

Hedonism, the middle class, and the experience economy. What an interesting combination!

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Keywords

Hedonism

Wellness

Middle income

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Abstract

This research explored the behaviours of consumers of a hedonistic lifestyle as well as businesses that are part of the experience economy to understand how to influence other middle-of-the-pyramid consumers into a hedonistic lifestyle. A qualitative exploratory method was used as it aimed to develop the theory that already exists in this marketing field. The literature was systematically reviewed with the addition of in-depth individual interviews of two homogenous groups which were service providers and consumers, to understand the research question.

It was concluded from the study that consumers within the middle-income bracket in South Africa do pursue a hedonistic lifestyle to increase their wellness. A framework was developed for suppliers of hedonistic experiences to follow on how to influence middle-income consumers in South Africa to pursue a hedonistic lifestyle to increase their wellness.

Introduction

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is an expression from Benjamin Franklin (1735) which links to the definition by Witmer (1996) who articulated wellness as a positive state of health. The World Health Organisation defines well-being as a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. The same organisation describe wellness as not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, but as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being (Chatterjee et al., 2022). The Global Wellness Institute

(<https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/what-is-wellness/>) more commonly describes wellness as “the active pursuit of activities, choices and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health”. Wellness models as described by the Global Wellness Institute constitutes a minimum of six different components, some of which can include spiritual, emotional, physical, mental, social, and environmental elements. The institute argues that wellness is a continuum which moves from illness to wellness, in which illness is treated reactively and wellness is a proactive approach to life.

Clement et al. (2006) have described hedonistic goods as experience goods whose quality is unknown before consumption. Hedonistic goods are often described as symbolic and are used to describe people’s personalities as in the example of music. It can be argued that a hedonistic lifestyle will lead to wellbeing (Ortner et al., 2018) and it is linked to what the individual desires (Andrić, 2019).

The study by Asano et.al. (2021) suggests that the HEMA scale can be used to measure well-being based on hedonistic consumption. The study reveals that hedonistic pleasure is associated with greater life satisfaction and therefore wellness. For hedonistic products, partitioned pricing is required, since consumers may feel guilty for their purchases of pleasure and desire (Choi et al, 2020). This contrasts with utilitarian consumers where combined pricing can be used. The partitioned pricing requires suppliers of hedonistic goods and experiences to split their charges between the cost and the surcharge to reduce the emotion of guilt that consumers may feel as they downplay the effect of the surcharge.

This research will explore the behaviours of consumers of a hedonistic lifestyle as well as businesses that are a part of the experience economy to understand how to influence middle-of-the-pyramid consumers into a hedonistic lifestyle.

Background

Hedonistic consumption, as described by Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), is the part of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product usage experience. Hedonistic and wellness experiences form part of the experience economy. Hirschman and Holbrook further explain that feelings or emotions play a large role in hedonistic consumption. They argue that the traditional view of consumption has been an economic one in which consumption is driven towards maximising the utility of a product or service and therefore the hedonistic needs of consumers have been neglected. While the traditional approach may suffice for tangible products, it cannot provide value to those service providers of pleasurable or hedonistic products. For this reason, service providers of hedonistic

and wellness products should understand how to specifically market their products and services.

Service providers of these experiences require specific ways in which to influence people within the middle-of-the-pyramid to adopt this lifestyle. Many factors influence the middle of the pyramid consumers of which Chikwe and Fletcher (2014) suggest that there are three that must be focussed on. These are branding, peer and social networks and aesthetics and product performance. The degree of wellness and hedonistic consumption is not known within the middle-class in South Africa hence the purpose of the research to better understand their hedonistic needs. According to Cunningham and Petzer, (2021) there is a lack of an updated comprehensive definition of the middle-class in South Africa, because it is difficult to define the South African middle-class since assets cannot be used due to income inequalities.

Dwyer et al. (2009) explain that wellness is becoming a fashionable tourist product because the working population from the middle and upper classes have an increased awareness of health prevention and are constantly forced to cope with stress at work. This explains why there is an increasing number of wellness destinations on the tourist market and those that belong to wider spa tourism offers have better chances to succeed.

