# Towards A Framework of Value Driven Political Acculturation: A Study of South Asian (im)migrants' Engagement with British Politics

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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# Abstract

In light of the growing attention to recent political events and issues in the UK, there has been an increase interest in the questions surrounding the political engagement of South Asian (im)migrants' and their political alignment (Dowling, 2021; Alabrese et al., 2019; Ehsan, 2017). To extend previous research, the aim of this thesis is to advance and provide a nuanced understanding of the South Asian (im)migrants' disposition and expression of ethnic values that lead to their acculturative political orientation, which is quintessentially needed for their acculturative behaviour within the British society. As a result, this thesis focus on South Asian (im)migrants' involvement with Brexit debate and other relevant political and economic developments. Specifically, it looks at the role of values and extrinsic influences where the findings show that the nature and outcome of acculturative orientation within the realm of local politics can be conceptualised as the 3C's: compelled by ideology, conformation underpinned by self-interest and complexity with caveats.

This research also argues that the phases of (im)migrant's acculturative journey are non-static in nature. They are subjected to change as individuals undergone a phase of exposure, experience and evolution in their socio-cultural, digital, political and economic positions. Finally, a 2x2 matrix were constituted where ethnic (im)migrants' expression and engagement within the realm of local politics can be classified into four types of typology: politically embracive, politically sensitive, politically reticent and politically separated. This research employs the phenomenon of value-driven identity as a dynamic approach to understand South Asian (im)migrants' acculturative political orientation and journey in the host society.

***Keywords: Acculturative Orientation, Acculturative Journey, Political Expression, Social Identity, Values, Extrinsic Influences, Brexit, South Asian (im)migrants***

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Research Background

In light of the increasing political and economic turmoil, questions about immigration and the meaning of Britishness have become frequently recurring themes in Britain's public political discourses. Due to increased interaction amongst various communities, communal boundaries are becoming blurred (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019). Ethnic communities, such as the South Asian diaspora, are increasingly becoming part of the texture of new Britain (Dolbear, 2019). South Asian (im)migrants have contributed extensively to the British culture and economy through various contexts but also in the form of political representation. In recent times, three South Asian politicians (Rishi Sunak, Suella Braverman and Sajid Javid) entered the Tory leadership race after the resignation of Boris Johnson in July 2022. However, despite the increase in political figures from South Asian backgrounds, it can be argued that political values and expressions amongst South Asian (im)migrants are obscure and complex. For instance, why did some South Asian (im)migrants decide to vote for the Brexit campaign, which, at times, can be seen to be fuelled by anti-immigrant rhetoric? These inconsistencies and ambiguities, although reflected only in the political spheres, can characterise the complex behavioural expressions of ethnic (im)migrants and remain as a persistent challenge for academics and marketers in developing effective segmentation and designing appropriate marketing strategies. With the growing diversity of the population in the UK and in many other countries around the world, this is an impending agendum for research and practice alike.

Due to the results of British imperial rule in India, individuals from the Indian subcontinent have been coming to Britain where they have learnt to adapt new cultures and working conditions (Khedar, 2020). Referring back to between the 17$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ century, Indians were brought to Britain to work primarily as ayahs (i.e. nannies) and lascars (i.e. sailors) who eventually settled in Britain to form the earliest working-class communities (Khedar, 2020). Although immigration from South Asian continent can be traced back to over four centuries, the events of Indian independence in 1947 and the end of the Second World War led to a large-scale immigration from the Indian subcontinent and permanent settlement of South Asian families in Britain (minorityrights.org, 2022). For example, a large number of Indian and Pakistani men were recruited to resolve manual labour shortages in the post-Second World War reconstruction of Britain. Due to the barriers of proficiency in English language, we can

also see the development of English-language programmes launched by BBC in Hindi and Urdu on TV and radio in the 1960's which aimed at teaching English to the South Asian families. The later decades in the 1970s and 1980s also witnessed a large number of families who set up businesses in the service sector (i.e. restaurants and corner-shops) which led to a rapid increase in self-employment amongst the community (Minorityrights.org, 2022).

Britain has also seen changing population demographics with the arrival of individuals from countries which formerly comprised the British Empire since the end of World War II (Rizwan et al., 2017). According to the UK Census published in 2011, the White share of the population was reduced to 87%, from 92% in 2001, due to an increase in the share of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population. As of the 2011 census, the most ethnically diverse region in England and Wales was London, where 40.2% of residents identified with either Asian, Black, Mixed or Other ethnic groups, making London the region with the smallest percentage of White British people at 44.9% (ONS, 2019). The Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2019) also reveals that South Asians are the single largest ethnic group in the UK, comprising around 50% of the total non-White population.

South Asian ethnic minorities in Britain are largely the product of an influx of immigration, which mostly commenced during the post-WWII period. It is suggested that South Asian migration took a huge leap in the 1950s as a movement of intending sojourners who instead became settlers, thereby creating a new life for themselves in a different social context (Anwar, 1979). As the largest visible ethnic minority in the UK, the South Asian diaspora has been the focus of research and commentary concerning national identity (Dwyer, 2000; Maxwell, 2006; Modood, 2005). As a community that holds and exhibits values of both Britain and the Indian subcontinent, South Asians can be identified as transient in their cultural self-identities, thereby forming a diaspora identity phenomenon (Bardhan, 2011; Dasgupta et al., 2007; Lindridge, 2005).

According to Minorityrights.org (2022), Indians (2.3%), Pakistanis (1.9%) and Bangladeshi (0.7%) accounted for the population in Britain. New data from ONS (2021) shows that the number of non-UK born who arrived in the UK was half a million more than in the previous decade. For example, of the total 10 million non-UK born living in the UK in 2021, 42% migrate to Britain since the last census in 2011 (Migrationwatchuk.org, 2022). The rapid growth of the South Asian diasporic community in recent decade is equivalent to the entire

population of Northern Ireland (Migrationwatchuk.org, 2022). As their numbers have grown in an unprecedented manner, we have seen how the South Asian community have made a tremendous contribution to the British economy and society. For instance, the community growth has led to a change in their political affiliation. Historically, South Asian community were known to be a strong supporter of the left-of-centre Labour Party. However, Duckworth et al. (2021) study of Britain's New Swing Voters have highlighted how their support for Labour appears to have eroded in recent years. Therefore, it is important to understand how their national identity is conceptualised and how it operates within their self-concept in relation to other identities: for instance, identities in relation to socio-cultural, political and self-identity (online and offline).

Facilitated by globalisation and other macro-environmental factors, the degree to which (im)migrants have adapted themselves and/or integrated into the host society has been an area of academic interest (O'Guinn and Faber, 1986; Penaloza, 1994; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). Their behavioural change (or lack thereof) has been scrutinised within the acculturation literature. The classic acculturation studies, however, took a post-colonial perspective in which acculturation was deemed as a way of learning a better culture. In other words, the host colonialist culture was considered as an improvement on the home cultures of (im)migrants who had moved from the former colonies. Accordingly, the early acculturation studies were dominated by the assimilationist perspective, which considers the acculturative journey as a mono-dimensional phenomenon.

However, acculturation studies over the years have evolved and taken into account the ever-changing dynamics in global migration. Existing acculturation scholarship posits that ethnic consumers learn new skills and culturally appropriate behaviour by interacting with acculturation agents such as family members, friends, schools, and churches, as they represent the lifestyles, values, objects, and consumer practices of both cultures (Askegaard et al., 2005; Balmer and Chen, 2015; Cappellini and Yen, 2013; Jamal, 2003; Penaloza, 1994). The immigration of people from one country to another, either permanently or temporarily, has exposed (im)migrants to an obscure process of adaptation and assimilation to different foreign cultures and values. This includes food, fashion, customs, health, economic and social cultural conditions, which often lead to acculturation and psychological stress among such (im)migrants (Berry and Sam, 1997; Choudhary et al., 2018; Luedicke, 2011; Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

In the context of an increasing ethnic minority population in Europe, current scholarly debates on acculturation, multiculturalism and assimilation can be found within the academic and political spheres (Brubaker, 2001; Koopmans, 2013). (Im)migrants who live and work in multicultural settings are exposed to a multitude of cultures. Their knowledge of and interaction with these different cultures may influence changes in their lifestyle and cultural dispositions, leading to acculturation. Although various aspects of culture dispositions, such as food (Dey et al., 2019), entertainment (Dey et al., 2017) and celebration of events (Weinberger, 2015) have been discussed in previous scholarly works, ethnic (im)migrants' involvement with acculturative political orientation, their acculturative journey, and its expression within political systems remain understudied. Partial understanding can be drawn from a recent work by Kizgin et al. (2019), which alludes to the complex nature of ethnic consumers' engagement with host and home country politics. However, there is still a glaring gap in knowledge of how (im)migrants' values and ethos are shaped and/or reshaped over the course of their stay in multicultural host societies.

In the UK context, the South Asian communities are making a major contribution to British society by involving themselves with and often leading business, academia, and politics (Minorityrights.org, 2022). For example, the increasing political representation of the South Asian community, such as the likes of Priti Patel, Rishi Sunak, Sadik Khan and others, can provide a palpable sense of diversity and multi-ethnic composition within the society. People of South Asian heritage are also becoming active in politics in some other developed and Western countries (e.g., Kamala Harris in the US, Leo Varadkar in Ireland). Their political mobilisation interest ranges from the political affairs of their home countries to issues that have implications for individuals in the host society (Bentz and Guyot, 2021). On one hand, it appears that the South Asian diaspora are vocal about their support/criticism of the leadership (e.g., Imran Khan/Narendra Modi) in their countries of origin, while on the other hand, they engage with global issues (e.g., Black Lives Matter) or issues that very much relate to their country of abode (e.g., Brexit). Substantial evidence can also be found in the current literature that minority identities are associated with forms of political engagement or behaviours (Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Martinovic and Verkuyten, 2014): for instance, the role of ethnic embeddedness and majority acculturation and their influences on greater political engagement among ethnic minorities (Sanders et al., 2014).

## 1.2. Research Motivation

As ethnic identity is a complex phenomenon that constantly evolves with external and internal environments, current literature has some conceptual deficiencies which impede clearer theorisation of ethnic individuals' motivation for and nature of acculturation. Therefore, this research develops a theoretical rationale and scope by consulting the existing literature on acculturation and its implications for South Asian (im)migrants' political orientation, journeys, and their expressions.

Ethnic consumer behaviour has moved beyond the assimilationist model as globalisation creates a heterogeneous and diverse composition of multicultural markets (Beck, 2006; Cavusgil et al., 2005; Neal et al., 2013) across the Western world (Eurostat, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2010). Since the seminal work of Berry (1992), acculturation theories (Askegaard et al., 2005; Berry, 2005; Penaloza, 1994) have sought to explain why and to what extent ethnic consumers retain their heritage cultures, integrate into the host culture, or develop a new culture that differs from both. For instance, in a ground-breaking study, Penaloza (1994) details two institutional and agent factors of acculturation representing host and home culture that influence Mexican (im)migrant consumers' responses to the US host environment. She highlights (im)migrants' responses to these factors by reflecting on Berry's (1992) acculturation model. Penaloza's (1994) study of the Mexican–American acculturation process argues that consumer acculturation is a phenomenon that occurs over time and spans two nations; however, she assumes that acculturation is a two-directional process (Penaloza, 1994) and does not consider a transnational consumer culture (Ritzer, 1998; Askegaard et al., 2005). Likewise, Oswald's (1999) study identifies two acculturative dimensions – the North American host and Haitian home cultures – where ethnic identity choices are also fixed rather than being fluid.

Although both Penaloza's (1994) and Oswald's (1999) studies advance Berry's (1992) model of the modes of acculturation, they are context-specific (Askegaard et al., 2005). Recent acculturation literature demonstrates that ethnic consumers' interactions in the multicultural market are not only confined to host and ancestral values, but also involve other ethnic cultures, including global consumer culture and other sub-ethnic cultures (Askegaard et al., 2005). Therefore, they exhibit multiple and co-existing identities (Jamal, 2003; Oswald, 1999; Schwartz et al., 2010). Askegaard et al.'s (2005) seminal article has also enriched the debate

surrounding the issues of consumption and ethnicity by insisting on the relevance of social context and transnational consumer culture to ethnic consumption and identity work. Following Askegaard et al.'s (2005) study, which transcends bi-directional analysis between host and home country cultures and values, Dey et al. (2019) demonstrated ethnic multi-directional acculturation strategies by developing a classification of four groups – rebellion, rarefaction, resonance, and refrainment – which are also determined by their levels of cosmopolitanism.

With a view to developing a robust understanding of ethnic acculturation in a multicultural society, this thesis is an addition and contribution to the ongoing research on acculturation studies. It also contributes to the current understanding of the uni-directional, bi-directional and multi-dimensional acculturation approach (Askegaard et al., 2005; Dey et al., 2019; Oswald, 1999; Penaloza, 1994) by analysing and revisiting the notion of how acculturation is supported and/or inhibited by the political engagement amongst the members of the South Asian communities in Britain. In doing so, this research goes beyond the existing acculturation dimensions by employing the phenomenon of value-driven identity. This dynamic approach can facilitate and capture the intricate details (values and extrinsic influences) that underpin the drivers for ethnic (im)migrants' acculturation in the mainstream society. This research also views acculturation as a political expression rather than a strategy, as depicted in recent literature (Dey et al., 2019).

## 1.3. Research Gaps

Despite the seminal research and advances in recent years, an extensive review of the literature reveals several gaps pertinent to this research. By following the current acculturation and social identity scholarship (Askegaard et al., 2005; Banerjee et al., 2021; Berry, 1992; Cleveland et al., 2016; Dey et al., 2019; Jafari and Suerdem, 2012; Kizgin et al., 2019; Oswald, 1999; Penaloza, 1994), this study endeavours to provide a further analysis and nuanced understanding of the South Asian consumers' disposition and expression of ethnic values that lead to their acculturative political orientation.

This research particularly focuses on South Asian (im)migrants' involvement with the Brexit debate and relevant subsequent political developments. It also quintessentially demonstrates how they perceive and interact with the political processes and crisis of the British society. It discusses the notion of acculturative journey, through the concepts of exposure, experience,

and evolution, in the context of the typology of four types of political expression: politically embracive, politically sensitive, politically reticent and politically separated (Table 7). The findings aim to present useful marketing and managerial implications that will be beneficial for profiling and segmenting ethnic minority communities, specifically in areas of political campaigns. Following this notion, the researcher identifies the following research gaps that will contribute to and advance the current scholarship on ethnic (im)migrants' acculturation.

- **Research Gap 1:** It is argued that acculturation cannot be regarded as mono, bi- or tri-dimensional, as suggested in the previous acculturation literature (Dey et al. 2019). Although there is an advancement in the development of acculturation studies that encompass the multi-dimensional perspectives in various contexts, acculturative orientation and its components are not a monolith. South Asian (im)migrants are likely to have a wide range of motivations behind their acculturative orientation, particularly in areas of their political interest and affiliation within the host society. With the recent political and economic turmoil that we have witnessed in Britain (e.g. Brexit, Covid-19, the war in Ukraine), the existing literature does not offer any clear and structured classifications for the acculturative political orientation of ethnic communities. Despite some literature on ethnic minorities' political engagement in recent years (Kizgin et al., 2019; Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2022), there exists scope for further classification to advance this understanding. This is the first research gap that offers theoretical motivation for this research, which seeks to undertake a thorough analysis of acculturation through the lens of value-based identity and extrinsic influences.

- **Research Gap 2:** As ethnic individuals develop their own identity by interacting with cultural outsiders from a multicultural background, their acculturation experience and journeys can change as they interact with and learn about new and different cultures, particularly in a multicultural environment. This reiterates and reifies the notion of strengthening ties with both the in-group and the out-group, which can support and facilitate their integration into broader host cultural society, which is beyond the users' own community (Dey et al., 2020). Thus, it can be argued that ethnic multi-directional acculturation strategies are not a static state and can move from one identity to another. In addition, prior research on acculturation lacked explanations regarding the dichotomies of (im)migrants' cultural disposition (Cleveland et al., 2016; Jaspal, 2015)

and their formation of ethnic identities during their acculturation journey. Thus, a gap exists within this emerging multi-directional acculturation journey in the host society. Therefore, this thesis will offer deeper insights into how and why ethnic individuals obtain various attributes from host, ancestral or global culture over the course of their residency and settlement in the host environment.

- **Research Gap 3:** Although acculturation studies have been conducted in contexts that look into (im)migrant political engagement in the western society (Kizgin et al., 2019), examinations of how political engagement and expressions inform (im)migrant voters' association with their local politics remain scarce. The present literature does not fully capture the dynamics and kinetics of ethnic (im)migrants' political alignment as an expression of their acculturation. Therefore, this research recognises the importance of conceptualising and constructing South Asian (im)migrants' political expression with British politics. It reassesses and contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the various types of political typology employed by South Asian (im)migrants.

## 1.4. Research aims and objectives

By identifying the research gap in the current consumer acculturation literature, the following research objectives were developed. This thesis aims to explore and analyse the consumer acculturation of South Asian (im)migrants through an analysis of their political orientation and expressions. The various stages of the acculturative journey within the multicultural context of Britain will also be explored. In order to achieve the research aims, this research will address the following objectives and questions:

**Study Objective 1: To provide novel conceptual scaffolding for British South Asian (im)migrants' political acculturation.**

Question 1: How do South Asian (im)migrants living in Britain constitute and define their political orientations?
Question 2: Why and how do (im)migrants demonstrate alignment/lack of alignment between their values and political orientations?

**Study Objective 2: Drawing on the abovementioned gap in the acculturation scholarship, this research seeks to explore the nature and motivation of the acculturation journey in the host society.**

Question 1: What are the various roles and stages of acculturation agents and how do they influence (im)migrants' identities and the journey of (im)migrant consumers?

Question 2: Why and how do South Asian (im)migrants' interplay and navigate their acculturation journey, influenced by different dynamics and contexts?

**Study Objective 3: To capture the dynamics and kinetics of South Asian (im)migrants' engagement with politics as an acculturative expression.**

Question 1: How do British South Asian (im)migrants' values and upbringings determine the nature and extent of their political expression in the host country?

Question 2: Why and how do British South Asian (im)migrants demonstrate different types of political engagement and expressions?

To achieve these objectives, this thesis seeks to explore the political participation and identity of South Asian diaspora members living in the UK. This research involves a qualitative study that investigates different research questions within the topic of ethnic political acculturation and identity. In order to capture the various dimensions of opinions and usage, the research applies triangulated qualitative tools by blending multiple sources, such as semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation exercises, and online observation. The chosen methodology follows a predominantly inductive approach that is underpinned by an open mind towards the emerging patterns of the data, while taking cues from established concepts and constructs within relevant scholarships. By acknowledging the strengths of a qualitative approach, the author embarked on collecting the primary data using his chosen data collection methods. Further details on the methodology employed for this research can be seen in Chapter 3.

## 1.5. Theoretical lens

In order to achieve the abovementioned objectives, this thesis uses Social Identity Theory (SIT) as its theoretical lens. The interrelations between migration, community and identity have long been the focus of academic debate. According to SIT (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), individuals tend to categorise themselves and others into distinct social groups derived from salient characteristics. SIT stresses that a group to which an individual belongs is an important source of pride and self-esteem (Koburtay et al., 2020). As highlighted by Korte (2007), the theory classifies people into 'them' and 'us' through a social categorisation process. The fundamental principle of SIT is an understanding of social identity as a relational concept of the self, meaning that one's group identity exists in relation to other groups, and that social identities are constituted by individuals' past and present experiences of social reality (Hornsey, 2008). Therefore, social identity is necessary to make sense of social environments and to successfully adapt one's behaviour to different interactions (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In addition, SIT may explain why South Asian (im)migrants may select different acculturation orientations and expressions during their acculturation journey.

Following Ashforth and Schinoff (2016), individuals need a situated identity to guide their actions. As acculturation occurs during exchanges with other people, SIT may help to explain the complex nature of identity in social interactions (Korte, 2007). In the case of South Asian (im)migrants, they may define or locate themselves in different socio-economic categories, religions, age, gender identities, and others. As proposed by SIT, these (im)migrants are likely to face discrimination from cultural outsiders in multiple ways that can reshape their social identity (Koburtay et al., 2020). However, the notion of in-group and out-group dynamics does not fully capture the multi-dimensional contextual levels involved in the inclusion/exclusion practices. As argued by Jenkins (2014), identification is an expression of interest that has implications for others through the process of inclusion and exclusion (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

SIT has been proven to be a viable theoretical underpinning to analyse consumer acculturation. In this research, SIT helps to uncover whether the 'us' and 'them' attitude exists, as explained above. With SIT theory as a theoretical lens, ethnic (im)migrants' formation of identities and their acculturation process can be conceptualised (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Therefore, this

research has adopted the SIT theory to carefully analyse the ethnic political acculturation of the South Asian community in Britain. For instance, in relation to the expectations of support for political parties by ethnic minority communities, more left-wing political affiliation is associated with a stronger ethnic identity, as parties from the left wing tend to espouse and champion the issues of diversity, inclusion, and minority rights, as seen in Martin and Mellon (2020). Moreover, the decline of ethnic identities across generations while national identity increases has illustrated a range of characteristics that are associated with ethnic identity, inclusive of age, gender, education, and political affiliation, amongst other variables (Nandi and Platt, 2020). For example, education has been positively linked to political engagement, as attainment of a higher education provides an opportunity for exposure to, awareness of, and engagement with local politics (Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Nandi and Platt, 2015).

Based on SIT, this research argues that different South Asian (im)migrant groups will activate various acculturation conditions, depending on their motivations, frames of reference, and self-knowledge (Li et al., 2021). Different acculturation conditions that arise from various contextual examples and situations are analysed throughout the research period. These conditions include individual values, macro-environmental (extrinsic) influences, exposure, experience, and evolution. Acculturative political expressions and their typologies are also explored by using the engagement and expressions of South Asian (im)migrants' involvement with local politics. In light of this, multi-dimensional levels of acculturation are defined by considering three acculturation variables, namely acculturative political orientation, acculturative journey, and acculturative political expressions.

## 1.6. Political narratives of South Asian (im)migrants in Britain (contextual background)

The socio-economic and cultural integration of (im)migrants, including South Asian (im)migrants, into their host countries have been studied numerous times (Bhatia, 2007; Brown, 2006). Current literature on (im)migrants' political engagement often tends to focus on only one aspect, thereby overlooking the connections between various realms of mobilisations such as diaspora politics, (im)migrant politics and political participation. In their research, Bentz and Guyot (2021) highlight that scholars working on 'diaspora politics' are interested in the engagement of (im)migrants and their descendants in the political affairs of the homeland, and tackle issues such as the diaspora's impact on the conflict at home as well as (im)migrants'

influence on the host country's foreign policy through ethnic lobbying. Secondly, '(im)migrant politics' focus on the political actions undertaken to improve (im)migrants' social, economic, or legal situation in a host country, such as the struggles of undocumented migrants, racial discriminations, and workers' movements (Garbaye, 2005; Koopmans, 2004). Finally, the notion of political participation in the host country's mainstream politics deals with voting behaviours, social movements, or civic society associations (Gabrielli et al., 2017). Therefore, the different political engagements that (im)migrants can undertake within the realm of political mobilisations can be questioned in relation to the (im)migrants' transnational practices and political integration into the host country.

In a multi-cultural western society, a certain political system will be better suited for allowing (im)migrants to engage in a host country's politics, as links can be established between diaspora organisations and political parties. For instance, an activist from an ethnic community who defends homeland politics may not align ideologically with any of the host majority parties, but will side with a party or leader that can support their cause (Bentz and Guyot, 2021). This example can be seen in the recent study by Thobani (2019), in which ideological affinity explains the support for Donald Trump in the 2016 US electoral campaign from some Hindu nationalist organisations, such as 'Hindus for Trump' and the 'Republican Hindu Coalition'. Moreover, other factors that can play a role in the participation of the host-country politics can include easy access to social, economic and health benefits, employment opportunities, and swift acquisition of citizenship. Establishing and understanding the links between the three spheres of political mobilisation in a host country are part of a viable process which can turn (im)migrants from activists to concerned citizens, as the two processes reinforce each other (Bentz and Guyot, 2021).

***Social structure of the Brexit vote by ethnic minority***

A recent study by Dowling (2021) points out that there is no academic research to date that probes the disaggregation of South Asian voters that offer support for Brexit (Abbasi, 2016; Ehsan, 2017). The attention to the notion of class as a category was a point of conversation during the Brexit vote: either the conversations have rested on a highly problematic notion of a radicalised 'white working class' (as discussed by Bhambra, 2016; Shilliam, 2018; Virdee and McGeever, 2017) or the term is rendered synonymous with a particular social identity (Clarke, 2020; Dowling et al., 2017). However, the conceptions of class deployed have been

limited. Therefore, it is important to understand how individuals make sense of the world and how their lived experiences shape the dynamic and often dialectic inter-relationships between a multitude of issues. This includes their class conscience, socio-cultural identity, fundamental values, and ethos class segmentation. The issue has received attention for the working-class British population from the predominantly left-leaning political heartland, which embraced Brexit, mostly led by ultra-right-wing social conservatives.

