

**The impact of a western country of reference (COR): The effect on Jordanian youth consumers****Mohammad Al Khasawneh<sup>a</sup>, Fandi Omeish<sup>b\*</sup>, Sager Alharthi<sup>c</sup>, Diala Al Asmar<sup>d</sup> and Joude Al-Taher<sup>d</sup>**<sup>a</sup> Professor, E-Marketing and Social Media Department, Princess Sumaya University for Technology, Amman, Jordan<sup>b</sup> Assistant Professor, E-Marketing and Social Media Department, Princess Sumaya University for Technology, Amman, Jordan<sup>c</sup> Assistant Professor, Business Administration Department, College of Administrative and Financial, Sciences, Saudi Electronic University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia<sup>d</sup> E-Marketing and Social Media Department, Princess Sumaya University for Technology, Amman, Jordan**CHRONICLE***Article history:*

Received: July 11, 2024

Received in revised format: August 2, 2024

Accepted: August 11, 2024

Available online: August 11, 2024

*Keywords:**Country-of-Reference**Westernization**Jordan**Purchase Behavior**eWOM**Herd Behavior**Social-Identity***ABSTRACT**

This study sought to empirically test the novel Country-of-Reference (COR)-effect by investigating the impact of Westernization on Jordanian youth's purchasing behavior. The constructs examined were (Social-Identity) Self-Discrepancy, eWOM, and Herd Behavior in relation to Western COR and subsequently, purchase behavior. The data was collected in two phases; semi-structured in-depth interviews and online surveys. 12 interviews were conducted in total, following the saturation principle. Moreover, 232 questionnaire responses were gathered, through convenience sampling and snowballing techniques. The study substantiated the existence of strong links between (social identity) self-discrepancy, eWOM, herding behavior, and Western COR. In addition, proved Western COR's mediating role between the variables and purchase behavior. Conclusively, all the proposed hypotheses were corroborated qualitatively and quantitatively. Researchers looking to further study the COR-effect should consider possible time, budget, and language restraints. As well as extend the literature to varying age groups and geographical areas. Moreover, it might be interesting to explore the COR concept in diverse industries and through a comparative research approach. This research paper analyzed a new notion of understanding consumer behavior. More specifically, it is the first to assess the role Westernization plays in Jordanian youth consumers' consumption behaviors. Further, the findings presented in this study can aid businesses and boost the economy, through encouraging "shop local" communication strategies.

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**1. Introduction**

The Country of Reference effect (COR) is a novel idea proposed by (Chen et al., 2020). It suggests that consumers mimic the purchasing behavior of foreign consumers, in order to bridge between a feeling of discontent; that arises due to an incongruence in self-perception, and their ideal self, through compensatory consumption. Moreover, the COR effect counteracts the limitations of the COO concept highlighted by many scholars, such as the COO's lack of breadth in tackling the social and psychological motivators behind consumer behavior, it's inability to conceptualize product origins beyond a manufacture-orientation, and the absence of relevant literature addressing "place" as a symbolic sphere (Andéhn & L'espoir Decosta, 2018; Garrett et al., 2017; Papadopoulos et al., 2018). Henceforth, the COR effect aims to provide a means to overcome the drawbacks of the COO concept, in order to deepen the knowledge of consumer markets (Chen, 2020; Chen et al., 2014). The current research paper draws on this theory and posits that a Western COR-effect exists amongst Jordanian youth consumers, and mediates their purchasing behavior. In light of the relevance the new construct promises, this research paper seeks to empirically investigate the COR-effect, to determine its viability in analyzing consumer behavior. This is realized through expanding the COO narrative to test the impact socio-

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psychological factors have on purchasing decisions (Chen et al., 2020). Further, the following research hopes to contribute to the academic literature, through filling in the gaps of preceding research (Chen, 2020; Diamantopoulos et al., 2017; Mostafa, 2015; Sadat Al Sajib et al., 2016), as it studies the COR effect in a diverse cultural context (Jordan). In addition, it integrates the concept of “Westernization” and the power it exerts on Jordanian youth consumers, as well as examines their actual purchasing behavior. Last, the importance in conducting this research is also extended to business sectors. More specifically, local (Jordanian) businesses could utilize the findings to better understand their target markets, and develop more effective marketing plans, which encourage youth consumers to positively perceive and eventually opt for local products. Consequently, nurturing a “shop local” initiative will not only stimulate sustainable expansion in domestic production, but will also aid in the economy’s recovery from the on-going pandemic (Heintz, 2020).

## 2. Literature Review

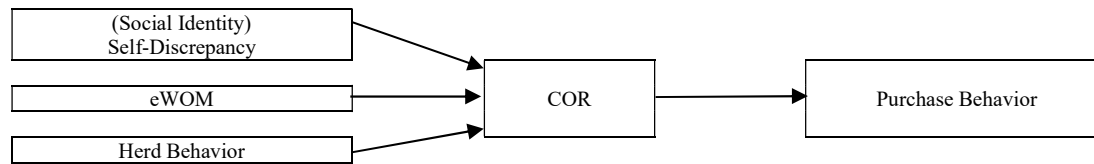
### 2.1. Introduction

The Country-of-Origin effect (COO) has been tremendously researched in recent years (Lu et al., 2016), and although, the field of study is saturated, many researchers stipulate that the importance of the COO effect is gradually decreasing (Chen et al., 2020). Moreover, many scholars have suggested the shift from the traditional understanding of COO effect (Andéhn & L’espoir Decosta, 2018), which is manufacture factor-related, towards a more socio-psychological understanding, that not only takes into account the various components of consumer behavior, but also, the symbolic significance of places (Papadopoulos et al., 2018). Hence, Chen et al (2020) introduce a new concept; the Country of Reference (COR) effect, which suggests that consumers pay greater attention to the purchasing behaviors of consumers residing in other countries, rather than the perceived (manufacturing) origins of products. They extend their concept to propose that consumers intentionally imitate the consumption patterns of consumers living in favorably perceived countries, thus, driving the COO literature away from production-focused and steering it towards consumption-focused. Moreover, in their conceptual research paper, Chen et al (2020) utilize a framework which encapsulates “self-discrepancy theory”, “system justification theory”, “decision heuristics”, and “mental stimulation effects”; in order to develop a model that tests the effect COR deploys on product preferences. They attempt to test out their concept through applying “optimal distinctiveness theory”, in which they postulate that consumers with a local membership group, who also mimic the purchasing behaviors of consumers in desirably perceived countries, fulfil both the need to fit in and the need to be unique. Chen et al (2020) also analyze the ‘optimal distinctiveness theory’ through studying “system justification theory” and “self-discrepancy theory”, in addition to, eWOM, as a contextual factor, and mental stimulation and herding behavior, as facilitating factors. They posit that positive system justification and self-discrepancy, coupled with the impact of eWOM, create “Etic Conformity”, which in return leads to the transmission of product preferences from consumers of one country to another, thereby placing COR as a mediator variable. Based on the research conducted by Chen et al (2020), their limitations, and recommendations for future research, a model was constructed for the current study; that aims to address the impact (social identity) self-discrepancy and eWOM have on COR, and on purchase behavior when mediated by COR.

First, self-discrepancy is a growing field of research within consumer psychology (Mandel et al., 2017). More so, self-discrepancies, stemming from an inconsistent social identity or self-concept, are hypothesized to affect consumption patterns; with (Mandel et al., 2017) suggesting a “Compensatory Consumer Behavior - (CCB)” model that is based on understanding the role self-discrepancy plays in altering purchasing behaviors. Furthermore, Mandel et al (2017) claim that social identity discrepancy, which results from negatively perceiving one’s social group, urges individuals to engage in compensatory behaviors that reduce the discomfort caused; usually through purchasing products that permit the individual to align themselves with the positively perceived social group. Henceforth, analyzing (social identity) self-discrepancy through a wider lens is proposed, where the social group is considered to be the society at large. The significance of researching (social identity) self-discrepancy in the aforementioned manner is evident in (Chen et al., 2020)’s conceptual paper, where they deconstruct and define (social identity) self-discrepancy in relation to COR as: individuals who wish to identify with consumers in foreign countries (“aspirational reference groups”), but are not able to do so, due to travel limitations, and instead self-soothe this discrepancy through purchasing products which the aspirational reference group members also purchase or favor, consequently, engaging in CCB (Mandel et al., 2017). Next, the influence eWOM exhibits on purchase decisions has been immensely noted in recent studies, with (Steenkamp, 2017) statistically calculating the increase/decrease in sales resulting from negative/positive eWOM. Further, the easy access and wide proliferation of consumer opinions and feedback have made eWOM a powerful information source, and an important tool to be utilized in purchasing decisions (Chen et al., 2020). Therefore, studying the effect of eWOM as a separate variable, rather than as a contextual variable as done by (Chen et al., 2020), is proposed; to determine the influence eWOM has on COR, and on purchase behavior when mediated by COR. Thus, in the context of the current research paper, Jordanian youth consumers’ sense of affiliation towards the Jordanian society will be evaluated as a yardstick of (social identity) self-discrepancy, in order to determine if a (social identity) self-discrepancy has an impact on Western COR, and purchase behavior when mediated by Western COR. Moreover, eWOM, as a unique variable, will be examined to determine the impact it has on both the COR effect and Jordanian youth consumers’ purchasing behaviors when mediated by Western COR.