Three sub-questions were created to further explore how suppliers of pleasurable experiences could influence middle-income consumers in South Africa into a hedonistic way of life to increase their wellness:

Sub-question one: What are the needs for a hedonistic and wellness lifestyle?

Sub-question two: What are the strategies that service providers of the experience economy should adopt to attract middle-of-the-pyramid consumers?

Sub-question three: What are the consequences of the strategies on the adoption of the wellness and hedonistic experience economy?

Literature review

Needs of the Experience Economy

Pine and Gilmore (1998) advise that there are four distinguishable economies in operation. These are goods, services, commodities, and experiences. The experience economy, according to them, has always been in existence however it has been grouped with the other three economies. Their research also suggests that consumers experience economic value in different stages from extracting commodities to staging experiences where staging experiences are not about entertaining customers but rather about engaging them.

The research of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), as well as Alba and Williams (2012), suggest that hedonistic consumption consists of behaviour that is multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of a person's experience. Further research will need to be conducted to understand the strategies that must be used to influence consumers into hedonistic behaviour to supplement the research conducted by An and Han (2020) into the perceived psychological benefits and intrinsic motivation of hedonistic consumption.

Experience and wellness economy in South Africa

Hedonism, which is the pursuit of pleasure and comfort has been directly linked to greater life satisfaction and wellness as described by Asano (2021) by using the HEMA scale. While wellness has been described in many ways in literature, two definitions can be mentioned namely, Ardell (1985) who described wellness as a state of physical, psychological and spiritual health that is created by a conscious and deliberate approach, and Corbin and Pangrazi (2001), who described wellness as a multidimensional state of being linked to positive health in an individual as exemplified by quality of life and a sense of well-being.

It can be argued that the experience and wellness economy in South Africa is focussing on the industries that produce tangible benefits for example healthy eating, weight loss and physical activity. While it can be noted that there is a smaller focus on the other industries. It is unclear whether these industries are not focussed upon due to the supply or the demand of the industry. There is also very little research to indicate which consumer base this economy can attract. The middle-of-the-pyramid consumers which is the middle-class is a growing group within South Africa as noted in the doubling of the middle-class from 1993 to 2012 (Daniels et al, 2012).

Rise of the Middle class in South Africa

Chikweche and Fletcher (2014) argue that the South African middle class, also known as middle-of-the-pyramid consumers, are different to the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa due to the advanced economy that exists in South Africa. Their research shows that middle-class consumers are defined by economic, infrastructure and social indicators. Economic indicators drive the need for ownership of assets namely houses and cars. Infrastructure like electricity for their houses is regarded as a basic need which is driven by the infrastructure indicators. The social indicators are listed as the access to tertiary education and health care. The middle-of-the pyramid in South Africa has been found to be growing. The middle class in other emerging countries, such as Brazil, Russia, Egypt, and India, account for 3%–8% of its population, while South Africa's middle class comprise 31% of the population (Cunningham and Petzer, 2021).

Consequently, retailers are becoming more cognisant of emerging markets like South Africa offering substantial expansion opportunities.

The middle class in South Africa according to Lappeman et al. (2019) has been split into two distinctive groups namely the emerging middle class (EMMC) and the established middle class (ESMC). Lappeman et al. (2019) further elaborate that not much research has been done to understand the consumer behaviour of the EMMC and the ESMC in South Africa. They go on to explain that the ESMC is regarded as the more established group within the middle class as they can maintain their socio-economic status and move towards affluence while the EMMC has emerged from poverty and struggled to maintain their status as a middle-class due to many factors. Cunningham and Petzer (2021) confirm this by adding that most research on the middle-class only focus on the black middle-class instead of the entire South African middle-class. This contributes to the difficulty in defining the middle-class in South Africa.