The 2016 vote to leave the EU marked a historical moment in Britain. In England, the share of the vote for leaving ranged from nearly 76% in Boston, Lincolnshire to 21% in Lambeth, London (Goodwin and Heath, 2016). Political signification and meanings can also be shaped by the circulating political views (online and offline), as discussed in the current literature about the online echo chambers of social media (Sunstein, 2009). For instance, feelings such as resentment, frustration, anger, anxiety, and hope can be given political meaning. With this in mind, the framework of affective-discursive structures of the Leave and Remain voting patterns (Dowling, 2021) can unlock the stable sets of interlocking relations that operate to produce feelings, motivations, and sensations. This can augment or diminish an individual's capacity to act. The ideas of Leave and Remain were fuelled by different elements of the affective-discursive structure. The strongest support for Brexit was recorded in areas where average income and education skill levels were low, with fewer opportunities (Goodwin and Heath, 2016).

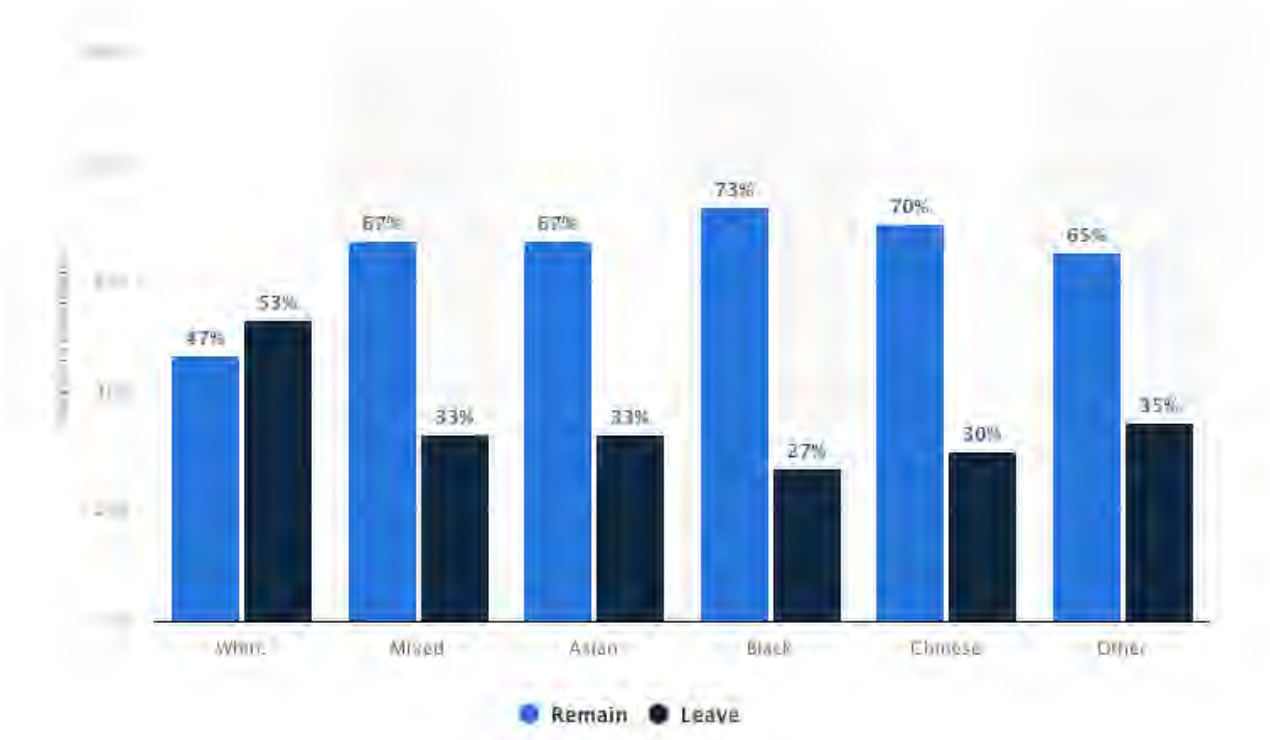


*Figure 1. Brexit Votes in the United Kingdom by ethnicity (Statista, 2016)*

The attitude towards gaining a better understanding of the perceptions towards EU membership among ethnic groups is still scant. The Remain vote was inextricably linked with the maintenance of a political and economic status quo of neoliberal crisis, which stems from deindustrialisation and uneven regional development. As a result, only those at the very top of the society have managed to immunise themselves from economic crisis, thereby creating the affective–discursive elements of Leave and Remain. Ethnic minority voters were overwhelmingly pro-Remain (73% of non-white voters), which is unsurprising given the alleged racist overtones of the Brexiteers and the experience of significant economic inequality and hardship (Alabrese et al., 2019; Emejulu, 2016). Ethnic minority voters saw the evidence of the xenophobic and anti-immigrant tone of the Leave campaigns. They also placed greater emphasis on environmental rights and regulations, and afforded lesser importance to national identity and sovereignty (Begum, 2018).

Despite the large numbers of non-white voters who were pro-Remain, the disaggregation of ethnic voting offers evidence of the South Asian support for Brexit, as discussed above. Although the overall percentage of ‘Leave’ votes by ethnic groups was lower (Figure 1) when compared to white voters, BAME voters were concerned about the EU overriding the UK law. Begum (2018) shows that ethnic minority groups show resentment towards the apparent ease

given to European (im)migrants in the UK. This includes access to working rights, freedom of movement and claims of government benefits. In addition, Europe was seen as a 'white fortress', with Britain offering better protection for ethnic minority rights. Ehsan (2017) suggests that identification with EU (im)migrants and Europe in general may not be relevant and significant enough for South Asian Brexit supporters. Some of the arguments surrounding the EU integration issues may also have been fuelled by the pro-Commonwealth rhetoric of the Leave campaign, such as the assertions of political leaders like Michael Gove, who reiterated and reinforced that the EU was forcing Britain to favour EU (im)migrants at the expense of citizens of the British Commonwealth who share long historical ties with the UK.

Hence, despite the support for Brexit amongst ethnic minorities in general, the issue is not very linear for the South Asian community. Furthermore, it remains to be seen why some South Asian (im)migrants opted to vote for Brexit. Political orientation, as discussed above, can also relate to social views and values. For instance, Western European liberal values, championed by some of the pro-remain political parties, involve recognition of LGBTQ+ rights and a secular ethos. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of South Asian (im)migrants' values, views, and perspectives, and the expression thereof, is required in order to analyse the alignment, paradoxes, and idiosyncrasies pertinent to acculturative political behaviour.

## 1.7. Overview of thesis

This thesis is structured according to the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1** – The introductory chapter provides a thorough background to this research. The conceptual rationale, based on existing consumer acculturation studies, is presented, along with the significance of the contextual relevance (South Asian (im)migrants' involvement with British politics). The underlying theoretical lens of SIT that underpins the acculturation framework is also presented. Through the extant literature, various research gaps are identified that are relevant to the general aim of this thesis. In additions, the aims, objectives, and questions of the research are also set out and discussed. Finally, the structure of the thesis is outlined and summarised.

- **Chapter 2** – This chapter presents an extensive review of the extant literature pertaining to existing theories of acculturation and social identity. The chapter begins

with an overview and development of consumer acculturation studies from various contexts. A chronology of seminal research is presented, encompassing political and digital acculturation. Next, a table providing an overview of influential key studies of acculturation is presented. Moreover, analysis of SIT, which underpins the acculturation framework, is discussed to identify the strengths and gaps amongst the previous scholarly studies. Identity changes in the context of migration, ethnic boundaries, and multiculturalism are also highlighted.

- **Chapter 3** – This chapter discusses the methodology chosen for this research. This research adopts an interpretivist philosophy with a view to accomplish a subjective and descriptive understanding of the orientation, journey, and expressions of value-based political acculturation within the South Asian community in Britain. The research approach, strategy, and design are also presented. The chapter then provides a comprehensive analysis of the data collection methods, a description of triangulation, and a discussion of the limitations of the study. It also presents an extensive explanation of the data analysis and coding process with the selection procedure for the sampling. In-depth presentations of the chosen methods for data collection (i.e., semi-structured interviews, online observations, and photo-elicitation) are also provided in this chapter. Ethical considerations and the study's reliability are also discussed.

- **Chapter 4** – This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the findings from the empirical data. It follows the chronology of the thematic data analysis. It deconstructs all the relevant themes into constituting codes (units of data) and eventually reconstructs them to create a summative and holistic understanding that is corroborated against the relevant literature. The chapter also outlines the three empirical studies to answer the research aims and objectives. Various themes (composition of ethnic values, extrinsic influences, work and social/personal settings, digital experience, equality, fluidity, prejudice, and discrimination) are captured and analysed through the related interpretations and excerpts from the participants. In addition, interpretations and relevance of political expressions with regard to local politics are also derived from the findings. Finally, a summary of the findings is presented in table 6.

- **Chapter 5** – This chapter provides a thorough and robust discussion of the findings by revising the extant literature on acculturation and SIT. An acculturative political

orientation framework is developed which contains the three political orientations (Three C's: compelled by ideology, conformation underpinned by self-interest, complexity with caveats). The acculturative journey and its components (exposure, experience and evolution) are also presented. In addition, a 2x2 matrix of typologies political expression is derived from the findings (politically embracive, politically sensitive, politically reticent, and politically separated). As a result, a comprehensive integrative ethnic acculturation model is developed that serves as a theoretical framework and contributions of this study. Finally, empirical and theoretical contributions are presented and explained.

- **Chapter 6** – The concluding chapter addresses how the study has achieved the research aims, objectives and questions. Managerial and practical implications can also be found in this chapter. Furthermore, the research limitations and directions for future research are presented.

# 2. Literature Review

## 2.1. Introduction

This chapter will lay out the main theories and concepts which constitutes the foundation for the research aims and objectives in Chapter 1. The primary approach to examine the study objectives rest heavily on the theoretical frameworks of acculturation and social identity theory. To further investigate the value-based identity orientation, the chapter starts with a discussion on negotiating and navigating an ethnic identity through the concept of multiculturalism. The chapter continues with an understanding of value driven behaviour across various consumer behaviour contexts. Moreover, the subsequent sections will also capture and explain the evolution and development of acculturation literature by providing a nuanced understanding of multi-dimensional global consumer culture. Next, it lays out a detailed and comprehensive analysis of acculturation as a political engagement and expressions within the context of local politics. Political discourses on the notions of polarisation, voting behaviour and public trust will also be discussed in details. Finally, the theoretical lens of social identity and their relation to acculturation literature will be highlighted.

## 2.2. Multiculturalism and their influence on ethnic boundaries

Societies have become increasingly diverse and inclusive due to a number of multi-faceted layers of migration stories and motivations. Due to immigration from various countries and regions (Vertovec, 2007), the unprecedented nature of historical political changes (e.g. Brexit referendum) have become a part of our everyday life and practices (Foroutan, 2016). A growing body of research investigates how people deal with increasing diversity and their attitudes towards multiculturalism and migration. For instance, Stuart and Ward (2019) report various factors of multiculturalism in regards to their advantages and disadvantages. In addition, other studies conducted by Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver (2003) also highlighted the notion of acculturation preferences of different ethnic groups. We can also see the rise of other scholars' work (Ward et al., 2020) that investigates and assess the perceptions and attitudes of citizens towards their interactions with different ethnic groups. These perceptions and attitudes includes their views towards diversity ideologies and policies that support the integration of (im)migrants.

Following previous scholarly work on multiculturalism (Berry et al., 1977; Van de Vijver, et al., 2008), it can be defined as a multifaceted concept which is intertwined between the dimensions of psychological perspective, demography and the nature of policies around ideology and values. Recent studies by Schachner et al. (2019) explains the element of demography as the acknowledgement of ethno-cultural diversity in our society. Their work suggests the promotion and integration of inter-cultural communications amongst the ethnic minority group. For instance, improving and supporting the promotion of multiculturalism in schools or financial support for cultural organisations (Berry and Ward, 2016). In addition, Celenk and Van de Vijver (2014) also refers to psychological aspects as the understanding of the attitudes and behaviours that support cultural diversity at the individual level. Therefore, this approach can facilitate in improving the acceptance of ethnic minority cultures.

The support for multiculturalism can vary across different ethnic groups of various status. By referring to Arends-Toth and Van de Vijver (2003) study which was conducted in the Netherlands, their findings posit that many of the ethnic minority members have expressed their positive support towards the acceptance of multiculturalism. However, this supports comes with the caveats of compartmentalising their cultural values to specific domain and context. Their findings reveal that ethnic minority members prefer to maintain their cultural values in private domains and adopt mainstream culture in the public sphere. As post-modern consumers can significantly shift their perspective and opinions on their attitudes and behaviour over time, the dynamics and complexity of this identity conflict confirms the need to constantly revisit and revamp the current research findings on ethnic identity. On a similar vein, we can also see from previous academic work (Callens et al., 2019) which indicates that majority members of the host society were displaying and showing a positive attitude towards (im)migrants from a culturally similar background. It is clearly evident that migration patterns and the boundaries between minority and majority population are becoming blurred. As posited by Stogianni et al. (2021), it is vital to acknowledge the intricate details of intercultural dynamics and their influence on the formation of ethnic identity and their acculturation journey.

In order to critically understand the multifaceted layers of ethnic identity, it is crucial to capture the in-depth analysis and perspectives around the conceptualisation and political theorisation of multiculturalism. For example, Taylor (1994) and Parekh (2000) highlights the initial concerns that surrounds the recognition for ethnic minority rights within the institutions of liberal democracy. Advancing the contribution made by Taylor (1994) which affected the

modern politics of identity, we can witness the progression of a society towards the integration and acculturation of (im)migrant community. Modood (2011) work represents the image of multiculturalism as a positive vision of an inclusive society towards minority groups. This indicates the supports towards understanding the important facets of our social fabric such as equality and sense of belonging which is encapsulated in the heart of multicultural citizenship (Elliot and Yusuf, 2014). Therefore, it has become an integral part of ethnic and racial diversity evolution (Kymlicka, 2012) as can be seen in the political accommodation nurtured by the state (Meer and Modood, 2012).

As our western society continues to grow and evolve, the importance of a continuous understanding of ethnic identity and their boundaries is one that cannot be dismissed or overlooked. Ethnic consumers can engage in various types of strategies to navigate their values when confronted with their ethnic boundaries in the host society. Wimmer (2008) conceptualised ethnic boundaries as an intangible barrier to incorporate (im)migrants into a society. Following previous scholarly work on ethnic boundaries (Lamont and Bail, 2008; Warikoo, 2011), a number of categorisation used to distinguish the strategies can be drawn. For instance, 'Boundary maintenance' refers to focus on the (im)migrant identity and their particular values vis-à-vis the majority population. 'Boundary crossing' talks about the nature of assimilation to the majority society. Finally, 'Boundary blurring' refers to the acknowledgement and the ability to adopt a hybrid form of ethnic belonging to reduce ethnicity as a principle of discrimination in the society.

According to Drewski and Tuppat (2021), ancestry, religion, language or history can be regarded as a socially constructed shared characteristics between the different ethnic groups. They are not a static state, but operates under a specific structural and social conditions which is open to negotiations. In addition, ethnic boundaries can also go beyond the shared common characteristics by incorporating the elements of a symbolic and social dimensions (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). The symbolic dimension refers to a conceptual distinction between ethnic categories based on certain markers of membership. On the other hand, the aspects of social dimensions refer to the formation of group making and the unequal accessibility to resources and opportunities for the (im)migrant members. Due to the rise of analysing and exploring the notion of inter-ethnic boundaries, the likes of scholars such as Drewski and Tuppat (2021) asserts the varieties of conceptualisation for ethnic boundary issues amongst a multiple reference groups. They argue that the model of majority and minority is not a simple mono or

bi-dimensional approach. Their work encapsulates that many (im)migrants engage beyond the stereotypical assumptions of interactions with the host society and (im)migrants from other countries. As ethnic members strive to engage with other sub-cultures and (im)migrant groups from various background (Hall, 1990), their behaviours indicate the multi-dimensional nature of ethnic boundary work. In addition, the progression of embracing and accepting multiculturalism towards the ethnic (im)migrants can also be seen in the recent consumer and cultural studies. Referred to as boundary spanning behaviour, ethnic individuals tend to creatively link with out-group members which enables them to negotiate and navigate their multiple identities (Dokko et al., 2013; Schotter and Abdelzaher, 2013).

## 2.3. Negotiating and navigating identity in a global world

When it comes to understanding identity in the context of migration, changes in one's identity is one of the most useful and essential indicators for (im)migrants' social integration in the hosts society. Previous current literature has widely applied and recognised the role of identity changes to various contextual studies (Verkuyten et al., 2019). For instance, assimilation to the hosts society indicates a loss of one's ethnicity whilst a strong ethnic identity indicates a low level involvement to the mainstream society (Berry, 1997). In contrast to Berry (1997) arguments, Verkuyten et. al (2019) posit that (im)migrants' can possess multiple identities with their host and home cultures or sub-culture group where these two relationships may be independent. Chasserio et al. (2014) also points out how an individual is capable of constructing a unique identity in which their values and norms can play a major role in their identification process. Furthermore, we can see the likes of Fleischmann and Verkuyten (2016) and Gui et al. (2012) who argues that (im)migrants who integrate to the host society can experience a reduction in socio-cultural adaptation issues which presents the best outcome for their health, well-being and self-esteem. However, according to Berry (1997), those who associate themselves to marginalisation category have the worst socio-adaptation outcome. In addition to these categorisation, Phinney et al. (2001) also highlights that individual characteristics such as age, gender, education, language skills, ethnicity and social capital may affect the formation of their identity. Recent study conducted by Svensson and Syed (2019) found that (im)migrants in the United States were more likely to identify themselves using racial and multi-ethnic categories (Chattaraman and Lennon, 2008) whereas (im)migrants who live in Sweden tended to use their national identity as a label to their associations.

Ethnic identity and culture of origin came to the fore of discussions (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001) when one is questioning and exploring the background and history of their cultural roots and heritage. From this, societal macro environmental factors such as political and economic issues are clearly impacting and redefining the ways in which (im)migrants can negotiate and navigate their personal identities (Lin et al., 2022). For example, value-driven identities that can promote and facilitate (im)migrants career (Gunasekara et al., 2021). As a consequence, identity development can be complex and blurred due to negotiations between different multi-cultural identities (Gray-Little and Hafdahl, 2000). In order to gain a deeper insight into ethnic identity formation, the findings from Umana-Taylor et al. (2004) indicates the three components of ethnic identity. They explain the details of ethnic identity in relation to emotions, feelings and their attached meanings. The three components are:

- Exploration: active exploration of ethnicity through the engagement of culturally defined and specific activities, behaviours and roles.
- Resolution: a sense of commitment and understanding of what extent do the meanings and roles of ethnic identity occupies in people's lives.
- Affirmation: indicates a feeling of positive and negative associations to their own ethnic memberships.

In order to further explore the intricate dynamics of identity within the context of social interactions, Ashforth and Schinoff (2016) asserts the importance of evoking and elucidating the drivers of a situated identity. In addition, recent studies in marketing (Dey et al., 2019; Cleveland and Xu, 2019) have also emphasise the relevance of understanding the interplay between our ethnicity, identity and their social contexts. As migration continues to grow exponentially due to digital advancements and innovation, concerns and questions of how an (im)migrant construe or maintain their identity in a different situational context requires constant scrutiny. Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics of how our behaviour are guided by our moral compasses of core values (i.e. cultural values and beliefs) to inform our identity in the host society which is presented in section 2.4.

## 2.4. Dynamics of value to behaviour relations

In light of the economic and political uncertainty, human values and their relation to attitude and behaviour is of a growing interest amongst the academics (Smith and Hempel, 2022; Poortinga et al., 2019). According to Schwartz et al. (2012), individual values can be regarded as a fundamental tool for expressing a broader perspective on life goals. In fact, Schuster et al. (2019) argues the stability of people's value and their priorities. However, consistent with Schwartz (1992), it is important to understand the prominence of values and their attributes amongst the consumers. In order to comprehend the relationship between values and behaviour, it is vital to recognise how consumer behaviour can be driven by their interpretation of one value over another (Schwartz, 2015). Although values can be a fundamental construct to the way consumers behave in certain situations, they are relatively a broader aspect of the self. It can be argued that our values are not always aligned to our behaviours. For instance, self-interest can be promoted and driven by the notion of achievement and power (Smith and Hempel, 2022).

In general terms, values emanate from beliefs that indicate and guide our desirable behaviours which can be intuitively understood through the use of an individual's interactions with their view of the world in various situations (Schwartz, 1992). Extensive research can be seen in academia where examples of political values can be explained and discussed through various avenues. Feldman's (1988) research posit that people hold a variety of political values which were empirically connected to a diverse set of political opinions. In a similar vein, Lane (1962) and other researchers took a similar approach to understanding the basis of political opinions of the public where they have also extended the debate on the discussions of looking at different dimensions and their consequences for public opinion (Alvarez and Brehm, 1997; Feldman and Steenbergen, 2001).

In the past decade, we have seen the likes of Haidt (2012) who has developed the five foundations and dimensions of morality which explains the adherence to different political ideologies: care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion and sanctity/degradation. From his work, Haidt (2012) argues that liberals' ideology can be aligned with two dimensions such as care and fairness whilst conservatives are known to be sensitive to all the five moral dimensions identified. However, other scholars such as Jacoby (2006) have shown that values have little additional power in explaining issue opinions when compared to

the effect of ideology. To explain this further, Goren's (2013) work has developed a focus on principles rather than values: limited government, traditional morality and military strength. Goren (2013) argues that these three key principles can be positioned as a structure to further explain the specific issues and preferences of eligible voters. Moreover, his work finds no abstract ideological dimension such as the left-right continuum logically or empirically binding his three key principles. As a result, values and principles can be regarded as more relevant to actual political decision making rather than the ideological organisation and conception of beliefs (Carmines and D'Amico, 2015).

Previous cultural studies in Britain have argued for many years that cultural identities are constructed situationally and are dynamic and fluid in nature (Morley and Chen, 1996; Wright, 1998). Due to the complex and ever evolving nature of multiple identities, the notion of identities are subjected to constant negotiations. As Wright (1998) highlighted, theoretical development in cultural studies have shown that cultures are not naturally bounded entities. Therefore, the idea that project hegemonic ideologies as authentic culture can be contested. As individuals learn the different facets of everyday life through the exposure of multicultural societies, the idea of culture and its underpinning ideology possessed by individual can evolve as they can be described as the process of contestation and transformation (Wright, 1998). As a result, the accumulated meanings of culture and the associated ideology can be re-work and re-defined in numerous ways to assert different definitions with various material outcomes (Street, 1993).

By situating the notion of cultural studies and ideology, the implication of one's culture and background can be explored in relation to British politics. For instance, the concept of new culture has been appropriated and redefined by the New Right in British politics by putting ideology as a hegemonic stance (Seidel, 1985; King, 1987). This New Right movement and perceptions have generated the idea that migration and diasporic community have created a population with multifaceted differences which gives rise to the appropriation of anti-racist language and cultural differences (Hall, 1993; Wright, 1998). Furthermore, there is an emerging opposition to dilute the differences by introducing the concept of essentialism to reassert boundaries. For example, Brexit as a tool to re-define and defend the distinctiveness of being British from cultural outsiders. As Kahn (1995) posited, this new wave of contesting the meanings of cultures have reinforced exclusion which inevitably have a profound implication for public policy and people's political ideology/identity affiliations.

Recent research in political ideology has found that the measurement and conceptualisation of political ideology as a self-identification tool (i.e. single dimensional perspectives) have proven to be of limited use when one has to describe their political ideas and viewpoints (Carmines et al., 2012). As culture is a complex phenomenon which underpins the way we view and see the world, the multi-dimensional conceptions of ideology plays an important role in shaping and structuring the political thinking of individuals which involves deeply held principles and value-laden perspectives (Carmines and D'Amico, 2015). Extensive empirical research have shown how an individual behaviour can be guided and affected by ideological structures (Conover and Feldman, 1981; Evans et al., 1996; Federico and Schneider, 2007; Jost, 2006). For example, these studies further explore and understand the influences of individual evaluations of political candidates as well as a person's attitude formation from a philosophical construct. Given the complex nature of ideology that goes beyond the liberal-conservative dichotomy, the prevalence of ideology and their association to individual values and opinions are complicated and contingent. Traditionally, political ideology has been conceived in existing research as a single left-right dimension. For instance, Jost et al. (2003) described these dimensions into two types of preferences: preference over change versus stability in relation to society and a concern over the government's role in the economy which were argued to be highly correlated and hence collapse into a single dimension (Poole and Rosenthal, 2007).