The research questions in this paper are in line with previous studies' recommendations regarding future research on the topic of westernization within emerging economies; in the contexts of purchasing behavior and COO (Sadat al Sajib et al., 2016; Touzani et al., 2015), communication appeals (Shahin et al., 2019), and perceived preferences for western vs. local brands/products (Smaoui et al., 2016). In addition to, the role of self-image and social identity perceptions of Arabs vis a vis the West (El-Dine, 2016), and the impact of an existing/not self-discrepancy on consumption patterns (Mandel et al., 2017) within the MENA region (Touzani et al., 2015). Last, although the system justification theory had to be foregone, due to time restraints, (Chen et al., 2020)'s conceptual paper does suggest investigating the COR effect within the situations mentioned above.

## 2.2. Proposed Research Model



**Fig. 1.** The Research Model

Source 1: Modified for this research from Chen et al (2020).

### 2.2.1 (Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy

According to previous studies, social identity is defined as an individual's affiliation with one group, termed the "in-group/membership reference group", contrasted against the individual's detachment from another social group, termed the "out-group/dissociative reference group" (Kharroub, 2016). More specifically, social identity is one of the many identity pillars that formulate an individual's self-image, and therefore, plays a significant role in moderating how individuals interact in and with their environments (Kharroub, 2016; Mandel et al., 2017). On the other hand, Self-Discrepancy is a dissonance that occurs when individuals face an imbalance between who they are and who they want to be. Self-discrepancies impact varying dimensions of one's self-perception, such as, but not limited to; social identity; resulting in an altered behavior to alleviate the uneasiness created by the discrepancy (Kim & Gal, 2014; Li et al., 2019; Mandel et al., 2017). Hence, (Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy is a disparity stemming from adverse judgment, by peers, towards one's membership group; causing the individual to negatively perceive their social group and deflect from it (Mandel et al., 2017). This (social identity) self-discrepancy is assumed to lead to compensatory consumption; where individuals purchase products with symbolic connotations in order to lessen the discrepancy (Chen et al., 2020; Mandel et al., 2017; Xiao et al., 2018). Further, the significance of (social identity) self-discrepancy is evident in the studies published by (Chen et al., 2020 and Mandel et al., 2017), where they highlight the importance of understanding the impact self-discrepancies, especially, social identity discrepancies, have in the fields of consumer behavior and international marketing. Additionally, most scholarly articles written on self-discrepancy theory and the compensatory consumer behavior model were analyzed in South-East Asian countries, utilizing an experimental approach, and almost consistently recommended testing out the CCB model in relation to (social identity) self-discrepancy theory in differing cultural contexts (Kim & Gal, 2014; Li et al., 2019; Valaei & Nikhashemi, 2017). Thus, although the importance of comprehending the influence (social identity) self-discrepancy exhibits on purchase behavior, is well-established, the literature on (social identity) self-discrepancy falls behind in diversity of population samples and research design. Specifically, the CCB model proposed by (Mandel et al., 2017), as well as the "role theory", which discusses the impact of reference groups on product choices, proposed by (Schulz, 2015), must be tested quantitatively. In addition to, expanding the limited sample sizes in nearly all the prior work to encapsulate individuals from varying backgrounds and geographical locations (Chen et al., 2020; Li et al., 2019; Mandel et al., 2017; Schulz, 2015; Valaei & Nikhashemi, 2017). Subsequently, (Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy, in the current research paper, will be defined as an incongruity created by an individual's perceived lack of belonging to their local social group (society) – Jordanians' vis a vis Jordanian society, and the urge to associate with their aspirational reference group (the West/Western societies).

The researchers of the current study acknowledge that not much research has been done in the Arab Peninsula regarding such areas of pedagogy, however, two prominent papers by (Touzani et al., 2015) and (Smaoui et al., 2016) touched on the matter in question by carrying out research on the reasoning behind Tunisians' preferences for western products/brands, in relation to a (social identity) self-discrepancy harbored by western communications. Both papers relied on qualitative techniques, and ergo proposed future researchers to test out their findings quantitatively and in different parts of the Arab world. Thus, the assumption that Jordanians experiencing a (social identity) self-discrepancy would perceive the West as an aspirational group, is primarily based on (Touzani et al., 2015)'s findings in regard to Tunisian consumers' longing to acculturate with the West, and the researchers' recommendations to conduct research in varying Arab countries; to better understand the deeply seeded effects of western communications on Arab consumers' purchasing behavior. In addition to the prior explained importance of the following variable, it is necessary to re-emphasize how most scholarly articles written on self-discrepancy theory and the compensatory consumption

behavior model highlight the role of (social identity) self-discrepancy in purchasing decisions (Chen et al., 2020; Kim & Gal, 2014; Mandel et al., 2017), and stress the significance of conducting in-depth research utilizing mixed methodologies and analyzing a more diverse sample of consumers (Mandel et al., 2017; Xiao et al., 2018). Also, the relevance of (social identity) self-discrepancy in relation to COR is noted in (Chen et al., 2020)'s conceptual paper, yet it too requires quantitative testing, which will be carried out in the current research. Henceforth, it is hypothesized that the resulting (social identity) self-discrepancy will positively impact (Western) COR. Thus, the first hypothesis is:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *(Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy has a significant positive effect on (Western) COR.*

#### 2.2.2. eWOM

eWOM's widespread has made it a powerful communication tool that affects purchase behavior (Chen et al., 2020; Steenkamp, 2017). eWOM can be defined as sentiments (positive/negative), shared online, towards a specific topic. More, it is most often used to signify information online, shared by consumers (in the various stages of the consumer lifecycle) about products (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Mohammad et al., 2020). The importance of eWOM has been extensively studied over the past couple of years, with a substantial number of studies in differing contexts proving its burgeoning power within the consumption sphere (Steenkamp, 2017). More so, eWOM not only demonstrated high perceived credibility and reliability (Mohammad et al., 2020), but also, has been established as an unwavering communication tool (Chen et al.) and moderator of purchase intentions (Kudeshia & Kumar, 2017). Further, the significance of eWOM in relation to the COR effect is subtly noted in (Chen & Lu, 2014), where they discovered that the reliability of eWOM is dependent on the perceived perception of the individual/s sharing it and the extent to which those seeking the electronic recommendations tend to align themselves with the majority. Hence, a connection between the trustworthiness of eWOM and its providers is evident (Mohammad et al., 2020; Chen & Lu, 2014), and accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** *eWOM has a significant positive effect on (Western) COR.*

#### 2.2.3. COR

Country of reference is a novel concept derived from the COO concept. It is better suited to understand the psychology behind purchases, as it looks to analyze individuals' preferences for products from certain countries through positing that products with perceived foreign COO are purchased because of the products' users, rather than the perceived manufacturing country of the products. Simply, COR claims that consumers in a country perceived inferiorly, purchase products used by consumers in favorably perceived foreign countries. Thus, consumers imitate consumption patterns of those perceived highly, as a way to associate themselves with them; such that the foreign consumers become the aspirational reference groups of the local consumers (Chen et al., 2020). Furthermore, the value of the COR effect arises from the numerous recommended changes to the understanding of the COO concept by contemporary scholars (Chen et al., 2020). In addition to, a huge amount of preceding literature highlighting the positive influence of perceived COO on purchasing behavior in both emerging and developed economies (Rooma & Ramsaran, 2015). However, the existing literature has identified a recurring theme which is unique to developing countries; where consumers opt for and purchase products from favorably perceived foreign countries, even when the prices are significantly higher (Rooma & Ramsaran, 2015; Woo et al., 2017). Moreover, the tendency to associate western products with symbolic attributes such as a "sense of freedom" has been witnessed in the purchasing behaviors of consumers from developing regions, where they not only prefer purchasing western products, but also, believe that through buying them, they identify with the positively perceived western country (Sadat al Sajib et al., 2016; Smaoui et al., 2016; Touzani et al., 2015). Consequently, a relationship undoubtedly exists between the COO effect and purchase behavior and is therefore also extended to the COR effect (Chen et al., 2020). Based on this, the third hypothesis is proposed:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *(Western) COR has a significant positive effect on purchase behavior.*