The African Development Bank has identified that the rise of the middle class in Africa as an important economic trend (Tschirley et al., 2015). The middle-class in South Africa can be found both within urban and rural areas. Lappeman et al. ((2019) further postulate that the middle class in South Africa, is defined as earning more than ZAR 250 thousand per capita per annum and less than ZAR 1.8 million per capita per annum. Their consumption provides a positive effect on the economy. Sheth (2011) argues that the middle-class requires a different approach to marketing, which includes market segmentation and differentiation.

Strategies to attract middle-of-the-pyramid consumers.

There are currently many strategies that exist to market products and services. The existence of strategies for the experience economy come a long way (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). In the past, it was part of other strategies, but recently it has become a strategic focus on its own. Vergamini et al (2019) stressed that an experience strategy has to take into consideration that the venues selected for the experiences, must be close to large urban areas.

Marketing of experiences should not include any religious connotations but should be linked to promoting health and well-being (Telej and Gamble, 2019). The experiences must also be linked to the picturesqueness of the place in which the experience occurs as well as the cuisine within that area. Telej and Gamble conclude that marketers would need to remain flexible in their marketing approaches to more accurately serve the market in which they operate.

Big data can also contribute to making companies more sustainable and should be used in marketing strategies (Gnizy, 2019). With the usage of modern data management systems, companies will be able to alter their marketing strategies to remain responsive and flexible in

their approach to their target markets. Viral marketing is another effective marketing strategy (Choshaly & Mirabolghasemi, 2022). Viral marketing can be found to be effective as users find reviewers to be credible. It needs to be used cautiously though as bad reviews are also noticed and responded to. Choshaly and Mirabolghasemi suggest that viral marketing should include three aspects namely entertainment, source credibility and informativeness.

It can also be argued that online purchases should be a focus area for marketing strategies. Hasan (2016) observed irritation among consumers when making online purchases when they abandon their carts and not completing a purchase. This irritation goes against a hedonistic experience which he has highlighted as critical for website creators to consider during the design phase of a website. He has found that retailers should be cautious when designing their websites regard to continuous animations and irrelevant and unnecessary information.

Many different methods are preferred by hedonistic consumers, of which one is word-of-mouth advertising (Avogo et al., 2022). They prefer word-of-mouth instead of only online advertising. Apart from word-of-mouth, Gilboa et al. (2019) recommend that smaller businesses should focus on relationship marketing as their niche, distinction and competitive advantage are nestled in human interaction. Communication, connected with personal care, increases trust; and the social and personal relationship, increases commitment. This is a key factor for suppliers in the wellness economy as many suppliers tend to be smaller companies due to the hedonistic nature of the products and services that they provide.

Segmentation is a critical factor when creating promotional strategies for hedonistic consumption (Payini et al., 2022). Identification of the various segments or subgroups will be crucial for marketing strategies for hedonistic experiences. The motives for the various segments should be identified and catered for by the hedonistic and wellness suppliers.

To discuss well-being, hedonistic and eudemonic dimensions must be considered (Andrade et al., 2022). The hedonistic domain focuses on the pursuit of pleasure instead of displeasure and this requires consumers to understand what products, services and experience brings them pleasure. To influence people to pursue hedonistic experiences, more emphasis should be placed on the individual instead of on the collective (Andradae et al., 2020). Anderson and Fowers (2020) however, have reasoned that social interaction is one of the most important lifestyle behaviours when promoting well-being.

Hedonistic lifestyle

Hedonistic pursuits are those that focus on pleasure and avoid pain. Eudaimonic pursuits however are those that lead to personal growth and self-mastery. It can be argued that the two concepts are related but have different effects on people.

Clement et al (2006) have described hedonistic goods as experience goods whose quality is unknown before consumption. Hedonistic goods are often described as symbolic and are used to describe people's personalities as in the example of music. Ortner et al. (2018) argue that a hedonistic lifestyle will lead to wellbeing.

The HEMA scale can be used to measure well-being based on hedonistic consumption. A HEMA scale study done by Asano et al. (2021) revealed that hedonistic pleasure can be associated with greater life satisfaction and therefore wellness. It is for this reason that the research aims to understand which strategy businesses must use to influence consumers from the middle of the pyramid to adopt a hedonistic lifestyle.

