

Exploring Apple's Marketing Strategies Through the Lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

A Qualitative Study on Apple's Marketing
Strategies and Consumer Needs

Shady Aghabi

Parinaz Nouri Qurjanaki

Supervisor: Besma Glaa

Acknowledgments

In writing our Bachelor's Thesis we have successfully achieved our goal of sampling data and developing content in a manner that aligns with the objectives of this study. We extend our deepest appreciation to our supervisor Besma Glaa, for her valuable guidance and persistent support throughout this course. Besma's expertise, advice and her consistent availability throughout the course has been highly important in shaping the structure and direction of our research. Her mentorship has been a source of encouragement and for that we are truly grateful for her dedication to our academic growth – *Thank you Besma!*

We would also like to extend our appreciation to the participants who generously contributed their time and insights into this study. Their willingness to share their experiences and perspectives has enriched our research extensively, we are thankful for their contributions – *Thank you LiU students!*

Additionally, we acknowledge the Linköping University community and want to say special thanks to the people working at Studenthuset for providing us with relevant literature for our research, particularly in the beginning of this course where we lacked access to the necessary academic material to begin our study. Their assistance has specifically facilitated the beginning stage of this journey – *Thank you to the LiU librarians!*

17 June, 2024

*Parinaz
Nouri*

Parinaz Nouri

Shady

Shady Aghabi

Abstract

This study aims to identify Apple's marketing strategies and their consumers' fundamental needs, as well as to explore the alignment between them. More specifically, it examines how Apple's marketing strategies target the needs as outlined by Maslow's Hierarchy. By shedding light on the effectiveness of these strategies in meeting consumer needs, the study intends to inform future marketing initiatives within the technology industry. By adopting an abductive qualitative research method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Apple users at Linköping University.

Findings indicate that Apple effectively meets consumers' self-actualization needs through its emphasis on innovation and lifestyle enhancements. Esteem needs are addressed through anticipation and differentiation, positioning Apple products as status symbols. The seamless integration of Apple's ecosystem strengthens a sense of belonging and loyalty among users. The study also reveals the significant impact of word of mouth marketing in shaping consumer perceptions and driving the adoption of Apple products. Furthermore, the endowment effect, where ownership of Apple products leads to higher valuation and satisfaction, plays a crucial role in enhancing user loyalty and emotional attachment. Additionally, Apple's focus on reliable software and high data security fulfills safety needs by ensuring trust and privacy.

A conceptual model developed from the study's findings is added to demonstrate the correlation between Apple's marketing strategies and the hierarchical needs of its consumers. This model highlights the strategic efforts Apple undertakes to elicit a wide range of emotions and fulfill diverse consumer needs. While limitations include a restricted sample size, future research could broaden the demographic scope and integrate quantitative methods to validate qualitative insights, considering factors such as age and socioeconomic background.

Keywords: *Marketing Strategies, Consumer Needs, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Innovation, Ecosystem, Social Status, Brand-Consumer Relationship, Word of Mouth, Data Security, Conceptual Model*

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	2
Table of Contents	3
1. Introduction	4
1.1 Background.....	4
1.2 Research Problem.....	5
1.3 Research Purpose and Questions.....	5
2. Theoretical Framework	7
2.1 Consumer Needs.....	7
2.2 Consumer Behavior.....	9
2.3 Apple’s Marketing Strategies.....	12
3. Methodology	17
3.1 Research Strategy and Design.....	17
3.2 Abductive Research Approach.....	18
3.3 Data Collection.....	19
3.4 Data Analysis	20
3.5 Limitations.....	21
3.6 Validity and Reliability.....	22
3.7 Ethical Considerations.....	24
3.8 Usage of AI.....	24
4. Analysis	25
4.1 Consumer Needs.....	25
4.1.1 <i>Self-Actualization Needs</i>	26
4.1.2 <i>Esteem Needs</i>	28
4.1.3 <i>Love and Belonging Needs</i>	28
4.1.4 <i>Safety Needs</i>	30
4.2 Apple’s Marketing Strategies.....	31
4.3 The Interconnection between Consumer Needs and Apple’s Marketing Strategies.....	33
5. Discussion	34
5.1 Safety Needs Interconnected with Ecosystem and Data Security.....	34
5.2 Love and Belonging Needs Interconnected with Word of Mouth, Ecosystem and Endowment Effect.....	35
5.3 Self-Actualization Needs Interconnected with Innovation and Lifestyle Marketing.....	37
5.4 Esteem Needs Interconnected with Differentiation and Anticipation.....	39
6. Conclusion	41
6.1 Future Research.....	42
References	43
Appendix	46
<i>Interview Guidelines</i>	47

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The understanding of consumer needs and desires has become increasingly complex in the age of technological advancement, urging businesses to adapt their marketing strategies accordingly (Rosário & Raimundo, 2021). This evolution is particularly evident in Apple's marketing approach, which emphasizes comprehending consumer behavior to address both fundamental and emerging needs (Isaacsson, 2011). According to the golden rule of marketing, products are not merely sold but rather serve as solutions to consumer needs, a principle underscored by Theodossiou and Kourti (2007). Given the dynamic nature of industries such as software development, including mobile app development, businesses must continually adjust their strategies to keep pace with rapid innovation and technological change (Smith et al., 1989; 1992). Apple's ecosystem, particularly the iOS platform, exemplifies this adaptability, illustrating the influence of hardware, operating systems, app stores and developer rules on innovation and interaction (Teece, 2018). Thus, aligning marketing strategies with evolving technological landscapes becomes crucial for effectively meeting consumer needs.

Understanding consumer buying behavior has fascinated researchers worldwide for decades, as it is crucial for the success of any business. By understanding consumer behavior, companies can better predict purchasing habits, thereby enhancing their marketing strategies and customer satisfaction (Mitchell, 2014). Consumer preferences are influenced by various factors, including economic conditions, personal preferences and cultural influences (Stávková et al., 2008). Customer satisfaction, as explained by Kotler & Keller (2016), relies on the congruence between product performance and expectations. However, concerns have emerged regarding marketing strategies that exploit consumer vulnerabilities, leveraging ego, vanity and desires for status (George & George, 2023). This raises ethical considerations for businesses, emphasizing the importance of responsible marketing practices, particularly when targeting vulnerable demographics (Raciti et al., 2022).

Consumer buying behavior, much like other aspects of human behavior, is influenced by a multitude of factors. Companies that prioritize their customers aim for long term satisfaction rather than immediate sales, focusing on providing high quality products, ensuring their own survival and the fulfillment of long term goals (Syamsul Bachri et al., 2023). Moreover, the relevance of identifying potential tactics used in promoting unsought products that do not fulfill a fundamental need, is aiding businesses in making a choice regarding ethical marketing and how they differentiate their product selection. With the increasing reliance on social media and the digital medium, consumer wants and needs are in a constant change. This raises the need for sustainable business and marketing strategies both on environmental and on ethical grounds to maintain customer loyalty (Zhang, 2023; Qian, 2024).

Consequently, as the market becomes more competitive and digital media is introduced, it is evident that Apple and other businesses must continually adjust their strategies (Laroche, 2010). Apple has a reputation for its brand loyalty among its customers (Apple, 2024). The company has maintained a retention rate of over 90% in recent years, a 74% loyalty in trade-ins and an 84% proclivity of iPhone users to purchase an iPhone on their next smartphone update (Yacoub M., 2023). Given its size, reputation and innovation, we deem Apple as an example worth examining. A study showed that Apple users experience their needs to be met to a larger extent than Samsung users, with Samsung having been the leading smartphone retailer in 2023 (Laricchia, 2024). Additional previous studies suggest that Apple has been perceived as providing high value and need satisfaction to their consumers (Wu & Vasques-Parraga, 2015).

However, it is essential to assess how consumers perceive Apple's marketing efforts; do they view them as addressing fundamental needs or merely promoting additional products? This perception significantly impacts consumer satisfaction, loyalty and overall brand perception. Understanding this perception is crucial for evaluating the alignment between Apple's marketing strategies and consumer expectations. If consumers feel that Apple's marketing balances meeting their fundamental needs with the promotion of additional products, it suggests a nuanced strategy that aligns with consumer expectations. Conversely, if consumers perceive an imbalance, with an emphasis on promoting inessential products over addressing fundamental needs, it could indicate a potential misalignment.

1.2 Research Problem

Examining the correlation between consumer needs, behavior and how Apple addresses them, as well as the factors contributing to its popularity, provides valuable insights for both existing and emerging technology companies. Understanding consumer perceptions of product value is crucial for companies to adjust their strategies and align them with evolving market needs (Wu & Vasques-Parraga, 2015). While existing literature offers insights into Apple's marketing strategies, it often overlooks the ethical implications of these strategies. This research aims to bridge this gap by exploring the specific perceptions and experiences of Apple consumers, particularly focusing on how ethical considerations in Apple's marketing impact consumer satisfaction and retention. By examining both the effectiveness and the ethical dimensions of Apple's marketing approach, this study enriches our understanding of consumer behavior and provides areas for improvement.

1.3 Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research is to identify Apple's marketing strategies and explore how they address consumer needs, with a focus on consumer perceptions and experiences. This study aims to provide insights that might help marketers and technology companies optimize their approaches to enhance brand-consumer relationships. When examining Apple's marketing strategies and their resonance with consumers, the research seeks to generate knowledge that can improve consumer-centric marketing campaigns, guide product development and highlight the ethical implications of marketing

practices. Ultimately, the goal is to increase the understanding of effective strategies in the field of technology as well as pave the way for similar more in-depth future studies. Therefore, our research questions will be;

1. *What consumer needs do Apple products fulfill?*
2. *What are Apple's marketing strategies and how do they align with the needs of its consumers?*

2. Theoretical Framework

In this segment, we establish the theoretical framework for analyzing Apple's marketing strategies and their alignment with consumer needs. We begin by presenting three theoretical models that will guide the formulation of interview questions and the interpretation of participant responses. To lay the groundwork for our analysis, we integrate insights from previous research with these theoretical models. Moreover, the literature review extends beyond Apple's internal philosophy to encompass external studies conducted on the company. To illustrate how the framework serves to answer our research questions, a conceptual model will be integrated at the end of this segment.

2.1 Consumer Needs

"Customer needs can be assessed by analyzing the factors such as who they are, what they buy, and why they buy it" (Rahman and Safeena, 2016, p. 259).

There are multiple models and theories regarding needs that are universal to all people, but one classical model which has maintained its relevance since 1943 is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. As described in the name, it is a set of human motivation that is derived by different needs which are arranged on different levels in a hierarchical manner. The model consists of a list of needs arranged in a hierarchical pyramid, with basic biological and physiological needs at the bottom, progressing to more sophisticated needs higher up. At the bottom of the pyramid lie our biological and physiological needs, which are needs humans share with all other beings, such as food, reproduction and basic survival needs. The next level comprises safety needs, initially prevalent in childhood but reappearing in adulthood as the need for psychological and physical security, as evidenced by fear of the unknown (Maslow, 1943).

The next level of the pyramid consists of the need for belonging to family and friends, social relationships, as well as the need for love in intimate relationships. After acquiring these needs, Maslow suggests that a person would look for ways to fulfill their needs for achievement, social recognition and reputation. On a higher level is the need for knowledge, self-awareness and the desire for learning. At the next stage of the pyramid are esteem needs, which can include aesthetic interests and the pursuit of beauty. Lastly, self-actualization, situated at the pinnacle of the pyramid, is achieved through high levels of problem-solving, creativity and skill mastery.

Simply put, it is the need for pursuing all that a person is capable of becoming, which can take form in diverse ways depending on the uniqueness of individuals. For some, it might mean becoming the best musician or artist they can be, while for others it may be the desire to become the best parent ever. What they all have in common is that they resemble a pursuit of what a person perceives to be their highest potential after having met all or most of the previous physiological and psychological needs (see Fig. 1).

Hence, Maslow's model of needs is described as a hierarchy where certain needs are more vital than others. For example, a person who is hungry would not worry about cognitive or social needs until their basic survival needs are met (Maslow, 1943). In other words, the parts of the hierarchy taken into account in our study are the needs concerning productivity, the social aspect, cognitive and creative needs, as well as self-actualization. Due to differences in buying power, it is worth mentioning that what could be considered a "luxury item" that falls under the higher needs of Maslow's pyramid in developing countries can be considered a necessity in developed countries. This implies that an Apple product may be considered an item that fulfills basic needs, such as safety and connectivity in a rich country, as explained by Maslow (1943). On the other hand, it might be considered a means of meeting higher fulfillment needs in a poor country.

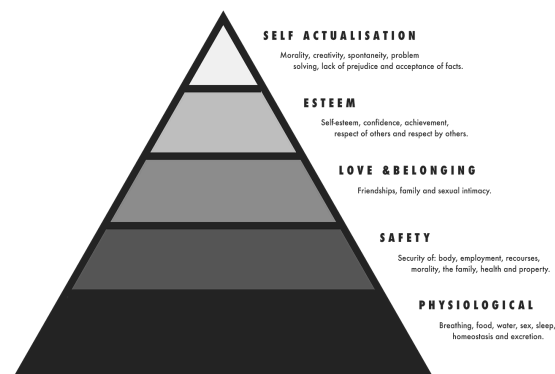


Fig. 1 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Adapted) – Source; *Maslow, A.H. (1943).*

"A Theory of Human Motivation" illustrated by (Kenney, E., 2018) and adapted by the authors.