#### 2.2.4. Purchase Behavior

Purchase behavior refers to the actual consumption pattern of consumers, meaning that it considers what individuals indeed buy in their day to day lives (Rahman et al., 2020). Therefore, purchase behavior in the current study denotes consumers' actual consumption patterns. Further, purchase behavior in relation to COO has been extensively examined, with multiple studies attesting to COO's impact on purchase intentions (Rooma & Ramsaran, 2015; Woo et al., 2017), especially, perceived western COO (Mostafa, 2015; Smaoui et al., 2016). More, the COO impact has also been linked to the consumption behavior of consumers in favorably perceived countries (Touzani et al., 2015). However, due to the saturation in the COO field, (Chen et al., 2020)'s proposed COR effect offers a more modern approach to understanding the role of COO; through the adoption of a consumption focused concept. Ergo, the current study follows (Chen et al., 2020)'s placement of COR as a mediator variable and proposes that the COR also acts as a mediator in the constructed model. More specifically, the proposed assumptions are that (Western) COR mediates the relations between (social identity) self-discrepancy and purchase behavior, and eWOM and purchase behavior, in Jordanian youth consumers. These assumptions are drawn from the multitude of studies repetitively mentioned above, which tackle the influence of westernization on (social identity) self-discrepancy and eWOM, in consumers from emerging economies. Hence, the final hypotheses, which draw on previous literature and do by the suggested recommendations, are:

**H4:** (Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy has a significant positive effect on purchase behavior, when mediated by COR.

**H5:** eWOM has a significant positive effect on purchase behavior, when mediated by COR.

### 3.1. Research Methodology

A mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques have seldom been used in recent years, mainly due to the complexity of applying a mixed method approach and a more generalized favoritism towards quantitative data and quantitative analysis techniques (Harrison & Reilly, 2011). However, the academic importance of more frequently adopting mixed methodologies in the marketing and social sciences' arenas has been pointed out by researchers (Valtakoski, 2019); drawing on the benefits and flexibility only an integrative method allows (Piccioli, 2019). Moreover, modern scholars' have begun to emphasize the advantages mix methods encompass; chief amongst them, gaining deeper and insightful knowledge on ambiguous research topics (Truong et al., 2020). Additionally, mixed methodology allows scholars from different disciplines to share a common research instrument, solve a wide range of emerging dilemmas, and even permits minorities to engage in and contribute to academic work more justly (Fetters and Molina-Azorin, 2017). Accordingly, a mixed methods approach is utilized in the current study; in order to, first, better comprehend the social phenomena at hand through applying qualitative techniques, and later, statistically prove (disprove) the hypotheses drawn through quantitative analysis.

### 3.2. Qualitative methods

One prominent feature of qualitative methods is the capacity it grants for flexible exploration. In addition to the depth of the information collected, the researchers' abilities to navigate through the information provided during the collection phase and identify patterns that would have otherwise been missed (Taylor et al., 2015). Therefore, a qualitative approach has been utilized as a first step; to deepen the understanding of the novel concept of COR and the proposed variables - (social identity) self-discrepancy and eWOM in relation to Western COR - within a localized context (Jordan).

#### 3.2.1 Interviews

In-depth interviews are a popular tool of qualitative research rooted in social disciplines, due to their resemblance of a conversation which garners huge amounts of data on a specific topic. More, in-depth interviews provide the interviewer with the unique advantages of learning the reasoning behind the phenomena being studied and the contexts in which different reasons arise. Additionally, in-depth interviews broaden the perspective of the interviewees beyond their initially presumed conceptions and bring to the forefront unconsidered variables (Belk et al., 2013). Hence, in-depth interviews have been adopted in the current research paper.

#### 3.2.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews grant the researchers freedom in steering the interview to emphasize points of interest. Moreover, they provide rapport for both the interviewee and interviewer through maintaining a semi-rigid form derived from pre-determined open-ended questions, whilst also, adjusting to meet each interviewee's communicative needs through question probing and alteration (Dearnley, 2005). Thus, conducting semi-structured interviews has been chosen, as they permit the exploration of the research topic in a coherent manner.

#### 3.2.3. Sample

The sampling technique chosen for the following research paper was 'Key Informant Sampling'; where interviews were held with individuals perceived to be knowledgeable about the research topic (Young et al., 2018). The interviewees were further filtered based on their nationality (Jordanian), age (youth: 18 to 35 years old) (Kailath, 2017), and educational backgrounds (which ranged between high-school diplomas and postgraduate degree). This sampling method was favored over others, as the current research seeks to understand consumer behavior within a very specific context (Jordanian youth consumers). Moreover, the saturation principle was applied, as it provides the opportunity of gathering information with a minimized risk of redundancy (Boddy, 2016). In total, 12 interviews were conducted, over a period of three weeks. The interviews lasted an average of 30 - 60 minutes and were held through utilizing an online communication tool (Zoom), due to on-going pandemic (COVID-19).

#### 3.2.4. Interview Process

All the interviews were conducted over Zoom (an online video conferencing software) and recorded; to ensure consistency during the analysis phase. Moreover, every interviewee was briefed about the topic of research at the beginning of the interview, assured that all answers are correct, and asked for consent to record (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Additionally, all the subjects were promised confidentiality through anonymizing their names, and ensuring that the recordings will not be accessed by anyone but the interviewers. Thus, all participants were assigned alphabetical identifiers and all interviews were transcribed by the interviewers (Saunders et al., 2014). Moreover, as suggested by (Morse & Peggy-Anne Field, 2006), every interview was scheduled according to the interviewees' preferred time, as was the language deployed in the interviews; navigating between the Arabic and English languages to ensure that interviewees' felt comfortable throughout the process. Further, given that semi-structured interviews were

conducted, the interviewers asked the participants a series of identical questions, which followed the same sequence, as well as, probed and altered other questions according to the interviewees' contributions (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Similarly, the researchers applied a funnel protocol, starting off with broad questions that became more specific as the interview progressed. In addition to, utilizing a combination of descriptive, normative, and contrast questions; to gain comprehensive insights that address the research objective. More specifically, all the interviews begun with a descriptive question (e.g., Describe your decision-making process when purchasing a product?), next, the subjects were probed using structural questions (e.g., What factors do you build your purchasing decision upon?), and finally, contrast questions were utilized to deepen the understanding of and confirm the information gathered (e.g., So, does this apply to other products as well, like clothes or food, or is it just with skincare?). On top of that, standard probing questions such as "Kindly elaborate on what you said" were used to clarify responses that were ambiguous (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Overall, the interview process drew on existing literature regarding initiating, managing, and concluding interviews for qualitative research approaches (Adams & Eike, 2010; Turner, 2010; Whiting, 2008).

### 3.2.5. Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was deployed, as it accommodates not only the frequency of a recurring idea, but also, the emergence of totally new ones. Additionally, thematic analysis offers the researchers a meticulous way of evaluating and drawing conclusions from the data (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Moreover, thematic analysis deconstructs huge bulks of information through identifying major concepts. This is done via transcribing the interviewees' contributions and then indexing them to formulate themes (Ngulube, 2015). Henceforth, thematic analysis was the adopted method of analyzing the qualitative data in the current study, where the analysis of the interviews was carried out through coding each interview manually, as (Valtakoski, 2019) conveys that manual coding provides a richer overview.

### 3.2.6. Findings from the semi-structured interviews

The presented findings are of relevance to the current research objective, as they elaborate on the notions of (social identity) self-discrepancy, eWOM, and Western COR's role in mediating purchasing behaviors amongst youth Jordanian consumers. Furthermore, in order to ensure a great degree of reliability, a wide range of products were used in the questions and altered to match the interviewees' purchase interests. In addition to, blending between the Arabic and English languages to ensure that the participants fully comprehended the questions and felt comfortable sharing their insights. Conclusively, three prominent themes emerged, two were anticipated: 'Jordanian (Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy' and 'Jordanians' Trust of eWOM' - and the third: 'Herd Behavior to the West' surfaced as a new theme. In this research, the three themes are suggested to positively impact the Western COR effect, and subsequently, positively influence purchase behavior when mediated by Western COR. Hence, the findings deduced from the semi-structured interviews are arranged as themes in the following table and discussed in detail below.