When it comes to pricing, Choi et al. (2020) suggest that partitioned pricing is required for hedonistic purchases since consumers may feel guilty about their purchases. This contrasts with utilitarian consumers since combined pricing can be used. The partitioned pricing requires suppliers of hedonistic goods and experiences to split their charges between the cost and the surcharge to reduce the emotion of guilt that consumers may feel as they downplay the effect of the surcharge.

Hedonistic wellness may not only be enjoyed individually but also as families. Families can increase their well-being by going on holiday together and participating in adventure activities (Lehto et al., 2009). Hedonistic well-being allows people to feel delighted and peaceful (Kumano, 2018), and good in the present moment such as when sharing family time or a good meal, and the bonus is if it can be in good surroundings. This remark is complimentary to the study by Vergamini et al. (2019) who noted that venues of hedonistic pursuits should be in locations that are close to the urban areas where the middle-class lives.

Methodology

This article, aimed at understanding the hedonistic and wellness needs of middle-income consumers in South Africa, was conducted by using a qualitative exploratory design. In-depth semi-structured individual interviews were done with two groups. Firstly, with the service providers and secondly, with the consumers, to find answers to the research questions.

The philosophy followed was that of interpretivism as it is best suited for understanding people and events in their natural environment (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). This study used an inductive approach within a phenomenological strategy. It was a cross-sectional study, due to time

constraints. The research was thus a snapshot of service providers and consumers that are part of the experience economy with a focus on hedonistic and wellness lifestyles.

Non-probability sampling was used, as the complete list of service providers and consumers of the experience economy within the South African region was not known at the time of the research being conducted. As this was a huge population, a small sample was selected to participate in the interviews to answer the research questions. The research was conducted using two homogenous groups of people and the researcher explored and identified people that fit into these groups using a set of characteristics per group. Five suppliers were identified using the set criteria to interview. They were interviewed separately. In the middle of the pyramid consumers that enjoy a hedonistic and wellness lifestyle's interviews followed a snowball sampling method.

The interviews were conducted until data saturation occurred. This occurred at interview four within the supplier group and interview four within the consumer group. Two more interviews were done in each group, to check, but no new information was presented.

Table 1 below sets out some criteria that were used for the sample population.

Table 1

Criteria for consumers	Criteria for service providers
1. Middle of the pyramid – emerging economy.	1. Considered to be a service provider of experiences.
2. Enjoys hedonistic/wellness experiences at least once a month.	2. Must be able to sell or create experiences and not only services or goods.
3. Feels happy when partaking in hedonistic/ wellness experiences.	3. Must be able to create memorable experiences that engage their clients.

Table 1: Sample criteria for sample groups

The analysis approach for phenomenological research was interpretive phenomenological analysis. Once the data was coded, it was then placed into categories and accordingly into themes. Data triangulation of the two sets of data ensured that the researcher had a comprehensive understanding of the data and was able to reach their objective related to the research questions. Data from the qualitative research conducted has been critically reviewed to ensure trustworthiness. The researcher ensured that the data was triangulated and peer-reviewed. An audit trail was created, and it was ensured that the recording and transcribing were done correctly.

Results/Findings

The consumers were asked about their various experiences as well as what motivated them to pursue this lifestyle as well as how these activities made them feel. The aim was to understand the emotions that were linked to the experiences to identify whether they were hedonistic in nature. They were also asked about the inhibitors to the hedonistic and wellness lifestyle. The consumers were further questioned about the frequency of their hedonistic pursuits as well as their preferences for finding information about the goods, services, and experiences. The marketing strategies that are used by their suppliers of experiences were also investigated as well as what attracted them to the hedonistic lifestyle. Further questions were asked about why they have pursued this way of life and how it links to their wellness.

