the research focus, this study also confirms the importance of brand consciousness towards attitude, status consumption towards subjective norms, and attitude and subjective norms towards the purchase intention of premium alcohol, as well as provides insight into the limited influence that PBC has on purchase intention towards a product where social groups play a significant role. This demonstrates that premium alcohol brand managers need to formulate marketing strategies and communication that allows consumers to formulate positive attitudes towards the premium alcohol brand and ensure that consumers are conscious of the brand. This is due to the fact that in order for consumers to have a preference of a particular brand, they need to be conscious of it (Sharda & Bhat, 2018). As status consumption-purchase intention of premium alcohol is the strongest relationship in this study, premium alcohol brand marketers need to ensure that consumers are not only conscious of the premium alcohol brand, but that the brand is synonymous with status. This is particularly important for categories that are status-driven (e.g., premium alcohol), where consumers purchase particular brands to attain status amongst their social groups (Chan et al., 2015). As status is a key element in the study, marketers of premium alcohol brands may focus on this element by ensuring that the premium alcohol packaging communicates status (i.e., glass bottle, exclusive packaging), since Calvo-Porrà et al. (2018) reported that the packaging of alcohol is more important than the taste. As competition among premium alcohol brands intensifies (KPMG, 2019), premium alcohol brands should concentrate on ensuring that their brand is the premium alcohol brand of choice and one that may be linked to social acceptance—given its importance when consuming alcohol.

## 8. Limitations and future research

The limitations to the study include the context of the study—premium alcohol and the perceptions thereof. This topic made it difficult to identify respondents, as many individuals did not want to participate in a study that focused on their alcohol consumption. Another limitation of the study is that the study Centred on one country (South Africa). It would be worthwhile conducting future

research focusing on other countries as well as a comparative study to determine whether the role of social influences is apparent in emerging markets specifically, where social acceptance drives consumer behaviour or whether the product category (i.e., premium) drives the need for social approval given the positive outcomes that the category provides consumers in their social environments.

## 9. Conclusion

With consumers being concerned with purchasing less, but more expensive alcohol brands (Mordor Intelligence, 2019), the need to understand the drivers of purchase intention is apparent. Considering that consumers generally consume alcohol in a social setting (Calvo-Porrall et al., 2018; Ferreira-Borges et al., 2016), understanding the role that social influences play is also necessary, as consumers purchase products and services that their social groups deem acceptable (Helaniemi, 2016). The study found that consumers' attitudes and subjective norms influenced the intention to purchase premium alcohol, while the relationship between status consumption and purchase intention was the strongest relationship in the study. This provides insight into how consumers purchase premium alcohol and demonstrates the importance of the need to secure status amongst consumers' social groups when purchasing premium products.

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