#### 3.2.6.1. Summary of Results from the Semi-Structured Interviews

**Table 1**  
Summary of Interviews

Themes/Comments	Interviewees												
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	
<b>Jordanian (Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy/Western Favoritism</b>													
Identifies with western consumers	√	√		√		√	√				√	√	
Perceives westerners as less judgmental/less cultural pressures	√	√		√			√				√		
Perceives westerners as practical/Concerned with functionality		√			√	√					√		
Perceives Jordanians as concerned with appearances/ Prestige		√			√						√	√	√
Perceives Jordanian as resistant to change/Traditional	√	√		√	√		√				√		
Perceive Jordanian to engage in herd behavior (Mainly to the West)	√	√	√	√	√				√	√	√	√	√
Perceives western products as high quality		√							√		√	√	√
Perceives western Product as safer/better regulated	√	√	√	√					√		√		
Preference for western products	√	√					√	√			√	√	
<b>Jordanians' Trust of eWOM</b>													
eWOM quality depends on expertise of eWOM provider		√	√	√		√					√	√	
eWOM from the west perceived as more credible	√	√		√	√		√				√	√	
<b>Hers Behavior To the West</b>													
Follows Western eWOM	√	√		√	√		√					√	
Sense of belonging to the West	√	√					√	√					√
Sense of belonging unclear				√	√	√			√	√	√	√	
Favorably perceive Western consumers	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	
Imitate western's purchase behavior	√	√		√	√			√	√		√	√	
Favorably perceive Western product	√	√					√	√			√	√	

#### 3.2.6.2. Jordanian (Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy/ Western Favoritism

The interviewees were asked two questions to discover if they exhibited a (social identity) self-discrepancy, which prompted or led to the development of a positive affiliation towards the West, and in return created a Western COR effect.

First, interviewees were asked to provide a personal description on their perceptions of Jordanian consumers (supposed membership reference group) vs. Western consumers (supposed aspirational reference group).

The two most stated differences were that Jordanians tend to imitate the West (Interviewees: A, B, C, D, E, H, I, J, K, L), and are more concerned with “prestige” and their social images (Interviewees: B, E, F, H, J, K, L), contrasted to the West who are more practical. For Example, interviewee B said that: “...: *I feel Jordanian consumers are very, very swept away by the appearance of products, rather than the actual functionality, and they just follow whatever the trend is, they don't really see if it benefits them. They look after social class... But Western consumers, I feel like they highlight the functionality of the products and care less about the social class. They don't just buy for the sake of buying products*”.

Similarly, interviewee E reaffirmed these views by stating “... *I feel like Jordanians are very westernized... when I say westernized, I mean all of them; West Europe, North America and Australia... Jordanians follow them most of the time. So, it's the same crowd mostly... They would go for stuff that looks better or sometimes, I see this often, they will go for stuff that is more expensive just because they're expensive, hence why you have a lot of “Apple” products in Jordan*”. Moreover, interviewee J shared the same notion of Jordanians' immense care for ‘prestige’ claiming “... *a lot of the consumption has to do with prestige... like people are willing to take loans and be in debt... in specific circles... I feel like it's less now than in the past, but still, they're willing to be indebted, just to buy a specific type of car or a house in a specific area... so yeah, this might be a difference between us (Jordanians) and westerners. We maintain prestige in all classes, or let's say middle and upper, but they (westerners) are more practical, generally speaking*”.

Other respondents had slightly varying answers, with interviewee C saying that: “*They're both cautious of what they buy... I think they both have the same buying ways*”, and interviewee (G) stating that: “...*I don't think I have thought about it before. I don't know much about it*”.

Second, interviewees were asked to share their feelings of belonging to the Jordanian society (membership reference group). The majority of responses entailed a lack of sense of belonging to the Jordanian community, and rather, a stronger association with the West.

For example, interviewee A voiced her discontent at the Jordanian society and shared her sense of belonging to the West stating that “... *here I just don't like the people, their values and how they belittle women, but I do like the family aspect... However, I do feel like I belong in Canada more because I would like to make friends with non-Arabs in a sense, as I don't like the value of how women are below and how everything here (Jordan) is ‘Haram’*”.

Also, interviewee H shared their identification with the West saying: “...*I definitely feel like I identify more in a western country*”. On the other hand, respondents F and L stated that although they don't identify with every aspect of the Jordanian society and perceive themselves to lean more towards the West, they still admired some traits which Jordanians share: “... *A situation in which my values aligned with Jordanians would be... maybe, you know how there's this general idea that Jordanians are helpful and that they're willing to help in whatever circumstances...*” (F), and “... *I like a lot of things about our culture, like how welcoming we are, how kind we are*” (L).

Overall, interviewees confirmed that some sort of (social identity) self-discrepancy does in fact exist amongst youth Jordanian consumers. More specifically, a majority of the respondents shared negative associations towards Jordanian consumers, perceiving them as less informed and more concerned with social image and trends ‘popular in the West’. Contrary to this perception was the interviewees' description of Western consumers, who were believed to be more practical, less judgmental, and generally, more informed. Furthermore, when the interviewees were asked about which group, they identified with (Jordanians vs. Westerners), most claimed to feel that they better identified with Westerners in regard to shared values and consumption patterns.

Thus, the interviewees' answers attest to the proposed hypothesis that:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** *(Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy has a significant positive effect on (Western) COR.*

### 3.2.6.3. Jordanians' Trust of eWOM

The interviewees were asked three questions regarding eWOM; to determine the role eWOM plays in their purchasing process and if a Western COR effect exists in their perceived trustworthiness of eWOM.

First, the interviewees were asked to describe their decision-making process when purchasing a product. Most interviewees emphasized eWOM as a determining factor in their decisions (A, B, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L). For example, interviewee L stated: “... *I really like reviews. Even with movies, when the cinemas were open, I had to always go check out the reviews to see how the movie is performing*”. Similarly, interviewee I said that: “...*For example with a book, if I like its title, I do my research by browsing reviews on websites that are legit, such as ‘goodreads’... So, based on the reviews and the reading sample, I would decide on whether or not to give the book a shot*”.

On the flip side, a few respondents mentioned price as their primary purchase decision determinant: “... *Price! Price is one of the things... but I think it depends on the things (purchased)*” (J).

Second, the participants were asked to describe the extent to which they believed eWOM played a role in their purchasing decisions. Nearly all the respondents stressed the power eWOM displays in their purchasing decisions. Surprisingly though was the importance some attributed to the expertise of the reviewer (the person providing the eWOM).

For example, interviewee F stated that: *"...Honestly, I would read online reviews that just normal consumers post to make sure that there are no... say, issues with the product, that aren't mentioned, or some products might be defective, so I'd read the online reviews to be sure that generally the product is as advertised. These are the normal people reviews, however, reviewers, professionals to be specific, I would say their reviews are pretty influential to me"*.

Third, the interviewees were given a scenario which required them to choose between the eWOM provided by a Westerner vs. a Jordanian. In the scenario, both individuals were given the same descriptive identities, thus only highlighting their nationality as the point of differentiation. The majority of the answers indicated that the eWOM by Westerners was perceived as more credible (A, B, D, E, G, J, K).

For instance, interviewee B stated that: *"... for some reason I'd feel that the American one would be way more credible. Maybe because I have the sensation that she has more knowledge compared to the Jordanian. Maybe because Jordanians, generally, like company owners, tend to only look after the purchasing amount or percentage... they care about the sales rather than actually making the people benefit from their products"*.