The service providers, on the other hand, were asked about the various strategies that they use to influence people to adopt this lifestyle and how they maintain their current client base. They were also questioned on their strategies to maintain a competitive advantage within the experience economy. Several questions were asked about the location of their experiences as well as whether the experiences require a host or facilitator or whether their clients go alone. Further questions were asked about their marketing strategies as well as whether they aim to stimulate all five senses in the experience thereby making it a multi-sensory experience. Their marketing strategies were further interrogated to understand what approach is currently being followed including the effectiveness of their current strategy. The questions were concluded with an understanding of how more successful companies were marketing their hedonistic goods, services, and experiences.

The themes emerging from the interviews were consistent across the supplier and consumer groups interviewed.

Consumers

The consumers were all South African citizens. Four of the six were within the middle-income bracket while the other two were in a higher-income bracket.

Reward and exhilaration

The first question asked, was: What are the needs for a hedonistic and wellness lifestyle? The consumers would only consider their hedonistic pursuit during weekends or school holidays as they would consider it as a reward to themselves to be able to spend quality time with their families. Most of the consumers indicated that they take part in activities more than once a month whereas others indicated that it is only done quarterly. They consider the pleasurable

pursuit as a reward where they can disengage and recharge. It was noted that the activities brought a sense of balance to their professional work.

It was also noted that the consumers took part in activities that were exhilarating and created a dopamine rush thereby relaxing them. One participant stated: "I'll attempt things like climbing the Eiffel Tower or climbing the Statue of Liberty, or bungee jumping or skydiving. So, I'll go with my heart in my hands or my heart in my mouth but afterwards, the feeling is so exhilarating."

Most of the consumers took part in group activities that included either family or friends to maximise their time together and increase their wellness. Only one of the consumers would take part in individual activities. The reward that was experienced by the consumers was a reward of the actual activities completed as well as a reward for hard work being done on a professional level which resulted in the time away to reward themselves and recharge and refresh their minds, bodies, and spirits.

Another participant responded: "So firstly, I guess it's fun. It's spending time together. Most of the things I would do is not individualistic. I think to some extent a bit of a reward. I've worked hard, so now I can treat myself to whatever event or fun thing."

Word of mouth

The second question asked: What are the strategies that service providers of the experience economy should adopt to attract middle-of-the-pyramid consumers? All the consumers indicated that word of mouth was a large identifier of activities. After they heard about an experience, they seek online for more information, advice, and guidance regarding the activities. The activities that they engaged in were referred to them, in all instances, by friends or family members.

Digital Marketing

All the consumers noted that once they identified a service or experience that piqued their interest, they would turn to online sources to provide more information. The online sources would include websites, social media, electronic newsletters, or electronic mail groups to which they would belong. The consumers would use the suppliers' websites for information and thereafter subscribe to their social media channels and online newsletters to remain informed of the suppliers' activities and events. The consumers preferred choosing suppliers that provide all their information including dates, times, prices and a calendar of all activities.

One participant mentioned: “It’s nice to treat yourself with someone else taking care of stuff, say at the music festival. So, you do get this, they call it glamping. You pay someone that sets up the tent and bedding and get everything sorted for you. You take yourself to the rock festival and nothing else. That, to me, is what appeals to me because that’s what I would like. I would like to fully experience it, don’t have the hassle of anything else. So that sort of thing attracts me.”

All the consumers noted that they have to probe further into the supplier to find out what other experiences or services they provide. They also did not enjoy being marketed to and would prefer choosing their own without directly selling to them. It was noted that more personalised content should be considered per segment instead of broad high-level information that is currently on the suppliers’ websites.

Online Presence

It was noted that only a few of the suppliers who are niche players in the market have a strong online presence. Most of the suppliers that the consumers searched for would not have a website and would only focus on social media as a platform. Some suppliers would make use of other websites to market their services instead of creating their own which makes it more difficult for consumers to find them. One participant commented: “I guess it depends! They are niche players. Smaller companies don’t have a web presence. They don’t have big budgets, so they don’t have their websites. Or maybe it’s just because they are small and unique. Because not a lot of people do their adventures or activities, it’s not that common and when you Google it, you’re not going to hit it, so to speak. Where activities or venues are well-known, and if everyone goes there and does e.g., segway, you should find a lot of hits when you Google segway.”