The studies of understanding the notion of ideology for both the public and the political elites have developed over the past few decades. Converse (1964) argues that within the context of political belief systems, some attitudes are more prominent and the number of political attitudes can vary. Similar approach and evaluation can be found through the work of Nie et al. (1976) who demonstrate the increased levels of ideological constraints amongst voters which in turn is extended by Abramowitz (2010) findings. The issues of increasing polarisation in relation to voting and attitudes can be observed. On the other hand, Lane (1962) depicts a strong proposition to suggest that an ideology is not constrained by the standard liberal-conservative framework, rather, it is at times underpinned by how people think of themselves and society: moral codes, fundamental personal values, quality, freedom and democracy. Existing research has also shown that political behaviour and non-political opinions can be shaped by ideologies: giving positive associations to various political parties or candidates they condone as the bearers of their ideologies (Carmines and D'Amico, 2015). In the UK political landscape, working class adopted Labour party policies whereas conservatives (i.e. Tories) like right-of-centre candidates and manifestos (Jacoby, 1991; Zaller, 1992). The role of ideology within the

political spectrum can be argued to go beyond the grasp of many individuals. As Federico and Schneider (2007) put forward, scholars can observe the consequences of ideological thinking only when individuals are motivated enough to evaluate political objects (e.g., voting in elections). Through the extensive work done by scholars in this research area, political ideology can be presented as a powerful tool that shapes how individuals think of politics and the wider society. It can be used to predict a number of non-political values and beliefs among individuals. Labour party supporters, for example, not only support left-of-centre policies but are also likely to hold the values of egalitarianism and protection of minority rights (Rokeach, 1973; Feldman, 1988; Jost, 2006).

Ideologies and values can play a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of an individual's behaviour (Jung et al., 2017). In the contemporary marketing literature, the concept of ethnocentrism is used to assess the pride that an individual can possess for their own national and cultural identities (Dey et al., 2022) whilst disassociating themselves from the integration to cosmopolitanism and values of other cultures and nations (Gonzalez- Fuentes, 2019; Ma et al., 2020). In line with Steenkamp et al., (2003) findings, ethnocentric individuals associate their identification to local products as it provides them a sense of belonging to a specific cultural identity. In so doing, they harbour a resentment towards the use and purchase of global brands. Recent studies by Dey et al. (2022) highlights how there is a lack of consensus and inconsistency towards consumers' values and attitudes towards socio-political values. Their work has utilised the notion of consumer reshoring sentiment (CRS) to assess a wider sets of metrics that can help to assess the consumer attitude and disposition towards reshoring. By incorporating the element of Brexit and national pride, their paper has captured the essence of socio-political issues that are often deeply rooted within the complex nature of individual interpretations. The implications and seismic shift caused by Brexit to our economic and political landscape can be applied across various contexts. As this thesis seeks to explore the value-driven system of ethnic individuals and their interpretations of socio-cultural and political issues, the historical incidents of Brexit and their impact on ethnic values and behaviour merits further investigation. In this research, by incorporating the concept of Brexit, the researcher investigates the congruent relation between human values and their underlying moral principles that may or may not influence their consumption practices.

In addition to understanding the cultural disposition of everyday consumption practices, it is also important to incorporate the recent debate on consumer behaviour and their relation to

ideological beliefs (Kidwell et al., 2013). The mediating role of political ideology can be used to further explore the antecedents of liberal and conservative values. According to Graham et al. (2009), conservatives are in favour of authority, self-control and uphold a sense of duty and in-group loyalty. Conversely, liberals tend to be more focused on the notion of inner feelings and behaviour to promote and protect the welfare and rights of individuals. Moreover, Khan et al. (2013) finds the positive association to national brands is in line with the conservatives' values. On the other hand, Watkins et al. (2016) posit that liberal political values were positively affiliated to the acceptance of sustainable consumption. By referring to sustainability movement, we can see a rise in the promotion of sustainable behaviours amongst the consumers. In recent decades, changes in consumer behaviour can be drawn from our conscious choices to practice recycling, purchase of green products and support for climate change movement. For instance, previous studies highlight the surge in political participation amongst the politically interested adolescents who attach high importance to democracy, environment and welfare of others (Stattin and Amna, 2022; Grasso and Giugni, 2016).

In consumer research, the role of values and their implications on the effects of cognitive and affective components remains blurred. Following the likes of Muhammad et al. (2021) and Dey et al. (2022), partial understanding can be seen to assess the link between cognitive attitude to product features and corporate social responsibility (CSR) to affective attitudes. In addition to the sustainable consumption practices, numerous debate can be drawn across various ideology driven consumer behaviour practices. This includes the intention to support political campaigns and the adoption of radical and liberal thoughts. In contemporary marketing literature, the alignment between our values and behaviour is inconclusive and inconsistent. The questions of whether behaviour are always driven by ideologies and values requires a deeper insight which this thesis will seek to explore. Therefore, in line with the findings of (Podnar and Balmer, 2021), an identity-based view is needed to explore the multifaceted layers of the link between ethnic values and behavioural/orientation attributes.

To indicate the influence of values on political engagement and alignment, it is important to understand the journey and history of political ideologies in western societies. Jost (2006) defines political ideology as a set of cognitive, motivational and affective attitudes. These sets of components provide an indication and explanation on how society can achieve social order and justice. Values can also be conceptualised as a social goal that can prioritise individuals' material or post material needs (Inglehart, 1977). For instance, post-materialist can view

political participation as a way to embrace the changing patterns of society (i.e. acceptance of self-expression and community). Resurgence in the study of the inter-relationship between ideology and personality can be seen in the past few decades (Jost et al., 2016; Hirsh et al., 2010). Due to the complex nature of political values and its components, it is fundamental to understand the differences in political ideologies such as the left-right distinction (Bobbio, 1996). This distinction between left and right has been classified as the most useful way to characterise political values and opinions across all cultural contexts (Jost, 2006).

Whilst previous scholars have conducted a notable research, more research is needed on the concept of political values and ideology in marketing. It can be argued that political ideologies are not a static state as they are socially interwoven and constructed by the fabric of our society. As a result, the multiple dimensionality of ideological beliefs and outcomes has become a recurring debate within the marketing literature. As Jung et al. (2017) highlighted, questions pertaining to whether a single left/liberal and right/conservative dimensions can capture enough of the social and economic variances is necessary to understand the dynamics of political value and behaviour. Following Festinger (1957), the inter-relationship between human values and their political orientation can be explored by reflecting upon the desires for consistencies at the cognitive level. People want to achieve consistencies to their attitudes, beliefs and opinions. In line with this notion, Smith and Hempel (2022) argue that when a person's political orientation is aligned with an important value, they can serve as a mechanism to validate their beliefs. Conversely, when values and political alignment gap becomes wider, it can create ambiguity and cognitive inconsistencies. This aspects of inconsistencies can be applied to the understanding of values and political orientation across different cultural contexts.

In order to comprehend the differences of values and their implications on political alignment, it is also important to highlight the interpretations of secularism and neoliberal subjects. The ideological contexts and practices of secularism in a neo-liberal society can be further explored. As Taylor (1998) puts forward, secularism depict the idea that influences of religious or ethnic allegiance must be free from the public and institutional spaces. Secularism are often perceived as universal but they are strongly shaped and constructed by the historical and geographical differences of modernity, political power, religion and social structures (Gokariksel and Mitchell, 2005). For instance, the interpretations of secularism in the sub-continent of South Asian countries can be seen as an indifference to religion rather than a conformation to being

an atheist in the west. As pervious scholars (Harvey, 2008; Teo, 2018) highlighted, the socio-cultural expressions of neo-liberalism have extended our understanding of liberal capitalism to all aspects of our life, including political alignment. The primary feature of a neoliberal society is to embrace a sense of freedom from constraints and the creation of an entrepreneurial society (Adams et al., 2019) to promote the integration of cheaper labour through migration and acceptance of Eurocentric modernity.

Although there is no doubt about the existence of secularism and the practice of neo-liberal cultural patterns in the western society, the rise of political conservatism has posed a challenge in recent times. Consistent with Jost and Kruglanski (2002), the explanation of conservatism values and ideologies cannot be provided by a single motivational driver. Similar to other socially constructed representations, social and political conservatism are driven by a changing landscape of local, national and global contexts (Jost et al., 2003). In relation to the historical and political changes, the United Kingdom exit from the European Union (i.e. Brexit) has become one of the most highly debated topic across the political domains around the world. The attitudes and opinions towards Brexit has divided the nations. Despite the increasing rise of widespread uncertainties caused by Brexit, the positive aspects of Brexit can also be seen as a hope to regain national identity for millions of people (Dey et al., 2022).

In line with the findings by Dey et al. (2022), it can be argued that the dynamics of secularism and neo-liberalism in the western society have undergone a series of change. For example, we can see the rise of social and political conservatism as a psychological route to protect and manage the uncertainty and fear. Threats and sense of fear around Brexit was driven by developing a negative connotation towards anti- immigration and scepticism towards Europeans. Although it can be conceived as a right-wing political agenda, the stereotypical assumptions to align Brexit votes to right-wing values can be contested. It can be argued that the multiple dimensions of values can be overlap between liberal and conservative values due to the nature of their psychological relations. For instance, the emergence of a leftist Brexiteer indicates the presence of how our behaviour are not always driven by our core values. Therefore, it is paramount and vital to explore and create a nuanced understanding of value driven behaviour and their positions to the political orientation. To capture the dynamics of value-based identity, this chapter will further explore the current literature on acculturation with the theoretical lens of social identity theory.

## 2.5. Development and evolution of acculturation literature

By following the existing acculturation literature (Berry 1992; Sam and Berry, 2010), acculturation can be defined as the continuous interactions between various groups of people from different cultures where psychological and behavioural changes can be witnessed. These psychological or behavioural changes may occur within the settled group of individuals alone or within the groups that were involved in the process stage. In order to fully comprehend and create a nuanced understanding of acculturation, it is important to identify and uncover the concept of psychological and behavioural acculturation. In addition, it is also important to understand how values possessed by an individual can deliberately impact on the ways in which an individual can direct and pursue their lives (Assor et al., 2020). According to Tropp et al. (1999), acculturation from a psychological perspective refers to the changes in the orientations of the psycho-cultural notions that were developed during the involvement and engagement with a new cultural system. On the other hand, the multifaceted layers of social interactions, food consumption, religion, language and media also contributes towards the components of the behavioural acculturation (Cleveland et al., 2009). With this in mind, Berry (1998) and Oppenheim-Weller et al. (2018) strongly assert the importance of understanding the process and outcomes of personal and social resources to value based acculturation within the context of our modern societies. In doing so, it will help in facilitating and capturing the essence of a dynamic intercultural contact within the multicultural societies.

The work on acculturation literature merits a further understanding due to the nature of changes that can happen within the individuals' life stages (psychological and behavioural). In order to understand the evolution of acculturation over the last few decades, it is important to trace and identify the various seminal work on the acculturation theory. The most widely cited and respected acculturation model was developed by Berry (1992) which identifies the two domains of acculturation: the maintenance of home culture and adaptation to other cultural groups. Therefore, this type of acculturation indicates that an ethnic individual will gradually lose their identification and adherence to their heritage values and norms over time. These studies tended to depict the process of acculturation as a linear continuum that ranges from no to full acculturation (Bauman, 2005). According to Berry's (1992) model, the first dimensions highlights the orientations towards the maintenance of one's cultural ethos and identity (home society) whereas the second dimensions describes the situation in which (im)migrants have the desire to develop an interactions and relationships with out-group members (mainstream

society). The degree to which one will choose to maintain their heritage culture and adapt to the mainstream culture varies independently and is heavily individualistic in nature. Berry (1992) model identifies four acculturation strategies which were derived from the two dichotomised dimensions as discussed before.

- *Assimilation:* occurs when (im)migrant adopt the dominant new culture (i.e. mainstream/host society) over their heritage cultural traits.
- *Integration:* occurs where an (im)migrant can adopt and embrace the cultural norms of the host and home society. They maintain their heritage culture and traditions whilst engaging with the wider society.
- *Separation:* occurs where an (im)migrant withdraw or reject the host culture to assert and focus on their own cultural values and ethos.
- *Marginalisation:* occurs where an (im)migrant reject or neither maintain nor acquire the cultural characteristics and traits from both societies.

Following the seminal work by Berry (1992), recent research in marketing literature has brought the debate and conversation towards the fluidity of ethnic cultural identity and their negotiations process. By using the concept of contrasting between an (im)migrant home country with the host society, other acculturation studies have advanced the model presented by Berry (1992). In recent years, various research has studied acculturation from a different perspective by using various consumption practices and contexts where Berry's linear model of acculturation was challenged and tested (Penaloza, 1994; Oswald, 1999; Askegaard et al., 2005, Dey et al., 2019). In a ground-breaking study, Penaloza (1994) study highlights the consumption pattern of Mexican- Americans. In doing so, Penloza (1994) proposed an empirical model which focused upon the process of consumer acculturation using movement, translation and adaptation. This in turn has led to the acculturation outcomes of assimilation, maintenance, resistance and segregation (Penaloza, 1994). Although the processes are not completely different or deviated away from the work of Berry (1992) model, it offers a deeper insights and sheds a light on the complex and dynamic processes of acculturation through the eyes of Mexican (im)migrants' adaptation to their new environment in the United States.

On a similar vein, Oswald (1999) also studied Haitian- Americans by focusing upon the idea of situational ethnicity and hyper-assimilation concepts (Stayman and Deshpande, 1989;

Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983). This research provides another empirical finding on acculturation by offering a nuanced understanding of cultural swapping. Cultural swapping is based on the views that consumers will have the desire to constantly swap their cultural identities in relation to the situational context that one is exposed to. Although new insights and perspectives can be drawn from both studies, the main limitations to their work is the contextual nature of their chosen country (i.e. United States). Therefore, with the advancement of disruptive technologies and the unprecedented shift and changes to our global political and economic issues, the conversations surrounding identity and its components have moved beyond the traditional acculturation model of bi-cultural local identities. Facilitated by globalisation and the emergence of cultural diversity amongst the western society, discussions and research interest has focused upon the topics of co-existence between the members of multicultural groups from different backgrounds and cultures. As a result, post-modern consumers are able to experiment and educate themselves on the multiple facets of acculturation conditions and orientations. For instance, by living in a multicultural city, an ethnic consumer can opt to experiment different lifestyles, beliefs and values which is outside their own cultural teaching and boundaries. With the understanding of this new phenomenon, Askegaard et al. (2005) study of Greenlandic (im)migrants in Denmark have pinpointed the concept of global consumer culture (GCC) as a third-generation agent. They described GCC as a term which reflects the transnational consumer culture with their own sets of values.

By confirming the results of Penaloza (1994) and Oswald (1999), Askegaard et al. (2005) highlights a portfolio of four identity positions of the Greenlanders in Denmark. Their work encompasses the negotiation of one's identity by using the three components of acculturation forces: GCC, Greenlandic and Danish culture. The four identity positions were: Greenlandic hyper-culture, in which hyped commercial elements are consumed as emblems of authentic culture. The Oscillating Pendulum, a person who experiences the alienations and attractions of both Greenland and Denmark. The Danish cookie, a relative newcomer who embrace the market freedoms and possibilities of individual advancements available in the more developed consumer culture. The Best-of-Both-Worlder, who express favourable attitudes towards the values of culture and social worlds. Thus, the four identities posited by Askegaard et al. (2005) are all fundamentally informed by the participation and celebration of transnational consumer culture.

The above discussion indicates that acculturation is not a linear phenomenon, instead, it is a complex dynamic process with a multifaceted layers of agents, drivers and factors. Based on the development and journey of acculturation literature over the years, it is clearly evident that self-identity and acculturation strategies were exposed to a constant dialogue. Facilitated by the advancements within our macro environmental factors (technology, immigration, globalisation and others), there is a growing acceptance towards the notion of a multi-dimensional acculturation journey where an individual can simultaneously feel assimilated, separated and marginalised (Bhatia, 2002). With this in mind, Dey et al. (2019) advances current acculturation scholarship by suggesting a multi-directional model (Figure 2) for acculturation studies as opposed to the existing uni-directional or bi-directional perspectives. In order to make a meaningful theoretical contribution, their work has focused on Askegaard and Linnet (2011) notion of contexts of context. In doing so, they have redefined consumers' responses to social, historical and institutional issues by introducing the concept of multi-dimensional acculturation strategies. Through this new perspectives of acculturation approach, their paper has contributed to the existing acculturation literature by conceptualising a taxonomy of multi-dimensional acculturation strategies.

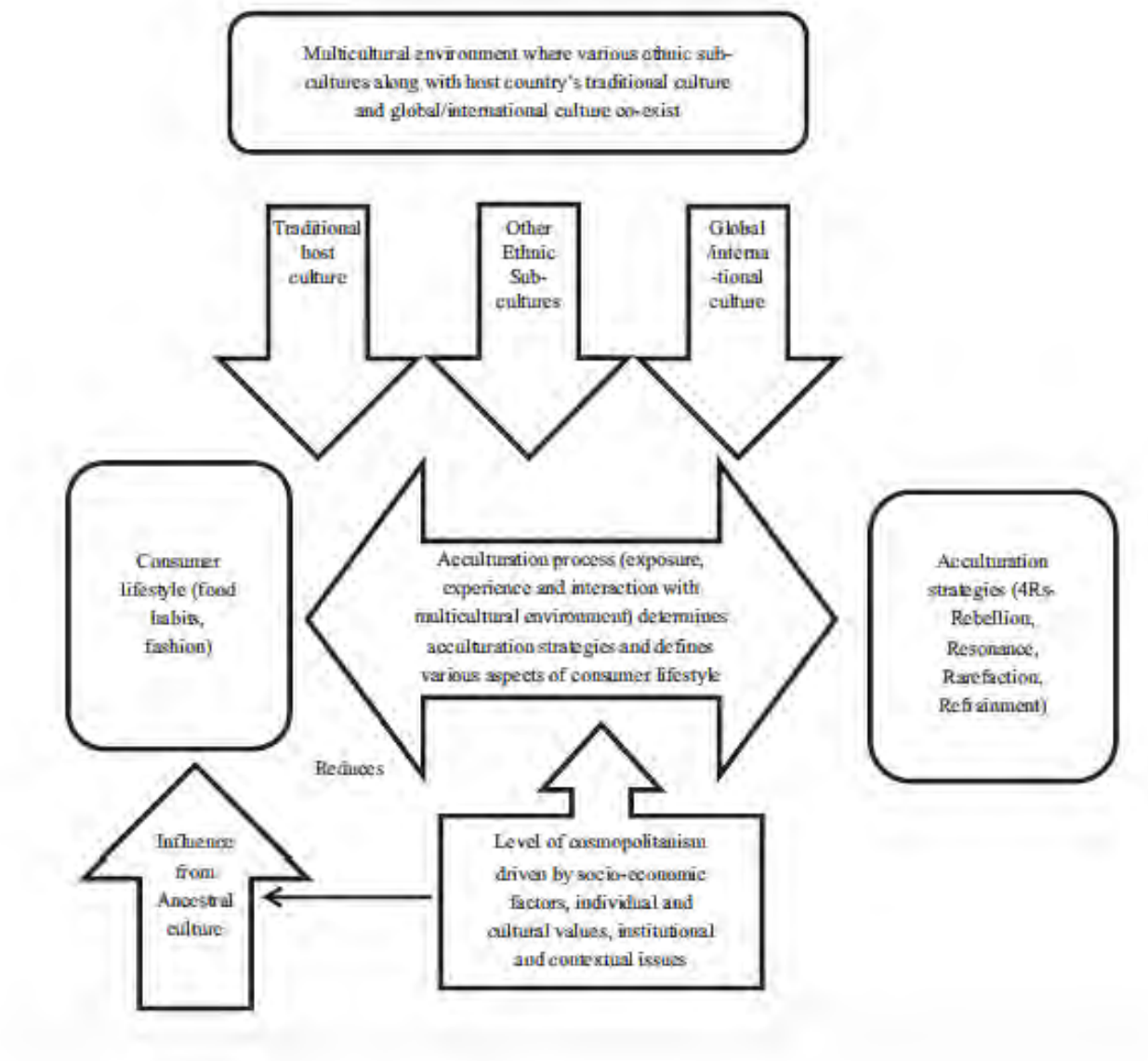


*Figure 2. Multi-directional acculturation strategies based on food consumption (Dey et al., 2019)*

By concurring with Cleveland et al. (2013) findings, Dey et al. (2019) work on acculturation strategies (Figure 2) have incorporated cosmopolitanism as an integral part of ethnic consumers' acculturation process in a multicultural western society. Their findings have coined four types of acculturation strategies which were based on the context of food consumption and habits. The taxonomy identified in this research can be described as:

- *Resonance*, where an ethnic individual can choose to adopt the attributes of other cultures that resonates to their own heritage and ancestral values and beliefs.

- *Rarefaction,* where an ethnic individual chooses to adopt cultural attributes from the out-group members whilst retaining their own cultures without any firm convictions.
- *Refrainment* can be described as an acculturation strategy where an ethnic individual has the intentions to adopt other cultural attributes as long as they are accepted within the boundaries of their own cultural values.
- *Rebellion* is a strategy where there is a desire for assimilation towards other cultures by overcoming the barriers of their own cultural attributes.

In addition, their findings indicate the existence and presence of inter-cultural contact and interactions amongst the ethnic consumers in London. These types of interactions can range from engaging with the host community culture (i.e. British culture) and/or interacting with a multitude of cultures and sub-cultures from various background. Therefore, it can be argued that ethnic consumers' acculturation strategies cannot be characterised by a linear continuum between host and home culture, but it is rather shaped and redefined by a multitude of cultural experiences and exposures from multiple contextual situations and directions. As such, they are not static in nature and are subjected to change. In line with previous acculturation research (Askegaard et al., 2005; Dey et al., 2017), their findings of cultural hybridity have solidified and reiterate the prominence of fluidity and flexibility in the formation of acculturation strategies in a multicultural environment. The model of multi-directional acculturation strategies reflected a comprehensive and unprecedented shift within our multicultural society and communities. From this perspective, acculturation is no longer a mono, bi or tri-dimensional as highlighted in the recent acculturation studies. They have been positioned as an amalgamation of the numerous cultural attributes and forces that constitutes the importance of understanding and strengthening of cultural hybridity within our culture and social life (Oyserman et al., 2017).

Despite the advancement towards multi-dimensional acculturation scholarship, ethnic individual mode and strategy for acculturation is susceptible to change throughout their lives. This is an inevitable process that one can expect to encounter during their acculturation experience in the host society. For instance, changes in one's social, work and personal circumstances can enforce some individuals to re-evaluate and/or adjust in their consumption behaviour. Hence, this thesis will further explore and ascertain the deeper analysis and nuanced understanding of multi-directional acculturation scholarship by assessing the disposition and

expression of ethnic values and acculturative orientations. The next section 2.6. will highlight the role of digital consumer culture (Dey et al., 2020) and their relation to digital acculturation studies.

## 2.6. Acculturation and global consumer culture in a digital era

According to Stromquist and Monkman (2014), globalisation can be defined as a multi-faceted concept with political, economic and cultural implications. The key aspects of globalisation are the opportunity to harness the creation of multicultural spaces fit for the cosmopolitan cities. The rapid growth of linkages between different countries have contributed to the acceptance of the global economy and culture where our marketplace has turned into a multicultural environment (Torelli and Stoner, 2018). With this new insights and perspectives, the view of the world as a multicultural global village represents new opportunities, ideas, exposure, knowledge exchange, cultural awareness, education and an inclusive enriched society. This new wave of knowledge and educational exchange have given rise to a growing demand and appetite for multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism across the globe. For example, the unprecedented demand of migration levels in the UK indicates the power of a globalised economy. In addition, the recent technological and digital developments, the historical political movements such as Brexit and Ukraine War and the growing calls for worldwide agreement on climate change (i.e. COP27) shows the importance of globalisation as a global force.

Consumers in a multicultural society have the options and opportunity to belong and connect to not only to their local culture, but also to a global culture. The desires and attraction to making a connection to other cultural attributes can be conceived and achieved through various practices. For example, it can be in the form of participating in different consumption contexts such as dresses, festivals, food, branding, politics and others (Weinberger et al., 2015; Kizgin et al., 2019; Dey et al., 2019). Despite the acknowledgements and appreciation for globalisation, we have also witnessed nationalistic tendencies which is fuelled by globalisation (Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007). As a consequence, cultural conflicts and clashes can be observed at various levels: local, national and global. These issues can in turn help to integrate and transform each others differences and concerns (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2009). For instance, this is where identity negotiation can be observed as individuals can relate and learn from the local and global cultures. This is indicated by the recent studies conducted in situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation in home and host culture and work

settings as discussed in 2.3. (Banerjee et al., 2021). Therefore, identities are fluid and non-static in nature, where time and space are not fixed. It exhibits and advocates a new way of modern social structures as a liquid modernity (Bauman, 2007).