Wu and Vasques-Parraga (2015) delved into Apple, Samsung and their consumers in an attempt to find potential links between consumer needs, the perceived value of products and how these factors relate to consumer behavior. The study utilized multiple regression models to analyze a number of surveys in light of key dimensions such as information commerce, entertainment, communication and connectivity. These dimensions represent primary consumer needs in the realm of electronic devices. The results provided insights into how these needs are addressed by Apple and Samsung.

The authors specifically outlined the emotional attachment that consumers have towards their brands, particularly highlighting the dimensions of communication and entertainment. The attachment was pronounced among Apple users, in particular when it came to the needs for communication and entertainment. This was partially explained by the fact that perceived product values among Apple users were higher than in Samsung users. Moreover, the study underlines that since basic human needs are the same regardless of the context, consumer needs are fulfilled through the value a customer perceives when attaining the product (Wu & Vasques-Parraga, 2015).

The study by Bartosik-Purgat (2008) on *"Consumer Needs - The Base of Attitudes for Purchasing Foreign Products and Brand Products"* provides additional context by exploring how consumer needs

influence attitudes towards purchasing decisions. The study found that consumer needs are consistent across contexts and that products like those offered by Apple meet these needs through their perceived value (Bartosik-Purgat, 2008). This reinforces the idea that once basic needs are satisfied, higher-level needs become more significant. Understanding how Apple products fulfill these various levels of needs and how they align with consumer perceptions will be critical for analyzing consumer behavior in this study.

2.2 Consumer Behavior

Consumer behavior is an internationally recognized term within the marketing field, which encompasses more than purchasing actions. Contrary to its implied focus solely on behavior, it extends to encompass activities occurring before and after a purchase, such as attitudes and values. The term, as outlined in the American Marketing Association Dictionary, characterizes consumer behavior as; "*The dynamic interaction of affect and cognition, behavior and the environment by which human beings conduct the exchange aspect of their lives*" (Ekström, et al., 2017, p. 11). This definition emphasizes the interplay between psychological factors, individual actions and external influences in shaping consumer decisions and exchanges. The Theory of Planned Behavior, developed by Icek Ajzen, delves into factors influencing individual behavior, particularly consumer behavior. This theory suggests that behaviors stem from intentions, which are influenced by *attitudes*, *subjective norms* and *perceived behavioral control*. These factors influence an individual's intentions, which in turn determine behaviors (Ajzen, 2020).

Attitudes regard people's assessment of specific behavior, in other words whether they favor a behavior or not. It entails an evaluation of a certain behavior and its potential outcomes with regards to the beliefs the individual holds about the behavior. *Subjective norm* points out the effect of special pressure on the decision making process when it comes to behaving in a certain manner. This involves the individual's beliefs about how its social circle thinks and judges the behavior as well as how important it is to comply with the peer pressure. The *perceived behavioral control* refers to how easy or difficult it is for the individual to carry out a behavior, based on past experiences. This depends on the resources that are available to the person when deciding to do a certain behavior (Ajzen, 2020).

Those factors that influence intentions are in turn connected to behavioral, normative and control beliefs about the behavior (see Fig. 2). Behavioral beliefs are what shapes the attitude toward the behavior and constitute beliefs about possible outcomes of a behavior as well as personal judgements about them. Normative beliefs are what underlie the subjective norms and cover the motivations to behave in accordance with what important others approve of. Control beliefs govern the perception of facilitating or hindering factors to a specific behavior, meaning the perceived ease or difficulty to pursue a behavior. This in turn either strengthens or weakens the perceived behavioral control. When determining the likelihood of a behavior, the more favorable the attitude and the subjective norm and the more an individual's perceived control of that behavior, the more probable it is that the individual intends on doing that behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

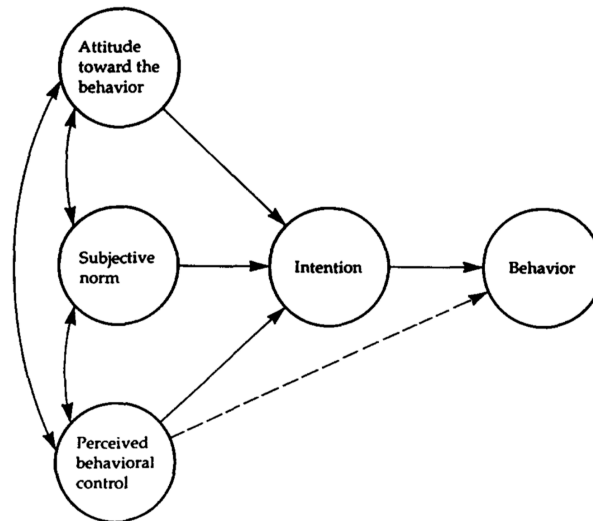


Fig. 2 Theory of Planned Behavior – Source; *"The Theory of Planned Behavior"* illustrated by (Ajzen, 1991).

By investigating how companies leverage fundamental consumer needs in marketing strategies the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory can be used to understand the underlying psychological mechanisms that influence consumer behavior. These theories can be used to provide valuable insights into how individuals perceive themselves and others within social groups, which then can be applied to understand consumer behavior within the context of marketing. Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals derive their sense of identity from the groups to which they belong. This not only includes personal identities, but also social identities based on group memberships (Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C., 1986), (see Fig. 3).

Within the field of consumer behavior, consumers may form attachments to brands or products as a means of expressing their Social identity (Ekström, et al., 2017). Marketing strategies that leverage these social identities can effectively influence consumer preferences and purchasing decisions. Brands can for example often use imagery and messaging that align with the specific social groups or lifestyles to appeal to consumers' sense of identity (e.g., Gabriel & Lang, 1995; Lodziak, 2002). Self-Categorization expands upon SIT by emphasizing the importance of the categorization process in shaping Social identity. SCT suggests that individuals categorize themselves and others based on social groups and that their behavior is influenced by prominence of these group memberships. In the context of marketing, companies can influence consumer behavior by framing their products or brands in a way that aligns with the consumers' self-categorizations. Advertising campaigns may emphasize how a product fulfills the needs of a particular group, leading consumers to identify with the brand and be more likely to make a purchase (Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C., 1986).

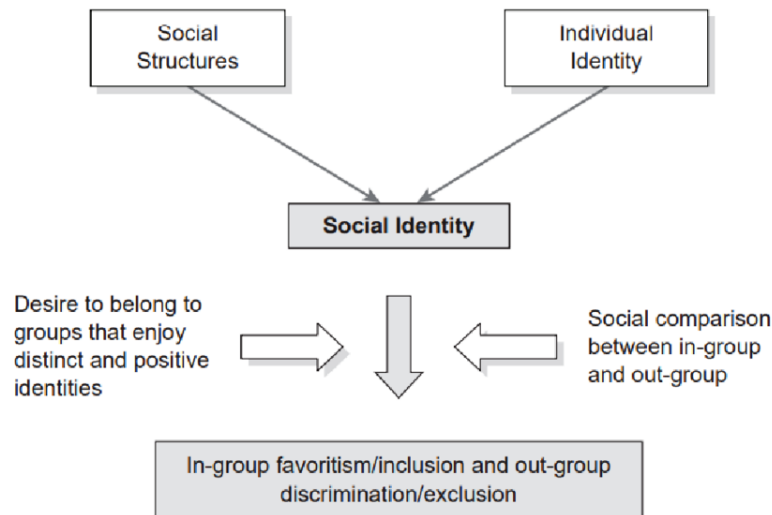


Fig. 3 Conceptual Diagram of Social Identity Theory – Source; *"Social Identity Theory"* illustrated by (Barak, M.M., 2008).

A study by Kim and Jang (2014) on Generation Y consumers who are aged 18 to 33 years old revealed a number of motivational drivers for status consumption. The authors found that young adults who are highly materialistic and driven by social comparison goals are more likely to purchase status symbols to boost their social standing. Moreover, the source of their income plays a significant role, with those relying on parental financial support still engaging in luxury spending due to *"income source accounting"*. This underlines the fact that the origin of the money affects spending behavior. Additionally, women in this age group are particularly prone to spending on luxury items to signal their social status. The study indicates that desire for prestige and peer influence strongly motivates consumers, as they seek to fit in or stand out within their social circles through their purchases. These findings also illustrate how materialism, social influences and economic factors shape the buying behaviors of Generation Y (Kim and Jang, 2014).

Expanding on this theme, Rajendran & Hariharan (1996) conducted a study focusing on the influence of consumer preferences on perceived quality, perceived value and purchase intention. Their findings suggest that meeting consumer preferences, particularly through the presence of desired attributes, positively influences consumers' perceptions of product quality. This implies that when products align with consumer preferences, they are perceived to be of higher quality. Moreover, the study highlights that perceived value is also positively influenced by the effectiveness of meeting consumer preferences. When products fulfill consumers' desired attributes, they are perceived to offer greater value, which in turn enhances purchase intention. These findings underscore the importance of understanding and incorporating consumer preferences into product design and marketing strategies. The relevance of which is in enhancing perceived quality, value and ultimately purchase intention (Rajendran and Hariharan, 1996).

2.3 Apple's Marketing Strategies

"Get closer than ever to your customers. So close that you tell them what they need well before they realize it themselves" - Steve Jobs, (Rahman and Safeena, 2016, p. 259).

Steve Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, embraced this quote as a guiding principle in shaping Apple's approach to innovation, product development and marketing. Jobs believed in the importance of intimately understanding customers' needs, desires and behaviors to create products that would resonate deeply with them. The aim was to anticipate their needs before they even recognized them by getting "*closer than ever*" to customers. This strategy has elevated Apple to the forefront of technological innovation and consumer preference (Isaacsson, 2011).

Steve Jobs wanted to follow the footsteps of Bauhaus which focused on minimalistic and artistic design, the objective was to portray inventiveness and functionality into the products. As expressed in the biography, the significance of the product design is for the main part in its role of creating a competitive advantage and differentiating the brand. The biography also details the foundational principles that guide Apple's marketing strategy, as reflected in the insights of key figures like Mike Markkula in his Apple Marketing concepts. Markkula emphasized three key concepts: *Empathy*, *Focus* and *Impute*. Empathy was defined as understanding the customer's feelings and needs better than they do themselves. Focus involves eliminating unnecessary details and prioritizing quality and simplicity. Impute refers to the importance of consumer perception, as consumers tend to judge products based on their presentation (Isaacsson, 2011).

A study about Apple iOS Smartphones conducted by Hiremath (2022) in Surakarta, Indonesia, analyzed Apple's main marketing strategies. This study provides concrete examples of how big companies like Apple capitalize on fundamental consumer needs, particularly social identities and their effect on purchasing behavior. The study examined Apple's most successful strategies that have enabled them to maintain their position in the technology market throughout the years. Product design, features, brand image and the well integrated ecosystem were found to be the main factors contributing to Apple's differentiation and strong business position. Additionally, Apple's advertising campaigns focus on enhancing customer experience, providing quality in designs that integrate exclusive functionality. This approach allows Apple to maintain differentiation and a loyal consumer base, despite the high cost of its products (Hiremath, 2022).

Although cultural and demographic factors may vary, since the Hiremath (2022) study was conducted in Indonesia, the principles still offer valuable perspectives. By delving into how Apple caters to specific consumer needs in this demographic, insights can be gained into wider strategies the company employs. The outlined aspects will also be investigated in our own conducted interviews, while giving space for the participants to point out other potential factors that influence their behavior towards Apple.

According to Li (2023), Apple's marketing strategy leverages psychological tricks such as the endowment effect and status quo bias. The endowment effect, where individuals value an object more once they own it, is harnessed by allowing consumers to interact freely with products in Apple showrooms, fostering a sense of ownership that makes it harder for them to part with the product. This is further reinforced by Apple's generous return policies, which initially reduce purchase risk but ultimately increase consumer attachment to the product over time. Similarly, the status quo bias plays a significant role in maintaining Apple's customer loyalty. By promoting a lifestyle rather than just products, Apple creates an emotional attachment that discourages consumers from switching to other brands. The seamless integration of Apple's ecosystem, including features like iCloud and iMessage, creates practical switching costs for the consumer that reinforce the status quo bias (Li, 2023). These strategies raise ethical considerations about consumer manipulation and the importance of responsible marketing practices.

Discussing Apple consumers' purchasing behavior within the technology market, Hsiao et al. (2016) delve into studies on social mobile apps. Their research identifies the factors influencing users' continuance intention regarding social apps, including satisfaction, social ties and hedonic motivation. Habitual use and satisfaction were two highlighted preceding factors to continued usage (Hsiao et al., 2016). On a different note, Dahl (2006) highlights the significant impact of dissociative reference groups on consumer preferences. Individuals may avoid products associated with dissociative reference groups due to self presentation concerns, as they attempt to project a positive self image to others. This implies that consumers might hesitate to purchase products labeled with gender-specific terms or those linked to social groups they wish to distance themselves from, even if the products align with their preferences. Understanding the effects of social dynamics, as discussed by Dahl (2006) about dissociative reference groups, can guide the analysis in terms of Apple consumers' behavior toward the brand identity.