Relaxation

The third question asked: What are the consequences of the strategies on adoption to the wellness and hedonistic experience economy? All the consumers interviewed revealed that their main reason for taking part in these activities is relaxation. Most of the consumers revealed that while the activities may be exhilarating and provide a sense of thrill and adventure, it does, however, provide a sense of relaxation too. It was also noted that the activities provide a sense of balance and bring perspective back into their lives during and after the experiences.

Contentment

The consumers noted many links to their wellness during and after the pursuit of their pleasurable experiences. They experience a sense of happiness, joy, fun, vitality, and achievement during and after the experiences. The experiences are also shared with their friends and family members which increases their sense of bonding. A sense of calm with an increase in dopamine was also noted by one of the consumers. Another one remarked: “Giving joy or it sparks joy”. A third participant stated: “I say to myself after everything is said and done, and I’ve met all my responsibilities, can I also just reward this body that is working so hard?”

Suppliers

Six suppliers of experience and services were interviewed. The suppliers confirmed that their target market was middle-income clients. Most of the suppliers interviewed would only create and host their own experiences whereas two would create and host their own as well as collaborate with other suppliers of experiences to provide a more holistic and memorable experience.

Multisensory

The first question asked to the suppliers was: What are the needs for a hedonistic and wellness lifestyle? All the suppliers confirmed that their experiences, whether created by themselves or provided by other suppliers, involve more than one sense. One participant stated: “Sometimes we’ll focus on a specific breath, taste. Then, of course, taking note of nature and the birds. Each time, it’s specific senses we’ll focus on.”

Individual focused

All the suppliers noted that they focus on their clients’ individual needs and ensure that they make it personal. About half of the suppliers mentioned that they would tailor-make an experience for a client based on a pre-consultation to discuss their needs. One supplier confirmed: “So as a small business, we try to be diverse. It’s not one size fits all. We cater for each client individually.”

Word of mouth

The next question asked: What are the strategies that service providers of the experience economy should adopt to attract middle-of-the-pyramid consumers? The general answer was

that word of mouth is the strongest tool that is used for marketing by suppliers to middle-income consumers. There is a strong reliance on and preference for word of mouth being successful. While ratings on social media and online are sometimes requested, most of the suppliers depend on good ratings and referrals from people that they know. As one participant commented: “I want to become a best kept secret. That it becomes the word of mouth and referrals sell me! No social media.”

Social media

Most marketing is done using social media on an as-and-when basis and a strong online presence is not always created due to budget constraints. This correlates with the feedback from the consumers that suppliers do not have a strong online presence.

Feedback

Feedback is always requested from their clients, and this is used to ensure that the objective of the experience was obtained and to create better experiences for future clients. The feedback is also used for research purposes and to create new experiences to obtain a competitive advantage. One participant stated: “We do some research into it and then we also try to incorporate the new changes into the business.”

Memorable

The next question was: What are the consequences of the strategies on adoption to the wellness and hedonistic experience economy? It was noted that all attempts are made to ensure that the experiences are memorable by either creating a safe space or interacting with their clients post the experience. The suppliers have all mentioned that they collect feedback at the end of every session in person as well as on social media which ensures that they created client-centred experiences. Clients are encouraged to share and participate in some way. A supplier commented: “People must be able to feel themselves. When they feel themselves, it opens them up to be active or participate more, somehow.”

Increased wellness

The suppliers noted that they aimed to increase their client’s wellness by providing a holistic approach to well-being which included self-care and collaborating with them to ensure that their needs are met. One participant stated: “To ensure that my clients get wellness, I take a very therapeutic approach and therapy is a session where the body, mind and energy are

touched, in any form, because I use different methods with colour and with sound therapy, with scent therapy, and then with physical touch, and also then with counselling; talking sessions are helping the person's mental perspective on how they can come to a resolution and most of the time after a session, a person would say: wow! It made them feel much lighter. It helps them to put things into perspective. So, from a wellness point, I look at it holistically and I always embrace that the body, mind, and spirit can never be treated separately. It must be treated in a very collaborative way."