Altogether, the interviewees asserted the importance of eWOM in their purchasing decisions; with the majority ranking eWOM as a primary factor in their decision-making process when purchasing products. Moreover, when interviewees were asked if they paid attention to the reviewers' nationalities, and if that played a role in the trustworthiness of the eWOM, many said that they in fact did care about where the reviewer was from and expressed that Westerners were more credible sources of eWOM. However, another facet for the credibility of eWOM arose, which was the perceived level of expertise of the reviewer, with some respondents claiming to only care for that. Nonetheless, the respondents' replies corroborate the second suggested hypothesis that:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** *eWOM has a significant positive effect on (Western) COR.*

#### 3.2.6.4. *New Themes That Emerged - Herd Behavior to The West*

An interesting and unexpected theme which emerged from the semi-structured interviews was herd behavior, specifically, Jordanian youth consumers' tendency to engage in herd behavior to the West. Herd (herding) behavior has been repetitively defined as: the blind imitation of others' behaviors/choices (Benmabrouk, 2018; Kanojia et al., 2020; Kumari et al., 2019). This social phenomenon has mostly been studied in a financial context, and therefore would benefit from diverse research (Kumari et al., 2019). Moreover, the significance of better understanding herding behavior stems from the evident impact such an occurrence has on purchasing behavior and the marketing industry (Huh et al., 2014; Rejikumar et al., 2021). In the current research, herd (herding) behavior follows the same definition adopted in former studies. Additionally, given that this study draws on (Chen et al., 2020)'s study, conceptualizing herding behavior as an independent variable in relation to COR is beneficial, as per their and precedent researchers' recommendations for future research on the COR effect. Henceforth, the interviews conducted revealed that herd behavior is a powerful motivator in Jordanian youth consumers' purchasing behavior. Specifically, almost all the interviewees mentioned the influence Western trends and majority opinion and consumption styles have on their purchase decisions and subsequently, purchasing behavior. For example, when asked what role they believed other consumers played in their purchasing decisions, multiple interviewees asserted that if many people are purchasing a specific product, they were very likely to also purchase that product, even if they weren't fully convinced of it. Moreover, when probed about if the effect of herd behavior is stronger when an activity is carried out by Westerners vs. Jordanians, many respondents shared that they were more likely to impulsively follow Westerners. For example, interviewee K shares: *"... for example, there was this phase, I don't remember what year, where people in the West started going for oriental stuff, and for us, as Jordanians, it may be something that we're all used to. However, when in the Western world they started wearing these things as something that is new to them, I felt like here, in Jordan, as well, people started doing it again...Yes, I took part in this. I actually even tried to start a business out of it, but it failed miserably!"*.

Similarly, interviewees E and D shared that: *"... If I see a lot of people buying something, I definitely feel like I should buy it, even if I'm convinced that my option is better. So, that's the role they play... I would go for the popular products...and I would say if it's more popular in the West, I would go for that"* (E), and *"... I think many Jordanians go for what Americans recommend, so whatever Americans are going for right now the Arabs or Jordanians look up to them and follow their footsteps. We follow them more than we go for what we want. We would rather be similar to them"* (D).

On the other hand, some respondents expressed their disdain for imitating the product choices of others. For example, one of the interviewees stated that: *"... I'm really not the type of person who is affected by others... If I'm convinced of what I want, then I'm going to get it, even if other people perceive it as silly or not nice... you know, I don't really care what other consumers have to say as long as I'm convinced of the product; if I like it, or if I need it in my life or not, and whether I want it or not. Honestly speaking."* (I).



Again, another interviewee reemphasized this opinion by saying: “... *If something is trending, I would run away from it, a complete 180 degrees, and just buy something completely different. I like to think of myself as a trendsetter when I’m probably not... people just probably laugh at me, but I just enjoy doing that and being a bit different. Like if somebody’s wearing what I’m wearing, I’d just be uncomfortable and quite frankly, a bit unhappy, like” oh I gotta go change.*” (H).

All in all, the interviewees demonstrated some form of herding behavior, especially to the West. However, of interest is the need to be unique, perceived in older interviewees (29 to 34 years old), compared to their younger counterparts, who exhibited a stronger need to assimilate with the (Western) majority through mimicking their purchase behaviors. Hence, it’s hypothesized that:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *Herd behavior has a significant positive effect on (Western) COR.*

Further, based on the data which emerged from the semi-structured interviews, the fourth stipulated hypothesis is that:

**H<sub>4</sub>:** *(Western) COR has a significant positive effect on purchase behavior.*

Conclusively, the fifth, sixth, and seventh hypotheses emerge from the information uncovered by the themes above:

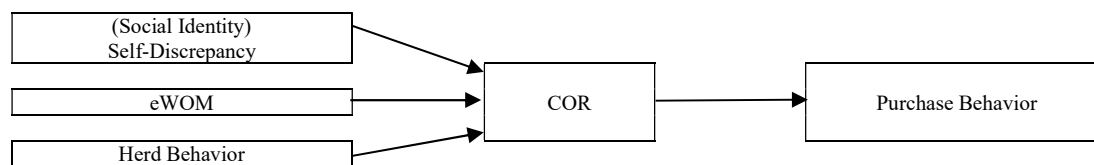
**H<sub>5</sub>:** *(Social Identity) Self-Discrepancy has a positive effect on purchasing behavior when mediated by (Western) COR.*

**H<sub>6</sub>:** *eWOM has a significant positive effect on purchasing behavior when mediated by (Western) COR.*

**H<sub>7</sub>:** *Herd behavior has a significant positive effect on purchasing behavior when mediated by (Western) COR.*

### 3.2.7. Revised Research Model

Given the identification of a new variable, which came to light during the interviews, the following modification to the initial research model is proposed:



**Fig. 2.** Revised Research Model

## 4.1 Quantitative Analysis

As previously mentioned, a mixed methodology approach was utilized in this research, and thus a quantitative research approach is presented as the next step in the research design process. Quantitative methods help researchers encompass a wider population during a narrow timeframe, as well as support the proliferation of the findings in a statistically significant and representative manner (Swanson & Holton, 2005; Truong et al., 2020). Henceforth, a quantitative approach complements the formerly applied qualitative approach, by strengthening the corroborated hypotheses through numerical testing. Moreover, it allows the current study to quantify the data collected in the earlier stage and expand it further through the utilization of quantitative techniques. Additionally, it permits the researchers to objectively analyze the data gathered, and even generalize the deduced results (Goertzen & Ala Techsource, 2017; Sukamolson, 2007).

### 4.1. Surveys

Surveys are one of the most popular data collection tools used in quantitative research (Bowling, 2009). They provide the researchers with a relatively cheap opportunity to gather huge amounts of data about varying topics (Gürbüz, 2017). Moreover, they usually have the advantages of being “self-administered” and anonymous, which theoretically should permit the mining of highly reliable data. In addition to, the close-ended question-format with specific point scales which allows for more accurate interpretation of the data (Nardi, 2018). Therefore, surveys were utilized as the main data collection method during the quantitative analysis phase.

### 4.2. Online Surveys

In addition to what has been mentioned above, the following research relied on online surveys, due to their low cost and ease of distribution (Stockemer, 2018). More, online surveys enable researchers to gather sensitive data from a diverse range of individuals in short periods of time (Wright, 2006). As well as require fewer labor efforts in regard to data analysis, as most survey platforms encapsulate easy data extraction tactics (Nardi, 2018).

### 4.3. Data Collection

Given the use of online surveys as a data collection tool, a questionnaire was designed on ‘Google Forms’ and later distributed via social networking sites, through utilizing a snowballing technique. The questions addressing the variables proposed in this research paper were derived from existing literature.

First, the questions pertaining to (social identity) self-discrepancy were deduced from a scholarly article by (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) and adjusted to match the current research objective (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) were the first to create a scale for quantitatively measuring social identity theory and the impact it has on an individual’s life. Moreover, the scale constructed consisted of 4 categories: “Membership”, “Private”, “Public”, and “Identity”, however, only the subscales in the identity category were utilized in the current study, as they were the most suitable for analyzing the aforementioned variable.

Second, the questions adopted for eWOM were chosen from a research paper by (Rejikumar, et al., 2021) (Rejikumar, et al., 2021) sought to understand the role of eWOM in influencing online shopping behavior, and therefore some of their scales were utilized and adjusted for the current research.

Third, the questions addressing herd behavior were also deduced from (Rejikumar, et al., 2021), who in addition to researching the role of eWOM, looked to understand how herding behavior in consumer purchasing occurs. Hence, given the similarity between (Rejikumar et al., 2021) and the following research variables, some of their scales were altered and used.

Fourth, the questions regarding COR were developed from (Pratono, & Arli, 2020)’s scholarly article, which investigated the impact of global consumer culture on purchasing intentions, through the utilization of 4 consumer behavior categories. For the current study, only one category’s scales were adopted; “Global Consumer Culture”, and modified to suit the current study, since there has been no empirical research on the COR effect to date (Chen et al., 2020).

Last, the questions for purchase behavior were based upon research conducted by (Soh et al., 2017) to study the purchase intentions of youth. The scales derived from (Soh et al., 2017) were also adjusted to fit the research questions of the current study.

Further, ‘Google Forms’ was preferred over other survey platforms, as it offers easy data editing, extraction, and storage features, as well as simple visualizations of the data collected. Also, ‘Google Forms’ is relatively straightforward, making it extremely easy to navigate and shift through questions on a wide range of devices (Djenno et al., 2015).

More, the questionnaires were distributed across social networking sites, specifically; Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp, for two weeks. Additionally, to ensure a high response rate, the survey was shared with several groups on the social networking sites; whose participants fit the research population.