In his book *Evangelist Marketing* by Alex Goldfayn, the author outlines the major success aspects of big technology companies, where Apple specifically is discussed as a prime example of successful marketing. While Goldfayn did not work for Apple, his book includes an editorial review by former Apple CEO, John Sculley, who confirms points made by the author. The book suggests that one of the main drivers of technology giants' success is word of mouth. The author claims that even if technology companies like Apple stopped their marketing activities, they would not see a drop in their revenue. The author characterizes ways through which Apple builds "buzz". The first one is through their high quality products, where they focus on making the best out of a few devices. Whereas other companies produce for instance appliances on top of phones and laptops (Goldfayn, 2011).

The advertising techniques used by Apple are distinguished by their ability to create and maintain excitement around their events and new product announcements. Apple evokes a major curiosity about its products from the general public by focusing on producing premium quality products and industry leading designs, thereby leading to high trend anticipation. When it comes to creating mystery and excitement, Apple tends to reduce its communication with the media around their big

events. The purpose is to tease the events and allow for rumors and anticipations, which all adds to the word of mouth marketing effect, where consumers market the product by casually speaking positively about it. An additional marketing technique that Apple focuses on is communicating lifestyle enhancement to the customer by demonstrating how good of an experience their products provide, which also shifts the focus to the most relevant aspects for the consumer (Goldfayn, 2011).

On the topic of advertising campaigns, one iconic example that still holds its relevance from 1997 till this day is the *“Think Different”* campaign. The TV advertisement stood out as it celebrated creativity and innovation, instead of portraying product features and attributions. This campaign portrays Apple's approach in marketing (Isaacson, 2011). In the campaign, Apple focused on creating a strong emotional response in the viewers and associating their brand image with some of history's most influential names, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Albert Einstein. The main message from the advertisement was; *“The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do”* - Steve jobs, (Shields, 2001).

Apple's strategy is to a large extent focused on targeting the premium segment of the technology market. While their devices may cost more to produce, the company is still able to charge premium prices for their products and services, while maintaining a high level of loyalty among its consumers. Apple has made this possible by differentiating them in the market and narrowing their forces on certain aspects. The company's most apparent differentiation is its iOS software that is well integrated within the hardware. While Apple does not tend to provide better specifications on paper than its competitors, Apple products still have their competitive advantage. Companies that manufacture phones that use the Android operating systems usually need to adhere to the limitations set by Google Inc for the Android operating system. Whereas with Apple devices both the hardware and the software are designed by the company, which allows for a significantly smoother optimization (Oliveira, 2021).

The iOS is designed to integrate seamlessly into the hardware of the Apple's, iPhones and iPads. Thanks to their optimization, the level of smoothness and simplicity in using Apple's devices is unmatched despite the fact that other technology manufacturers provide better specifications. Moreover, Apple provides exclusive features, such as AirDrop, that allows for quick and easy information sharing between Apple devices. In addition to that, iOS has its own music streaming and messaging app. Therefore, Apple's ecosystem remains at the core of Apple's differentiation strategy, with all of its exclusive and easy to use features that only Apple has ownership of and access to (Oliveira, 2021).

A study by Cai and Chen (2024) investigates the influence of marketing strategies on consumer purchasing behavior, focusing on Apple as a case study. It identifies several key findings; firstly, Apple meets consumer needs through its continuous product innovation, offering unique features and design aesthetics that satisfy consumers' desires for advanced technology. Secondly, the company's strong brand image and reputation for quality and innovation fulfill consumer needs for status, prestige and serve as an assurance of product excellence. Creating anticipation and suspense around

their big releases is something that Apple is famous for. The idea is to increase consumer engagement by prompting them to discuss and speculate new releases. Despite its premium pricing strategy, Apple delivers perceived value through superior product quality, user experience and ecosystem integration. This in turn creates a loyal customer base that does not mind the high prices as well as a means to meet consumer needs for quality and superiority (Cai and Chen, 2024).

Additionally, Apple addresses consumer needs for convenience and accessibility through its extensive distribution channels, providing easy access to its products at multiple retailers. Apple stimulates emotional connections and enhances consumers' lifestyles through its marketing communications and product experiences. While these strategies aim to meet desires for self-expression and lifestyle enhancement, it is essential to recognize that some consumers perceive these efforts as creating unnecessary product dependencies rather than addressing fundamental needs.

One major detail that characterizes Apple's marketing approach is focusing on the effect of its products on enhancing the lives of its customers, rather than focusing on listing specifications and attributes. These findings collectively underscore Apple's success in effectively meeting a range of consumer needs. This includes innovation, quality, status, convenience, emotional connection and lifestyle enhancement, through its well-crafted marketing strategies in the competitive technology market (Cai and Chen, 2024).

The way the different aspects of TPB can be beneficial to our research purpose is by viewing Apple's consumers in light of the theory as follows; in the context of consumer behavior, perceptions of the products as well as the perceived value of Apple products impact the attitudes of the consumers (Ajzen, 2020). The way Apple consumers perceive its products explains their attitudes toward the brand and helps understand how their needs are being met. The way *subjective norms* can be applied to this research is by investigating to which extent the social aspect impacts Apple's consumers' behavior. For example, if a participant shows a somewhat positive perception of Apple products and mentions that the reason for the purchase was that they have always been an Apple user, then it can be a case of perceived behavioral control.

Perceived behavioral control can also be applied in a different manner, depending on the findings of the interviews. For instance, in case a pattern of brand loyalty by virtue of habit is observed among the answers of some participants. An example of this would be that a participant is a current Apple user mainly because they always have been or that they were brought up using Apple devices. This implies that they may have an easier time utilizing and navigating the devices, which can be explained by a perception of facilitating factors, e.g. the hardware and software of the owner's device. Viewing the research problem in light of these factors we can broaden the understanding of how Apple's advertising messages are being taken and to which level the consumers feel that their needs are being met.

A conceptual model will be presented, serving as groundwork for analyzing the empirical findings. This model aims to facilitate understanding how Apple consumers perceive the company's marketing strategies in relation to their fundamental needs. This segment will focus on exploring the correlations between the components of Maslow (1943) and the participants' answers. Due to the nature and narrow scope of this thesis, the physiological needs in Maslow's Hierarchy will not be completely excluded from our conceptual model. Additionally, a potential connection between consumer needs and Apple's marketing strategies will be studied, as illustrated in the conceptual model (see Fig. 4).

This conceptual model synthesizes *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* to aid in identifying the needs of Apple's consumers. Moreover, the model seeks to help view the company's marketing strategies in relation to fundamental needs in order to look for an alignment. The analysis model can provide insights into why consumers are attracted to Apple products and which of the needs outlined in the theoretical framework Apple's marketing strategies targets. However, before analyzing Apple's marketing strategies through the lens of Maslow (1943), it is essential to cluster the needs that Apple fulfills based on participants' responses. Therefore, the hierarchy of needs is divided into multiple levels, each fitting under its respective heading in the analysis section.

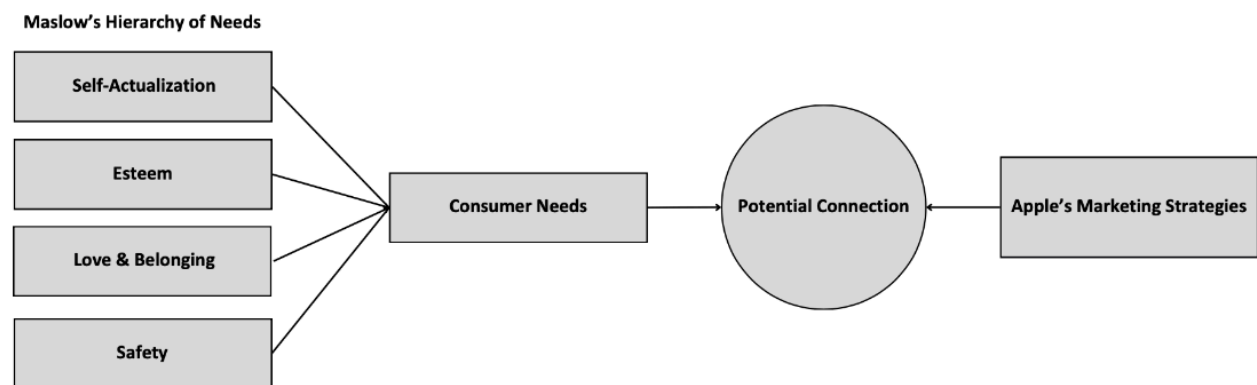


Fig. 4 Conceptual Model Aligning Apple's Marketing Strategies with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – Source; (own model).

3. Methodology

In this segment, we will introduce the methodology chosen for our study and outline the approach we will take to understand the fulfillment of consumer needs by Apple products, as well as to investigate Apple's marketing strategies. We aim to comprehend the alignment of these strategies with consumer needs. Each headline will be accompanied by an explanation detailing the procedures to be followed and the manner in which they will be conducted. This comprehensive methodology will ensure a systematic investigation, providing valuable insights into our research question.

3.1 Research Strategy and Design

Given the nature of this study and the difficulty of relying on numerical data analysis for a conclusion, the method we chose to carry out will therefore be qualitative. Quantitative research primarily focuses on examining relationships between variables measured numerically, often through statistical and graphical techniques (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, in the context of consumer needs within marketing mechanisms, numerical data may not capture the complete picture when it comes to consumer perceptions and behaviors. Qualitative research, on the other hand, allows for a deeper exploration of these aspects through techniques like semi-structured interviews, enabling researchers to understand the underlying motivations and meanings behind consumer actions (Saunders et al., 2019).

Numerical data from both consumers and marketing agencies would be necessary to measure the extent to which organizations consider consumer needs, but such data is often unavailable. Therefore, our research will involve conducting semi-structured interviews. This method allows for a combination of predetermined questions and the flexibility to explore additional insights through follow-up questions. This enriches the answers and allows for capturing certain insights that may not have been highlighted by the selected questions.

In this research, follow-up questions will depend on how well the participants understand the questions and whether they mention specific details that require clarification (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The research questions focus specifically on how Apple consumers perceive the company's marketing strategies in relation to their own fundamental needs and whether there is a connection between consumer perception and Apple's strategies. These questions delve deeper into understanding the subjective experiences and perceptions of Apple consumers, which will be explored further in the subsequent sections of the study. For further clarification on how the interview questions are formulated and to which aspects of the chosen theoretical framework (*see section 3.4*).

Theoretical frameworks serve as the lens through which the interview responses will be analyzed. To gather our secondary data we have chosen to utilize a number of valid academic databases. To name a few; Linköping University Library, ResearchGate and Google Scholar as well as Apple's own website. In addition to the literature selected for our theoretical framework, conceptual figures have been

included to illustrate key concepts of the selected theories. The figures serve as visual aids under each theoretical model, offering a graphical representation of complex concepts and enhancing the reader's comprehension of the theoretical foundations underpinning our study. These conceptual figures are sourced from reputable academic literature, ensuring their reliability and accuracy (Saunders et al., 2019). Some are derived from scholarly sources, accompanied by detailed explanations of the theories they represent, providing an understanding of the underlying concepts. Others are sourced from peer-reviewed academic papers discussing similar topics, further validating their relevance to our research context. By integrating these conceptual figures into our study, we aim to provide readers with a multifaceted approach to understanding the theoretical underpinnings of our research. Moreover, visual representations offer a complementary perspective to textual explanations, facilitating a more comprehensive grasp of the theoretical frameworks guiding our investigation.

In order to cluster the interview findings into different categories in accordance with Maslow (1943), a list of the most codes has been compiled. Coding is a process where bits of data are summarized using labels that symbolize the content of that data. These codes facilitate the identification of themes, which subsequently enable us to label the most significant quotes and expressions accordingly (Saunders, 2019). Each theme corresponds to a specific need within Maslow's Hierarchy. The categorization is as follows; codes related to valuing data security and reliable software constitute a theme of trust and security, which connects to the need of safety. The codes of influence of friends and family, word of mouth as well as recognition fall under the theme of social influence, correlating to the need for love and belonging.

The codes of markers of premium, competence, simplicity, prestige and sleek design fall under the theme of premium. This indicates a correlation to the hierarchy's esteem needs. Lastly, codes including productivity, integration of Apple's ecosystem and the functionality of Apple products imply a theme of seamless integration, which can be linked to the need for self-actualization (*see Table 1*). Moreover, a separate table has been assembled that combines quotes from different sources describing the strategies used by Apple. The aim is to illustrate how we identified Apple's strategies through our exploration of secondary data (*see Table 2*).

3.2 Abductive Research Approach

Deduction involves developing a theory and testing it through a series of propositions, making it a structured approach often used in natural sciences to explain causal relationships, predict phenomena and allow for generalization. It requires operationalizing concepts for measurement and relies on collecting data to verify or falsify the theory. Induction starts with data collection, often through qualitative methods, to explore phenomena and identify patterns leading to the formulation of a theory. It emphasizes understanding the context and subjective interpretations of human behavior, allowing for alternative explanations and often involving the study of smaller samples without methodologies. Lastly, the abductive approach in research involves moving back and forth between theory and data to develop explanations for surprising facts or observations. It combines elements of

both deductive and inductive reasoning, allowing researchers to continuously improve their theories based on new insights and evidence (Saunders, 2019).