Perceived marketing budget

It can also be noted that the more successful or bigger companies provide the same products to a corporate client base or a higher income market. This was the perceived reason for them being more successful and why they have a higher marketing budget. It was also mentioned that the aesthetic value within the more successful companies was higher charged, due to their high-income clients, higher budget, and increased prices. One supplier stated: "We charge more and are more professional. We focus on a different market."

Discussion

The objective of the article was to explore how suppliers of pleasurable experiences could influence middle-income consumers in South Africa into a hedonistic way of life to increase their wellness. Two homogenous groups were interviewed that consisted of suppliers of experiences, to understand their current marketing strategies, and consumers, to understand their needs for a hedonistic lifestyle, their marketing preferences, and the consequences of the chosen lifestyle. Figure 1 below depicts the findings per group which are aligned to the research questions of the article.

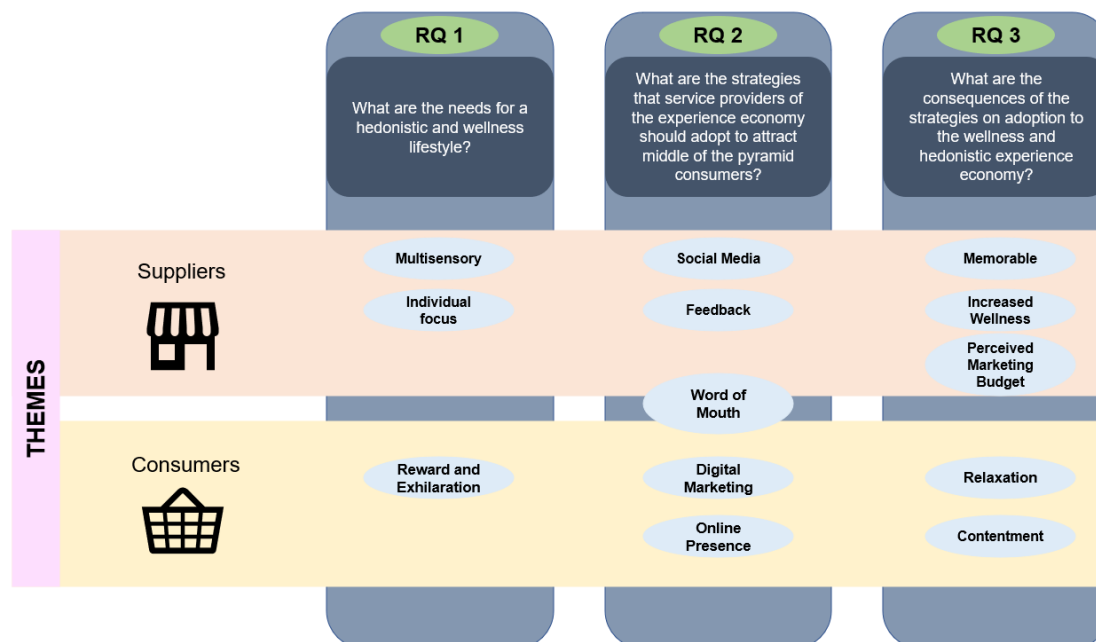


Figure 1: Research Findings

The study revealed that consumers prefer group activities to individual ones which are supported by Lehto et al. (2009) who mention that families can increase their well-being by taking part in adventure activities together. The suppliers interviewed, however, prefer to focus on individuals during an experience as opposed to groups because they can give more attention to an individual than to more than one person at the same time.

The suppliers focus on ensuring that their experiences are multisensory, which is aligned with the study by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982). This also links to the work by Pine and Gilmore (1998) who indicates that the fourth type of economy that exists is the experience economy which focuses on staging experiences. Consumers felt a sense of reward and exhilaration during and after their experiences which created a sense of wellness for them.