With the emergence of globalisation, disruptive technologies and multi-polarity in the world, our societies are increasingly becoming more diverse and inclusive. As the demands and needs of our contemporary society continues to evolve and develop, the acculturation process, strategies, outcomes and associations cannot be restricted to inter-cultural and inter-social group contacts within a host-migrant setting. As highlighted by previous scholars (Cleveland and Laroche, 2012), the initiation and desires to create a globally inclusive cultural society has gained currency within the consumer acculturation research. As we live in a digital world where digital applications and tools have been integrated into our daily activities (personal and work settings), it perpetuates the need for a further discussions and engagement on an online platform as consumers' have the accessibility to communicate with other groups without the need for physical connections (Phillips, 2008). According to Choudhary et al. (2018), this has instigated and open avenues for inter-group and inter-cultural interactions with a new form of acculturation called remote acculturation. The benefits of remote acculturation are its flexibility and endless opportunities for people to develop relationships and make connections without the effort or need for physical interactions (Panteli and Marder, 2017). This argument has been supported by the likes of Dey et al. (2018) who argues the use of social media as a tool to diminish the gap between the real and virtual life. In addition, Yen and Dey (2019) asserts the added benefits and convenience offered by the rise of the digital technologies. The use of digital applications and tools can help in the promotion and acceptance of integration, assimilation or acculturation beyond the user's own community.

Although various acculturation research investigates different areas of consumption practices, the subjects of digital acculturation still remains understudied and scarce within the acculturation scholarships. Despite the advancements of borderless boundaries, the role of digital media in consumer acculturation is an evolving and dynamic process. As consumers are constantly driven by the new applications and tools (e.g., the rise of Tiktok applications during Covid-19 pandemic), it is vital to investigate how these new digital applications can have an implication on one's acculturation expressions and outcomes. Therefore, this new sense of knowledge sharing and cultural contact on a digital platform offers an opportunity for a new conceptual scaffolding and empirical application of acculturation in a digital world, particularly

in areas of ethnic communities. As migration levels continues to rise, we can see the changes in the patterns and behaviour of ethnic communities and their expressions. This can include their view of ethnic identity (Dey et al., 2017), political engagement (Kizgin et al., 2019) and acknowledgement of international and regional cultural attributes of identity (Fujita et al., 2019).

In order to understand this new phenomenon, it is crucial to conceptually depict digital consumer culture and its relation to digital acculturation. In a neo-liberal and post-modern world, consumption practices and their symbolic presence in human lives are central to the consumer culture. It is vital to note that the practices, view of the world and identities that were embedded within the daily activities of our life are constituted by the lived experiences of the consumption at an individual and collective level (Dey et al., 2020). In order to fully capture the dynamics of digital consumer culture, Dey et al. (2020) have coined the notion of digital consumer culture as a shared sets of consumption behaviour that directly or indirectly emanate from people's interactions with digital technologies and applications, which thus have implications on a shared social level- both on an online and offline environment.

As mentioned before, acculturation can have a complex form as people interact and adopt cultural attributes of different ethnic and religious groups in multicultural societies (Dey et al., 2019). In their paper (Figure 3), Dey et al. (2020) pioneer a conceptual framework that encapsulate and explain the three inherent characteristics of digital consumer culture: consumer empowerment, reciprocity between online and offline worlds and decompartmentalisation of identities. The paper also expands on the studies of acculturation by identifying the three acculturation outcomes in digital consumer culture- digital integration, digital separation and digital deprivation. They define digital acculturation as the process of expressing and managing individuals' identities and practices within the social and cultural boundaries created and is characterised by the dynamic inter-relationships between and amongst online and offline world. Their concept captures the interactions, perceptions, paradoxes and intricacies pertaining to consumers' exposure to digital consumer culture. Therefore, this digital acculturation is a dynamic and evolving process that is subjected to constant change which can also help in re-shaping the current and future innovation of our social-cultural and political changes.

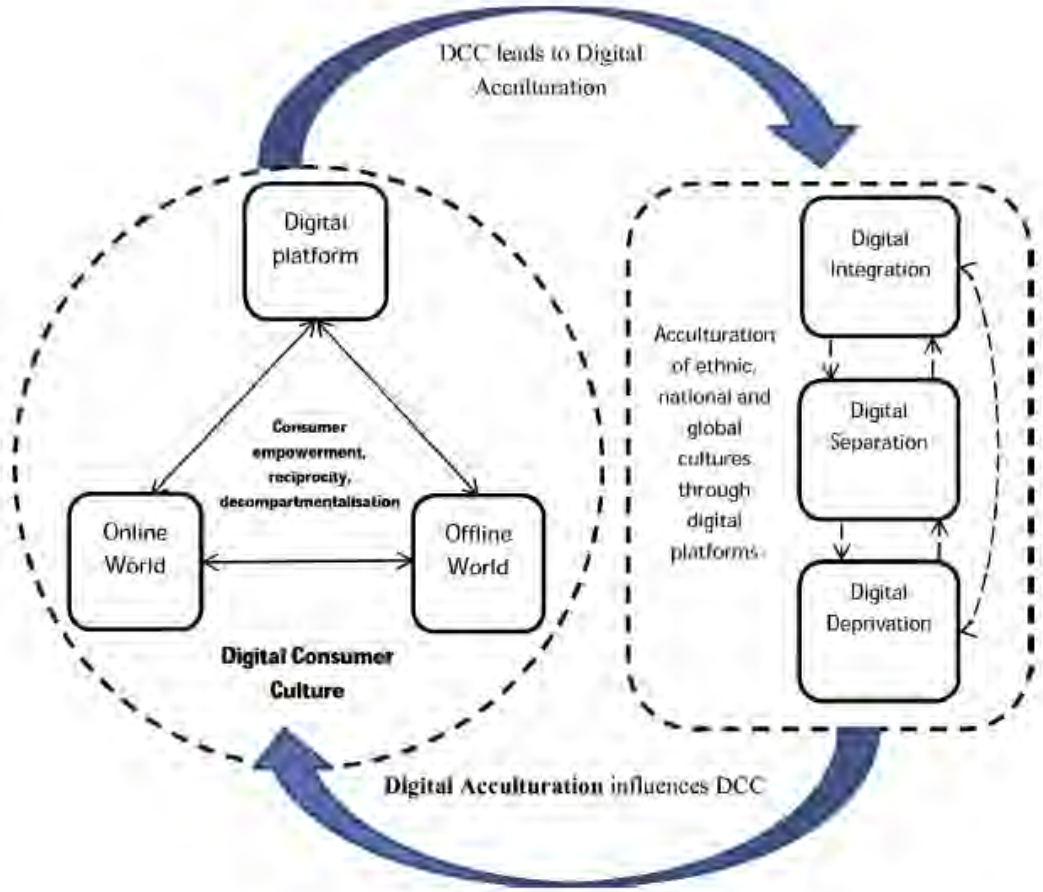


*Figure 3. Inter-relationship between digital consumer culture and digital acculturation (Dey et al., 2020)*

In addition, there are numerous studies that have examined the process of digital acculturation and consumer culture. For instance, Li and Tsai (2015) argues that ethnic individuals who consume more ethnic social media tend to show a stronger ethnic cultural identification. On a similar vein, Park et. al (2014) asserts that international students (i.e. Chinese) who utilise social media applications as a way to reconnect or maintain their connection with their home country can encounter a slower progress in acculturation and increased their acculturation stress. They posit that the use of social media to engage and interact with the culture of their home country is associated with a higher degree of ethnic identity maintenance, whilst the effort to use social media as a tool to integrate with the host communities can be associated with a better social-cultural adaptation.

Moreover, approaching from a different angle, Yu et al. (2019) focused on the content of social media usage. Content in this matter includes knowledge sharing, interaction and entertainment on a digital platform. By using the contents of social media, their findings indicate the dyadic

inter-relationship between social media activities and acculturation. For instance, the higher the amount of time spend on social media, the stronger the adoption of the host culture on a psychological and behavioural perspective. Given that today's social media scene is highly diversified by platforms with different purposes and interactive features, it is clearly evident from the existing literature that social media can be a significant force in shaping user's cultural orientation. This reiterate and reify the need to include social media as a key factor in future acculturation models. Such projections are consistent with the findings reported in Qiu et al. (2013) that Chinese users tend to be involved in more collectivism-oriented activities when they use Renren (the Facebook of China) as compared to when they use the U.S. based Facebook, although the two social networking sites utilitarian functions are highly compatible. Although the prominence of digital consumer culture to acculturation studies is undeniably relevant in today's society, the work on acculturation within the context of local politics is still scarce. Drawing upon the roles of digital acculturation, this thesis has focused on value-based political acculturation amongst the South Asian (im)migrants in the UK, where a further review on political acculturation literature will be shown in section 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9.

## 2.7. Political Acculturation

While acculturation is extensively studied in the social and cultural domains, the current research on acculturation has conceptual deficiencies and opportunity to explore acculturation values and behaviour within a political domain (Schwartz et al., 2014). Unlike other consumption research on areas such as food, lifestyle, dresses and festivals, the notion of political identity can present a more complex intricate details as they are heavily intertwined and interwoven between the multi-faceted layers of human values. With this in mind, the research on ethnic minority communities and their political acculturation in the western society is still an under-research area. Therefore, this emerging and exciting research area requires a constant evaluation against the political and economic external environment. As highlighted by previous studies (Hindriks et al., 2017), there is very limited number of (im)migrant minorities that participate in mainstream politics in many European states. The resistance to participate in the local politics stems from doubts about their ability and right to participate (Petrusevska, 2009). As a result, inequality, unfair treatment and exclusion in the host society can increase. Although the importance of political acculturation process is acknowledged (Hindriks, et al., 2017; Kizgin et al., 2019), it is important to understand the processes

underlying ethnic minority willingness to accommodate host society political domains into their acculturation journey.

There are various ways in which ethnic minority members can participate politically. The execution of political participation can range from exercising their rights to vote in the general elections, joining political demonstrations and protest, or by being actively involved on social media and other digital platforms. Applying the acculturation framework to the political domain, the research conducted by Hindriks et al. (2015) examines how Dutch majority members and members of different minority groups evaluate the political acculturation strategies of an (im)migrant-origin group (Figure 4). Using a national sample and an experimental vignette design, they investigate the attitudes towards political acculturation strategies of the Turkish-Dutch. In line with the discussions on SIT (Turner et al., 1987), their research focused on the (im)migrant-origin group in the Netherlands: the in-group attitudes of the Turkish-Dutch and the out-group attitudes of the native Dutch. It also incorporates people from a Moroccan or Surinamese background. They also have analysed and investigates whether the opinions and perceptions of threat to the position of one's own ethnic group can effect and moderate the attitudes towards various acculturation strategies. Moreover, it also analyses the role of dual identity in the evaluation of political acculturation strategies of their in-group.

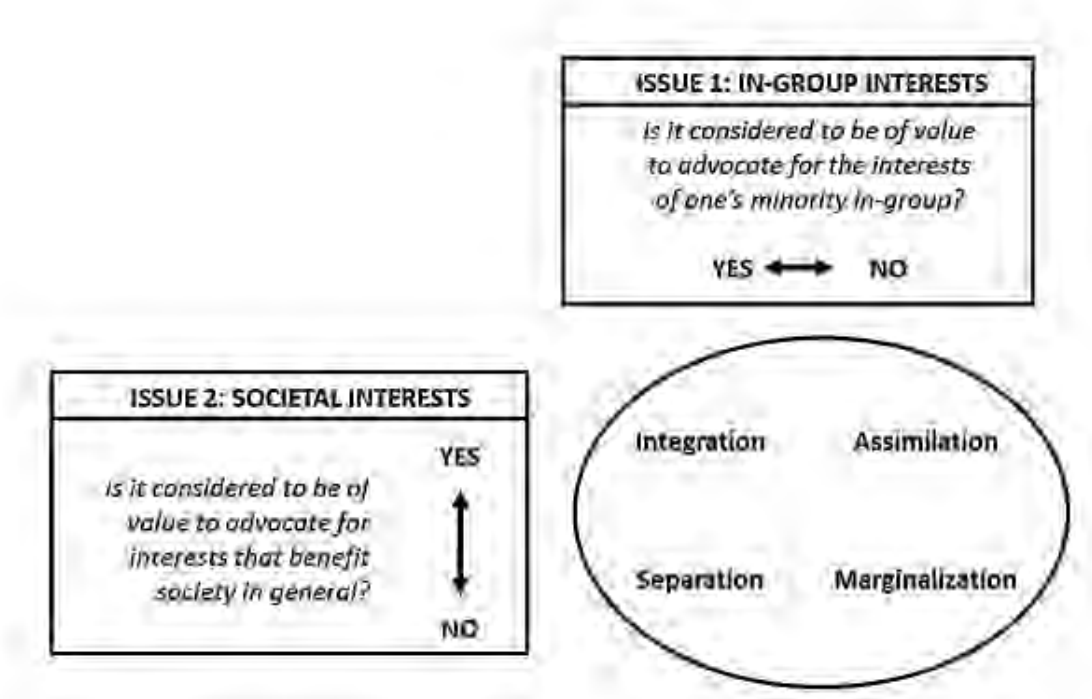


*Figure 4. Political acculturation strategies (Hindriks et al., 2015)*

Following the four acculturation strategies posited by Berry (1992), Hindriks et al. (2015) requires (im)migrants to decide their desires for interactions with the host society and also the extent to which they want to maintain their heritage culture. Within the context of politics, they were faced with the questions and dilemma between two dimensions: to advance their minority in-group interest and goals or to advance interest and goals that can benefit the society as a whole. By considering these points into the political domain, political acculturation strategies were identified by Hindriks et al. (2015). Marginalisation implies that minority members do not wish to represent any political interests or goals by keeping their interest and goals away from any group based political issues. Separation is the strategy in which minority members predominantly wish to advance the interests of their in-group desires and interest that can benefit the society as a whole. Assimilation strategy is when minority members wish to advance society's interest and not those of their ethnic minority group. Their results show that the assimilation strategy was evaluated most positively, followed by integration and then separation, which was found for both native Dutch and the (im)migrant-origin groups. As a result, their findings indicates that minority members do not view minority out-groups as their potential allies to counter the majority dominance. Instead, they view it as a competitor for influencing the political issues and concerns. In addition, the role of dual identity for the

evaluation of in-group political acculturation is also dependable on the type of political acculturation strategy.

Following the specifics of political contexts, the adoption and desires to integrate into the mainstream culture is more prevalent and prominent in some domains than in others. By referring to the contexts of Spain, ethnic minority members will prefer assimilation in political domain, integration in social domain, and separation in the domain of cultural values (Navas et al., 2007; Snauwaert et al., 2003). In addition to these differences in political acculturation strategies, perceptions of out-group threat can also form a crucial determinant of acculturation processes and outcomes (Schwartz et al., 2014). On a similar note, Brown and Zagefka (2011) also clearly indicates the foundation of discrimination and inequality that can be found in the dichotomy of majority and minority members. Their work reveals the negative connotations of (im)migrants as a threat to the society with too much of an influence. For instance, some members of the majority group perceived the actions of (im)migrants as undermining the interest of the national culture.

Due to the above nature of ethnic representation, most (im)migrants will also try to reconcile their minority group belonging with a sense of belonging to the hosts society (Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2012). The ways in which the political acculturation strategies are evaluated can also depend on the concepts of dual identity. Simon and Klandermans (2001) defines dual identity as the combination of the perceptions of in-group interest and goals with feelings of entitlement. Following this notion, other researchers (Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Simon and Grabow, 2010) signifies the role of dual identifiers. By using Turkish (im)migrants from three countries (Germany, Netherlands and United States), dual identifiers can act as a political allegiance on behalf of their in-group characteristics. This approach can prove to be beneficial when one encounters the conditions of unfair treatment or equality. Furthermore, in western Europe, Fleischmann and Verkuyten (2015) adds that many (im)migrants will typically developed a dual identity when their sense of national belonging is added to an existing strong associations to ethnic minority values and beliefs. In doing so, dual identifiers will firstly identify as a member of their ethnic minority community and secondly as a member of the host society. The prioritisation of ethnic values and membership also implies that dual identifiers were more concerned about the specifics of their minority group interest and advancements within the society (Hindriks et al., 2017).

## 2.8. Political Engagement and Expressions

Political engagement research has undergone a multitude of complex developments over the last few decades. According to Verba and Nie (1972), the participation in politics can be defined in relation to casting votes, joining a political party and engagement in numerous other activities. For instance, their typology consists of cooperative or communal activities, engaging with public officials, voting and campaign activities. Since then, political engagement has paved the way for the analysis of actions such as strikes, protest and petitions which does not only have a direct implication for the government, but also highlights the issues within organisations and other institutions (Pattie et al., 2014). The evolution of political engagement can be seen through the work of van Deth (2001) publication of landmark studies. Engagement in politics during the 1940s to 1950s were mainly restricted to voting and campaign activities which transitioned into conventional modes of political participation in the 1960s. During the 1970s, unconventional ways of viewing political engagement erupted in the form of protest, rejection and new social movements. As a result, the new forms of expressing political opinions, values and behaviour can be witnessed in today's society where what was once deemed as unconventional approach is now a common theme amongst the wider society.

As our political and societal landscape rapidly changes, the notion of political affiliation and identity are becoming more polarised which produced a high level of identity conflicting evaluations of one's political identity (Lavine et al., 2012). Despite a significant amount of existing research that can be seen in relation to understand ambivalence, the notion of ambivalence within the British politics (i.e. implications due to Brexit) amongst the ethnic minority group merits a further exploration. Individuals may hold ambivalent attitudes towards all forms of shapes and contexts such as their career choices, sports team, fashion choices, food/cuisine preferences etc. (Johnson, 2014). However, political engagement and affiliation can be deemed as an enigmatic area of human behaviour. They can be classified as a complex layer of different factors that can be difficult to be categorised and defined. Johnson (2014) study focused on partisan ambivalence which can be conceptualised as an attitude that arises when one can possess a set of competing considerations, conflicts and experiences (Lavine, 2001; Alvarez and Brehm, 2002; Basinger and Lavine, 2005). In line with this, Basinger and Lavine (2005) work find that ambivalent voters tend to rely less on party identification when they evaluate and select their political candidates. In other words, they tend to exhibit less attitudinal stability and less predictability in their voting choices (Rudolph and Popp, 2007).

Following the clear link between ambivalence and political behaviour, other scholars have provided more insight into the negative impact of ambivalence on political engagement (Mutz, 2002; Greene, 2005). As a result of this ambivalence, individuals become less inclined to engage in political activity in order to reduce any conflict amongst the members of their social group (i.e. inter-personal relationship).

In order to understand ambivalence as a broader psychological construct that can impede upon the human values and behaviour towards politics, it is imperative to further explore the various influences in a diverse set of political environments (i.e. diasporic political engagement). Previous research has examined the effects of individual and institutional factors on the levels of diasporic political engagement. For example, individual-level factors can include resources available to migrants and the length of time spent in the host society (Shibata, 2023). Studies that takes on the assimilationist stance argues that political engagement amongst diasporic community can decline over time as one can socio-politically integrated into the host society (Portes, 2001; Alba and Nee, 2003; Waldinger, 2015), whilst other researchers document a positive association between resources and the level of diasporic political engagement (Guarnizo et al., 2003; Morales and Pilati, 2014). Another angle of studies look into the institutional-level where they examine and understand diasporic political engagement in a triad framework between sending and receiving contexts, and migrants (Brubaker, 1996; Smith, 2003; Kim, 2016; Portes and Fernandez-Kelly, 2016). As such, research on receiving contexts examine the effects of institutional and policy contexts and also considers the broader aspects of reception including the local socio-economic contexts which results in a no clear sense of consensus and conviction (Chaudhary and Guarnizo, 2016; Pilati and Herman, 2020; Morales and Pilati, 2014). As a result, political expressions amongst the diasporic community becomes a complex phenomenon which requires a deeper understanding of the notion behind their political engagement and expressions.

As discussed in section 2.7, the rise and popularity of digital technology and social media have changed the way we represent and share our knowledge and ideas. Due to the easy accessibility and affordability of social media at our disposal, previous boundaries and limitations to our views of political alignment and concerns can be contested. According to Ali et al. (2019), it enables consumers to have a voice by breaking down the existing barriers. Information technologies and their applications can also exist a medium and determinants of identity (Carter and Grover, 2015). This shift in consumer behaviour is also driven by the recent popularity of

radical left and the surge of extreme right political views. For instance, in light of the recent economic and political debate across the globe, we have seen the power and convenience of social media to project our concerns, ideas and opinions on different socio-cultural and political issues. This new ways of engagement on a digital platform can even contravene the liberal ethos by normalising political incorrectness (Grover et al., 2019; Jamal et al., 2019).

The growth of (im)migrant subcultures and their influence on politics and policy making in the host countries raises interest and questions amongst the acculturation researchers. As Jamal et al. (2015) and Esser (2015) pointed out, the evidence of an increasing ethnic communities across the western societies has changed the stance on ethnic community and their influences. Guided by their heightened sense of political awareness and buying power, it is imperative to have a better understanding of the way ethnic communities interact with their political values and orientations in an online and offline platform. The current empirical research that explores ethnic political engagement (Kizgin et al., 2019) with local politics is still quite scarce and under-research. As a result, it presents an important shortcoming in political acculturation scholarship. This thesis will offer a deeper insight into the intricate dynamics of ethnic multicultural identity that is inclusive of fluidity and self-expression.

In order to ascertain the phenomena of political involvement or engagement amongst (im)migrants, it is vital to unpack the degree of involvement in terms of personal significance and interest. As highlighted by Evans et al. (2009), paying a specific attention to individual values and their attitudes can help us to understand the numerous drivers towards their objectivity of involvement. According to Celsi and Olson (1988), a person may identify something to be of personal importance and interest when they are self-related and becomes instrumental in accomplishing specific values and life goals. For example, public policies that can impact the social, cultural and political activities of an (im)migrant can serve as a fundamental step to harness representation and compassion towards the ethnic community. Recent research by Jamal et al. (2019) indicates a lack of uniformity in relation to political involvement as a function of acculturation and enculturation. Talking about the elements of acculturation and enculturation, Kizgin et al. (2019) argue that highly acculturated individuals are likely to have a strong desire and proclivity to learn and adapt to the new cultural environment. On the other hand, enculturated individuals demonstrate preferences and tendencies for maintaining their own cultural identity and consumption practices. Their work has also indicated cultural orientation as a significant role in moderating the impact of

acculturation as a positive effect and enculturation as a negative impact on political involvement. Their findings also concur with Li and Tsai (2015) and Grover et al. (2019) work on the impact of social networking sites and acculturation. As Putnam (2000) puts forward, the respective levels of this acculturation and enculturation exhibited by an individual consumer can also potentially act as a significant determinant of their civic life such as their political involvement at an individual level.

Ethnic identity is subject to increasing analysis and political debate in western European countries. As Cameron (2011) noted, the discourse surrounding politics has linked failures of integration to ethnic minority members desire to retain their ethnic cultural roots and failure to engage with national identity. Research also suggest that those contexts which foster ethnic identity and belonging can also mobilise political consciousness amongst ethnic members (Sanders et al., 2014; Sobolewska et al., 2015). Following earlier research on political engagement (Sanders et al., 2014; Heath et al., 2013), Nandi and Platt (2020) posit that if political identity is associated with political engagement, factors influencing political identity can be comparable for the members of minority and majority. As educational attainment can provide an alternative and valued source of identity for ethnic communities, education has been linked negatively to ethnic identity and positively linked to political identity/engagement in the current literature (Fischer-Neumann, 2014; Nandi and Platt, 2015). Nandi and Platt (2020) also asserts that support for a political party can be linked to greater political engagement and identity. For example, guided by the ways in which left-wing parties tend to explicitly support and celebrate the inclusions and diversity of ethnic minority rights (Martin and Mellon, 2020), support for a right-wing political affiliation can be associated with stronger ethnic identity amongst the majority. In contrast, identification with left-wing politics will be associated with a stronger ethnic identity amongst ethnic minorities.

Recent research also suggests that ethnic minority identity can decline and vary across generations (Platt, 2014; Van Heelsum and Koomen, 2016). As one has embraced and are more exposed to multiculturalism and cosmopolitan ways of living (transnational orientation), second generations may exhibit a greater understanding of the broader political messages through the refinement of the ways in which they view their environment (Platt, 2014). Heath et al. (2013) also pointed to assimilation to a relatively low level of engagement among young minorities across generations. However, Martin and Mellon (2020) show a rather large degree

of political favouritism and bias amongst the younger generations. This notion of creating an empathetic sense of understanding is a key value for politicians, brand and political marketers.