In our research, the combination of induction and deduction is most fitting, therefore our research can best be described as abductive. For our first research question, we conducted interviews with students to gather qualitative data, adopting an inductive approach to derive broader theories about consumer needs from their responses. For the second research question, we analyzed secondary data, beginning with existing theories and concepts about Apple's marketing strategies and consumer needs, and then explored how these theories align with the needs identified from our interview data. This is a deductive approach because we are starting with a general idea, being the alignment of marketing strategies with consumer needs and looking for specific evidence to support or refute this idea (Saunders, 2019). Thus, the analysis segment comprises two parts; one section identifies consumer needs based on interview responses and another section examines Apple's marketing strategies and their alignment with these needs using secondary data.

3.3 Data Collection

This study relies on existing public knowledge in the field of marketing, consumer behavior and social psychology, supplementing primary data collection due to time and resource constraints. Utilizing previous research, reports and articles regarding motivation and need theories as well as Apple's marketing initiatives aids in analyzing the study's research problem. However, a drawback of this approach is the limited control researchers have over the data's outcomes (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The primary data collection is acquired through interviews with ten participants. Our empirical study will involve conducting interviews with individuals who own Apple devices. We will analyze the empirical findings and compare it to existing Apple reports and case studies on their marketing strategies. The discussion section will focus on interpreting and summarizing our findings in relation to previous research and theoretical frameworks. It will address the implications and potential limitations of our study without reiterating the empirical analysis, ensuring a clear and focused narrative on the significance and context of our findings.

The only condition to be eligible for this study, besides being a student at Linköping University, is to own and use at least one Apple device. These interviews seek to explain consumers' perceptions about the brand's marketing strategies. The interview is semi-structured and is designed in accordance with Patton's interview guide (Patton, 2022). The interview consists of main questions, as well as follow up questions that depend on the answers provided by the participants and whether or not they understand the questions. Convenience sampling is the chosen method for our data collection, which entails choosing participants who are simply accessible to the researcher (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In the case of this study, the main factor for choosing our sample has been proximity, as we attend the same university as the participants. The participants are randomly selected among students at Linköpings University by approaching students around Campus Villa and asking if they were willing

to participate in the study. The interview was conducted face-to-face without prior booking or planning with participants. Since the questions did not interfere with particularly private information nor did they impose any serious repercussions, we chose to conduct the interview on the spot. We believed that the students would be more likely to participate when not faced with a serious email request, which can be intimidating. The only criteria to fulfill upon the interview is that the participant must own at least one Apple device. Interviews are later on transcribed at a later stage and all the answers that are in Swedish are translated to English.

While a larger sample size would be preferable, our study is constrained by current location and time limits. This constraint impacts the breadth and generalizability of our findings, which we acknowledge and will discuss in detail in the findings section. Future research should aim to include a more diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the results.. The sampled data aids in analyzing Apple's effectiveness in meeting the consumers' fundamental needs. Given the qualitative nature of this study, the collected data is not numerical, but rather qualitative. This is so it can provide rich insights into the alignment between Apple's marketing efforts and how it correlates with the actual experiences of the customers, despite the limitations in accessing internal company resources.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interviews will be recorded after receiving the participants' consent and transcribed using the transcription function in Microsoft Word. Interviews that are carried out in Swedish will be translated to English to facilitate the analysis. Afterwards, the data will be coded based on our chosen theoretical models and analyzed using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis is a foundational method in qualitative research, involving processing interview transcriptions in an attempt to find patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The relevance of this approach is due to the fact that the analyzed data will be regarding experiences, which entails interpreting what the participants mean. In other words, certain themes are to be identified depending on the frequency of specific words and expressions that appear throughout the interview transcripts. While there is a risk that the semi-structured interview can go too far off topic, a central thread will be ensured throughout the interviews, by keeping track of the participants' answers. In addition to that, the freedom of answering provided for the participants in this kind of interview suits the nature of this study, since it seeks to explore perceptions (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The interview questions have been strategically formulated to align with our theoretical framework models. This has been done in a manner that provides a detailed understanding of how Apple's marketing strategies resonate with consumers' fundamental needs and perceptions. The questions regarding participants' experiences with Apple products explore the Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory. For the purpose of identifying how participants perceive themselves in relation to the brand and which aspects of Apple's marketing efforts resonate with their social identities, we aim to understand the participants' preferences with Apple products. This insight can

help explain how Apple effectively influences consumer behavior by appealing to their sense of identity and belongingness.

Furthermore, the questions about how Apple products affect participants' lifestyles aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In exploring how Apple products fulfill participants' daily needs and requirements, we aim to determine which of Maslow's needs, such as esteem and self-actualization, are addressed by Apple's marketing strategies. This helps us evaluate the extent to which Apple considers and addresses consumers' fundamental needs in its marketing. While our interview questions aim to cover a broad spectrum of participants' experiences and perceptions regarding Apple products, it is essential to acknowledge that there might be limitations in addressing every aspect of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. While there might be a variety of needs fulfilled by Apple, our first research question confines the study to needs outlined by Maslow (1943) to narrow the purpose of the study.

The interview questions do not explicitly address Maslow's physiological survival needs, as they are not associated with technology gadgets. Lastly, the interview questions also aim to explore participants' perceptions of Apple's marketing strategies and their alignment with previous research and theories, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior. This theory explains how individual behavior is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control. Through questions regarding participants' perceptions of Apple's marketing approach and its influence on their behavior, we seek to understand how attitudes towards Apple products shape their consumers' behavior. This understanding provides insights into how Apple's marketing strategies effectively influence consumer intentions and behaviors.

Since the first research question is about consumer needs, the interview responses in the analysis will serve as the answer for that. We will pay particular attention to any variations in responses, identifying patterns that may reflect heterogeneity among the participants. This approach helps us understand how different factors (e.g., personal preferences, cultural influences) shape consumer perceptions of Apple's marketing strategies. As the analysis progresses, we will incorporate Apple's own philosophy as a guide to address our second research question: *What are Apple's marketing strategies and how do they align with the needs of its consumers?*.

3.5 Limitations

The study only concludes the perception and behavior of Apple consumers at Linköping University, which means that it does not account for the cultural and geographical diversity among Apple users globally. Due to time limitations, the study only includes ten Linköping University students who use Apple products, which is a specific sample. The selection of our participants for interviews may not accurately represent the broader population, leading to results that are not as generalizable as in large

scale studies. This limitation will be explicitly stated in our findings and we will suggest that future research include a more diverse sample to increase generalizability.

A larger sample size would have benefited the thesis by capturing different consumer perspectives from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds as well as different age groups (Saunders et. al., 2019). The study relies primarily on secondary data regarding Apple's strategies for identifying the company's philosophy and marketing mechanisms. In other words, no direct internal data from Apple's employees or executives has been acquired for this thesis. Therefore, interviews with marketing executives who work at Apple would have added a more original dimension to the research by allowing for a broader evaluation of how their marketing initiatives are being perceived by the consumers.

While the sources used are tested for validity and relevance, direct access to Apple's managers could have provided more profound data and insights into how the company practically works. In certain cases, case studies can have an interpretative style of analysis, as some marketing initiatives may not be widely available on the internet. The limited disposable time for the study may have impacted the quality and the depth of the thesis. Therefore, this study may be described as a brief investigation of the connection between certain students' needs and Apple's products and their marketing. To be able to draw general conclusions about Apple's marketing effects on its consumer base, a similar study has to be done on a much broader base, where multiple continents are included for instance.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Compared to quantitative studies where sampling is randomized, in qualitative studies, it is more challenging to ensure a good level of validity and reliability. Therefore, it is essential for this study to ensure that we at least have internal validity and that our interview questions and conclusions actually reflect the research question. Internal validity refers to the extent to which the findings can be attributed to the intervention you are researching rather than to flaws in your research design. In an experimental scenario, internal validity is achieved when the observed outcomes can be directly attributed to the intended cause, rather than being influenced by other factors at play (Cook & Campbell, 1979). In our study, we did this partially by testing the interview questions and asking follow-up questions where participants clarify their experiences as much as possible.

As for the validity, it comes down to ensuring that what is meant to be measured or observed is what is actually observed, which we did by clarifying the purpose and choosing the right methodology. For example, choosing a qualitative approach where we ask explanatory "how" questions and allow for deeper expression. These concepts are associated with positivist and quantitative research and can be applied to causal or explanatory studies, but not to exploratory or purely descriptive studies (Malterud, 2021). However, the external validity, which is equally as important, is left up to the reader to determine. This is due to the fact that the results of the study need to be applicable in different contexts and for that, the reader needs to evaluate the credibility of our findings. With that said, it is

worth mentioning that the limited sample size of this study may affect its external validity (Malterud, 2021). Furthermore, data selection from online websites can bring its own limitations and implications.

To ensure the reliability of chosen online sources, an evaluation of the following aspects needs to be made. The relevance to the research question, the activity level of social interactions on the site and the richness of content and participants (Kozinets, 2015). We will use triangulation to enhance the credibility of our findings by cross-checking data from multiple sources, including interview transcripts, secondary data from academic articles and public reports on Apple's marketing strategies. We conducted that the existing literature mainly consisted of analysis of Apple's initiatives in specific countries as well as generic papers on marketing research. Therefore, we wanted to further investigate how the consumers practically perceive Apple's initiatives in the light of established theories regarding human needs and motivations.

Our secondary data will be used to provide context and depth to our primary data. For instance, we will compare participants' perceptions with existing literature on Apple's marketing strategies to identify consistencies and potential discrepancies. This comparison will help validate our findings and offer a broader perspective on how Apple's marketing is perceived. Our findings are cross-validated by combining semi-structured interviews with an analysis of secondary data, such as academic papers. This approach allows us to compare and contrast the qualitative insights from interviews with the documented strategies and outcomes reported by Apple, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding (Saunders et al., 2019).

We evaluated the relevance of the chosen articles by looking into a number of metrics, such as whether they are peer-reviewed, the number of citations and the relevance of the findings as portrayed in their abstracts. Moreover, The literature that we have chosen only serves as a guideline for the background and theoretical framework. They also serve as the thesis' main source of secondary data on Apple's marketing philosophy. In reviewing the literature for this essay, it became evident that some of the sources are dated. However, this is not necessarily a drawback, as older sources offer invaluable insight into the original models and theories that laid the groundwork for contemporary understanding (Booth, W.C., 2016).

These original papers contribute to a better understanding of the current discourse. Therefore, while newer research may provide updated perspectives, the inclusion of older sources enriches our analysis by offering a direct link to the foundational concepts upon which our current understanding is built. While we acknowledge the value of older sources in providing foundational insights, our primary focus is on acquiring newer research sources, especially concerning technological advances. We aimed to incorporate the latest findings and perspectives to ensure our analysis reflects the current state of knowledge in the field.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Common ethical considerations in business research include fundamental principles such as harm to participants, informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception (Diener & Crandall, 1978).

Obtaining informed consent from participants requires providing participants with comprehensive information about the research process and explaining any potential risks or implications (Homan, 1991). Moreover, confidentiality and anonymity are essential ethical considerations, especially in qualitative research where participants' identities must be protected (Grinyer, 2002). Therefore, we ensure that our participants' identities are safe to prevent any potential harm or implications.

However, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity can be challenging, particularly in small scale research studies, where participants may be identifiable. Careful measures, such as numerical identifiers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) to anonymize the participants, are necessary to adhere to ethical standards and maintain privacy (Parker, 2000).

Our research adheres to the guidelines set forth by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority for information and consent (Etikprövningsmyndigheten, 2024). All participants are over 18 years old, considering the age requirement for completing secondary education in Sweden is 19 or above (European Commission, 2024). Prior to participation, individuals receive clear information about the purpose of the interview, ensuring their voluntary involvement and guaranteeing anonymity to maintain confidentiality.

We anticipate no psychological or social impact on our participants, as the interview questions focus on their perceptions and experiences with Apple products, which are not typically sensitive topics. The research process and interview pose no harm or risk to participants, their data will neither be shared nor manipulated. Moreover, to enhance clarity, the interview questions underwent piloting with a test participant to check for any potential unclarities or misinterpretations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Participants are informed about the study's purpose, procedures and their right to withdraw at any time without any repercussions.

3.8 Usage of AI

In this study, AI was utilized to assist in structuring interview findings and correcting grammatical mistakes. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, all data processed by AI tools were anonymized and handled in compliance with ethical guidelines. No personal or sensitive information was shared with external AI systems, maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of participant data. Additionally, at times when there were two sentences that did not flow well, AI tools helped us merge them together to make them more comprehensible as well as correct any grammatical mistakes. AI also served as a dictionary, offering synonyms for words we struggled to find, thus enhancing the text to a more academic and university-level standard.

4. Analysis

This segment compiles interview responses and organizes them according to predefined questions, correlating them with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to understand how Apple products fulfill consumer needs. The responses are categorized under different themes derived from the interview questions. Additionally, secondary data on Apple's marketing strategies is included to understand how these strategies align with consumer needs. The analysis process is illustrated through Tables 1 and 2, which demonstrate data categorization and the identified marketing strategies. The interconnection between consumer needs and Apple's marketing strategies is explored briefly in the analysis section (*see section 4.3*) with interview responses providing insights into certain strategies. These insights will be elaborated further in subsequent sections, emphasizing the strategic alignment between consumer needs and Apple's marketing efforts.