This article demonstrated that all the suppliers interviewed, obtained feedback from their clients to ensure that they met their objectives for the session as well as to create better experiences in the future. It was also noted that both the consumers and suppliers used word of mouth as a marketing tool which is congruent with the finding from Avogo et al. (2022). The study found that middle income consumers prefer personalised digital marketing content whereas suppliers rely on word-of-mouth referrals. Consumers noted that their preference is suppliers with a strong online presence in which suppliers provide comprehensive detail on all their experiences as well as an events calendar so that they could plan accordingly. This is in

direct contrast to the suppliers as they do not have a strong online presence and prefer social media only. While Avogo et al. (2022) posit that word of mouth is preferred to online advertising, this research noted that word of mouth is the first option which is then supplemented by online research to select an appropriate supplier. The suppliers admitted that they are updating social media sporadically and that they have a very low digital footprint. The results of this study concur with Chikwe and Fletcher (2014) who suggest that marketing to middle income consumers in South Africa should focus on branding, peer, and social networks, aesthetics, and product performance.

While it was noted that more marketing should be done to increase their client base, most of the suppliers felt that it was out of their comfort zone to do so.

The suppliers interviewed focus on making their experiences memorable to provide an increased sense of wellness to their clients. The consumers found a sense of contentment and relaxation during and after their experiences which is what the suppliers aimed to attain. This is aligned with the study of hedonistic wellness by Kumano (2018).

A framework for suppliers of pleasurable experiences to influence middle income consumers in South Africa into a hedonistic way of life to increase their wellness can be found in figure 2 below.

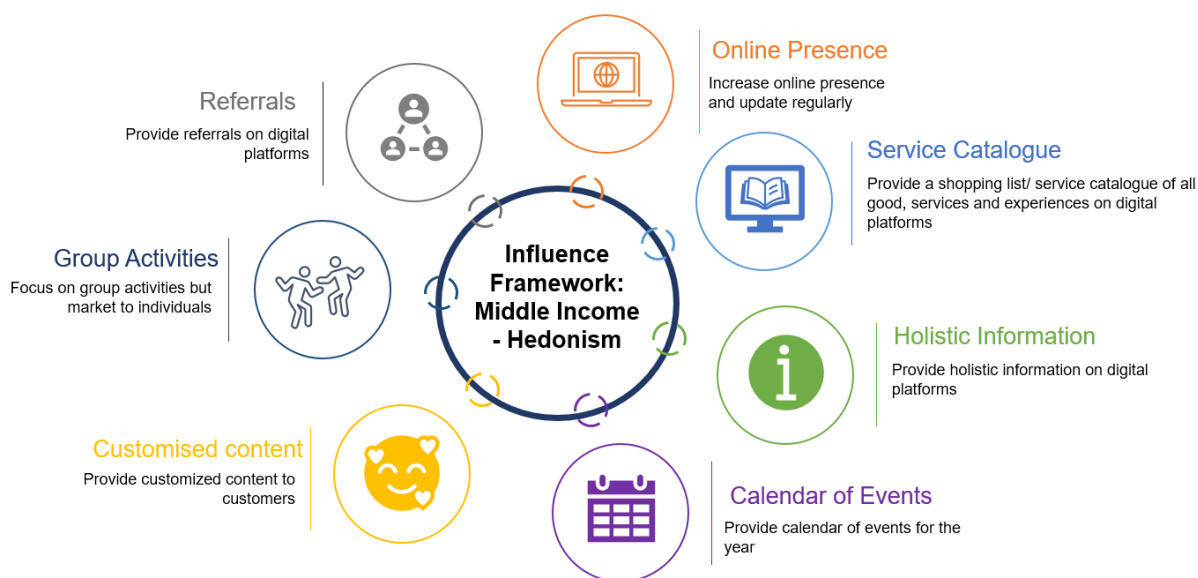


Figure 2: Influence framework

Conclusion

It can be concluded that consumers within the middle-income bracket in South Africa do pursue a hedonistic lifestyle to increase their wellness. Suppliers of these experiences will need to

align to the framework in Figure 2 above to influence more people from the middle-income bracket to pursue this lifestyle as it increases their wellness which will align with the Global Wellness Institute's wellness model.

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