Altogether, social networking sites and a snowballing technique were utilized as distribution methods, due to their ability to reach the appropriate population, and the limitation enforced by the on-going COVID-19 pandemic; which made it difficult to carry out a different distribution method (Dusek et al., 2015; Torrentira, 2020).

### 4.4. Measurement and Scaling

The questionnaires were adopted from previous literature and altered to meet the current research’s objectives, as is mentioned above. In total, 21 scales were developed, and an additional 3 factors were included to capture demographic information (Gender, Age, and Educational Background). Moreover, a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the proposed hypotheses, with 1 signifying “Strongly Disagree”, 5 signifying “Strongly Agree”, and 3 signifying “Neutral”. The deployment of a typical 5-point Likert scale is in-line with the existing literature from which the survey questions were derived (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Pratono, & Arli, 2020; Rejikumar, et al., 2021; Soh et al., 2017). To elaborate, all the scales adopted were slightly modified to include the notion of “West/Western”, and edited to align with the local context of the research; in order to gain a representative understanding of the examined phenomena. The first variable consisted of 8 scales (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The second and third variables were adopted from the same scholarly article (Rejikumar, et al., 2021); where eWOM consisted of 4 scales, while Herd Behavior was comprised of 3 scales. Last, the remaining two variables were made up of 3 scales each. Particularly, to test the COR effect empirically, 3 scales were deployed (Pratono, & Arli, 2020), and similarly, 3 scales were selected to investigate purchase behavior (Soh et al., 2017).

#### 4.4.1. Scaling Table

**Table 2**  
Scaling Table

Original Questions	Adjusted Questions
Social Identity Self-Discrepancy (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992)	
1. I often regret that I belong to some of the social groups I do. 2. In general, I am glad to be a member of the social groups I belong to. 3. Overall, I often feel that the social groups of which I am a member aren't worthwhile. 4. I feel good about the social groups I belong to. 5. Overall, my group memberships have very little to do with how I feel about myself. 6. The social groups I belong to are an important reflection of who I am. 7. The social groups I belong to are unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am. 8. In general, belonging to social groups is an important part of my self-image.	1. I often regret that I belong to Jordanian social groups. 2. In general, I'm glad to be a member of the Jordanian social groups I belong to. 3. Overall, I often feel that the Jordanian social groups of which I'm a member aren't worthwhile. 4. I feel good about the Jordanian social groups I belong to. 5. Overall, my group memberships have very little to do with how I feel about myself. 6. The Jordanian social groups I belong to are an important reflection of who I am. 7. The Jordanian social groups I belong to are unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am. 8. In general, belonging to Jordanian social groups is an important part of my self-image.
eWOM (Rejikumar, et al., 2021)	
9. I feel online information shared out of expertise on the matter are credible. 10. I think online information is credible if many others share the same feeling. 11. I consider other's views in my decisions. 12. I like to use popular online reviews in my decision-making.	9. I feel online information shared out of Western expertise on products are credible. 10. I think online information is credible if other Westerners share the same feeling. 11. I consider Westerners' views in my decisions. 12. I like to use popular (Western) online reviews in my decision-making.
Herd Behavior to the West (Rejikumar, et al., 2021)	
13. I will follow the majority in my decisions. 14. I feel that accepting views of the majority is safe. 15. I feel that accepting views of the majority is beneficial.	13. I will follow the Western majority in my buying decisions. 14. I feel that accepting views of the Western majority is safe. 15. I feel that accepting views of the Western majority is beneficial.
COR (Pratono, & Arli, 2020)	
16. I identify with famous international brands. 17. I pay attention to the famous clothes worn by people in my age group that live in other countries. 18. I believe that advertising by foreign or global brands has a strong influence on my clothing choices.	16. I favour products or brands purchased by Westerners. 17. I pay attention to the products bought by people in my age group that live in Western countries. 18. I feel that Westerners have a strong influence on my buying decisions.
Purchase Behavior (Soh et al., 2017)	
19. I often buy luxury fashion products. 20. When I go shopping, I often look for luxury fashion products. 21. I often choose to buy luxury fashion products, even if they are more expensive than other products.	19. I often buy Western products. 20. When I go shopping, I often look for Western products. 21. I often choose to buy Western products, even if they are more expensive than other products.

Scale: 5-Point Linear Likert Scale

#### 4.5. Sample

The population sought for the current research was Jordanian youth, precisely, those between the ages of 18-35, who have also obtained a basic education (High-school diploma). These criteria were established to ensure, to a certain extent, that those participating in the study have autonomous purchasing power and thus make their own purchasing decisions. Also, the criteria abide by the research question, which looks to expand the concept of COR in an empirical and localized way and gain deeper insights into Jordanian youth consumers' behaviors. Therefore, a non-probability sampling approach was selected for this phase of the research methodology (Etikan et al., 2016).

Specifically, convenience sampling, which relies on ease of accessibility to the population members (Sedgwick, 2013), was utilized to collect the required data. Convenience sampling not only offers efficiency regarding time and generalizability of information but is also relatively cheap. Henceforth, it has the propensity to attract a huge number of respondents, which in return increases the statistical relevance of the findings (Acharya et al., 2013; Etikan et al., 2016). Consequently, the convenience sampling technique was favored over others, as it complements the preceding judgmental sample used in the qualitative stage; by allowing the researchers to extend support (or refute) of the proposed hypotheses mathematically and to a wider population. Further, since the survey encompassed 21 questions, the ratio of required responses per scale as recommended by (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012) was a minimum of 5:1. However, for greater accuracy, response rates with a ratio of 10:1 were favored (Gefen et al., 2000). Hence, 210 completed questionnaires were needed ( $21 \times 10 = 210$ ) to accurately measure the performance of every variable through structural equation modeling and reliability analysis. The survey garnered 232 responses in total; 65% of which were females and 35% males. Additionally, most of the participants were between the ages of 21-23 (45%) and had obtained a bachelor's degree (87%).

#### 4.6. Data Analysis Techniques

AMOS software was used to analyze the data gathered in the quantitative research phase, through applying structural equation modelling (SEM), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and reliability analysis.

AMOS, which stands for 'Analysis of Moment Structure', is a software that supports a diverse array of timely automated data analysis techniques for research models. It relies on the deployment of statistical functions and methods, such as: SEM and CFA.

Also, it offers a smooth user interface with visually pleasing data representations (Barnidge & Zúñiga, 2017). Ergo, AMOS is easily comprehensible, and was therefore chosen as the data analysis tool for the following stage in the current research.

### 5. Quantitative Data Results and Analysis

#### 5.1. Demographic Data

Precise demographic information is presented in the figures below:

**Table 3**  
Demographic – Gender

Survey Demographics - Gender				
Male		Female		
Number	Percentage %	Number	Percentage %	
82	34%.8	150	64.8%	
Total = 232				

**Table 4**  
Survey Demographics - Age

Age	Percentage
18 – 20	16.4%
21 – 23	45.3%
24 – 26	15.5%
27 - 29	7.2%
30 – 32	5.3%
33 - 35	10.3%

**Table 5**  
Survey Demographics - Educational Background

Educational Background	Percentage
High School Diploma	5
Bachelor's Degree	86.6%
Master's Degree	6%
PhD	2.4

After analyzing the demographic data presented above, it is clear that a huge number (45%) of the respondents were between the ages 21-23. Moreover, 65% of the surveys were completed by females. Last, the majority of the participants had attained a bachelor's degree (87%).

## 5.2. Model Fit

**Table 6**

**Model Fit**

Model Fit	CMIN/DF	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Values	2.055	.943	.933	.071
Cutoff	Less than 3.0	Greater than .90	Greater than .90	Below .08

Source 7: AMOS data analysis for this research

Table 6 indicates model fit by evaluating the degree of correspondence between the observed or actual covariance matrix, and the anticipated one by the proposed or projected model (Mostafa, 2013). The measures of model fit are classified into two groups, namely: Absolute Fit Indices and Incremental Fit Indices. Further, Absolute Fit Indices include Chi-Square Statistic (CMIN/DF) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). On the other hand, Incremental Fit Indices include the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI). Moreover, according to (Hair, et al., 2006) the cutoff values for CMIN/DF is < 3.0, CFI & TLI is > 0.90, and RMSEA is < 0.90. Hence, as is evident from the table above, the indices show that the measurement model achieved a good fit; as the value of CMIN/DF is 2.055, which is less than 3.0, the values for CFI and TLI are 0.943 and 0.933 respectively, which are greater than 0.90, and last, the value of RMSEA is 0.071, which is less than 0.08. Overall, the fit indices show that the model achieved a good fit.