4.1 Consumer Needs

Quotes	Codes	Themes	Needs
<p><i>"You start something on the iPhone and then you can pick up on the iPad, which really helps me when writing assignments"</i></p> <p><i>"I feel smarter when using iPhones, since Apple's functions are easier to use"</i></p>	<p>Productivity</p> <p>Apple Products' Functionality</p> <p>Feeling of Competence</p>	<p>Seamless Efficiency</p>	<p>Self-Actualization</p>
<p><i>"Apple products were seen as status symbols among my social circle"</i></p> <p><i>"I wanted to be associated with a brand that represented prestige, and when I got my first apple device at that time, it was just that"</i></p> <p><i>"Their presentation of different products indirectly makes you perceive the brand as premium and high quality"</i></p> <p><i>"Apple products are quite simple to use, the operating system is easy"</i></p>	<p>Markers of Premium</p> <p>Simplicity</p> <p>Associating with Prestige</p> <p>Sleek Design</p>	<p>Premium</p>	<p>Esteem</p>
<p><i>"...everybody else has it"</i></p> <p><i>"I was born into using Apple..., so it is more common in my family"</i></p> <p><i>"If your friend would buy an iPhone 16 Pro next year, you would also want to have it, even if it costs 14 000 SEK"</i></p> <p><i>"...it is easier to communicate with friends because everyone uses Apple"</i></p>	<p>Copying Friends & Family</p> <p>Influenced by Word of Mouth</p> <p>Recognition</p>	<p>Social Influence</p>	<p>Love and Belonging</p>
<p><i>"I rely on iCloud heavily for storing and accessing my files across all my devices. It is reassuring to know that my documents are always available, whether I use my phone or computer"</i></p> <p><i>"I rely on my Apple products devices for work, they never let me down!"</i></p> <p><i>"It is reassuring to know that my documents are always available, whether I use my phone or computer"</i></p>	<p>Valuing Data Security</p> <p>Reliable Software</p> <p>Integration of Apple's Ecosystem</p> <p>Storing Important Files and Photos</p>	<p>Trust and Security</p>	<p>Safety</p>

Table. 1 Coding of all interviews based on questions about what Consumer Needs Apple products fulfill – Source; (own model).

4.1.1 Self-Actualization Needs

During the exploration of perceptions regarding Apple's functionality and product differentiation, participants consistently emphasized the simplicity of Apple products and the advantages of its exclusive features in their responses. When comparing Apple products to other options, most of the participants pointed out some exclusive features like FaceTime and the AirDrop sharing function across Apple's ecosystem as strong selling points.

Participant (#3) stated; *"For me, Apple's Facetime feature is what differentiates the brand from other technology brands.... It is also exclusive to Apple devices, which I believe makes the product unique"*. The sync up features and the ability to access files from different devices are also strong points of differentiation for most of the participants. Participant (#10) restated one of their previous statements on accessing files across all devices by adding; *"The iCloud feature is the primary reason why I purchase Apple products"*. Participant (#8) explained how Apple's hardware and software integrate smoothly and stand out more than other options in terms of comfortability. When comparing the Apple device to other options, this participant expressed; *"I feel smarter when using iPhones over Android phones, since Apple's functions are easier to use"*.

Participant (#2) focused more on the physical aspect of Apple's iPhones and described them as *"modern"*. When asked to elaborate, the participant stated *"I like their new iPhone models with metal, I did not like when they used glass for the backside of their phones"*. The participant noted that they had heard numerous complaints from consumers regarding the backside of the iPhone, stating that the phone easily got shattered. The participant even observed that Apple altered their design following this criticism.

Participant (#3) described Apple product's attributes of being; *"Stylish, simple and flexible"*. The exceptional easiness to navigate Apple's computers and phones as well as their independence when it comes to designing the software is what differentiates the company, according to the participant. Building on this, participant (#4) mentioned that the main factors for choosing Apple was the design and photo quality in addition to the exclusive features like FaceTime and iMessage. Further, this participant mentioned that the ability to use the iPhone and MacBook interchangeably when making calls and managing files is a major reason for preferring Apple.

For participant (#5), the integration of the ecosystem on top of how easy Apple products are to use is the reason for preference. While the products are efficient and modern, the usage of glass in design is a downside according to this participant. Participant (#6) describes Apple products as a daily need that helps with health and fitness as well as school work. The design is uniquely simple and the technical functionality of iPhones, Apple Watches and MacBooks is unmatched, according to this participant. In terms of hardware, participant (#7) also pointed out how easy it is to use the phone especially with Apple's AirPods, because they can be connected to the MacBook at the same time.

They highlighted the seamless integration across devices, mentioning the effortless syncing of data and tasks. Many participants emphasized the convenience of starting a task on one device and seamlessly continuing it on another, enhancing productivity and efficiency. Among the participants, there seems to be a range of perspectives on how Apple products affect their lifestyle. Some participants feel that Apple products help simplify their daily routines, making tasks like planning and staying organized easier. Others appreciate the seamless integration between devices, as recurrently mentioned within the second set of interview responses. However, there are also participants who feel that Apple products do not significantly impact their lifestyle, viewing them primarily as functional tools rather than something that influences their lifestyles.

Participant (#7) has used Apple products, specifically iPhones, specifically since grade 4, which makes it easier to continue buying their products and get used to navigating the software. When asked specifically about the functionality, the participant reiterated that the most compelling factor is the simplicity, followed by how the products look. Specifically, the participant mentions that the newer phones use titanium in their build. This participant also touches on the aspect of software integration and how Apple's ecosystem makes it easy to initiate and finish work from different devices; *"You start something on the iPhone and then you can pick up on the iPad, which really helps me when writing assignments"*.

The participant describes the design of the devices as sleek and stylish and points out exclusive features like FaceTime, iMessages and Apple Notes as great tools for staying connected and planning one's life. Just like the other participants, participant (#9)'s opinion on Apple's functionality is that the operating system is very easy to use and that the products have an elegant design, compared to other devices. Despite the positive outlook on MacBooks, participant (#9) does not believe that they provide any substantial advantage in how functional they are on a daily basis.

Furthermore, Participant (9#) mentioned the perk of being able to message friends who live abroad on iMessages as a perk that connects Apple users. The participant mentions that the feeling of connection Apple creates is similar to the feeling they get from branded clothes. The feeling, alongside the feeling of being part of a popular community is however almost exclusive to younger people and new university students, according to the participant. This participant states in regard to the sense of identification with Apple; *"I think that the older I get, the less I care"*.

Based on the responses from the participants, the experience with using Apple products varies but generally leans towards positive. Participants appreciate simplicity, ease of use and seamless integration of Apple products. Participant (#1) took note of the ecosystem saying; *"One of the things I love about Apple products is how well they integrate with each other. I can easily switch from my iPhone to my MacBook without missing anything"*.

4.1.2 Esteem Needs

Participants expressed several reasons for their initial attraction to Apple products. Firstly, many mentioned the sleek design and user-friendly interface as key factors. As participant (#9) put it *“Apple products were seen as status symbols among my social circle”*. Another participant added to this stating; *“I wanted to be associated with a brand that represented prestige, and when I got my first apple device at that time, it was just that”*. Participants even showed appreciation for the seamless integration across Apple devices, which made daily tasks easier.

Some highlighted specific features like FaceTime and the Apple ecosystem's integration as to why they were drawn to Apple's products. Apple's design, functionality and marketing developed a strong initial attraction among users. Additionally, marketing efforts were mentioned as contributing to a sense of exclusivity and belonging. Participant (#8) answered in line with all the other participants and expressed that the main advantages of Apple is how easy it is to use the devices, but on top of that the participant added that they are futuristic. Participant (#7) has used Apple products, specifically iPhones, specifically since grade 4, which makes it easier to continue buying their products and get used to navigating the software.

Regarding participants' perspectives on how Apple's marketing approach influences their perception of the brand compared to other companies, some felt that Apple's marketing played a significant role in shaping their perception. Several participants referred to the company's ability to create a sense of exclusivity through their advertising campaigns, emphasizing Apple's focus on aesthetics above all.

Participant (#2) states; *“Their presentation of different products indirectly makes you perceive the brand as premium and high quality”*. There were instances where participants had more neutral or negative views. Participant (#4) and Participant (#6), in particular, expressed frustration and provided additional insight into the pricing aspect. On the other hand, participant (#1) mentioned their high quality and added; *“Although Apple products are generally expensive, they market their products so well that I really do not care about the prices”*. The same participant later added; *“Or maybe I do care about the prices on a subconscious level”* appearing indecisive. Participant (#5) remarked; *“Apple products are quite simple to use, the operating system is easy”*. This sentiment was resonated with participant (#6) who stated; *“For me, it is convenient and practical”*. Thereafter, participant (#8) shared a similar view stating; *“In general, I think they are pretty easy to use”*.

4.1.3 Love and Belonging Needs

Most of the participants' initial interaction with Apple and the reason for their purchase has been due to word of mouth or to copy the behavior of their friends and family. A recurring theme among the participants has been that they bought Apple products either because they grew up with them or that they had heard a lot about them. A majority of the participants mention their preference for Apple devices when it comes to staying social, considering that most of their acquaintances are Apple users. Participant (#1) finds Apple products to be trendy and easier to connect with friends on; *“...it is easier*

to communicate with friends because everyone uses Apple". The perception of Apple as a trendy brand was also influenced by word of mouth and the brand's reputation. When asked about Apple's marketing efforts, participant (#1) stated; *"I'm also born into using Apple, my parents started early with the brand Apple, so it's more common in my family"*.

While some participants feel a sense of belonging and connection to the brand due to its simplicity of use, others see Apple products as just one of many options for meeting their daily needs without fundamentally affecting their lifestyle. Participant (#8) for instance, mentioned that while using Apple products is easy, they do not feel a significant effect on their daily life beyond the basic purpose of a phone. Similarly, participant (#4) expressed that while they appreciate the simplicity and design of Apple products, they do not perceive a significant impact on their lifestyle beyond aesthetic preferences.

Participant (#7) does not care about other people's judgment and does not experience a sense of belonging to the brand and its consumers. In other words, the social aspect did not have an effect on the participant's decision to become an Apple user. Participant (#8) was more descriptive and mentioned that Apple uses words like *"connectivity"* and *"family"* when they advertise iMessages and FaceTime. The participant did however become an Apple user due to word of mouth and mentioned that they experience a sense of attachment to the feeling special, because the products are special to them. Furthermore, the participants appreciated specific features such as FaceTime for easy communication with friends and family and the intuitive design of Apple products that simplifies navigation and usage.

Participant (#10) explained that Apple's marketing may seem unconventional at times, referring to their new Vision Pro Headset, which is based on virtual reality. This participant explains; *"Everyone laughs at the idea now, but in a few years everyone will be owning an Apple Vision Pro. They can easily manipulate you through their marketing"*. The remaining participants acknowledged the impact of Apple's marketing, yet believed that their perception was mainly influenced by personal experiences with the products, i.e the brand's reputation for quality and reliability. Participant (#7) mentioned; *"I rarely see Apple advertisements, to be completely honest. Therefore, their marketing does not affect my perception of them. I only own some of their devices because they are trendy"*. Participant (#5) experienced peer pressure to join the Apple community, since most people they knew spoke positively of the company.

On the other hand, the participant does not feel the sense of connection that others experience. Participant (#6) emphasizes that the reason they chose Apple is because *"everybody else has"* their products. The need to join the hype and the feeling of being part of Apple's community is the reason this participant feels the need to upgrade their devices. Despite the high cost, participants justified the price of Apple products due to their high perceived value, driven by the quality, design and user experience. As this participant further expressed *"If your friend would buy an iPhone 16 Pro next year, you would also want to have it, even if it costs 14 000 SEK"*.

However, participant (#4) believes that Apple's approach to make their devices easy to use is a way to create a subculture for people who do not like complicated technology. Participant (#4) mentions that through their marketing, Apple creates a sense of being left out and a need to become an Apple consumer to join their friends and family. Moreover, the participant claims; *"I do not feel like Apple's marketing contributes to building a sense of connection, I would say more of a sense of feeling left out if you are not following their flow"*.

The participants mentioned that while the advertisements may have influenced them, they would not have impacted the buying decision, since the participant is already acquainted with the quality of the devices; *"Apple's ads make you feel like you're part of something cool and modern..... they show those amazing iPhone photos, it makes you want to be part of that world"*, stated participant (#1). Participant (#2) reported that Apple's marketing seems to have created a "cult" around its products, which they think is ridiculous. When questioned about their association with the claimed cult, the participant instantly objects, insisting that they do not identify with such a categorization. While the participant is not affected by the allure of Apple's marketing, they mention the fact that most people around them used Apple products, which made the participant buy an iPhone. FaceTime, specifically, is a primary means of contact for the participant.

4.1.4 Safety Needs

Apple's iCloud service exemplifies how the company addresses concerns about usability and data security, while also fulfilling users' need for safety. For instance, participant #10 stated; *"I rely on iCloud heavily for storing and accessing my files across all my devices. It is reassuring to know that my documents are always available, whether I use my phone or computer"*. This highlights the convenience and security iCloud offers. Additionally, participant (#3) emphasized the intuitive nature and sleek design of Apple products, while participant (#5) mentioned their reliability, stating; *"I rely on my Apple devices for work, they never let me down!"*.