The scholarship on political communication has long undermine the importance of political talk where current literature has depicted them as an uncomfortable subject to explore. With the challenges and the associated complexity of political positioning, Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2022) explores the affordances and dynamics of cross-cultural contexts and multi-platform functionality of social media environment. By using a comprehensive dataset that focus on younger generations (ages 18-29) from five countries (i.e. United States, Israel, Japan, Finland and Argentina), their work focused on the various approach to political debate and talk amongst the younger generations. With reference to the affordances of digital media, their findings put forward a nuanced and comprehensive typology of young people approaches towards the discussions on political talk and debate.

Through their utilisation of cross-cultural contexts, Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2022) construct a typology based on the varieties of emerging patterns. The typologies presented depicts a cohesive and coherent sets of various approaches to political talk. The identified types of typology were: The uninterested, who represents the stereotypical assumptions of younger people as apathetic towards the politics (Hayes and Matthes, 2017). The Quiet Attentive, who resent the distribution and dissemination of politics on an online or offline format, but follow the political news for information and knowledge. Face-to-Facers, who are willing to discuss politics, but only in a physical interaction with another person. The Calculating Expressers represent those who will discuss politics in any platform but with a caveat. They value the importance of curating a carefully considered interactions on political talk which is in line with Mor et al. (2015) findings of picking the right platform to reach their target audience. Finally, The Steadfast Expressers are those who renounce the negative perceived norms and connotations of politics. They are heavily engaged and speak out on their political opinions with little regards to reactions from outsiders.

Within the context of political acculturation, it is also important to understand the dynamics of acculturation in the post-modern world. For instance, Berry and Hou (2017) asserts that discrimination towards (im)migrants in a host society can lead to enculturation orientation and a stronger tie to ethnic identities. As a result, this negative experience in the host society can also impact the mental well-being of (im)migrants. As discussed before in section 2.6, due to

the nature of acculturation as a multi-dimensional strategy and process, the role and power of social media communication is a concept that is embedded in the formation of ethnic identity during the acculturation journey. Facilitated by the unprecedented nature of disruptive technologies in the past decade, social media has become an important vehicle for our acculturation process and have received a notable academic attention. As Li and Tsai (2015) argues, social media can support (im)migrant's decision on whether to acculturate or enculturate. There are various reasons that can contribute to the disposition of acculturation through the use of social media channels.

Driven by the easy accessibility to social media networks, western societies have seen a high penetration of social media usage in recent years (Mosca and Quaranta, 2016). According to Kruikemeier et al. (2016), social media communication is a multi-directional interactive tool which enables political discourse to shift from the traditional mass media to a social media platform such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tiktok and others. We can see the rise of the effort towards political marketing and branding to disseminate political information. Having a social media approach can be seen as an attempt for a political party to align one's political orientation to their own agenda (Ross and Burger, 2014; Skogerbo and Krumsvik, 2015). Furthermore, the nature of social media can be seen as an avenue to break down traditional barriers to political bureaucracy and process. Their features and functionality has seen new heights of traction within the eligible voters which in turn enables crowd mobilisation and impressions to a wider range of people within a small span of time (Theocharis et al., 2015; Heo et al., 2016). Therefore, by referring to the seminal work on SIT (Turner et al., 1987), social media has provided a capacity for like-minded users to strengthen their own group identity and characteristics whereas communication between different minded users can often leads to in-group and out-group affiliations (Yardi and Boyd, 2010).

In light of the increasing influence and use of digital applications, we can see the rise of political campaign through social media platforms. There are a number of ways in which politicians can engage with their target audience. Following Karlsen and Enjolras (2016), they can be divided into two broad types: party centric or individually targeted. By drawing upon the subjects of political engagement amongst the younger consumers, social media channels can be used to create values and engagement in a creative way (Vromen et al., 2015). For instance, we have witnessed the power and use of viral marketing content amongst the younger generations. As a result, social media create a border less communication that can be use to

disseminate political information and concerns on a global scale. For example, Engesser et al. (2017) presents the features and functionality provided by Twitter applications. They assert that public opinions, ideologies and messages can be freely circulated where a considerable attention can be observed. This can be in the form of re-tweeting actions performed by several users. The circulating information can emanate from a loop of several tweets which can be dissected from the original content.

Driven by the nature of borderless functionality, the work by Grover et al. (2019) also indicates the benefits of social media to political marketing. Their findings indicate the higher the consistency of social media activity by a political candidate, the higher the popularity and engagement with their followers. However, the popular engagement can also generate a higher levels of criticism. In recent times, we can see the capitalisation of social media by leading politicians around the world (e.g. Donald Trump during his presidential campaign). As a result, it facilitates the acculturation of ideas amongst the social media users which helps in understanding the prevalence of polarisation within the political sphere.

Recent scholarly work on political participation also shows that online activities supports the desire to seek new information and improvement of political knowledge (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2012; Beam et al., 2018). The underlying assumption here is that, the more favourable an individual belief about politics, the more likely it is that the individual will perform positive behaviour related to the object in focus (i.e. political orientation). There are important differences across the social networking sites. Laroche and Jamal (2015) reports that (im)migrants engage in hyper-acculturation when they make inferences about host cultural lifestyle, values and traditions on the basis of host culture media usage. Due to this, (im)migrants showing a preference for maintaining their cultural background may choose to not engage in political matters on an online and offline context. This type of behaviour can also influence the extent to which they are interested in exercising their citizen rights such as their voting intentions (Jamal et al., 2019).

Considering the importance and significant role of social media within political acculturation, the work of Kizgin et al. (2019) also identifies the actions taken by individuals to satisfy their wants and needs for socialisation on an online platform. In doing so, individuals can create a sense of support and community with like minded people. As highlighted by previous scholar (Park et al., 2015), online socialisation can be regarded as a key driver in building social capital.

This social capital can be use for building stronger connections and network in an online and offline context. Kizgin et al. (2019) findings also reiterate and reify the propensity to share as a key element in predicting online socialisation. The importance of creating a sense of community and harnessing a peer to peer support is also clearly evident. The findings also conclude that intensity of use can strengthen the expected direction of socialisation through the formations of peer bonding and information exchange to co-create value. In addition, as briefly mentioned in this section, it is also important to review the literature on how political brands can communicate their value proposition to their party supporters and retain their loyalty. As human values are intrinsically linked to our lived experiences, the analysis of political engagement in relation to the current political and economic climate is a key strategy for political marketers. Due to this notion, a section on political polarisation and its connection to political discourses will be highlighted in section 2.9.

## 2.9. Political discourse on polarisation, voting intentions and public trust

Creation and mobilisation of political engagement by investing in identifying the key values, attitudes and behaviour (salient features) of an ethnic member can serve as a fundamental political strategy (Wodak and Khosravinik, 2013). These strategies can be effective if it can trigger an 'in-group' political identity (Turner et al., 1987). In doing so, it can help policy makers to identify the core expectations and values that an ethnic (im)migrant will prioritise when they make their rational decisions on their voting behaviour. Investigating ethnic differences in political integration is crucial to our understanding of (im)migrants' representation and their contribution to the cohesion and systemic integration of the wider society (Dollmann, 2021).

Theoretically defined by DiMaggio et al. (1996), polarisation can be described as a state in which an opinion on an issue has generated an opposing opinion to a maximum value over time. Their study highlights four dimensions of polarisation: 1) Dispersion involves the diversity of opinions amongst the public. As the dispersion of this public opinion increases, establishing and maintaining consensus can be difficult within the political system. 2) Bimodality refers to when people with different perspective and opinions cluster into separate groups. 3) Constraints considers whether the extent of opinions is associated with any other opinions. 4) Consolidation refers to differences in the responses to an issue on the basis of demographics characteristics such as gender, race, occupation, income and others. Therefore,

this thesis will consider the perspectives of both positive and negative states of polarisation that can impact the voters state of mind towards a political candidate.

In an attempt to explain political polarisation, it is also important to analyse the concept of echo chamber. As coined by previous scholars (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015), it refers to an environment where eligible voters are only exposed to information that is designed specifically to reify and reinforce their own opinions. Their work also suggests that the presence of a political candidate on a social media channels can be regarded as a vital role in polarising the political choices of voters. As a result, this notion can have a direct impact on the important aspects of gaining trust and transparency for the political parties (Layman et al., 2006). However, this point has been argued by other scholars (Lee et al., 2014) who offers a differing opinion on the use of social media for information dissemination. Their studies claim that the idea of echo chamber and their benefits can be challenged since discussions on an online platform represent an open access to anyone who wants to get involved. With this in mind, social media has the potential of exposing voters to positive or negative arguments which can lead to polarisation of opinions amongst the eligible voters (Chadwick et al., 2017). As a consequence, it can result in the amplification of division between different social groups with varying and diverse views.

Following the above points, it is important to understand and define a person's desire to vote for a particular party or candidate. As Fishbein (1967) argues, people's experiences and their interaction with others can result in the formation of beliefs. For example, if an individual has a positive favourable belief towards a political figure or party, the higher is the chance of exhibiting a positive behaviour towards that candidate or party. In the context of (im)migrants, research shows that (im)migrants' involvement with politics and their voting intentions are influenced by their political engagement in their own country of origin (Wals, 2011). In addition, Rolfe (2012) also reveals the role of their personal networks as an influential factor in determining their intention to vote. Therefore, in order to have a nuanced understanding of multidimensional nature of political engagement and voting behaviour amongst ethnic group, research findings by Kizgin et al. (2019) indicates a unique contribution to political acculturation scholarship. Their work contributes to political acculturation studies by providing a holistic information on the dyadic inter-relationship between (im)migrants' use of social networking sites and its relation to online socialisation, political involvement and voting intentions. As a result, clarity of the links between online (social media and their key drivers)

and offline context (voting intentions, acculturation and enculturation) can be captured and noted.

In addition to political polarisation and voting behaviours of ethnic community, discussions on political discourses surrounding the public trust is a recurring theme in our news outlet and political debate. According to Baines and Harris (2011), the application of political branding concepts to the political environment is of a growing interest for many scholars and practitioners as they can be utilised as a heuristic tool for eligible voters. On a similar vein, Scammell (2015) asserts that political brands can serve as a great avenue for people who have limited time and interest in politics as it can enable them to have a better understanding for their ideological stance and the way they perceived the political promises. In recent years, the rhetoric of political branding has been widely accepted and supported by political parties to create differentiation against their competitors (Pich et al., 2014). However, it is important to note that political branding is not a streamline process. Embodied within the personal characteristics of the elected leaders, it can also entail the composition of a complex inter-related components which can be ideological and institutional (Pich and Dean, 2015). Similar to the formation of identity as a multi-dimensional process, political brands are a multi-layered complex entity that are often difficult to deconstruct (Phipps et al., 2010).

At a time when electoral voters' opinions of our politicians is at an all time low, it is crucial to harness and gather a deeper insight into the political measures required to regain the loss of the public trust. Fuelled by the recent economic and political issues around the globe, political issues and their implications on the consumer's personal life is a topic that merits a further investigation. In light of the recent political turmoil, the demand and desire for a trustworthy candidates and political party is clearly evident (Newton, 2001). To start the process of healing and restoring the public trust, it is important to devise a key appropriate and strategic approach that can empower and engage voters to participate in the electoral process (Dean and Croft, 2001). As Susila et al. (2015) puts forward, trust is a behavioural intention that can lead to a positive expectation. Due to the nature of our political economy, trust has gained a considerable attention in areas of political marketing (Dermody et al., 2010). For instance, Burke et al. (2007) proposed an integrative multi-level framework which focused on trust in leadership. They suggest that trust falls within three specific categories: ability, benevolence and integrity. Nevertheless, this doesn't provide a full picture of the inter-relationship between trust and electoral behaviour.

Following the above points on public trust, the main factors for the decline of public trust in political leaders and parties is related to the over promises of manifestos that were never accomplish to meet the public expectations (Dermody and Hammer-Lloyd, 2005). Moreover, the days of political talk as irrelevant were gone due to the increase in bargaining power of consumers. Supported by the easy access to online platform and digital media, the political discussions on various concerns and issues can be seen across multiple generations. For example, the increasing number of younger consumers who campaign for climate change using their social media channels has grown exponentially. As a result, there are a number of conditions that are required to restore faith and trust in the elected government. According to Niemi et al. (1991), the government need to put their focus on people's needs. Secondly, it is vital to involve the eligible citizens in the process of government decision making. Finally, the government should be able to convey its policy according to public expectations. With the ever-increasing political debate, more academic attention is required to consider the prominence of public trust and its influences on electoral behaviour. As posited by Nardelli (2014), the issues in our current political climate indicates a crisis of trust. As trust can be treated as an ambiguous concept, they need to be constantly analysed and clarified in line with the current economic and political climate. Therefore, it is imperative to understand and comprehend the antecedents of trust and their dyadic inter-relationship with political participation.

As seen from the existing literature (Dean et al., 2015), political branding is much more complex than ideology or policies as it also incorporates party members, leaders and candidates who personalise their political offering. In doing so, it can also evoke a symbolic feature of identification by using branding strategies in the form of colours and logos. Hence, brand strategies need to capitalise on the opportunity of building a clear emotional and trusted identity. For instance, creating a political branding concept that can encompass an emotional message to resonate with the needs and desires of the target community can help to capture, acquire and retain new and existing eligible voters. This approach can engage and motivate electoral voters in a meaningful and personalised way. In their paper, Dean et al. (2015) also provides a tentative framework on achieving a consistent narrative where voters can achieve a sense of belonging. Their holistic approach to their work provides an important message for political campaigns. Their findings indicate the success or failure of a negative campaign can be due to the authenticity of the party's brand values. In order to create an authentic political

brand, they have highlighted the importance of reducing a gap between the values perceived by the community and the party.

Furthermore, in order to create differentiation in the political marketing sphere, reiterating and communicating a set of political brand values is vital to build brand loyalty (Peng and Hackley, 2009). To restore cohesion and credibility of the party, previous studies on political branding (Newham, 2005; Smith and French, 2009) have also clearly indicates the importance of avoiding conflicting messages to create a simple and aspirational political brand. Therefore, capturing and understanding the cohesion of the political brands from a citizen perspective is a priority for political parties and leaders. The likes of Christopher et al. (1994) also argues that the nature of the citizen and candidate relationship should focus on building and encouraging the citizens to vote at the impending election in the short term. At the same time, considerations should also be taken towards building a sustained loyalty to ensure the continuation of voting actions and behaviour for the party in the longer term (Peng and Hackley, 2009).

In order to have a comprehensive analysis of value-based acculturation, this thesis will use Social Identity Theory (SIT) as a theoretical lens to explore the various dimensions of ethnic identity that has been discussed in this chapter.

## 2.10. Social Identity Theory

In order to have a thorough investigation to how an ethnic member negotiate their boundaries in the host society, it is important to trace how ethnic identity formation can emanate from the theoretical lens of social identity. The social identity approach is one of the most commonly used term to explain theoretical developments based on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT). According to previous literature on social identity (Tajfel, 1974; Phinney, 1992; Reeskens and Wright, 2013), the expressions and formation of social identities can originate from cultural, historical and ideological conditions that encompasses the matters for social relations, individual development and/or for the national cohesions. The key takeaway is the importance of regarding our social identity as a relational concept to our own-self and that our social identity is the amalgamation of our past and present experiences of social reality.

Following Tajfel (1974) work on social identity theory, Turner et al. (1987) describes the process associated with social identity. Firstly, an individual can make a classification of themselves and others within the context of their social environment. In doing so, it allows them to locate their similarities and shares of same attributes to others, which were termed and identified as an 'in-group'. This categorisation process is also referred to as self-categorisation where a broader ranges of social categories can be used to define the sense of in-group belonging. For example, religion, sexual orientation, gender, social class, racial ethnicity and others can be incorporated within the SCT. Secondly, Turner and his colleagues discuss the notion of social comparisons between in-group and out-group by evoking the emotions, feelings and attachment that an individual can affiliate towards their group memberships. Turner et al. (1987) have described this motive as a need amongst the group members to enhance their self-image and self-esteem to achieve a positive social identity. Their work sought to redefine and elaborate the cognitive element of SIT by moving beyond the intergroup focus of SIT. According to SCT, self-categorisation occurs as a function of both accessibility and fit. Their approach to SCT is to understand the extent to which they can be perceived to reflect and diagnose the reality of our social fabric. In addition, the proponents of SCT characterised identity as an operation for inclusivity at different levels. Due to this, it is possible to unveil and uncover the finer layers and gradations of the intermediate level of abstraction (Hornsey and Hogg, 2000).

## 2.11. The composition of Social Identity Theory framework to acculturation

According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity is a vital element to adapt one's behaviour to different cultural interactions and to make sense of their exposure to social environments. As mentioned in 2.10, SIT is an important source for self-esteem and pride where theories have classified people into the notion of distinctions by using 'them' and 'us' (Korte, 2007). It is interesting to identify how the dimensions of SIT can impact the selection of various acculturation strategies. For instance, Li et al. (2021) indicates that the various aspects of each identity is not solely focused and based upon the nature of self-knowledge. Instead, they are linked to a frame of reference which can be stimulated by different situations to trigger the multi players of identity facets. Due to this, we can see how conflicts between the members of the in-group may activate the development of social identity (Brickson, 2000).

Following Brickson (2000) points, SIT theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) can help to identify and explore the complex dynamics of 'in-group' favouritism and degradation of 'out-group' members. Referring to Li et al. (2021), they assert that SIT theory can also help to explain the occurrence of racial discrimination. The existence of group membership supports the construction of identity which in turn plays an important role in the acculturation process of (im)migrants. For instance, we can see how the perceptions and attitudes of host country nationals can influence and shape the acculturation process of ethnic members. This includes their personal choices to integrate or marginalise towards group memberships. Therefore, their social identity can play an important role towards their acculturation process and journey. Following SIT theory, Li et al. (2021) posit that various types of racio-ethnic (im)migrant groups can choose to activate the different acculturation strategies which is dependent upon their own collection of knowledge and motivations. Based on their study on bicultural migrants in South Korea, they argue that the origin of an ethnic culture can effect acculturation strategies. Their findings show that bicultural Korean-Chinese tend to enact more integration and assimilation strategies, whilst mono-cultural Han-Chinese workers enact more separation and marginalisation strategies.

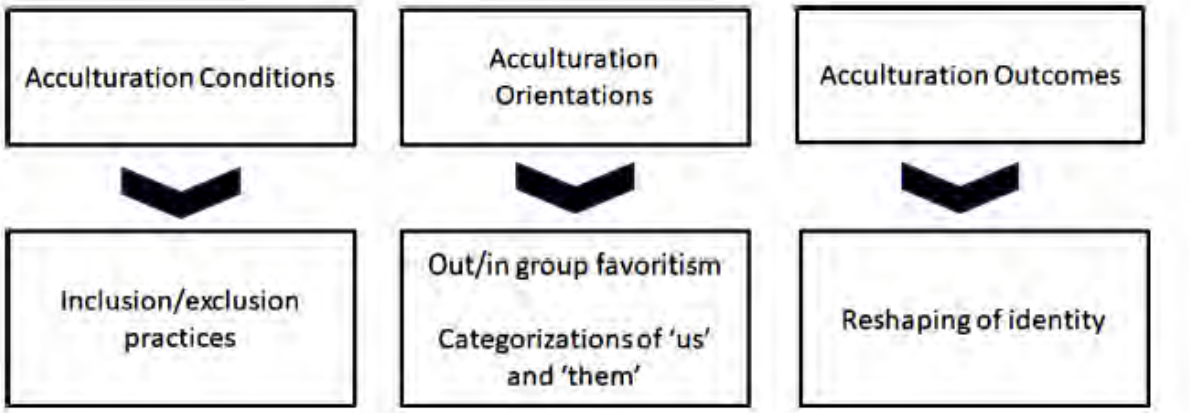


*Figure 5. Combination of SIT and Acculturation Framework (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Arends-Toth and van de Vijver, 2006; Koburtay et al., 2020)*

In addition, we can also see the recent studies conducted by Koburtay et al. (2020) on the role of cultural pressures and group favouritism in shaping the identity of Syrian refugees in Jordan (Figure 5). The study highlights how Syrian refugees in Jordan may define or locate themselves in different social categories. This sense of distinction or categorisation can be in the form of organisational memberships, age group, gender based or social groups (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). By capturing the essence of SIT theory, these refugees are likely to face discrimination

from out-group members. Due to this nature, Yitman and Verkuyten (2018) and Schulz and Leszczensky (2016) argues that their experience and approach of sense making and knowledge can shape and/or reshape the way they define their social identity. It can also be classified as implicit and pervasive. By looking through the current studies, it is evident that SIT theory does not capture the multi-dimensional contextual levels. This can be defined in terms of exclusion and inclusion practices as coined by Koburtay et al. (2020) in Figure 5.

Moreover, other scholars (Cicognani et al., 2018; Inoi et al., 2017) have also assert that social exclusion practices can be operationalised as the exposure to the changes that people will experience within their social engagement with cultural outsiders. They also clarify that the notion of inclusion and exclusion practices showcase the existence of how an individual can be systematically block for accessibility to several rights and resources that are available to different groups. This experience can create a behaviour of resentment towards the host society values which can impact on the acculturation conditions of an (im)migrant (Tsukamoto and Fiske, 2017). Furthermore, Iwasaki et al. (2005) also argues that institutional exclusions, limitations to social networks, cultural exclusion, poverty and unemployment constitutes the multi-dimensional challenges that an (im)migrant can encounter within a new society (Schulz and Leszczensky, 2016). In addition, exclusions and discrimination can enforce a sense of fear and anxiety amongst the out-group members (Vandrevala et al., 2022). Therefore, the identified challenges and issues can emanate from the various environmental levels of macro, micro and meso (Wang and Lysenko, 2014; Al Ramiah et al., 2014).

Using multi-dimensional acculturation as a sensitising lens, Koburtay et al. (2020) refers to the concept of acculturation as a phenomenon to create a nuanced understanding of the acculturation journey that one can experience by having a first-hand contact with people from multiple backgrounds. It also incorporates any subsequent changes in the original pattern at an individual or group level. They define these multi-dimensional levels by considering three acculturation variables: acculturation conditions, orientations and outcomes. Their conceptual framework explores acculturation orientations, where SIT was used to unveil the attitudes towards ‘us’ and ‘them’. By exploring and unpacking their acculturation orientations, their findings also indicates the impact of acculturation conditions which further facilitate in defining the social exclusion practices. This can include the limitations to accessibility in various context as highlighted before. The acculturation conditions can include the types of migration, group characteristics of in-group and out-group and intergroup relations. We can

also see acculturation conditions based upon the micro-level factors such as adaptability, duration of stay, generational differences, position in the society, and situational contexts. As a result of the acculturation orientations and conditions analysis, the elements identified within these two acculturation dimensions indicates a significant role of community and societal practices that can go beyond the cultural differences between the various groups and communities. It also extends the current understanding and interpretations of SIT as a theoretical lens.

In order to have a deeper understanding and interpretations of SIT as a theoretical lens, it is vital to accommodate the characteristics and composition of ethnic identity. Current literature (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019; Stottinger and Penz, 2019) have worked on the prominence of constant identity negotiation between host and home countries as an acculturation approach. Following the previous seminal literature on identity and acculturation framework, an (im)migrant can adopt and retain values and behaviours by exhibiting a hybrid or a multi-dimensional approach to acculturation (Dey et al., 2019). In addition, the notion of utilising a different concept to describe ethnic consumers' identities can also be observed. For instance, we can see the likes of Jafari and Suerdem (2012) who use the concept of 'authorised selection'. This concept suggest that individuals can authorise themselves to justify their life choices and everyday life practices with reference to their own religion. An understanding of this concept can also provide a further exploration on the impact of situational contexts between ethnicity and consumption choices (Sekhon and Szmigin, 2011).

By drawing upon the existing acculturation literature (Berry, 1992; Cleveland and Balakrishnan, 2019; Dey et al., 2019; Zolfagharian et al., 2017), research on multi-directional acculturation strategies indicates the dynamic nature of negotiating an ethnic identity. Previous scholar has argued for the influence of situational ethnicity with regard to physical and social surroundings that immediately precede choice (Belk, 1975). Although recent acculturation studies have captured the acculturation dimensions and evolvement within the marketing literature, the work of Banerjee et al. (2021) have also enrich the acculturation research from a different perspective. They argue the absence of hosts society as a minority population within the existing acculturation research. Their work also pointed out the limited research on indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism. Indifference as a way of examining acculturation studies remains largely unknown and unexplored. Therefore, following the scarcity of research in the marketing literature in relation to indifference, Banerjee et al. (2021)

work offers a new insight into the negotiation of identity by ethnic consumers when the host society is the majority as well as a minority. By examining the concept of identity negotiation, self-construal and situational ethnicity in the UK and UAE, they provide clarity to the phenomenon of indifference. They explained and defined indifference as a mechanism to neither fit in nor stand out when one is negotiating their identity with others. Their findings were also consistent across both scenarios of host country as a majority and a minority population. Khalifa and Shukla (2021) also validate this point by asserting that indifference can serve as a better coping mechanisms when there is uncertainty about acceptance or rejection by the host society. For instance, indifference can be perceived as a better choice in a state of acculturation liminality (Mitra and Evansluong, 2019) for (im)migrants who are in their sojourner's stages of acculturation (type of migrations).

Indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism can also be applied to work and social settings of host and home societies. As a result, it reinforces and reiterate the stability of indifference as a mechanism. According to the findings by Banerjee et al. (2021), ethnic consumers felt the need to fit in with their home cultures in their social settings, but remain indifferent to their home and host culture work and social settings. This can be influenced by both of their culture and environmental settings. Moreover, it can also be in relation to their independent self-construal. Based on the recent scholarship of acculturation and social identity, this thesis will examine South Asian (im)migrants' disposition and expression of their values and acculturative behaviour by using the context of political orientation. As societies are becoming increasingly heterogeneous and diverse, the need to revisit and refresh our understanding of identity negotiation and acculturation mechanisms is an exciting and emerging agenda in a changing migration landscape. This research will also shed a new light and uncovers the notion of multidimensional acculturative journey by focusing on acculturation as an expression rather than a strategy itself.

## 2.12. Chapter Conclusion

The following Table 1 exhibits a synopsis of the literature review on acculturation and social identity theory. It highlights the key theoretical concepts, seminal empirical papers and a broader understanding of the theoretical underpinning that is linked to the research aims and objectives of this research.

*Table 1. Summary of the seminal literature review on acculturation and social identity*

| List of authors and their context of research | Research Contributions | Scope for contribution to existing literature in relation to this thesis |
|---|---|---|
| ***Tajfel and Turner (1979)*** Understanding intercultural conflict and discrimination amongst students in Bristol school. | Provides a deeper understanding of ethnocentrism and the motives behind in-group and out-group distinctions. | Following the argument posited by Banerjee et al. (2021) and Li et al. (2021), the identity of South Asian (im)migrants are framed by a multi-faceted layers of situational contexts that can be triggered by their cultural values, ethos and ideologies. |
| ***Penaloza (1994)*** Research on Mexican American community | Referring to seminal work by Berry (1992), the work presents an empirical model which focused upon the process of consumer acculturation using movement, translation and adaptation leading to four major outcomes: assimilation, maintenance, resistance and segregation | The cultural and historical background of South Asian (im)migrants in Britain are significantly different due to their cultural background and values. |
| ***Oswald (1999)*** Haitian community in United States<br><br>***Askegaard et al. (2005)*** Greenlanders in Denmark | Desire to create a cultural duality in relation to the situational context.<br><br>Negotiation of identity by using three acculturation components: global consumer culture, Denmark and Danish culture leading to four identity positions: Greenlandic hyper-culture, Oscillating Pendulum, Danish Cookie and Best of Both Worlder. | Although the existence and desires of global and dual identity is acknowledged, value-driven interactions with multiple cultures and sub-cultures in the UK can be drawn from South Asian (im)migrant communities and is ought to be further investigated. |
| ***Dean et al. (2015)*** Issues and problems in relation to the brand identity of Conservative party | Provides a symbolic identification to political branding through the use of colour and logos to create a personalised political | Due to the complexity of political orientation and expressions amongst the South Asian communities, political parties can seek to |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | offering beyond the party policies. | address many of the latent value-driven and emotional issues by creating a nuanced understanding of the alignment between their values and behavioural expressions. |
| ***Dey et al. (2019)*** Ethnic consumers in multicultural London | Presents a taxonomy of multi-directional model for acculturation strategies: Rebellion, rarefaction, resonance and refrainment. | This thesis goes beyond the taxonomy of acculturation strategies by using value-driven approach to acculturation as an orientation and expressions. It also offers a new insight by using politics as a context. |
| ***Dey et al. (2022)*** Mixed methods study amongst the UK residents incorporating the context of Brexit and consumer sentiment towards reshoring brands. | Their work suggest that consumer reshoring sentiment (CRS) and corporate social responsibility have positive effects on consumers' attitude towards reshored brands. | Using their concept of Brexit, this thesis seeks to explore a nuanced understanding of value to behaviour dynamics in relation to consumption practices such as political participation, sustainability and socio-cultural contexts. |
| ***Kizgin et al. (2019)*** Turkish-Dutch communities in Netherlands | Examines the interaction effects of enculturation and acculturation on political involvement and the drivers of socialisation on social media channels. | Following Kizgin et al. (2019) contributions, this thesis focused on the interactions with local British politics amongst the South Asian (im)migrants. It offers a new conceptual insights into political acculturation by encompassing the notion of Brexit debate, Covid-19 and socio-cultural and political global events. |
| ***Banerjee et al. (2021)*** Home and host culture work and social settings in the UK and UAE | Indifference as a mechanisms employed by ethnic minority when the host society has the majority | This thesis offers a new perspectives and nuanced understanding on the dyadic inter-relationship between |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | (UK) as well as the minority (UAE) population. | values and extrinsic factors and how (im)migrants from South Asian communities can navigate their identity based on their perceptions of values (Figure 6) |
| ***Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2022)*** Qualitative interviews across 5 countries (Finland, Argentina, Israel, United States and Japan) focusing on young people (ages 18-29) political communications. | The findings indicate five typology of political talk: The Uninterested, The Quiet Attentive, Face-to-Facers, The Calculating Expresser, The Steadfast Expresser | This thesis focus on a variety of age group and a specific community of South Asians in Britain. In doing so, it captures the typology of political expressions and engagement (Table 7). |

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1. Chapter Introduction

The research gap, as identified from the existing literature review, impedes a clear comprehension and conceptualisation of acculturation within the context of political engagement and expression. In doing so, it holds significant implications for both political marketing and ethnic acculturation studies. This chapter will discuss and justify the philosophical stance and rationale of the methodology chosen to address this gap. It will also incorporate the variations within the adopted methodology. Detailed information in relation to the process of data collection and analysis will also be presented.

This thesis involves a qualitative study that investigates several different research questions within the topic of political acculturation. This research can be divided into sequential phases: planning, conducting the semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation exercise (online), online observations, data transcription, data analysis and writing up. The planning stage initially involved the consultation and development of the research proposal with the principal supervisor. The doctoral study was rigorously scrutinised by multiple panels at different levels of the research period. This repeated and regular monitoring ensured that the research method was properly applied to the highest standard. It helped the researcher to sharpen the research plan and also provided support for achieving high quality data analysis. Following this, ethical approval was obtained from Brunel Research Ethics Committee, and data collection began in October 2020. A total of 27 interviews were conducted, and were transcribed and analysed using NVivo software. Finally, the last stage was devoted to writing up the thesis.

## 3.2. Research Philosophy

With regard to research methodology within social sciences, it can be challenging to acknowledge the processes and the ways in which the results obtained are affected by researchers' philosophical beliefs, values, and norms. It is crucial for researchers to understand the key ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning the various approaches to research. It is also vital to understand how these given assumptions determine researchers' selection of an appropriate methodology and methods (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). The term 'paradigm' may be defined as a loose collection of assumptions and concepts, which can be

logically related, and which can guide our thinking and research (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). A paradigm can include three elements: a belief about the nature of knowledge, a methodology, and a criterion for validity (Mac Naughton et al., 2001). Rather than referring them to as paradigms, discussions of interpretive frameworks can also emanate from the perspectives of knowledge claims, epistemology or ontology, and/or research methodologies (Creswell, 2003; Neuman, 2000). The two main philosophical dimensions that distinguish existing research paradigms are ontology and epistemology (Kalof et al., 2008; Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). With regard to ontological terms, one can perceive that the existence of reality is external and independent of social actors and their interpretations of it, which is termed the objectivist (Saunders et al., 2009) or realist (Neuman, 2011) perspective. In contrast, according to the subjectivist or nominalist perspective, reality is dependent on social actors and assumes that individuals contribute to social phenomena. In line with Wahyuni (2012), epistemology is the belief to generate a nuance understanding of the chosen contexts and use knowledge that is deemed to be acceptable and valid. The fundamental beliefs of social paradigms in social sciences research can be found in Table 2, below.

*Table 2. Fundamental beliefs of research paradigms in social sciences. Adapted from Wahyuni (2012), Saunders et al., (2009), Guba and Lincoln (2005), Hallebone and Priest (2009) and Carson et al. (2001).*

| **Fundamental Beliefs** | ***Positivism*** | ***Interpretivism*** | ***Relation to this thesis*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Ontology** | External, objective, independent of social actors, human beliefs and knowledge. | Subjective and socially constructed, and may change multiple times. | Social and political acculturation within a host society cannot be independent of social actors and human knowledge. It is subjective, and is dependent on the continuous recursive loop of identity transition and changes. |
| **Epistemology** | Credible facts and data through observable phenomena, causality, law-like generalisations, reducing phenomena to simpler terms. | Derive meanings and social phenomena subjectively. Focus on details, reality behind situations and its motivating actions. | This thesis seeks to have a concrete understanding of the contexts chosen, which requires subjectivity as a predominant research epistemology. |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Axiology** | Value-free: researcher is independent of data and maintains an objective stance. | Value-bound: researcher is part of what is being researched and cannot be separated. | Value-boundedness is crucial and plays a large role in interpreting the results from the empirical data. The researcher represents the South Asian (im)migrant community. As such, the researcher has common ground and a clear interpretation and understanding of the community under study. |
| **Research Methodology Focus** | Mainly quantitative, clear distinction between reason and feeling as well as facts and value judgements. Logical and rational approach. Distinguishes between science and personal experience. | Mainly qualitative, understanding interpretation, experiences; involves feelings and reasons to link actions. The boundary between facts and value judgement is less clear. It considers science and personal experience. | This research focuses on using the qualitative approach to data collection. It seeks to elaborate and use the notion of value-driven identity as a tool for examining acculturation in the host society. In doing so, it extracts the deeply-rooted drivers and factors of acculturation within the UK political sphere. |
| **Techniques employed by researcher** | Predominantly statistical and mathematical measurements, to test theories or hypotheses. | Primarily non-quantitative tools such as interviews, focus groups, observation, and ethnography. | This research utilises online semi-structured interviews, online observation, and photo-elicitation exercises to triangulate the validity and reliability of the collected data. |

Following Wahyuni (2012), positivism applies the lens of natural science to social science, where a common view is shared that social reality is external and objective. It depends on the

philosophical stance of natural scientists working with observable reality. This in turn leads to the production of generalisations. According to Saunders et al. (2012), it also relates to the importance of what is given in general, with a tunnel-vision focus on pure facts without the influence and interpretation of human bias. Positivism views organisations and/or other related social entities in the same way as physical objects and natural phenomena. As the focus is on the discovery of facts or regularities that are observable and measurable, Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) argue that it can lead to the development of credibility and meaningfulness in the data. In this respect, understanding of phenomena in reality must be measured and supported by evidence (Hammersley, 2013). Within the process of studying the phenomena, causal inferences can be used to discover the relationship between an independent variable and one or more dependent variables as a result of experimental designs. Positivist researchers seeks to obtain law-like generalisations, termed as nomothetic (Neuman, 2011), by conducting value-free research to measure social phenomena. Creswell (2009) also pointed out that applying a similar research process by using the same factual problem will generate a similar result by using techniques such as statistical tests. Positivist researchers' common beliefs and values rest on the existence of a universal generalisation that can be applied across contexts.

Despite their prominence and popularity, the positivist approach has been criticised for a variety of reasons. The methodological approaches employed in the positivist philosophy are not always transferable and relatable to the social world. Therefore, some limitations can be identified with regard to the use of the positivist approach for a research methodology (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). Issues and concerns in this regard include the fact that it is impossible to measure phenomena related to human thoughts, feelings, and values, as they are deeply engrained within us. As a result, Hammersley (2013) posits that these concepts may not explicitly be observed or measured through sensory experience or without evidence. Moreover, careful consideration is also needed when adopting a positivist approach in one's research. For instance, statistical analysis and tests can be mistreated, which can lead to false information and misinterpretation of data due to the selection of incorrect statistical tests. In addition, statistical analyses are largely dependent on the sample size for their significance. Furthermore, generalisations in the research can be another area that requires the attention of the researcher. Following previous scholarly work (Saunders et al., 2012; Collins, 2010; Wilson, 2020), they are more dependent on the status quo, with more of the research findings being descriptive. It has also been highlighted that the true intentions of individuals may be ignored, as their actions may not be fully explored and understood. These shortcomings of the positivist approach limit

its usefulness for the present research, as the nature of this thesis requires a more in-depth investigation to answer the research questions subjectively.

Using qualitative methods will capture a wide variety of value-driven responses that are based on the participants' perspectives and opinions. In addition, the researcher's cultural background and knowledge is also a useful source of insight in deciding the research paradigm. Moreover, according to Willis (2007), interpretivism usually seeks to understand a particular context, and the core belief of the interpretivist paradigm is that reality is socially constructed. Following the previous points, positivism often looks for the discovery of universal and critical theories. In contrast, interpretivism includes the acceptance of multiple and diverse perspectives. It is open to change, practicing iterative and emergent data collection techniques. As posited by Thanh and Thanh (2015), the interpretivist approach goes beyond the inductive and deductive approach through the promotion of participatory, inclusive, and holistic research. In a similar vein, Willis (2007) also argues that the goal of interpretivism is to value subjectivity, and that interpretivists are 'anti-foundationalists', as there are no specific ways to harness knowledge that can link to intellectual progress. Moreover, Smith (2015) also argues that the existence of a universal approach to research cannot be accepted, as the standards that follow and guide the research itself are the by-products of a culture or group of people. Approaching reality and people's experiences from their cultural perspectives, it requires one to have a subjective point of view. Interpreting phenomena via this interpretivist paradigm incorporates the notion of disregarding and dismissing universally accepted jargon and terms. Instead, interpretivist studies are reliant and based upon cultures, values, behaviour, and navigation of concepts, which can ultimately lead to the conceptualisation and comprehension of people's decisions (Mallon, 2007; Andriopoulos and Slater, 2013; Thanh and Thanh, 2015). By following this approach, interpretivism as a research paradigm fits well with the aims and objectives of the research gap.

Following the notion of epistemological perspectives, explanations that are embedded within cultural knowledge can be subjective and subtle. For instance, we can see the inevitable alterations that accompany the dynamic nature of our reality in a social environment (Thanh and Thanh, 2015; Irshaidat, 2019). Interpretivism recognises individuals from a variety of dimensions and perspectives. These include their life experiences, cultural background, assumptions, and practices, which continuously contribute to the ongoing reconstruction of their own reality. The notion of a fluid construction of people's view of the world emanates

from their broader exposure to and experience of social contexts through their socialisation practices. Hennick et al. (2011) argue that these human perspectives, opinions, and values are subjective, which can lead to multiple perspectives based on the social reality that one encounters. To harness their desires to understand the social world from their own versions of experiences and the subjective meanings that people affirm and attach to them, interpretivist researchers favour the creation of meaningful and in-depth dialogue with the studied participants, which can provide an opportunity to extract a rich description of social constructs (Wahyuni, 2012). In addition, they also favour research which uncovers the multi-faceted layers of the inside perspectives or real meanings of social phenomena. Hence, the experiences and values of both research participants and researchers substantially influence the collection of data and its analysis.

In order to capture the multidimensional nature of political acculturation through the lens of a value-based approach, it can sometimes be a challenge to elucidate and evoke the inner perspectives on how cultural, social and technological factors interact with human agents through lab-based experiments or quantitative statistical tools (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007; Kizgin et al., 2019). Table 3, below, summarises some of the seminal works on acculturation and the research methodology chosen, demonstrating equal amounts of qualitative and quantitative research within the current acculturation scholarship. A researcher's observation using an interpretive paradigm can provide a better understanding of this phenomenon due to the complex intricacies of social and cultural identity that an ethnic individual can possess through living in a host society. It is also crucial to note the role of the researcher in the process of identifying the multiple layers of socially constructed phenomena. As ethnic identity can encompass a broad spectrum of layers of identification, the complex and recursive relationship of multi-dimensional acculturation processes and outcomes may be better captured by using qualitative methods of inquiry. Furthermore, contextual understanding of the topic in this study is vital when interpreting the data collected. Due to this, the positivist approach may not be appropriate for this research.

*Table 3. Summary of the methodology of seminal acculturation literature*

| ***Author (Year)*** | ***Key Understanding and Contribution*** | ***Methodology chosen*** |
|---|---|---|
| *Penaloza (1994)* | Dynamic model of acculturation with four major outcomes: assimilation, maintenance, resistance, and segregation, based around the US context. | Critical ethnographic research – fieldwork, interviews, participant observations. |
| *Askegaard et al. (2005)* | Transnational consumer culture as an acculturative agent. | Qualitative in-depth interviews with Greenlandic immigrants in four major Danish cities. |
| *Cleveland and Laroche (2007)* | Development and validation of a multidimensional scale for the measurement of acculturation to global consumer culture. | Mixed methods – four semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions, followed by paper-based expert opinion surveys. |
| *Kizgin et al. (2019)* | Examined the interaction effects of enculturation and acculturation orientations on the relationship between socialization and political involvement. | Quantitative self-administered questionnaires from Turkish-Dutch respondents. |
| *Dey et al. (2019)* | Multi-directional model for acculturation strategies in consumer acculturation, which can be classified into four groups: rebellion, rarefaction, resonance, and refrainment. | Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, observation and photographs were used for this study. |

The influence of the social surroundings on behaviour and identity cannot be underestimated. Scholar such as Irshaidat (2019) have highlighted that the ontological nature of beliefs that individuals can uphold is constructed by their social environment, where the foundation of their endorsed beliefs in a given culture is indicative of that culture. Following the notion of owing and adhering to the belief that reality is birthed through social interactions, empirical data is also generated by understanding the interactions between the researcher and participants. Since the interpretivist methodology requires the researcher's active involvement to understand the sample under study, Willis (2007) posits that interpretivists tend to favour qualitative methods, including observations such as ethnography. Consistent with Willis's claims, Thomas (2003) maintains that interpretivist researchers support the use of qualitative methods due to the nature

of their construction, which is complex, dynamic, and ever-changing. In addition, McQueen (2002) provided a further nuanced understanding of the dyadic interrelationship between the social environment and human beings by highlighting the part that people play in creating the social fabric of the society.

In order to examine the aforementioned elements of social reality and nature, Thanh and Thanh (2015) argued that qualitative methods are an appropriate means to conduct exploratory research and analysis. In doing so, they can capture the intricate dimensions of an interpretivist view of the world through a series of individuals' acculturation journeys, life experiences, and exposure. Moreover, the sense of knowledge and understanding that some individuals can ascribe to a social issue, problem, or concern can be explored and approached through a qualitative perspective (Creswell, 2009). Hence, in this research, in order to have a better understanding of the South Asian ethnic group and their acculturation process, qualitative methods are likely to be the most suitable. Taking the point from Punch (2009) about the importance of empathy and understanding of the participants' values, using the chosen qualitative data methods has allowed the researcher to gather meaningful insight and in-depth information through the process of extracting the intricate details of intrinsic values and their relation to external influences. However, it is also important to note that using qualitative methods does not discount the validity and importance of other paradigms, which could have been more appropriate in other contexts. Within the acculturation literature, both research philosophies are equally appreciated. The decision to choose the interpretivism paradigm in this research was defined by the research aims, objectives and questions.

## 3.3. Research Approach

After careful consideration and understanding of the broad research philosophy, an approach to this research was meticulously curated to reflect the aims and objectives of this thesis. The main focus of research can be drawn from the adoption of either a theory-building or a theory-testing approach. Theory-testing incorporates the practice of testing and taking an existing theory or hypothesis as a guide to the research that is conducted. This element of testing existing theories against the collected empirical data is most likely to be positioned within the positivism paradigm. In contrast, where the emphasis of the research is on theory-building, as discussed above, it seeks to clarify and achieve a deeper exploration of the research gap and phenomena, and is usually positioned within the interpretivism paradigm (Carson et al., 2001).

The distinction between theory-building and theory-testing is intrinsically linked to the issues of using either a deductive or an inductive approach. For the acquisition of new dimensions of knowledge, meanings and values, there are two general approaches to reasoning, namely deductive and inductive reasoning. Deduction entails moving from the general perspective to the specific. For instance, the process starts by deriving hypotheses from the theory, testing those hypotheses and revisiting the existing theory to gauge the similarities or differences between the two tested variables (Locke, 2007; Nola and Sankey, 2007). As Carson et al. (2001) noted, to understand the new experiences or observations, conceptualisation can be incorporated, which moves on to testing through the application of the theory in use. The researcher then decides which concepts are drawn from the theory. These can be quite abstract, as concepts are abstractions. In doing so, it is possible to identify the similarities and differences in our impressions of the world (Gill and Johnson, 2001). As a result, the derived hypothesis may link two or more concepts together in a causal chain. Therefore, the relationship between the concepts can comprise untested assertions. Hence, operationalisation of the concepts can be drawn when it is defined in a way that encompasses the elements of rules to oversee the observations and when an instance of the concept has empirically occurred (Gill and Johnson, 1991).

On the other hand, inductive reasoning is a theory-building process. Unlike deductive reasoning, the process begins with observations of the empirical world to allow the construction of multi-faceted layers of explanation and their associated theories (Hyde, 2000). Following the research gap in Chapter 1, in order to capture the dyadic relationship between values and behaviour in a political context, inductive reasoning can help in reflecting on specific past experiences that have shaped the present life stages of the participants. Although the approach of inductive reasoning has started to make its mark in social science research, deduction reasoning has come to dominate the means of advancing scientific knowledge and sensemaking (Omerod, 2009). It posits that our senses are not valid means of attaining new knowledge, values, and behavioural practices. These views have culminated in and become harnessed within the contemporary social science research, challenging the inductive reasoning approach. In doing so, they take a strong stance on the importance of testing hypotheses to eliminate the falsification of theories (Woiceshyn and Daellenbach, 2017; Ormerod, 2009).

However, research in marketing has historically emphasised deductive processes by applying processes prematurely. In fact, previous scholarly works (Deshpande 1983; Wells, 1993) have

criticised marketing scholars and presented a number of criticisms of the research methodologies traditionally adopted in consumer research. To support this argument, a number of criticisms of deductive reasoning stem from the over-reliance on hypothesis testing without the element of capturing the natural settings, which can be done through ethnography or netnography. Despite its dominance, the deductive approach has been challenged more recently in various fields. In line with this, a number of cognitive theorists and psychologists in social and psychology research have proposed that deductive logics and reasoning are not adequate to fully capture how individuals respond to their environments (Ormerod, 2009). Furthermore, inductive research has also been argued to be a key means of advancing knowledge by developing valid theories through the use of various qualitative methods, such as processes that require painstaking empirical observations which can enrich the foundations of the collected data. As a result, the researcher has opted to undertake online observation to create robust findings regarding the phenomena under study.

By drawing upon the work of Reichardt and Cook (1979), an area of differentiation between the qualitative and quantitative paradigms can be seen. According to these authors, research within the qualitative paradigm is exploratory, discovery-oriented, and inductive in nature. In contrast, they define quantitative research as a confirmatory approach with a hypothetico-deductive and verification-oriented nature (Deshpande, 1983). By referring back to Carson et al. (2001), it was noted that a balance of inductive and deductive approaches would be most appropriate for interpretive philosophies/approaches to research. For example, a deductive framework or conceptualisation may be derived from a review of the literature, which may be further analysed and evaluated empirically and inductively to allow new ideas, knowledge, and insights to emerge. In order to combat the disadvantages of using a qualitative approach, such as the leading results which are not tested against existing theories, the use of deductive and inductive reasoning can represent an important milestone towards the conviction for qualitative research methods (Hyde, 2000). Consistent with Hyde (2000), as the enquiry reveals major dimensions and patterns, the researcher can then begin to focus on verifying and elucidating the information that appears to be emerging, which is a more deductive approach to data collection and analysis.

In line with Deshpande (1983), it is important to understand that researchers in all areas fall somewhere between the two extremes of deductive and inductive reasoning. With this in mind, Eisenhardt (1989) notes that researchers can benefit from moving away from a purist approach

to *a priori* constructs. In doing so, they can help in shaping and/or reshaping the initial research design and ideas for theory-building research. However, Eisenhardt (1989) also cautions that researchers should avoid thinking about specifying relationships between variables. This is why Ali and Birley (1999) argue that a middle ground can be reached where existing theory is used, but in the form of a construct rather than variables. This will be synergistic with the previous argument for the use of a balanced approach to the whole tenor of the data gathering exercise. As a result, the approach to research can be more fluid and adaptive to the needs of the participant. This will enable the researcher to discover other dimensions of socio-cultural issues which may not have been in their minds when the interviews began. For example, participant can be asked about their perceptions of the recent political and economic movements and events in the UK during a photo-elicitation exercise. This approach opens an opportunity for a discussion of a variety of contexts (e.g., opinions on the LGBTQ+ community, women's rights, and climate change). As a result, it makes sense for qualitative researchers to use models to guide their investigations which are composed of constructs rather than variables. Different participants may discuss different variables, and in such situations, the *a priori* specification of constructs can facilitate a useful means of making sense of the disparate and diverse information provided by the participants.