## 5.3. Loading Estimates

**Table 7**

**Loading Estimates**

SISD1	←	Social Identity	.632
SISD2	←	Social Identity	.879
SISD3	←	Social Identity	.867
SISD4	←	Social Identity	.879
SISD5	←	Social Identity	.877
eWOM4	←	e Word of Mouth	.853
eWOM3	←	e Word of Mouth	.791
eWOM2	←	e Word of Mouth	.752
eWOM1	←	e Word of Mouth	.787
HBW3	←	Herd Behavior	.781
HBW2	←	F Herd Behavior	.677
HBW1	←	Herd Behavior	.646
COR1	←	COR	.783
COR2	←	COR	.789
COR3	←	COR	.790
PB1	←	Purchase Behavior	.601
PB2	←	Purchase Behavior	.612
PB3	←	Purchase Behavior	.696
SISD6	←	Social Identity	.700
SISD7	←	Social Identity	.854
SISD8	←	Social Identity	.834

Table 7 indicates the factor loading, which are coefficients and serves. This method was designed to reduce data in order to describe the correlations between observed variables using a smaller number of factors (Salkind, 2010). According to (Bollen, 1989) when factor loadings are larger, the evidence of the measured variables are stronger and thus more reliably represent the fundamental constructs. Similarly, (Hair, et al., 2006) proposed that the value of factor loading should be greater than 0.50. Hence, the factor loading of all items was greater than the threshold level of 0.50, supporting the reliability of all the variables. Evidently, social identity ranged from 0.632 to 0.879, eWOM spanned from 0.646 to 0.781; herd behavior to the West ranged from 0.783 to 0.790, COR ranked from 0.601 to 0.696, and finally, purchase behavior ranged from 0.700 to 0.854.

## 5.4. Validity and Reliability: Construct Validity and Composite Reliability:

**Table 8**

**Construct Validity and Composite Reliability**

Variables	COR	Herd Behavior to the West	Purchase Behavior	Social Identity Self-Discrepancy	eWOM
<b>COR</b>	0.832				
<b>Herd Behavior to the West</b>	0.642	0.862			
<b>Purchase Behavior</b>	0.577	0.386	0.870		
<b>Social Identity Self-Discrepancy</b>	0.388	0.317	0.242	0.546	
<b>eWOM</b>	0.558	0.697	0.356	0.265	0.774

Source 9: AMOS data analysis for this research

In construct validity, it is evident from the table above that all Cronbach's Alpha values were greater than 0.7 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Similarly, composite reliability values were greater than 0.8, and AVE values were greater than 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). These findings are satisfactory; signifying that the results are both reliable and valid.

#### 5.4.1 Discriminant Validity

**Table 9**  
Discriminant Validity

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
COR	0.798	0.881	0.713
Herd Behavior to the West	0.830	0.898	0.746
Purchase Behavior	0.884	0.928	0.812
Social Identity Self-Discrepancy	0.942	0.952	0.713
eWOM	0.815	0.878	0.643

Source 10: AMOS data analysis for this research

Discriminant validity values of all the constructs are below the convergent values (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), thus, the findings support the discriminant validity of the results.

#### 5.5. Path Coefficients

**Table 10**  
Path Coefficients

Variables' Path		Estimates	S.E	t value	P value
COR	← Social Identity	.465	.079	5.891	***
COR	← eWOM	.231	.044	5.204	***
COR	← Herd Behavior	.444	.062	7.202	***
Purchase Behavior	← COR	.911	.134	6.822	***

Source 11: AMOS data analysis for this research

Table 10 illustrates the impact of one variable on another and is known as path coefficients. It is clear from the results represented above that (Social-Identity) Self-Discrepancy has a positive, and significant impact on COR; as the coefficient value is 0.465 and the p value is 0.000, which is less than 0.050. Moreover, four of the (social identity) self-discrepancy items, presenting a negative statement, were reverse coded. This result meant that being a member of the Jordanian community and not feeling good about it led to favoring Western brands, paying attention to Western consumers, and subsequently, influenced buying decisions. Furthermore, the coefficient value for eWOM and COR is 0.231 with p value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This shows that eWOM has a positive and significant impact on COR; implying that popular Western online information and reviews lead to, result in favoring Western brands and paying attention to Western consumers. Consequently, the above results revealed that herd behavior to the West has a significant and positive impact on COR; as the coefficient value is 0.444 and the p value is 0.000, which is less than 0.050. This result indicates that following and accepting the views of the Western majority is coupled with feelings of safety and added benefits in purchasing decisions. Therefore, a sense of favoritism towards and keen awareness of Western consumers is fostered, which in return influences decision-making. Last, a significant and positive impact of COR on purchase behavior is demonstrated. The coefficient value is 0.911 at significance level  $p > 0.05$ . This finding denotes that frequent purchases of Western products occur, even when the items to be purchased are expensive. The aforementioned purchasing behavior is thought to stem from the strong influence highly perceived Western consumers have on buying decisions.

#### 5.7. Direct Effect

**Table 12**  
Direct Effect

	Herd Behavior	eWOM	Social Identity	COR	PB
COR	.687	.374	.483	.000	.000
Purchase Behavior	.000	.000	.000	.771	.000

Source 11: AMOS data analysis for this research

The direct effect table shows the pathway from the independent variables to the dependent variable, while controlling the mediator (Gunzler, et al., 2013). Direct effect of herd behavior to the West on COR is 0.687, eWOM on COR is 0.374; and (social identity) self-discrepancy on COR is 0.483.

5.8. Indirect Effect

**Table 13**

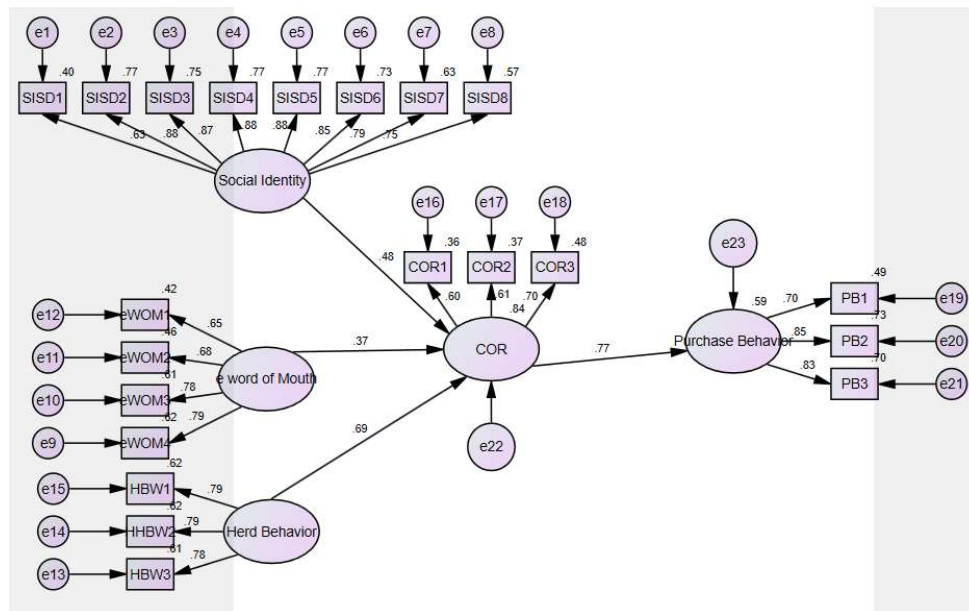
Indirect Effect

	Herd Behavior	eWOM	Social Identity	COR	PB
COR	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Purchase Behavior	.529	.288	.372	.000	.000

Source 12: AMOS data analysis for this research

Table 13 shows the indirect effect, which explains the pathway from independent variable to the dependent variable, through the mediator (Gunzler, et al., 2013). Indirect effect of herd behavior to the West on purchase behavior is 0.529, eWOM on purchase behavior is 0.288, and (social identity) self-discrepancy on purchase behavior is 0.372.

5.9. SEM Diagram



**Fig. 1.** SEM Diagram

Source 13: AMOS data analysis for this research

The SEM diagram above illustrates the impact of (social identity) self-discrepancy, eWOM, and herd behavior to the West on purchasing behavior with the mediating role of COR. It also shows the factor loadings. As well as direct and indirect effect of independent variables on dependent variables, while controlling the mediator and through the mediator, respectively.