Further exploration into Apple's functionality revealed participants' appreciation for the company's data management practices, particularly in terms of privacy. This was exemplified by participant (#8), who pointed out how difficult it was to access their Apple ID, after having lost their iPhone abroad. Even after contacting Apple Support, the participant was not able to provide sufficient evidence of their identity. This resulted in them not being able to log into the account and access the stored data. Apple's "Find My iPhone" feature was also highlighted by participant (#9) as a vital tool for safety, stating; *"Knowing I can locate my lost or stolen devices through the app gives me peace of mind"*. The physical safety of users is another aspect where Apple has made significant strides. Participant (#7) mentioned the health features integrated into the Apple Watch, such as fall detection and emergency SOS; *"The Apple Watch's fall detection feature once alerted my family when I had a minor accident, and they were able to reach me quickly"* the participant shared. Moreover, participant (#6) mentioned; *"The Face ID feature on my iPhone makes me feel secure because I know that no one else can unlock my phone"*.

4.2 Apple's Marketing Strategies

Apple's marketing seems to create a powerful emotional connection by building a strong community and sense of belonging among its users. This campaign, in particular, aligns with consumers' fundamental need for social connection and acceptance by associating the brand with creativity, innovation and a community of influential individuals. Although the *Think Different* advertisement may not directly influence consumers today, it laid the groundwork for Apple's current image. By associating influential figures of its time, the advertisement positioned the brand as an innovative pioneer in technology and associated the brand with qualities that still remain evident today. This is particularly exemplified by the participants who described Apple's exclusivity and futuristic design, despite not having been influenced by this advertisement. The emotional resonance not only reinforces the loyalty of existing Apple users but also attracts new users who identify with the values and community Apple represents.

There were eight strategies found through the secondary data that Apple employs in order to maintain its strong market presence and cultivate consumer loyalty. As discussed in the theoretical framework, Hiremath (2022) describes how Apple's ecosystem is one of the main selling points of the company and a major pillar in its differentiation. This strategy revolves around the seamless integration of Apple's various products and services, cultivating an integrated digital environment for users. The integration of Apple devices, such as; iPhones, AirPods and MacBooks, illustrates this approach, allowing for synchronization and continuity across platforms. Additionally, the ecosystem strategy highlights how when more people join the Apple community, it makes each product more valuable. This happens because there are more users and more services available, which makes everything work better together. Accompanied by the fact that connecting with friends who also are Apple users is easier using iMessages and FaceTime. As a result, this ongoing process strengthens Apple's position in the market and makes people more loyal to the brand over time.

Furthermore, Cai and Chen (2024) outline different strategies through which Apple effectively markets itself and attracts new customers while maintaining existing ones. These strategies include innovative products, lifestyle marketing by highlighting how the products affect consumer lives and building anticipation around new product launches, as also mentioned by Goldfayn (2011). A factor that acts as a marketing strategy which reinforces Apple consumers' sense of community is word of mouth marketing, where existing customers recommend the brand and its products to new customers. This is done by teasing events, carefully disclosing information and not communicating with the press (Goldfayn, 2011).

As for the aspect of differentiation and how it affects consumers' esteem needs, this was based on both (Hiremath, 2022), who emphasized the role of its brand image and operating system, as well as the interview responses that cited Apple being a unique brand. Additionally, Oliveira (2021) pointed out the integrated iOS software as a substantial differentiation factor that increases Apple's popularity.

Innovation (Productivity)	Lifestyle (Marketing)	Anticipation (Building Buzz)	Differentiation (Exclusivity)	Ecosystem (Connectivity)	Word of Mouth (Community)	Endowment Effect	Data Security (Reliability)
<p>(Cai & Chen, 2024); "By studying how Apple's branding, advertisements, and product innovations resonate with consumers, companies can gain inspiration and learn best practices to enhance their own marketing efforts"</p> <p>"With product innovation as the core, combining humanized communication planning such as copywriting, advertising, content and celebrities, as well as experience store marketing that brings consumers a sense of participation"</p> <p>"Apple, a highly successful and innovative technology company, has transformed the consumer electronics industry with its iconic products like the iPhone, iPad and Mac"</p> <p>"The iPod music player in 2001 and the MacBook in 2006, which further solidified the brand's reputation for innovation"</p> <p>(Apple Inc., 2024); "Apple devices are designed to be deployed seamlessly in various environments, offering flexibility and efficiency for IT departments"</p>	<p>(Cai & Chen, 2024); "Apple's marketing and advertising approach revolves around how their products can enhance people's lives"</p> <p>"Apple's Think Different image was strengthened into the user's brain, become a creative synonym"</p>	<p>(Cai & Chen, 2024); "Apple has adopted a unique approach by deliberately keeping the mystery surrounding their new products. By revealing less information"</p> <p>"Apple manages to ignite people's curiosity and generate even greater interest. This strategy of creating suspense during product launches has proven to be one of Apple's most effective marketing tactics"</p> <p>(Goldfayn, 2011); "No other company avoids talking to the press like Apple does"</p> <p>"Nothing is announced before the event occurs. But the rumors are buzzed about constantly. There is not a day in the year when Apple rumors are not flying around"</p> <p>(Hiremath, 2022); "Another one of Apple's strategies is acting mysterious about the things they are doing"</p>	<p>(Hiremath, 2022); "One of the biggest differentiating factors Apple has created is its ecosystem. The way these Apple products work together, no other brand's products work together"</p> <p>"Apple's brand image has a positive and significant impact on decisions about buying an iPhone"</p> <p>(Oliveira, 2021); "An iPhone user knows that a big advantage of owning this product is the distinct experience that the network enables when compared to other brands"</p> <p>"The iOS and the integrated ecosystem that comes with it are the main reasons why the iPhone is such an individualized product"</p>	<p>(Hiremath, 2022); "You have a few ideas, you note them down on your iPhone and want to continue it in your Macbook, all you have to do is connect to your Wi-Fi and the notes are synced across all devices and you carry on from where you left off from any device"</p> <p>"If a person buys one Apple product, he is curious to know how another Apple product will work with it and hence purchases another one"</p> <p>(Oliveira, 2021); "The operating system favors seamless communications between users"</p> <p>"Apple's peerless ecosystem is also part of the company's success, providing a distinguished 50 user experience"</p>	<p>(Goldfayn, 2011); "Apple builds and fuels its word-of-mouth machine"</p> <p>"There's no better App Store than Apple's, and iTunes is the very best online music and video store on the planet; it's mainstream consumers who are making them"</p> <p>(Hiremath, 2022); "There is a lot of hype created before any new event or product or service is announced and this creates excitement in customers and leads to word of mouth publicity"</p>	<p>(Li, 2023); "Endowment effect is widely used in Apple's marketing strategy"</p> <p>"The main trick for Apple to trigger the endowment effects is letting people play around with its products and providing free return policies."</p> <p>"This increased perceived ownership would result in an increase in the valuation of the product"</p>	<p>(Apple Inc., 2024); "Apple devices provide advanced security features. Many of these features are turned on by default, so you don't have to configure them."</p> <p>"Automated deployment processes reduce the manual effort required, enhancing the overall productivity and security of the deployment strategy"</p> <p>"If an Apple device is lost or stolen, you or a user can use a remote command to lock the device that includes the private information"</p> <p>"Apple devices provide security through passcode and password policies that you can deliver and enforce with an MDM solution"</p>

Table. 2 Identified Apple's Strategies based on Secondary Data – Source; (own model).

4.3 The Interconnection between Consumer Needs and Apple’s Marketing Strategies

The connection we found between self-actualization needs and the strategies of *innovation* and *lifestyle* is evident from the quotes provided by participants, as highlighted in Table 1. Additionally, quotes regarding the enhancement of consumers' lifestyles in the secondary data supported this connection. The correlation found between esteem needs and *anticipation* and *differentiation* is based on participants' quotes that convey a sense of premium attached to Apple products and their highly regarded exclusivity. Love and belonging needs are met through *word of mouth*, the *endowment effect* and the *ecosystem* strategies. The fact that many participants expressed that they were influenced by their social circle portrays the effect of word of mouth in love and belonging needs. Since the *endowment effect* elicits an emotional attachment to the product, it strengthens the sense of belonging to Apple and its community.

Safety needs are addressed through *data security* and *ecosystem*, and was found based on the participants’ quotes that express trust for data and file management as well as the reliability of the ecosystem. These quotes connect to their counterparts in Table 2, which show Apple’s advanced technology for security as well as the functionality of the ecosystem, according to the secondary data. Hence the relevance of combining those strategies with the needs for safety. In addition to love and belonging needs, the ecosystem plays a role in safety needs. It ensures that users' data is protected and encrypted across all Apple devices, addressing concerns about privacy and security, hence why the ecosystem is connected to both of the needs.

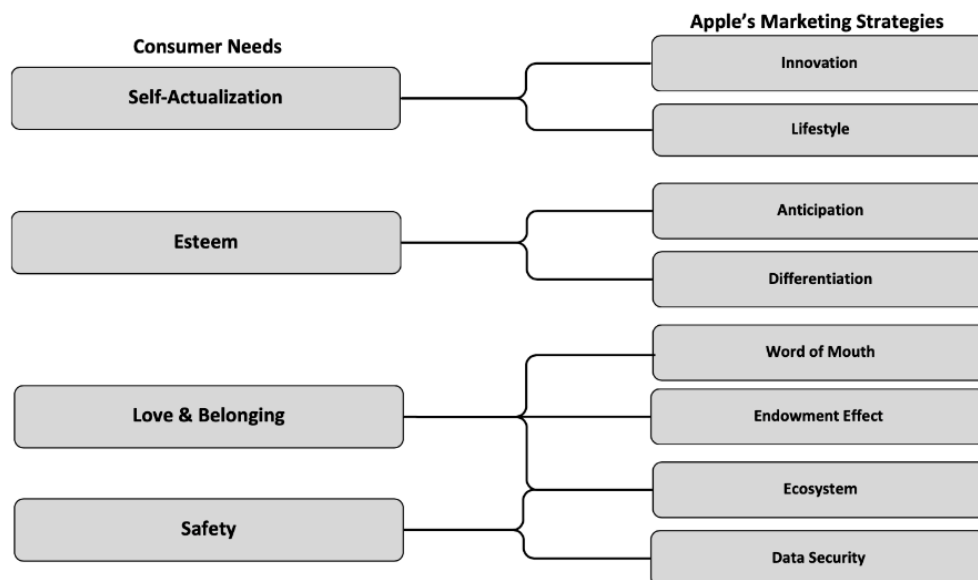


Fig. 5 The Connection between Apple’s Marketing Strategies and Consumer Needs –
Source; (own model).

5. Discussion

After structuring the interview findings according to their relevance to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, we will explore how each participant's responses align with the theoretical framework. The first research question has already been answered in the analysis, as the responses from the interviews are interpreted in this thesis as the consumers' needs. To answer the second research question, we will aim to interconnect the marketing strategies with their respective consumer needs. After discussing the strategies and their theoretical grounding, an answer for each of the research questions will be illustrated in the conclusion.

5.1 Safety Needs Interconnected with Ecosystem and Data Security

When asked about Apple products in terms of functionality and design, the participants experienced ease when utilizing their devices, which can be said to be conducive to a sense of security. The security of knowing that Apple's devices will reliably deliver the expected outcome. The simplicity entails that the participants should not need to worry about whether or not their devices would be efficient in the case of an emergency call, the need for a quick information search or making an urgent call for example. Avoiding unnecessary complexity or difficulty makes it easier to focus on the important things. Along those lines, the fact that users can sync up their data and photos on the iCloud service is an example of how Apple reduces concerns for usability and data security and fulfills the need for safety (Maslow, 1943). Participant (#10) highlighted their reliance on iCloud for data management, which aligns with Maslow's safety needs as it provides a sense of security and reliability in data handling. This is also seen in Apple's high privacy standards (Apple Support, 2024).

However, this reliability is called into question by another participant's experience with Apple ID accessibility issues. Despite contacting Apple Support, the participant was unable to provide sufficient evidence of their identity, resulting in a prolonged inability to access stored data. This incident highlights a critical contradiction; while Apple's security measures are intended to protect user data, they can also create significant barriers when users face issues, undermining the sense of safety and reliability.

A recurring theme among a majority of the participants is the habitual effect on their preference for Apple products. This habitual behavior reinforces their intention to continue using Apple products, since they feel confident in their ability to productively navigate their devices. While it may not be a surprise that people prefer to keep to what they are used to, Apple's ecosystem seems to strengthen the loyalty toward its products and services. As exemplified by participant (#10), who's main reason for remaining an Apple user is their digital storage service, the iCloud. This implies a perception of control (Ajzen, 2020) over the data management and thereby a stronger brand loyalty. The integration provided by iCloud enhances the perceived control over the participants' technological environment in general. Moreover, the role of Apple's ecosystem in maintaining a strong connection to the brand among the participants reaffirms (Li, 2023).