According to Kuhn (1962), any form of scientific inquiry is based on a particular paradigm which can be defined as a world view or a set of link assumptions about the world. These scientific paradigms are determined by ontological positions that can be defined as the study of reality or things that comprise reality and what kind of relationships exists amongst basic categories of being (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Sale et al., 2002). By understanding our ontological perspectives, it allows us to establish our process of knowing (i.e. epistemology) which relates to the theory of knowledge that is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In doing so, it leads to the question of exploring the concept of methodology which is a theoretical and philosophical systems that structures the way research is conducted (Guba, 1990). In summary, Slevitch (2011) highlighted the notion of social sciences research and scientific investigation as a set of meta-theoretical and philosophical assumptions concerning the nature of reality (i.e. ontology) and knowledge (i.e. epistemology), the principles regulating scientific investigation (i.e. methodology) as well as by techniques or tools regarding the practical implementation of the study.

As described by van Manen and van Manen (2021) study on phenomenological research and writing, giving a direct description of one's experience is not just about creating a story or narrative, it means taking up the attitude of immediate seeing and practicing an attentive awareness to the things of the world as we live them rather than as we conceptualise or theorise them. Therefore, strongly guided by the belief and values of the researcher's own view of the world (i.e. interpretivism paradigm), the research approach followed the systematic presentation of a "1st- order" and "2nd-order analysis as coined by Gioia et al. (2013). Both of these order analyses captured the tandem reporting of the informant and researcher which opens up a rigorous demonstration of the links between the data and the induction of the new concept, but also allowed for an insightful sensemaking which defines the hallmark of a high-quality qualitative research (Gioia et al., 2013). After acquiring a full set of 1st-order and 2nd-order codes, the construction of final order codes compels the researcher to think about the data theoretically, not just in a methodological manner. In doing so, the comparison between data codes and relevant literature allows the researcher to see whether the findings have precedents as well as new concepts. Upon consulting the current literature, the method can be viewed as transitioning from "inductive" to a form of "abductive" in that data and existing theory are considered in tandem. In other words, this chosen methodology can pave a pathway for a balancing act that allows for new discovery without reinventing the well-ridden wheels (Alvesson and Karreman, 2007; Gioia et al., 2013).

According to Glaser (1999), grounded theory provides a series of systematic and exact methods that start with collecting data which takes the researcher to a theoretical piece. In addition, Glaser (1999) also argues that all research is grounded in some ways which is implicit in the definition of research. In line with this and following Gioia et al. (2013) explanation of a grounded theory model, the research approach follows a vibrant inductive model that is grounded in the data (i.e. informants' experience in a theoretical terms). It shows the dynamic relationships amongst the emergent concepts that explain the phenomenon of interest and one that makes clear all relevant data to theory connections. First-order analysis uses informant-centric terms and codes, whereas second-order analysis uses researcher-centric concepts, themes and dimensions. The use of Gioia et al.'s (2013) approach to coding is further explained in section 3.6.1. The avenues from both participants and researcher allow rigorous demonstration of the links between data and the induction of new concepts. With this in mind, the researcher followed a predominantly inductive approach that was underpinned by an open

mind towards the emerging patterns of the data. This helped him to undertake a theoretically informed analysis of the data.

## 3.4. Research Strategy/Design

Bryman (2016) posits that research strategy is a general orientation towards the conduct of social research. For instance, a research strategy that emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data can be represented as quantitative research. By contrast, qualitative research can be conceived and construed as a research strategy that emphasises words to extract deeper meanings rather than quantification of numbers in the collection and analysis of data. In line with the assumptions of methodological constructivism, this thesis is situated within the realm of qualitative research. The research strategy was designed with a view to gaining a thorough understanding of how and to what extent South Asian (im)migrants engage with their local politics. It also reflects upon their identity transition and acculturation in Britain. With this in mind, recourse was made to interpretivist methodology, as this offers the opportunity to analyse and identify the answers to the research aims, objectives and questions set out in Chapter 1.

As the nature of the research topic required a deeper understanding of participants' inner values and their relation to behaviour, conducting a semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to create an open discussion where various topics and subjects relevant to political acculturation were explored. In doing so, a robust volume of data was captured to explain the intricate details of political orientation and expressions that were experienced during participants' acculturation journeys in the host society. In line with the notion of taking a more loosely structured approach to qualitative data collection, there was flexibility with regard to the development of highly specific research questions in advance. Therefore, the researcher opted to use qualitative data collection tools (semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation, and online observation), which were particularly suited to this orientation. This allowed the researcher to become submerged in a social setting with a general research interest in mind. It also gradually narrowed the focus of the research by allowing as many observations of the settings as possible. In addition, following this approach facilitated the formulation of more specific research questions from the collected data (Bell et al., 2018).

Whether one is looking at social sciences research from a positivist or an interpretivist paradigm, it is crucial to understand one's position in the research and show how one will ensure the trustworthiness of the study. As argued by Jonsen and Jehn (2009), one of the ways to mitigate the bias issues that can be associated with qualitative research is through the use of triangulation by using multiple sources of data. In qualitative research, triangulation adds robustness, validation, and depth to the data. There is a direct link between triangulation and data saturation, and the use of triangulation also enhances the richness and depth of the data that is collected (P. Fusch and Ness, 2015). As such, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) also posits that triangulation should be reframed as crystal refraction (many points of light) to extrapolate meanings inherent in the data. It is also important to note that a researcher's cultural and experiential background can contain unintentional biases, values and ideologies that can perhaps influence or interfere with the interpretation of the collected data (Fusch, 2001) Therefore, using strategies such as Denzin's (1989) triangulation techniques can assist with endeavours to understand each other.

As discussed, the above research strategy formed the overarching approach towards achieving the research objectives of this thesis. The defined research strategy provided support in assessing and identifying the suitable options that could generate in-depth data for this research. Use of the aforementioned tools and strategy provided guidance with regard to engaging with the chosen participants. This evoked emotions and feelings that could capture candid information and provided the opportunity to engage with the selected participants in multiple ways, to support and help in verifying the responses to their perceptions, views, and behaviours, as captured through the various data collection methods. In addition, due to inconsistencies, constraints and paradoxes faced by the South Asian ethnic community, differences in the expressions of their personal, political, and social identity can be extracted from this thesis.

## 3.5. Data Collection Methods

The decisions about the chosen data collection tools and methods for this thesis were made based on their usefulness for investigating and analysing specific research questions. Following the previous discussions on the nature of qualitative research as a means for constant exploration of new knowledge and ideas, this approach can also help in shaping and harnessing in-depth insights that can lead to the development of new theoretical models and even directions of research. As one of the key areas of qualitative research is to understand social

and cultural phenomena in their natural settings, one of the most important tasks was to select the right qualitative research methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews, photo-elicitation, and online observation for this study, as presented in Table 4). This selection needed to be a logical progression from the other tasks in the research methods design cycle. It also had to reflect the paradigm underlying this research. In addition, an advantage to the unstructured nature of qualitative enquiry was that it offered the prospects of flexibility and adjustments to the interview sessions as required by the researcher. For instance, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of how one participant views the phenomena of interest and how perceptions can vary across the sample board. This created the opportunity to capture additional information if prompted by the participant. Consistent with the nature of qualitative research, it also served as support and guidance to create a built-in momentum once the data collection was underway.

*Table 4. Sample size and the purpose of methodological tools chosen*

| ***Methodological Tools*** | ***Sample Size*** | ***Purpose*** |
|---|---|---|
| *Semi-structured interviews (online)* | 27 | To gain clarity and a deeper insight into participants' political acculturation orientation and expressions during their time in the UK. Social, work, and personal contextual environments and experiences were explored. |
| *Photo-elicitation exercise (online)* | 27 | In order to have a nuanced understanding of the value-based approach to ethnic acculturation, visual representations (researcher-generated photographs) were used to extract the multi-faceted layers of values and ideologies present amongst the (im)migrants. In addition, it allowed the researcher to explore unanticipated phenomena that arose from emotive responses to the photos. The use of this approach is in line with the practicality and functions of semi-structured interviews. |
| *Online observations* | 15 | In order to address the validity and reliability of the collected data, the researcher opted to undertake online observations to triangulate the findings. As the data collection happened after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, online observation was deemed the safest and most appropriate approach due to the nature of the global pandemic. The vast quantity of digital activities captured in the |

researcher's field notes enriched the arguments presented in the findings chapter.

### 3.5.1. Semi-structured interviews (online)

By acknowledging the strengths of the qualitative approach, the researcher embarked on semi-structured interviews (conducted online) to test the reliability and validity of the contribution of this research. As posited by Bryman and Bell (2011), semi-structured interviews usually involve a context in which the researcher designs a series of questions. This method also entails the ability to vary the sequence of questions as desired (Bryman, 2016). In this thesis, the adoption and use of the semi-structured interview technique allowed the researcher to take greater interest in the participants' political perspectives. It also unpacked the layers of political values and affiliations and provided an insight into what the participants saw as relevant and important.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic during the data collection period, conducting these semi-structured interviews using an online platform was deemed appropriate and convenient. The following reasons encouraged the researcher to choose semi-structured interviews for this thesis:

- Online semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to continue his data collection during the Covid-19 pandemic. This data collection method followed the UK government guidance on Covid-19 rules and regulations at all times. The decision to use online data collection methods enabled the research to progress without any issues.

- The researcher sought to elicit and extract a value-driven approach to political acculturation and identity for the South Asian (im)migrant community. In order to capture the in-depth responses to the research questions, the researcher designed the interview questions from *a priori* theoretical constructs and a review of the current literature on acculturation and social identity theory.

In management and marketing research, semi-structured interviews are highly regarded due to their ability to extract, obtain, and navigate substantial and rich quantities of data through free-

flowing and detailed discussions without being restricted by the rigid formation of hypothesis testing (Alam, 2005). They can also generate raw and pure information that is free from bias and outsider influences. This approach can sometimes generate better quality data (Palmerino, 1999). This is highly relevant to this thesis, which aimed to capture the value-driven analysis of ethnic political acculturation. As a theoretical guideline, the researcher worked within a broader theoretical outlook to accommodate unforeseen circumstances and outcomes. As highlighted by Bryman (2016), emerging themes from the interview sessions allowed the researcher to incorporate additional questions into the subsequent interviews. This allowed the participants to take the lead in their elaborations and responses. Since political orientation and personal experiences of political identity in a host country can require candid and unhindered responses in a comfortable atmosphere, the researcher opted to conduct online semi-structured interviews rather than focus group discussions. In this way, the participants had the free will and power to express their opinions and perceptions without external distractions and influences. In doing so, this approach is in line with Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) research on being an ethically skilled qualitative researcher who takes into account the cultural context of their participants.

Despite having a list of pre-determined questions (Appendix B) and photographs (Chapter 4), which were prepared and selected by the researcher, questions in some interviews were not asked in the same order as prepared by the researcher, as highlighted in the previous points. The interview sessions were mostly guided by how the participants responded to the forwarded questions in the first place (Carson et al., 2001). Thus, not only was the essence of the interviews seen as two-way communication, but also participants could fully express their identity and opinions in their own way without any influence from the researcher. The fact that their identities were kept anonymous and confidential proved to be vital. Through the use of consent forms and the assurance of confidentiality, the researcher provided a safe space and platform for participants to express their thoughts, emotions, and feelings. Therefore, robust and detailed qualitative data was captured for this study through the chosen methodology.

As mentioned above, questionnaires were designed around the existing theoretical constructs on acculturation and social identity literature (O'Donnell and Cummins, 1999). By developing a thorough review and understanding of the current literature, the researcher designed his list of questions by identifying and analysing concepts/constructs that required further investigation (i.e., the research gap). Following Ambert et al. (1995), evaluation of prior

specification of theories can facilitate the setting up and sensitising of the literature concepts to indicate new ideas and patterns. Following the proposed method of using semi-structured interviews with online observations and photo-elicitation methods, data were collected from October 2020, with adherence to the UK government's Covid-19 restrictions throughout. Due to the ongoing pandemic, all of the data for this study were collected online, with Zoom as the main platform for collecting primary data. The researcher interviewed 27 participants and observed the online activities of 15 of these participants. The interviews were split into two parts: semi-structured interview sessions and photo-elicitation exercise.

### 3.5.2. Photo-elicitation discussions

Over the years, social sciences researchers have become increasingly interested in the analysis of visual data (Pink, 2001). For instance, Bell and Davidson (2012) argued that there has been an undeniable and undue focus on the significance of language in the construction of meanings inherent in data. This in turn can lead to a tendency to undermine the importance of the visual information presented by research subjects. They highlight the unique aspects of the visual and indicates how attributes such as aesthetic can impact and induce the memories of research participants.

Following these arguments about the importance of visual data analysis, there has been a noticeable rise in the use of photo-elicitation methods in recent years. According to Collier (1967), the method of photo-elicitation interviewing may be defined as an interviewing technique in which researchers elicit information from participants by using photographs. This method, in which the notions of oral and visual data are used in tandem, has become one of the most sought-after ways to elicit value-based data. This rationale makes sense when a researcher wants to evoke participants' feelings, thoughts, and opinions. As such, photos can be used in research to generate thought-provoking and nostalgic memories, which in turn can be used to analyse how consumers organise and make sense of their views of the world (Patton, 2002). In line with Patton (2002), the inclusion of researcher-generated photographs during the semi-structured interviews not only elicited additional information, but also offered a visual dimension to the participants' unobservable thoughts, feelings, experiences, and understandings.

Photo-elicitation exercises exist in two main forms, involving either researcher-generated photographs or participant-generated photographs. Researcher-generated variants incorporate current photos taken of the research setting and topic of study, previously taken photos of the setting (Banks 2001), and photos from the archives of the research setting and topics (Bogdan and Biklen 1998). From the findings of Collier (1967) concerning the projective characteristics of photo-elicitation methods, various uses and benefits of photo-elicitation interview processes have been identified. Considering the decision-making and process aspects of photo-elicitation, the researcher decided to use this method to provide focus, gain in-depth information, and unveil the layers of drivers of political acculturation. Moreover, Harper (2002) advocated the potential of photo-elicitation techniques to alleviate the problems that can arise in interviews, such as miscommunication and lack of understanding about the research questions. Considering these rationales, the strength in this visual methods rests in the nature of its exploratory, discovery and empowerment characteristics.

For this thesis, the researcher conducted a photo-elicitation session after the initial interview discussions. The researcher produced four slides of various photographs depicting different settings and events (Chapter 4). This approach captured an in-depth explanation of South Asian (im)migrants' perceptions, expressions, and engagement through the use of researcher-generated photographs. The researcher carefully picked distinct photographs that represented a variety of recent economic and political events in Britain and around the world. The following questions constituted the basic framework of the rationale behind the photographs chosen to show to the participants.

- To further understand their political awareness and knowledge in the UK.
- To find out how and why their social media presence or experience has an effect on their political knowledge.
- To elicit responses driven by their values and ideologies on various protests around the UK and the world (e.g., Black Lives Matter, the LGBTQIA+ community, and the Me Too movement).
- To extract their perceptions and feelings on sustainability, climate change and the impact of Covid-19.

- To find out how they made meanings and sense of these recent events. How did these movements and operations resonate with, reinforce, or replace their existing perceptions, which can influence their political and social identity?

By developing a questionnaire design based on *a priori* theoretical constructs, the researcher decided to incorporate a photo-elicitation exercise to test and validate the opinions and perceptions raised by the participants in their semi-structured interview sessions. This collected data also served as a source of validation, as it allowed the researcher to triangulate his primary data for validation and reliability. Moreover, it provided an opportunity to compare and contrast emerging new patterns and data. If the experiences and responses elicited through these chosen photo collage carried from their initial responses, the researcher sought to capture the dynamics of the emerging new data, which made a helpful contribution in answering the research objectives and aims.

However, it is important for researchers to manage risks and identify the challenges of using photo research in a specific context. As posited by Creighton et al. (2017), these challenges can be both material and methodological. With this in mind, Lambert et. al (2010) cautioned researchers about the importance of reflexivity due to the tendency to construe the use of photographs as more truthful and objective in nature than words. Likewise, photographic images are commonly used to present a socially desirable image of the self. However, despite the mentioned limitations, the researcher strongly believed that using photo-elicitation would enhance his semi-structured interviews by fostering the development of complex concepts that may have been only partially understood through semi-structured interviews or more positivistic statistical methods.

### 3.5.3. Online Observations

Various attempts have been made in the last few years to reconsider online spaces in ethnographic research. With a vast number of studies using digital ethnography (Kulavuz-Onal and Vásquez, 2013; Paoli and D'Auria, 2021), this form of ethnographic study can be utilized as a way to harness and gain insightful information into digital consumer culture (Dey et al., 2020) and social media interactions. By referring to Kozinets (1998), observations of a significant shift in the digital space can be captured. Over the past decades, online spaces have become amongst the most useful platforms to gather customer insights (Bickhart and Schindler,

2001; Catterall and Maclaran, 2002). With their unprecedented nature of disruptive progressions, online platforms have become a household name throughout western society. The days of niche cyber culture amongst virtual communities and enthusiasts have been undermined by the constant development of the latest digital applications and tools.

Today, consumers are constantly connected to social media through an array of platforms (e.g., Instagram, Tiktok, LinkedIn, Twitter). They use these platforms to project their values, opinions, and associations to various contextual situations. The younger generations share many of their opinions, experiences, and everyday activities online. Thus, the vast volume of digital footprints left by consumers on various online platforms provides valuable data for researchers and managers. This rich data source led to a decision to use an online observation approach to gather data that could help to investigate the nature of the online social experiences and interaction of South Asian (im)migrants and their cultural background, languages and political identity formations. In his work, Kozinets (2010) extended these discussions of online ethnography as participant-observational research. This makes online spaces a multidimensional platform with the prominent use of images, emojis, text and videos (Winter and Lavis, 2020). In response to the dynamic changes in consumer behaviour towards online platforms, Robinson and Schulz (2009) highlighted the crucial role of producing online content that matches the experiences of the participants under study.

Winter and Lavis (2020) also drew attention to listening as an important element in the process of reflection. Consistent with the qualitative methodology as a tool to seek meaningful data, Back (2007) argued for the prominence of listening as an art. It also reiterates the importance of understanding our societies and how our cultures are transmitted. As mentioned above, online observation techniques can capture a variety of how people are shaping their online existence. For example, although the majority of their social media interactions may appear predominantly text-based, there are multiple ways in which individuals can express their views and perspectives (Steinmetz, 2012). Taking all conversational dimensions into account, the online observation for this thesis went beyond observation of the text itself. For instance, a social media post can often set in motion a discussion that moves beyond the original post and agenda. This can be achieved through the diverse forms of online expressions such as sharing stories on social media, retweeting contents, the use of hashtags, and the use of GIFs and images that are of interest to the user: for example, a participant sharing and retweeting their opinions on political and economic issues on their social media page.

The use of online observations can also be helpful in gathering a nuanced understanding of intrinsic and extrinsic values, through which one can interpret participants' consumption of online materials. In doing so, it can reveal and counter misconceptions that an interview alone may perpetuate. For this reason, the researcher incorporated online observation as one of his methodological tools in order to complement and/or contrast the data collected from other sources (i.e., semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation exercise). By ensuring that varied forms of interactions were included within the data collection and analysis, the researcher was able to capture the multi-faceted nature of the participants' online activities. For example, a varied number of photos, stories and status were collected by the researcher during his online observation period. During the observation period, the majority of the participants were found to be users of emojis and memes. For example, a meme describing a political leader and their downfall was shared continuously during the research. Participants also represented their opinions and attitudes not only through words but also through a considered articulation of social media posts. For instance, a politically sensitive expresser purposely framed their Instagram page to reflect their personal interests and values. This offered a way to embrace the multidimensional nature of online communities of different social media platforms and their distinct cultures.

By drawing upon the strengths and flexibility of online ethnography, the researcher adapted these techniques to the research topic, space and community under study during his online observation period. As discussed above, the researcher followed and observed 15 of the 27 participants on various online platforms (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn). Online observations were captured using field notes, which were kept, updated and monitored by the researcher throughout the data collection period. By following 15 of the participants' social media pages, the researcher captured a good volume of online observation field notes, which encapsulated the participants' various social media activities via different platforms. This will be explained in depth in the findings and discussion sections. The researcher's field notes helped to highlight the participants' activities within the online spaces, their engagement, and posts on various political issues and events.

### 3.5.4. Sampling

In relation to the selection of units and people as posited by Bryman (2016), this research employed the notion of purposive sampling. The sample population under study were members

of the South Asian community living within the UK (e.g., (im)migrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives). Sampling was used to cut costs whilst obtaining important information from a representative sample of the target population. Although the findings of the study had limitations (see section 3.8), it was vital that the number of participants providing information for this thesis was large enough to produce reliable and valid data, in order to facilitate a true representation of the target population. The sampling design and methodology had to be determined for each of the specific data collection methods employed.

For this thesis, 27 participants were selected using maximum variation sampling (Bryman, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) so that various demographic group (religion, ethnicity, gender and occupation) were covered. The chosen samples includes both South Asian (im)migrants' and British born South Asians as their upbringing, lifestyle and education can be deemed to be likely different (Jaspal, 2015). Maximum variation sampling was used to encompass a wide range of issues that might be central to the purpose of the evaluation. This approach helps in addressing the importance of triangulation, as presented in section 3.5.5. The use of triangulation addresses multiple interests and needs. The researcher used personal contacts, university students and work colleagues to reach out and recruit potential participants. All of the interviews were conducted via the Zoom platform due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

The sample selection takes the following into consideration:

As the largest diasporic South Asian community in the UK, The Survey of British Indian Attitudes (SBIA) was conducted in 2021 to analyse a nationally representative online survey of 792 British Indian eligible voters in partnership with YouGov (Duckworth et al., 2021). The survey instrument contains questions in relation to demographics, immigration, citizenship, family background, election campaigns and voting. Interestingly, 62% of the eligible voters' report discussing politics in the past year, 16% report posting comments about political news and issues online and 14% admitted to contacting an elected representative/government official. They are also more likely to discuss politics within their own circle of family and friends. Within the survey findings, two-thirds of the British Indian respondents also report voting for the UK to remain in the EU in the 2016 Brexit referendum. Interestingly, there is also evidence of how ethnic community identify with a political party based on the proximity

of their ethnic groups interest. A large proportion of other South Asian continent countries such as Pakistan (59%) and Bangladeshi (56%) align their ethnic groups to Labour party which in this instance make the British Indian community as an outlier (Duckworth et. al., 2021).

### 3.5.5. Triangulation

In order to clarify ambiguity and the nature of bias in responses from qualitative research, exploratory research designs can be used to elicit the multiple layers of realities (Kurt et al., 2011). Denzin (1989) asserted that triangulation is the method by which the researcher analyses the data and then presents the results to others. Doing this will unpack the interwoven layers of human nature and hopefully create a better understanding of common phenomena.

Furthermore, Denzin (1978) built on the notion of triangulating multiple sources of data and developed four types of triangulation that qualitative researchers can use to enhance the objectivity, truth, and validity of social research. The four types of triangulation were as follows: data triangulation for correlating people, time and space; investigator triangulation for correlating the findings from multiple sources/researchers; theory triangulation for using and correlating theories from multiple avenues; and methodological triangulation for correlating data from multiple data collection methods. In order to address the research gap identified in the present study, the researcher used methodological triangulation to triangulate the data. Using a methodological triangulation approach can help to combat the challenges of the various inherent flaws within each individual method. In this research, the data obtained from the three avenues (i.e., semi-structured interviews, the photo elicitation exercise, and online observations) were compared and contrasted to capture a variety of dimensions. Therefore, this approach helped the researcher to account for the flaws and deficiencies in relation to his chosen methods.

### 3.5.6. Limitations

Previous studies (Queiros et al., 2017; Myers and Newman, 2007) have identified a number of constraints and limitations that one may encounter with regard to qualitative research tools. The identified limitations for this thesis have been properly mitigated by the researcher, the solutions to the limitations identified are presented below:

- *Participant bias*: Throughout this process, the researcher understood the potential risks of having a biased approach when recruiting his participants. In order to ensure impartiality and fairness towards the data, the researcher decided to keep a well-balanced mixture of participants encompassing various generations of South Asian (im)migrants. As discussed above, the sample incorporated participants from all ages, occupations, religion and lengths of residency in the UK. As a South Asian (im)migrant himself, the researcher managed to balance his sample, which represented a wide variety of people from diverse multicultural backgrounds.