6.1 Discussion

The current study sought to empirically test the COR-effect theory proposed by (Chen et al., 2020) in a diverse context. More so, the objective of this research was to understand the influence of “Westernization” on Jordanian youth consumption behavior through a socio-psychological lens, in order to both; assist local (Jordanian) businesses’ in more effectively understanding and communicating with their target audiences, and shed light on the Western-superiority narrative; through deconstructing some of its descriptors within the marketing sphere. Accordingly, a research model was derived from (Chen et al., 2020)’s conceptual paper to meet the objectives of this research and fill in the literature gaps regarding the COO-concept and consumer behavior in the MENA region (Papadopoulos et al., 2018; Rooma & Ramsaran, 2015; Sadat al Sajib et al., 2016; Smaoui et al., 2016; Touzani et al., 2015; Zolfagharian et al., 2017).

First, the strength of the model is evident, as all three proposed variables: (social identity) self-discrepancy, eWOM, and herd behavior, had an effect on Western COR by 0.470 ( $R^2$ ). Also, the three aforementioned variables had an impact on purchasing behavior when mediated by Western COR by 0.333 ( $R^2$ ). The r-square findings prove the strength of the model constructed for this research, as the values are greater than 0.10 (Falk & Miller, 1992).

Second, the influence of each variable was independently tested to determine the strength of each variable on (Western) COR, and then on purchasing behavior when mediated by (Western) COR. The correlation between the variables demonstrated that the variable with the strongest influence on (Western) COR was herd behavior to the West, with value of 0.69 ( $\beta$ ), next was the influence of (social identity) self-discrepancy with value 0.48 ( $\beta$ ), and last came eWOM with value 0.37 ( $\beta$ ). Moreover, the strength of the three variables when mediated by (Western) COR was 0.77 ( $\beta$ ).

Henceforth, the first proposed hypothesis, which stipulated that the existence of a (social identity) self-discrepancy in Jordanian youth would have a significant positive impact on the Western COR concept (Chen et al., 2020; Touzani et al., 2015; Schulz, 2015) was supported.

To elaborate, the qualitative stage of data analysis corroborated the first hypothesis, where the majority of interviewees asserted that they in fact identified more strongly with the West, and followed Westerners' purchasing patterns. The hypothesis was further confirmed through the statistical analysis carried out in the quantitative stage, reporting a positive and significant effect of the impact of the (social-identity) self-discrepancy variable on the COR effect.

Ergo, (social identity) self-discrepancy in Jordanian youth had a significant impact on Western COR. This finding is aligned with previous research on social identity theory in emerging economies, where (Smaoui et al., 2016; Touzani et al., 2015) found a link between (social identity) self-discrepancy and the idealization of the West. Last, it also empirically supports (Chen, et al., 2020)'s proposed impact of (social-identity) self-discrepancy on the COR-effect.

The second hypothesis presented in this study, which stated that eWOM has a significant positive effect on Western COR, was also supported in both the qualitative and quantitative data analysis stages. This finding is in-line with prior literature regarding the importance of eWOM in determining consumer behavior (Chen & Lu, 2014; Mohammad et al., 2020; Steenkamp, 2017).

Next, the third hypothesis; *Herd behavior has a significant positive effect on (Western) COR*, was also supported by both the qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The finding is consistent with existing research on herding behavior and adds to the literature, as recommended, through empirically testing the phenomena in a unique context (Chen, et al., 2020; Huh et al., 2014; Rejikumar et al., 2021).

Similarly, the fourth hypothesis, which claimed that Western COR has a significant positive effect on Jordanian youth consumers' purchasing behavior, was corroborated qualitatively and quantitatively. This finding supports (Chen, et al., 2020)'s model and accentuates the importance of utilizing the COR effect alongside the COO concept in purchase-behavior oriented research (Andéhn & L'espoir Decosta, 2018; Garrett et al., 2017; Papadopoulos et al., 2018).

Moreover, the fifth hypothesis, which suggested that Western COR has a mediating effect on purchasing behavior in Jordanian youth consumers was backed by both the gathered qualitative and quantitative data. This finding is consistent with the aforementioned supported hypothesis relating to the influence of (social identity) self-discrepancy.

In a similar way, this hypothesis is consistent with previous studies' findings, which suggested that a (social identity) self-discrepancy does impact purchasing behavior (Chen et al., 2020; Mandel et al., 2017; Xiao et al., 2018).

Last, the sixth and seventh hypotheses, which also suggested that the Western COR effect has a mediating effect on purchasing behavior were confirmed qualitatively and quantitatively, as is evident in the data above. The current findings are aligned with the recommendations of the prevalent literature on enhancing the COO concept when studying purchasing behavior (Andéhn & L'espoir Decosta, 2018). In addition, they substantiate (Chen et al., 2020)'s conceptualization of utilizing the COR effect as a mediating variable for purchase intentions and behavior.

## 6.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study not only proved that Western COR influences Jordanian youth consumers' purchase behavior, but also solidified the link between (social identity) self-discrepancy and Western COR, and herd behavior and Western COR. Surprisingly though, the statistical findings of the (social identity) self-discrepancy variables were relatively insignificant, and therefore the relating hypotheses were unsupported. This anomaly is thought to have spurred from the lack of accuracy in respondents' data. Moreover, the current research offers practical means to local businesses, as it efficiently highlights the need to deconstruct the Western-superiority complex and embark on instilling a beautified image of local consumption patterns, and subsequently products. Initially, this can be realized through improving the perceived quality of and trust in local products, as well as addressing the mentality which favors and idealizes the West and Westerner consumers, through communicating the positive qualities of Jordanian and Arab consumers in marketing campaigns. To be specific, the variables discussed in this research can be utilized in a marketing context, through: for starters, deploying interactive communication campaigns which emphasize the positive qualities of



Jordanians, such as kindness, by local brands. More, marketers can rely on experimental and guerrilla marketing techniques to remedy the inherent favoritism towards the West and cut through the clutter. Second, companies should pay greater attention to local eWOM by encouraging consumers to share their feedback, which could be done through implementing a reward system, in addition to, adopting better community management tactics. This would prompt Jordanians to consider local eWOM more, instead of having to depend on Westerners'. Third, herding behavior is a very strong purchase motivator, and therefore can also be utilized in the favor of local businesses. This can be realized through shifting the youths' herding behavior from the West to Jordan. The simplest method to disrupt the tendency to follow Western consumption is to use sales promotional tactics, such as: discounts, bundles, and raffles.

Consequently, by integrating the findings of this research into the market plans of businesses', the Western COR-effect should subside along with its mediating power on purchasing behavior, and instead a "shop-local" attitude should arise.

### 6.3 Limitations and Recommendations:

Although the current study is the first to empirically test the novel concept of COR, and to carry out such research in a unique context; Jordan, (to the best of the researchers' knowledge), it has still faced some limitations. The direst limitation experienced was the time-constraint, which the researchers had to abide by. Moreover, a lack of funding and the existence of a language barrier in the quantitative design methods impeded the researchers' abilities to communicate with a larger sample population. Last, the sample size could have been larger if a survey written in Arabic language was deployed, and thus, could have ensured greater generalizability of this study's results. Therefore, it is recommended to extend the current research to a wider scope, which could encapsulate a larger sample size, varying age groups, different languages, and a greater geographical area, given that this research's primary focus was Jordanian youth consumers' who had at least attained a high-school diploma and comprehended English. Moreover, it is advisable to empirically test (Chen., et al., 2020)'s original model, which couldn't be done in the following study due to the aforementioned time-restraint. Last, interesting paths to explore would be to conduct comparative research utilizing the COR-effect in an Eastern vs. Western context, and to embark on exploring the role of COR in diverse industries.

### 6.4 Conclusion

The current research paper implemented an original concept, the Country of Reference (COR)-effect, in a relatively unexplored territory; Jordan; through adopting and altering the conceptual COR model developed by (Chen, et al., 2020) and utilizing a mixed methodology approach. Seven hypotheses were posited to test out the validity of the COR-effect through deconstructing Westernization's impact on purchasing behavior in the Arab World. Moreover, this research utilized (social identity) self-discrepancy, eWOM, and herding behavior constructs to evaluate Jordanian youth consumers' consumption behavior within the COR model. The findings shed light on the existence of strong relationships between (social identity) self-discrepancy, eWOM, herd behavior and Western COR, as well as demonstrated the Western COR's emphasized ability to mediate between the referred variables and purchase behavior. Overall, although this research encountered its fair share of drawbacks, the strength of the COR framework was still corroborated. Additionally, this research paper offers businesses, especially, marketers and managers, a fresh perspective on Jordanian youth consumers, and emphasizes the deep-seeded need to generate creative communication schemes that endorse a "shop local" attitude, and repaint local products and even Arab consumers in more favorable shades. Last, the viability of the COR-model designed for this study, which bridged between the notions of Westernization and purchasing behavior, can be viewed as a preliminary pathway to diverse research in the domains articulated above.

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