5.2 Love and Belonging Needs Interconnected with Word of Mouth, Ecosystem and Endowment Effect

As discussed in the social aspect of the analysis, the majority of participants expressed that they were influenced by word of mouth marketing and the opinions of their peers and family regarding Apple products. When asked about their initial interactions with Apple products, many participants expressed a high level of curiosity and interest before becoming Apple users, driven by a desire to join the hype. This willingness to try Apple products and the desire to be part of the community often emerged from the environment they grew up in; their parents owning iPhones and MacBooks influenced their decision to purchase Apple products later on. This validates the Theory of Planned Behavior concerning subjective norms, as many participants felt peer pressure or continued their past behaviors as Apple consumers. This also correlates to the belonging needs, as laid out by (Maslow, 1943), since the participants acted in accordance with their community. Our observation, where participants bought Apple products due to friends and family's recommendations, further confirms word of mouth as a pillar in Apple's popularity (Goldfayn, 2011). Rajendran and Hariharan (1996) emphasized the significance of interpersonal communication in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors, which explains the strong influence of word of mouth seen among our participants.

The participants' identification as Apple users correlates to the Self-Categorization Theory, as individuals are more likely to conform to the behaviors of groups they perceive themselves to be a part of. This explains why participants who stated that they grew up with Apple products or were surrounded by friends who were Apple users tend to repeat the behavior, as they see themselves as part of the Apple community. This clarifies why individuals who were exposed to Apple products during upbringing or through their social circle tend to continue the behavior, feeling connected to the Apple community. Participants, such as participant (#8), who find that Apple products help them connect with friends who also use Apple products, highlight the ecosystem's role in fulfilling belonging needs.

Apple's philosophy also emphasizes empathy towards users' social needs, ensuring that its ecosystem enhances social interactions and strengthens community bonds. Participant (#8) emphasized how iMessages and FaceTime facilitate social connections, fulfilling the participants' need for social interaction and affiliation (Maslow, 1943). The tendency for participants to continue using Apple products because of their positive experiences and ease of use can be explained by the arguments of Li (2023). Apple leverages status quo through its marketing techniques that foster a sense of attachment to the brand. The emotional attachment can in turn be linked to the endowment effect (Li, 2023), since the participants value the Apple products more now that they have owned them.

The participants' choice to become and remain Apple users can partially be explained by the Social Identity Theory. The sense of identity that the participants drew from the Apple community reminds of the mechanism through which individuals develop their personality. As mentioned by Tajfel & Turner (1986), individuals tend to uphold certain behaviors that are influenced by their social

environment to maintain their Social Identity. In our study, this tendency was recognized by analyzing participants' answers when asked about their initial interactions with Apple. It turned out that the majority became and remained Apple consumers as they felt validated and accepted by their classmates.

This is evident in Apple's consumer retention rate of 90%, as reported in their financial statements (Apple, 2024). This high retention rate indicates that Apple consumers choose to remain loyal to the brand, despite the evolving market that introduces new technology gadgets (Laroche, 2010). Despite concerns about pricing, some participants are influenced by social pressures to conform to certain behaviors. Thus, even if individuals hold negative attitudes towards purchasing expensive products, perceived social influences and external factors may still drive them to engage in the behavior. An example of this in the interview answers is participant (#6) who remarked that a friend's decision to buy the next iPhone Pro influences their purchase behavior, despite the product's high cost. Thus, we can predict that the participant is likely to buy the next iPhone Pro, due to the subjective norm, which is the friend's purchase decision (Ajzen, 2020). The subjective norm influences the participant's intention to buy as they perceive a social pressure to engage in the same behavior. This indicates that Apple's marketing leverages social influence and peer pressure effectively, aligning with consumers' social needs for belonging and acceptance.

Evidently, the opinions and the behaviors of the participants' friends and families influence their behavior toward Apple. The aspect of identity and belongingness from the TPB is evident in this dimension as well. This could explain why participants expressed that they bought the same products as their family and friends to fit in. In particular, a majority of the participants were not necessarily drawn in by Apple's marketing initiatives themselves, but rather by the positive experiences shared by their close ones. The effect of positive word of mouth on those participants can be reinforced by the impact of subjective norms (Ajzen, 2020); i.e. friends and family on their behaviors; i.e. becoming Apple users, which validates Goldfayn (2011). Additionally, the tendency of participants to buy Apple products due to peer influence and the need for social recognition aligns with the findings of Kim and Jang (2024).

As explained in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Tajfel and Turner (1986), individuals' sense of identity is developed through their social group. This can describe why the fear of being left out is so effective when it comes to buying Apple products among friend groups. Viewing the answers through the lens of subjective norms of the TPB, it turns out that the marketed simplicity of Apple and its exclusive features seem to be what keep the participants as Apple consumers, not what pulls them into the products. As mentioned by Apple (2024), the company has a loyalty rate of 74% for trade-in purchases. In other words, Apple's marketing strategies seem to account for customer retention more than customer attraction, in our interpretation. Furthermore, the fear of being left out aligns with Maslow's need for belonging, since the need for belonging and being accepted by a group makes the individual want to follow the prevailing behaviors, in order to fit in. This need is especially targeted since Apple has a loyal fanbase that subsequently engages in word of mouth marketing, as explained

in the interviews. Furthermore, through the sense of community that was created among Apple users and the social aspects outlined by the participants, which are partially fulfilled by Apple's *iMessages*, *FaceTime* and *AirDrop*. Apple fills aspects of the need for connection. The feeling of being part of a larger community gets stronger the larger Apple's community becomes. This in turn reinforces some of the participants' satisfaction and willingness to Apple, as they feel connected to a large group of shared interests and values.

Participants often cited a fear of being left out before owning an Apple product, a feeling that Apple's marketing strategies seem to use to their advantage (Hiremath, 2022). This finding is in line with Kim and Jang's (2014) research, which found that social and economic factors significantly influence buying behavior. Specifically, their study highlighted that consumer behavior in the context of technology products is heavily influenced by social factors such as peer influence and Social Identity, which explains why participants felt compelled to adopt Apple products to fit in with their social groups. It can be argued that this fear stems from not wanting to be socially excluded, which drives to develop a strong emotional attachment to the brand as it symbolizes a sense of belongingness, which validates Wu and Vasquez (2015). As participant (#7) mentioned, they want to be part of that world. As individuals categorize themselves based on commonalities and shared group identities (Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C., 1986), a majority of the participants tend to identify with being an Apple consumer.

5.3 Self-Actualization Needs Interconnected with Innovation and Lifestyle Marketing

Self-actualization is the highest order needs in Maslow's hierarchy, which covers goal setting, mastery, creativity and personal growth. As seen in participant (#6) who experienced that Apple products aid in keeping track of health and fitness as well as school projects. The participant also described the products as practical, which can also be said to help personal growth by having smart devices that for example manage fitness protocols, calendar plans, timers, calorie trackers, etcetera. Participant (#5) highlighted that their Apple products are essential for their work due to their consistent reliability and support for multitasking.

When asking the participants questions about their experience with Apple products, the majority highlighted the simplicity and ease of use as key factors contributing to their positive attitudes. Many participants praised the nature of Apple's operating system, describing it as easy to navigate and user-friendly. This fact strengthens the consumers' perception of having their needs met, as the perceived behavioral control increases (Ajzen, 2020), which is positive for the needs of safety and esteem (Maslow, 1943). Another commonly positive perception that was brought up by the participants was the design and aesthetic appeal of Apple devices, often referring to it as a key factor in their initial attraction to the brand.

Participants seem to agree on and describe Apple products as capable, which can be argued to help them with regards to tasks that require creativity, inspiration and technical capability. Hence, Apple

contributes to the participants' self-actualization, as described by (Maslow, 1943), through offering innovative and versatile products and services. Cai and Chen (2024) highlight how Apple's marketing communications and product experiences stimulate emotional connections and enhance consumers' lifestyles, meeting desires for self expression and lifestyle enhancement. This aligns with participants' descriptions of Apple products contributing to their self-actualization and personal growth.

For some of the participants, the mere fact that they had owned Apple devices since their early adolescence days was enough of a reason for them to keep renewing. Some participants have reported that they have gotten so used to the software that they do not want to go through the hassle of switching brands, reassuring the findings of Hiremath (2022) regarding switching costs. They also experienced the convenience of remaining Apple consumers, since they are used to their systems, which is a sign of perceived behavioral control. Hence the relevance of the TPB in explaining participants' loyalty and somewhat positive attitude toward Apple.

This finding is consistent with Ekström, et al. (2017), who emphasized the role of habit and familiarity in driving brand loyalty, highlighting that long-term use and comfort with a brand contribute significantly to continued consumer loyalty. This correlates to the findings of Hsiao et al., (2016), where continuance usage was to a large extent linked to satisfaction and habitual use. Hence, the choice of some participants to continue buying Apple products can be tied by virtue of habit-induced ease of use. It also implies a certain level of satisfaction that explains their loyalty to the products, which the participants may not be aware of.

This can particularly be seen in the expressions of some participants who mainly buy Apple devices because of their trendiness. Students at Linköping University seem to have been drawn to Apple because the majority of students around them use their products. This implies that they had easier access to try them, heard about their uniqueness and had a reason to behave in conformity with their schoolmates. One notable aspect that stood out in one of the interviews was the prevalence of the fear of missing out among students already in their teenage years. This was a stronger reason for some participants to join than the actual specifications and attributes of the products. After having had a number of conversations and follow up questions with the participants, we co-observed that the pattern of buying Apple products mainly due to the fear of being left out was in fact a common pattern.

All things considered, there seems to be a latent emotion among consumers that Apple helps them with achieving their full potential, which correlates to self-actualization in (Maslow, 1943). Apple's marketing strategies, exemplified by the *Think Different* campaign, emphasize exclusivity and innovation catering directly to these needs (Isaacson, 2011). This is especially notable, since Apple products are described as; cool, premium, modern and futuristic by the participants, as well as the company's general emphasis on innovation and creativity. This is strengthened by the findings of Cai and Chen (2024), who highlight the role of Apple's innovation in meeting its consumers' needs.

5.4 Esteem Needs Interconnected with Differentiation and Anticipation

The premium look and feel of Apple products were frequently mentioned as contributing to a positive user experience. One major factor that is evident in Apple's communication is appealing to its users' need for status and esteem as they were perceived as "cool" and "modern" by some participants. As expressed in (Isaacson, 2011), the significance of the product design is for the main part in its role of creating a competitive advantage and differentiating Apple's products. Apple's philosophy of imputing prestige through innovative design and premium quality further strengthens consumers' perceptions of status and self-worth associated with using Apple products.

Some participants emphasized the importance of upgrading their devices to be part of the hype surrounding Apple's marketing efforts, despite acknowledging the high prices. This suggests that for these participants the feeling of prestige associated with obtaining Apple devices outweighs the cost complaints, which aligns with (Cai and Chen's, 2024). More specifically, Cai and Chen (2024) state how Apple fulfills its consumers' needs for status through its strong brand image and reputation. Apple's strategic philosophy focus involves anticipating consumer desires and differentiating its products to enhance perceived value and prestige. This dual focus on differentiation and anticipation reinforces consumers' esteem needs by offering products that are not only functional but also prestigious.

This can also be seen in Apple's desirable products appeal to its consumers as it can resemble a symbol of self worth and capability, which addresses the needs for esteem, as outlined by Maslow (1943). Participant (#8) mentioned a different emotion derived by the usage of an iPhone, which is feeling smarter than when using Android smartphones. Along those lines are the expression of participants (#5) and (#7) who highlighted how Apple's intuitive operating system enhances ease of use and device integration, which in turn fosters a strong emotional connection and loyalty to the brand. Our findings regarding the simplicity and user-friendly nature of Apple products align with the principles of design aesthetics discussed by Dahl (2006), which emphasize the importance of aesthetics and usability in enhancing consumer experiences.

The attitudes of the participants can also be linked to their need for social acknowledgment and Social Identity that they receive by sharing behaviors and values with other Apple enthusiasts, as explained by the SIT model (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), (see Fig. 2). Apple's marketing strategy successfully taps into these esteem needs by positioning its products as premium and desirable, thus aligning with the consumers' desire for status and recognition (Goldfayn, 2011). Rajendran & Hariharan's (1996) also suggest that meeting consumer preferences enhances perceived value.

Apple's strategy involves not only shaping consumer desires but also responding effectively to consumer preferences by integrating desired attributes into their products, enhancing both perceived quality and value. This approach addresses consumer concerns about product costs, as highlighted by participant (#4), who discussed the perceived value versus cost dilemma. Despite acknowledging the

high price of Apple products, participants recognize their value and perceive them as premium, aligning with Apple's strategy of maintaining a premium profile (Oliveira, 2021). This consumer perception is crucial, as it reinforces Apple's appeal as a brand associated with higher status and social validation. This aligns with Tajfel and Turner (1986) in explaining consumer motivations for purchasing luxury items, consistent with the findings of Kim and Jang (2024).

6. Conclusion

This segment will summarize the results through which we formulate the answers to our research questions. The aim, as discussed earlier, was to understand how Apple's marketing strategies align with the needs of consumers, categorized according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The findings from the analysis of participants' responses suggest that while Apple attempts to fulfill several consumer needs outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy, such as safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization, there are varying perceptions. Some participants feel that Apple's focus on high-end, expensive products caters more to esteem and self-actualization, potentially overlooking basic affordability and accessibility. This conclusion is detailed in the analysis section. Subsequently, the following summary derived from both the analysis and discussion sections, addresses the second research question.

A central theme in the philosophy of Apple as a company is best summarized with the quote by Steve Jobs; "*Get closer than ever to your customers. So close that you tell them what they need well before they realize it themselves*". This quote captures Apple's philosophy, suggesting that the company aims to shape consumer wants. However, this approach can be controversial, as it may sometimes prioritize driving demand for new products over addressing pre-existing consumer needs. This can be seen in the conceptual model (*see Fig. 5*), where Apple's strategies seem to be focused on eliciting a wide range of emotions that correlate to various psychological needs. Nevertheless, after having examined Apple's philosophy and marketing strategies, several key findings have been concluded. The conceptual model outlines how Apple's marketing strategies correlate with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, revealing nine strategies aligned with each level of the hierarchy. This alignment underscores Apple's focus on meeting the diverse needs of its consumers and concludes the study by answering our second research question.

Innovation and *lifestyle marketing* were found to be Apple's strategies through which they meet the need for self-actualization. In practice, participants' usage of Apple products for health, fitness and work tasks aligns with achieving their full potential and personal fulfillment. Additionally, *anticipation and differentiation* turned out to be the strategies that target the consumers' esteem needs. Participants showed anticipation for future Apple products and features, influenced by Apple's marketing efforts to create excitement around new releases. Apple products were seen as distinct status symbols and associated with prestige by the participants, fulfilling the need for exclusivity and social status.

The strategies of *word of mouth*, *the endowment effect* and the *ecosystem* were found to fulfill the need for love and belonging. This was evident in the role of existing consumers' recommendations in attracting new customers, the emotional attachment Apple creates by allowing consumers to interact with its products, and the connectivity of its ecosystem. Additionally, the ecosystem, along with data security, was found to address the safety needs of Apple's consumers. This is due to the ecosystem's integration, which syncs users' data across their devices, as well as Apple's advanced privacy and data

security measures. Having outlined the needs fulfilled by Apple products according to our participants and having identified the connection between these consumer needs and our interpretation of Apple's marketing strategies, we conclude that the study has successfully met its purpose.

6.1 Future Research

In terms of future research, there are several directions that could be explored. Firstly, it would be valuable to conduct studies that involve direct interviews with Apple executives, which was not feasible for us. Such research could provide firsthand insights into the strategic thinking behind Apple's marketing approaches and how they perceive consumer needs. This direct source of information could fill a significant gap, which we particularly observed in the current literature. Additionally, cross-cultural analyses could offer insights into how Apple's marketing strategies resonate across diverse cultural contexts.

Future research could examine Apple's marketing strategies in different cultural settings around the world. For example, a study could compare how consumers in Europe respond to Apple's marketing campaigns versus consumers in Latin America or the Middle East. This could reveal whether Apple's strategies are universally effective or if they need to be tailored to different cultural preferences and values. Something that we could not unveil due to our study being confined to participants at Linköping University. For reference, in our theoretical framework, we included a study conducted in Indonesia to provide a broader perspective, even though our primary research was based in Sweden. This highlights the potential value of further cross-cultural research to understand the global applicability of Apple's marketing strategies.

Lastly, conducting comparative analyses with competitors could highlight Apple's unique strengths and areas for improvement. Such research could involve comparing Apple's marketing strategies, product features and consumer satisfaction levels with those of other leading technology companies. The relevance of this lies in the lack of comparative studies on how big technology market leaders differ in meeting consumer needs.

References

- Ajzen, I. (1991). The Theory of Planned Behavior. *Organizational Behavior And Human Decision Processes*. doi: [10.1016/0749-5978\(91\)90020-T](https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T)
- Ajzen, I. (2020). The Theory of Planned Behavior: Frequently Asked Questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, [online] 2(4), pp.314–324. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.195>.
- Apple (2024). Apple reports first quarter results. [online] Apple Newsroom. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/1C9vR>
- Apple Support. (2024). *iCloud data security overview*. [online] Available at: <https://support.apple.com/en-us/102651#:~:text=Your%20iCloud%20data%20is%20encrypted.>
- Apple Inc. (2024.) Deployment Guide DM035. Available at: <https://it-training.apple.com/tutorials/deployment/dm035>
- Barak, M. M. (2008). Social psychological perspectives of workforce diversity and inclusion in national and global contexts. *Handbook of human service management*, 239-254. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/BV018>
- Bartosik-Purgat, M. (2008) 'Consumer Needs - The Base of Attitudes for Purchasing Foreign Products and Brand Products', *ZAGREB INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS*, 1 January, pp. 137–156. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/L8A3N>
- Booth, W.C. (2016) *The craft of research / Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, William T. FitzGerald*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Cai, Q. and Chen, S. (2024). Analysis of the Influencing Factors of Marketing Strategy on Consumer Purchasing behaviour: A Case Study of Apple. *SHS web of conferences*, 188, pp.03005–03005. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202418803005>.
- Cook, T. D., & Campbell, D. T. (1979). *Quasi-Experimentation: Design & Analysis Issues for Field Settings*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Diener, E., and Crandall, R. (1978). *Ethics in Social and Behavioral Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dooley, R. (2011) *Brainfluence*. 1st edn. Wiley. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/aciJ9>
- Ekström, K.M., Ottosson, M. and Parment, A. (2017) *Consumer Behavior: Classical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Studentlitteratur.
- European Commission (2024). *Sweden*. Stages of the Education System.[online] commission.europa.eu. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/ZLMvq>
- Etikprövningsmyndigheten. (2003) Vad säger lagen? Etikprövningsmyndigheten. [online] Available at: <https://etikprovningmyndigheten.se/for-forskare/vad-sager-lagen/>

George, D. A. S., & George, A. S. H. (2023). Leveraging the Ego: An Examination of Brand Strategies that Appeal to Consumer Vanity. *Partners Universal International Research Journal (PUIRJ)*, 02(03), 94-108. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/txVZ1>

George, T. and Kourti Chrisea (2007). Marketing Research Merely Reflects The Needs And Wants Of Consumers. [online] ResearchGate. doi: [10.3844/ajassp.2007.587.591](https://doi.org/10.3844/ajassp.2007.587.591)

Goldfayn, A.L. (2011). Evangelist Marketing: What Apple, Amazon, and Netflix Understand about Their Customers (That Your Company Probably Doesn't). LiUB Library Catalogue.

Homan, R. (1991). The Ethics of Social Research. London: Longman. *Social Forces*, Volume 58, Issue 3, March 1980, Pages 962–963.

Hiremath, N. (2022). Marketing Strategies used by Apple to Increase Customer Base. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, [online] 7(7). Available at: <https://ijisrt.com/assets/upload/files/IJISRT22JUL940.pdf>

Hsiao, K. L., Chen, C. C., & Lin, J. C. C. (2016). Factors influencing the continuance intention to the usage of Web 2.0: An empirical study. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 64, 1063-1072. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2015.08.014>

Isaacson, W. (2011). *Steve Jobs*. Simon & Schuster.

Kenney, E. (2018). Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. [online] Medium. Available at: <https://medium.com/@elskenney/abraham-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-cc1bc0124a24>.

Kim, D. and Jang, S. (2014). Motivational drivers for status consumption: A study of Generation Y consumers. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 38, pp.39–47. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2013.12.003>.

Kozinets, R.V. (2015) *Netnography: Redefined* (2nd ed). London: Sage. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.07.016>

Kotler, P., Keller, K.L., (2016) *Marketing management*. 15th ed. Boston: Pearson.

Laricchia, F. (2024). Topic: Samsung Electronics. [online] Statista. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/topics/985/samsung-electronics/#topicOverview>.

Laroche, M. (2010). Advances in internet consumer behavior and marketing strategy: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(9-10), pp.1015–1017. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.06.010>.

Li, Y. (2023). Success Secret of Apple: How Does It 'Manipulate' Consumers' Behaviors. *Highlights in Business, Economics and Management*, 11, pp.260–264. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/louha/Downloads/GAGBM2023-260-264.pdf>

Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: standards, challenges, and guidelines. *The Lancet*, [online] 358(9280), pp.483–488. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(01\)05627-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(01)05627-6)

Mitchell, W. (2014) 'Why Apple's product magic continues to amaze - skills of the world's #1 value chain integrator', *Strategy & Leadership*, 42(6), pp. 17–28. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/3M4nl>

Yacoub, M. (2023). 10+ Apple Brand Loyalty Statistics and Data (Latest Numbers). [online] Onlinedasher. Available at: <https://www.onlinedasher.com/apple-statistics/>.

- Oliveira, I. D. S. (2021). Analyzing the Sustainability of Apple's Competitive Advantage Inês da Silva Oliveira. [online]. Available at: https://run.unl.pt/bitstream/10362/139935/1/2020-21_fall_44480_inesoliveira.pdf
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Parker, M. (2000). *Organizational Culture and Identity*. London: Sage.
- Qian, R. (2024). Decoding the Apple Inc: The Detailed Analysis of Innovation, Marketing, and Brand Image. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences FMESS*, [online] 2024. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/TBxmx>
- Raciti, M.M., Russell-Bennett, R. and Letheren, K. (2022) 'A strengths-based approach to eliciting deep insights from social marketing customers experiencing vulnerability', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 38(11/12), pp. 1137–1177. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/dY4mu>
- Rahman, M.R. and Safeena, P.K. (2016) *Customer Needs and Customer Satisfaction*. India, Australia: ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute. Available at: <https://research-ebSCO-com.e.bibl.liu.se/linkprocessor/plink?id=b98983d0-3332-315a-a0b0-53e238104a1a>
- Rosário, A., & Raimundo, R. (2021). Consumer Marketing Strategy and E-Commerce in the Last Decade: A Literature Review. *Journal of Theoretical and Applied Electronic Commerce Research*, 16(7), 3003-3024. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/jtaer16070164>
- Rajendran, K.N. and Hariharan, H.S. (1996) 'Understanding Value: The Role of Consumer Preferences', *Journal of Marketing Management* (10711988), 6(1), pp. 8–19. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/BTUvU>
- Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., Thornhill, A. (2019). *Research Methods for Business Students*. 8th ed. Pearson.
- Shields, R. E. (2001). The Force of Callas' Kiss: The 1997 Apple Advertising Campaign, "Think Different". *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 21(3), 202-219. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930108616170>
- Smith, K. G., Grimm, C. M., & Gannon, M. J. (1992). *Dynamics of competitive strategy*. SAGE.
- Smith, K. G., Grimm, C. M., Chen, M.-J., & Gannon, M. J. (1989). Predictors of response time to competitive strategic actions: Preliminary theory and evidence. *Journal of Business Research*, 18(3), 245-258. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0148-2963\(89\)90048-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0148-2963(89)90048-9)
- Stávková, J., Stejskal, L., & Toufarová, Z. (2008). Factors influencing consumer behaviour. *Agricultural Economics (Zemědělská Ekonomika)*, 54(6), 276–284. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17221/283-AGRICECON>
- Syamsul Bachri *et al.* (2023) 'The Digital Marketing to Influence Customer Satisfaction Mediated by Purchase Decision', *Jurnal Aplikasi Manajemen*, 21(3), pp. 578–592. doi: <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.jam.2023.021.03.03>
- Teece, D. J. (2018). Profiting from innovation in the digital economy: Enabling technologies, standards, and licensing models in the wireless world. *Research Policy*, 47(8), 1367-1387. doi: [10.1016/j.respol.2017.01.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.01.015)

White, K. and Dahl, D.W. (2006) 'To Be or Not Be? The Influence of Dissociative Reference Groups on Consumer Preferences', *JOURNAL OF CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY*, 1 January, pp. 404–414.
Available at: <https://shorturl.at/xNf4C>

Wills, G., Kennedy, S.H., Cheese, J. and Rushton, A. (1990), "Maximising Marketing Effectiveness", *Management Decision*, Vol. 28 No. 2. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EUM00000000000054>.

Wu, Y.-C. and Vasquez-Parraga, A. Z. (2016) "Fitting Consumer Needs to Perceived Product Value: The Example of Apple versus Samsung Products," *Atlantic Marketing Journal*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 13.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/amj/vol5/iss2/13>

Zhang, G. (2023). The Influence of Social Media Marketing on Consumers' Behavior. *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences*. 20. 119-124. Available at:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373896655_The_Influence_of_Social_Media_Marketing_on_Consumers'_Behavior

Appendix

Interview Guidelines

- 1. Ensuring Confidentiality: Understanding Participants' Privacy Concerns**
Your participation in this study is completely anonymous. Your responses will be used to analyze perceptions of Apple products among Linköping University students, with no risk to you. Results may be published, but your anonymity will be maintained. Do I have your consent to proceed?
- 2. Get to know the participants' background and relationship with Apple.**
 - Can you describe your experience with using Apple products?
 - What initially attracted you to Apple products?
 - How do the Apple products that you own fulfill your daily needs or requirements?
- 3. Explore the role of Apple products in the participants' life.**
 - Do Apple products affect your lifestyle and if so in what way?
 - From your perspective, how does Apple's marketing approach influence your perception of the brand compared to other technology companies?
- 4. Explore perceptions of Apple's innovation and product differentiation.**
 - How would you describe Apple products in terms of functionality and design?
- 5. Explore the social aspect of identity and belongingness**
 - In what ways do you think Apple's marketing efforts contribute to building a sense of connection or identification with the brand among consumers?