- *Hawthorne effect*: After conducting a number of semi-structured interviews (online), the researcher realised that his cultural background and origin could potentially influence and interfere with the social setting and people's behaviour (Fontana and Frey, 2000). There might be a tendency amongst the participants to say what they thought he wanted to hear, which could perhaps disrupt their honest views on their socio-cultural and political outlook. Therefore, the researcher decided not to rely on the interview and photo-elicitation data alone. Online observations of how the participants made use of their social and digital media platforms enabled him to capture real-time data from the followed participants.

- *Ambiguity of language*: During the interview sessions, all of the questions, which can be seen in the Appendix, were relayed in simple terms. The participants were reminded that they could voluntarily end the discussion should they wish not to discuss the questions in detail. The researcher avoided using any complicated jargons and explained all the relevant details to avoid ambiguity and misunderstandings. Consent forms and participant information sheets were provided to all the participants.

- *Insulting the participants*: The researcher was very much aware of the cultural sensitivity in relation to the South Asian culture. The researcher only asked and prompted additional questions from participants' responses if they wanted to elaborate and provide in-depth answers. He always used phrases such as 'Do you mind telling me more?' or 'If it is okay with you, can you please elaborate your points?'

Due to the nature and the use of online observations for this thesis, it could be argued that online interaction with the participants lacked the real connection that one can experience during face-to-face interactions. Nevertheless, a substantial volume of data was captured to answer the research aims, objectives and questions set out in Chapter 1.

## 3.6. Data Analysis

During and after the completion of the 27 interviews, the researcher transcribed his semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation discussions. All of the interviews were audio/video recorded via Zoom, while notes for the observations were updated throughout the study period to capture the most up-to-date data in real time. All of the recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher, comprising a substantial volume of interview transcriptions (70 pages). After this stage, the researcher transferred all of his transcribed data to NVivo software for mark-up and data analysis. However, despite the researcher's appreciation and acknowledgement of the usefulness of software such as NVivo, he has also manually coded his data for analysis. This approach ensured that all the important codes or themes emerging from the data were captured and analysed in a robust way.

### 3.6.1. Coding

Referring to a point highlighted by Charmaz (2006), in order to have an analytical interpretation of the collected data, it is important to understand the process of defining what the data are about in the first step. This will allow the data to move beyond concrete statements. Coding means categorising segments of data with short names. For instance, it can facilitate summarising and providing accounts for each piece of the data. Hence, the codes will show how the researcher selects and notices similarities and differences within emerging codes and help to sort the overall data to allow analytic evaluation. The researcher can then link the smaller segments to help build or challenge theories. In a similar vein, Timmermans and Tavory (2012) asserted that sensitisation of the research area can originate from previous research, as research projects are not wholly inductive. This is in line with the previous argument for having a balanced approach to the use of inductive and deductive methods.

A hybrid of inductive and deductive coding (i.e., thematic analysis) incorporated both the data driven inductive approach (Boyatzis, 1998) and the deductive *a priori* templates of codes.

Following this approach, the data analysis complemented the research aims and objectives by allowing the researcher to integrate the principles and doctrines of social-cultural and political phenomenology through deductive thematic analysis. Simultaneously, it also incorporated the data-driven themes by using inductive coding analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Thus, two forms of coding – *a priori* and data-driven codes – were used in the research. In order to ensure robust screening, organising, and categorising of data (Rocca et al., 2014), the codes extracted from both avenues served as data management tools. This helped to segment and categorise similar or related texts. It was also important to take note of an essential step in determining the applicability of the codes to the raw data and information, namely testing the reliability of the codes.

The *a priori* themes were identified based on the research objectives and existing theoretical concepts. By following the seminal work of Gioia et al. (2013), which provides a robust framework for coding in qualitative research, the researcher started with *a priori* themes such as acculturation, social identity, digital consumer culture, and political engagement and expressions. Following the extant literature (Chen et al., 2011; Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Lorenz et al., 2018), the researcher derived first-order, second-order and final-order codes based on the extracted data, as can be seen in section 3.6.2. The initial review of the transcribed interviews meticulously outlined the key points made by participants in response to the questions asked by the researcher. Therefore, emerging patterns and potential themes in the raw data were captured, using an approach which is closer to open coding, as guided by Mansourian (2006) and Haring (2008). Adhering faithfully to informants' terms in the first-order analysis, as suggested by Gioia et al. (2013), the researcher consulted his principal supervisor throughout the open coding process to ensure consensus from the collated sets of codes. The following table 5 provides a summary of the coding process.

### 3.6.2. Coding process

*Table 5. Coding process following Gioia et al. (2013)*

| First-order Codes | Second-order codes | Final-order codes |
|---|---|---|
| • Better financial benefits<br>• Education<br>• Entrepreneurship<br>• Visa sponsorships<br>• Work opportunities in host country | Reasons for Migration | Values in the host society |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Career aspirations and dreams<br>• Migration as a family<br>• Perceived British values pre-migration | | |
| • Cultural Sensitivity and ethos<br>• Faith and religion<br>• Family and ethnic values<br>• Heritage and ancestors<br>• Sense of belonging to ethnic group | Ethno-religious and cultural identity | Cultural Authenticity |
| • Care for the ethnic community's issues and the country<br>• Community engagement<br>• Community representation in the parliament<br>• Patriotic feeling<br>• Resonance and representation | Association | Desire for mainstream representation and engagement |
| • Host society laws and regulations<br>• Immigration issues and their connotations<br>• Britishness through various contexts<br>• Language barriers<br>• Personal experience in host society<br>• Personal experience of the differences between EU and non-EU citizens<br>• Polarisation in the host society<br>• Slang and accent differences<br>• Tangible items to show Britishness<br>• Working relationships in the workplace<br>• In-group and out-group favouritism<br>• Racial discrimination experience in the host society<br>• Responsibility and perks of being a commonwealth citizen<br>• Collectivism and individualistic society<br>• Brexit and its implications<br>• Honest opinions and perceptions on EU values | Post-Migration Host Experience | Experience |
| • Complex and dynamic self-identity<br>• Gender equality<br>• Generational gap in views and practice | Expression and variability | Fluidity |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Importance of physical and mental health<br>• Self-expression<br>• Separation identity<br>• Workers' rights and equality<br>• Sustainability and cost-effectiveness<br>• Security and privacy<br>• Diverse culinary experience | | |
| • Addiction and appealing online platforms<br>• Digital information and knowledge-seeking<br>• Embracing social media tools to create awareness and knowledge<br>• Engagement on digital apps and platforms<br>• Online presence and identity<br>• Online presence offers diverse functionality and meaning<br>• Usage of various social media platforms<br>• Compartmentalisation | Digital ethnic cultural dispositions | Exposure and interactions |
| • Interest in UK political landscape and issues<br>• Measurement and implementation of political promises<br>• Party manifestos versus personal values<br>• Political awareness as ethnic migrant<br>• The need for trustworthy political leaders<br>• UK political austerity<br>• UK political familiarity<br>• Voting intentions and their formation<br>• Economic outlook with facts and figures<br>• Policy<br>• Perceptions on movements, protests, and events.<br>• Online political news and sources among migrants | Political orientation and views | Expressions |
| • Attitudes and opinions on Covid-19<br>• Opinions on Covid-19 rules and regulations by UK government | Covid-19 perceptions and its impact | Attitudes |
| • Adaptable behaviour<br>• Appreciation<br>• Integration | Embracing diversity and inclusion | Multiculturalism |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| • Liberal and open-minded views<br>• Socialisation with cultural outsiders<br>• Respect | | |
| • Aesthetic marketing campaigns<br>• Inclusive and diverse marketing<br>• Target audiences<br>• Simple and seamless marketing campaigns<br>• Social media marketing | Ethnic marketing | Inclusivity |

### 3.6.3. Linking and analysing the codes using axial coding

Consistent with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) notion of axial coding, the researcher identified key areas that exhibited similarities and differences after a robust review and screening of the first-order codes. These codes were categorised under the relevant second-order codes as they emerged, as clear guidance to show similarity and indicative patterns. To highlight and explore the themes and patterns in the data, the identified codes were connected and clustered under headings that were directly related to the research questions. In relation to the research objectives, similarities and differences between separate groups of data were emerging at this stage, indicating areas of consensus. With the varying demographic backgrounds of the participants, themes within each data group were also beginning to cluster, and differences were identified between the responses of groups. Next, the final-order codes were identified through summative themes and meanings of the second-order codes. Finally, the researcher consulted the existing literature to identify the appropriate concepts for the final-order constructs.

As discussed above, through the use of data-driven and *a priori* theoretical constructs, a dynamic inter-relationship between data and theory can be evident through the rigorous and multiple reviews of the transcribed texts and existing literature reviews. For example, the participants' perceptions and reasons behind their choice of residency in the UK can be interpreted in terms of their socio-cultural, financial, and economic reasons. Whilst analysing the reasons behind their acculturation into the western society, some of the participants shared common themes, such as 'values in the host society', as presented in Table 5. However, the

texts grouped under each of these data-driven codes were further reviewed to extract more specific areas of investigation. At this stage, online observation notes were useful in complementing or contrasting the participants' opinions using a non-verbal technique (e.g., activities and expressions on various social media platforms).

As mentioned above, methodological triangulation helped the researcher to compare and contrast the data collected from multiple sources (i.e., semi-structured interviews, the photo-elicitation exercise, and online observation notes) to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings and resulting claims. Following Farmer et al. (2006), the transcripts of the 27 in-depth interviews were meticulously analysed and corroborated by using excerpts from the supporting materials (i.e. photographs/diary notes). As presented in the findings chapter, the supporting materials were categorised under the relevant themes and codes.

## 3.7. Ethical Considerations

Every participant selected for this study received a briefing from the researcher before giving any form of consent. The researcher sought consent before conducting the interviews and participants were allowed to withdraw at any point. They were sent a consent form and a participant information sheet before the sessions commenced. This study was ethically approved by Brunel Research Ethics Committee. All the collected data were carefully stored within Brunel University's password-protected servers. Moreover, the researcher also acquired consent to follow 15 participants for the online observations.

## 3.8. Reliability, Time Horizon, and Limitations

Issues of reliability and validity must be addressed (Bryman, 2016). The researcher achieved this through the use of audio/video recording and transcript notes. In addition, coding from Nvivo was manually checked and online observation notes were kept throughout the research period. As a result, a substantial amount of collected data was drawn upon to answer this study's aims, objectives, and research questions. Methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1978) also helped to compare and contrast the data collected from multiple sources to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings and resulting claims. However, the results of this research cannot be generalised beyond the specific research context, as they are likely to change in future studies. As with most research projects undertaken for academic courses, this study was

necessarily time-constrained. This particular research was also cross-sectional, which means that it was a study of a particular phenomenon at a particular time (Saunders et al., 2012). The main limitations encountered can also be linked to the sample size and the context of the study sample. It is also important to note that the results of the findings may vary in further studies, as the research topic is very dynamic in nature.

## 3.9. Chapter Conclusion

This research adopted an interpretivist philosophy with a view to accomplish a subjective and descriptive understanding of the political acculturation of South Asian (im)migrants living in the UK. In order to extract a deeply-rooted notion of the topic under study, a number of different methodological tools were used: semi-structured interviews, a photo-elicitation exercise, and observations (all conducted online).

All of the methodological tools employed in this research aimed to delineate a holistic picture of the multi-dimensional political acculturation in a given social and digital setting. The three chosen methodological tools provided rich and substantial data to support the extracted findings from this research. As mentioned throughout this chapter, a predominantly inductive approach, underpinned by an open mind towards the emerging patterns of the data, was utilised for the data analysis. Furthermore, a significant volume of raw data was analysed against the background of the existing theoretical constructs and theories.

# 4. Findings

This chapter reports on the data and information collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, online observation, and photo-elicitation exercises on the South Asian (im)migrants' acculturative political orientation, acculturative journey, and their political expression in the host society. The research findings offer deeper insights and reveal pointers that suggest and/or reiterate the complex nature of multiple cultural identities within a multicultural Western society. A detailed understanding of the broader socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts within which acculturation is embedded has provided an opportunity to further explore and analyse participants' choices and motivations for residing within a host society. The analysis will also examine the various attributes and factors which influence the co-existence of different cultural dynamics and groups.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the findings are constituted on the basis of structured codes against each theme. As such, this chapter deconstructs all the relevant themes into constituting codes (units of data) and eventually reconstructs them to create a summative and holistic understanding that will subsequently be corroborated against relevant literature to ascertain the theoretical contribution of this thesis. With a view to providing a more structured presentation of the findings, three substantive empirical studies are presented in this chapter. Each heading and sub-heading provides an overview of various themes and codes. They indicate how various themes and relevant codes have branched out of preceding units of analysis. The findings section has been designed in accordance with this structured categorisation.

The chapter starts with section 4.1, which identifies and assesses the role of values and macro-environmental factors (extrinsic influences) that lead to ethnic (im)migrants' acculturative political orientation. The next step (section 4.2) further analyses the lived exposure, experience, and evolution of South Asian (im)migrants' acculturative journey in the host society. These phases also emanate from the categories (sets) of codes, as discussed in the methodology section. Finally, section 4.3 will explore acculturation as a political expression rather than a strategy, where four types of expression are devised to examine the intricacies of political expressions in the context of local politics. The findings under each of these studies are presented and explained in depth in this chapter.

## 4.1: To assess South Asian (im)migrants' disposition and expression of their values and the influence of external dynamics on their political orientation.

### 4.1.1 South Asian (im)migrants' composition of their values in the mainstream society

The discourse of migration and immigration in the political spectrum often does not take into account the hardship experienced and the passion and ambitions that (im)migrants need to demonstrate in order to go through a rigorous process of naturalisation or settlement. The whole debate surrounding the negative connotations or perceptions towards immigration policy by the mainstream politicians and media fails to reflect the real struggles and situation of the migrant community. As such, these issues completely fall on the blind side of this ongoing debate. Within the rising scholarship examining inter-ethnic boundaries, it is argued that ethnic boundary work is much more complex than the simplified model of 'minority' and 'majority' (Drewski and Tuppat, 2021), as (im)migrants may not only be engaged in ethnic boundary work vis-à-vis the host society and immigrants from other countries, but also with regard to other immigrant groups from their own societies of origin.

In light of this phenomenon, gathering in-depth information is vital, as the majority of the mainstream community remains unaware of the levels of aptitude and financial investment encountered by South Asian (im)migrants. In fact, the findings highlight the lack of in-depth understanding of migration journeys by the mainstream society: for instance, situations arise where one can easily put the blame on (im)migrants without concrete acknowledgement of their personal experience and process. This includes paying for their visa applications, indefinite leave to remain, or naturalisation as highly skilled migrants. The current literature on acculturation mainly examines ethnic (im)migrants' acculturation processes and outcomes by using the notion of host and home societies (Berry, 1992; Penaloza, 1994). However, acculturation studies that examine ethnic values and ideologies are still scarce. Therefore, it is important to examine the intricate details of the value-driven acculturation process that (im)migrants experience through the context of various drivers and motivators.

### 4.1.2. Motivations and reasons for migration (personal aspirations and stories)

Known for its rich cultural heritage and prominent educational institutions around the world, the UK has a diverse number of (im)migrants from a wide variety of ethnic groups and cultural

backgrounds who have settled here for various reasons. Evidence of cultural appreciation, interaction and exchange can be observed and obtained from the participant interviews and online presence. As a result, many of the participants have experienced the co-existence of different ethnic and cultural groups. Facilitated by global consumer culture, many (im)migrants from South Asian countries have the opportunity to live in multicultural Western cities such as London, which is prominent for its cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity.

In line with the argument posited by Torelli and Stoner (2018), the participants' view of the modern society is a creation of multicultural global villages that represent new opportunities and exchange of knowledge facilitated by the rise and growth of globalisation. Due to a variety of factors that have projected the UK as a desirable country in which to achieve a better way of life, the evidence of how UK educational institutions can make an impact on the participants' reasons for migrating to the UK is clear and significant. Heni, an Indian participant from London, confirmed this:

> *I always wanted to pursue my education in the UK, so I moved to the UK in 2014 when I was 19 years old to do my undergraduate studies. I also have my family here in the UK. Obviously, I have thought about the quality of UK education, and the fact that it is so different from what I'm used to back home is what makes me excited. Apart from that, I also want to start a fresh chapter in my life. I also consider other alternate options such as Canada and Australia, but I decided to go ahead with UK, as I find the quality, the system, and the reputation very appealing.*

The desire to have a career and work in a global city like London was also evident in many of the participants' personal experiences. Although the intentions behind decisions to reside in the UK varied from person to person, the core ambition of seeking a better lifestyle remained prominent. Despite the hurdles that they had to navigate to secure their settlement rights, such as acquiring visa sponsorship for working rights, their personal and occupational goals had a significant bearing on participants' decision to migrate and stay. Sylvia, one of the participants, articulated this:

> *I moved here in 2015 and the main reason was to study in the UK for my master's degree at Newcastle University. After I graduated, I got a job in*

> *London, and I am still working here. I completely acknowledge about how hard it is to have a work permit in those days; I was not certain that I will find a job, but luckily I did manage to find one, and fulfilled my aim to have a job in London.*

In addition to work opportunities and education to accomplish their career dreams and aspirations, Puia also shared his appreciation and gratitude towards the host society. As a successful entrepreneur running one of the top care agencies in South West London, his explanation conveys a strong sense of embracive and converging behaviour:

> *I came here to pursue my education and get a proper career. I genuinely believe that studying and living in the UK offers me a great platform for my career ambitions. I have always wanted to be an entrepreneur in my life, and I believe that UK has given me that opportunity. I am very integrated into the British culture and I [have] fulfilled my lifelong dream of owning a business regardless of my background…*

The formation of positive associations towards Britain also goes beyond career aspirations and educational institutions. From the interviews, the association with a better way of life in the UK not only enables ethnic individuals to find a new lease of life in a foreign country, but also provides them with an opportunity to start a fresh chapter with their family and for their future generations. Sheena, a mother of three, expressed her emotions and feelings of pride and joy when she gave her comments on this topic:

> *We moved to the UK about 15 years ago when my husband got a job in London from India. At the time we have one little girl, and it was a very exciting chapter in our lives. Fast forward now, we are a beautiful family with three kids with a good work–life balance. For us, the main reason why we migrate to the UK was through work opportunities. After this, I suppose the rest of life stages follows… having more kids, job promotion and buying a house, which makes us put our roots down here and call UK our home.*

Similarly, Parvi, a third-generation (im)migrant from a Sikh family, also described her family's migration history as she recalled:

*I am a third-generation immigrant, and my family came to the UK many years ago for job opportunities. Since then, all my other extended families have joined us along the lines as well. Personally, a lot of my childhood was spent in Kent, Birmingham, and London. So, I will say better work opportunities and life circumstances have made my family move around the UK and settle.*

Interestingly, the presence of migration as a family was prevalent from the data, particularly among participants from a second-generation background. Questions of ethnic identity and culture of origin came to the fore in the discussions, as argued in the current literature (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Mya, one of the participants, explained how her parents decided to settle in North London from Sri Lanka. She described how the war experienced by her family had prompted them to find a new life in Britain:

*So, firstly, my dad came to this country in the 70s to study. Around the same time, we had a civil war in Sri Lanka. Because we are from a Tamil background, which is a minority in Sri Lanka, my parents, along with a lot of others, left Sri Lanka to escape the war. They came here in the 80s. I was born in 1986 in London and have been living in North London pretty much all my life. In fact, my mum still works for our primary school as a teaching assistant after all these years.*

Despite the common theme of using Britain as a place to start a brighter future, Mya's comments reflect how migration journeys can differ from one family to another. With escaping war in their homeland as the main motive for migration, the differences in social mobility can be witnessed when Mya's excerpts are compared to Sheena's family journey. This notion of differences solidifies why we need to further explore the values of an ethnic individual and how their values and ideologies shape their existence in the host society.

### 4.1.3. Components of core ethnic identity as narrated by South Asian (im)migrants

Adherence to one's own cultural values and identity in one way or another is clearly evident from the findings. Following the current literature on ethnic identity change in the context of migration as one of the essential indicators for social integration (Verkuyten et al., 2019), Abbie, a 34-year-old dentist, meticulously curated the respect and appreciation she had for her

heritage and ancestors. She explained what ethnic identity means for her. Abbie expressed that ethnic identity is a sense of belonging to a community who share the same set of faith and values as her. Her interpretation and associations with her ethnic roots played a pivotal role in her day-to-day activities.

Similar experiences were evident within the responses from Ravi, also British-born, who lived in Southall, London, where a large community from South Asian background have congregated and settled as a community group. He explained that his decision to live in Southall had made him more integrated into his own culture. He embraced his local high street, which is dominated by Asian vendors, and the easy access to the Gurudwara to practice his faith.

The findings can also reveal how places of worship or religious events can be utilised for various purposes. Javi, originally from Pakistan, described this:

> *Yes, I do engage with my own community. It is mainly to do with religious activities or events such as Eid or Ramadan where we will meet each other. We will also meet on other events such as birthdays, weddings, and other events, so, yes, I engage, but mainly for an event purpose.*

Ben, a naturalised UK citizen originally from India, also shared his opinions on identity formation and experiences as an (im)migrant in the UK. Talking about his community engagement, he articulated:

> *We have a few celebratory events in my church during the year where we gather as a community. We eat nice food, we sing at the top of our lungs, and dance the day and night away. When you have kids, it is also so nice to meet other family like ours. It gives us the chance to share ideas and let our kids socialise and learn about our home culture. It is also nice to have some intellectual conversations with like-minded people.*

From the above two excerpts, the notion of in-group satisfaction and sense of belonging can be regarded as one of the tools that can serve to preserve the roots of authentic cultural heritage. It reflects the notion of social identity as a frame for sense-making of social environments to adapt one's behaviour to different engagements and interactions (Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

This is an important asset that individuals possess by upholding their own cultural beliefs, values, and practice despite the consistent interaction with cultural outsiders, particularly when family and ancestors serve as an influential factor.

As discussed, ethnic identity is dynamic and complex in nature, constantly evolving as we learn to adapt to modern ways of living. Ethnic consumer behaviour has moved beyond the traditional assimilationist model as globalisation has created a diverse composition of multicultural markets in Western society, as presented by Luedicke (2011). Evidence of the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of the contact between different cultural groups is evident in the findings through experiences of cross-cultural contact due to migration from one country to another.

Javi, a participant from Pakistan, shared her experience and understanding of her ethnic identity. Her excerpt below exhibits her acknowledgement and awareness of multiculturalism:

> *Being a Muslim girl in her 20s, I am also very aware of my own ethnic roots despite us living in a world where online exposure is a norm. So, my sense of identity could perhaps be a combination of traditional and modern, in a way. I have a very good upbringing, and being a millennial, I have a lot of freedom, education, and political awareness. The one thing that have worked for me is that I have not become an extremist in my views and opinions. That has made me understand how to make a rational decision without insulting anyone.*

A similar experience and response were offered by Abbie, who reflected her intent to appreciate and accept her exposure to global culture. Referring to her appreciation and passion for art, she commented:

> *I love art and anything art from South Asian heritage really interests me, as I have that natural connection with it. So my identity is nothing in particular – I am quite open-minded, arty, but also acknowledge my own roots and background without heavily integrating into it.*

Due to exposure to a multicultural environment, ethnic (im)migrants may adopt attributes of other cultures, where their decisions and sense of adoption are guided by the level of

congruence and accordance between their ancestral culture and their chosen attributes of the host culture (Dey et al., 2019). For instance, Razin from Bangladesh, who was in his 40s, explained his sense of identity by referring to his consumption behaviour and lifestyle, such as food and socialisation with cultural outsiders:

> *I have a very pragmatic approach towards it: being a non-practicing religion background, it has given me the opportunity to adopt various lifestyles and elements of the UK culture. So, my flexibility with food habits, mixing with other people, going out for a pint with friends or have bacon and cheese burger has been with me from the start. The other thing that I also realised was that coming to this country as a very proud nationalist person, that sense of national pride is also gradually disappearing. I have now started to see the difference between nationalism and patriotism, and that has certainly made me think and change over time.*

Another participant, Mya, a British-born 26-year-old originating from Sri Lanka, also shared her views, which differed from those of her family. Most of her interview responses indicated that she had embraced western society and its attributes:

> *Ethnic identity for me is about my culture and background. I guess that is the main core of it, but, as I told you, I was born and raised in England. So, my perceptions and identification are pretty much Westernised and quite open-minded. My belief and perceptions about certain things in life are quite different from my other family members. For me, my ethnic identity doesn't reflect about tight-knit community or in-group associations at all. The way I live my life is very mainstream British, but, at the back of my mind, I still do respect my heritage.*

The above excerpt shows that Mya had a loose connection with her Sri Lankan origin; however, she was not fully immersed into the British culture either, as she was still proud of her familial origin and respected her ethnic cultural and family values whilst remaining open to other cultures.


Picture 1: Showcasing various movements and marches in recent years (Source: Google Images).

In response to a separate question involving photo-elicitation exercises (Picture 1), which showed various movements and events in photographic format, Mya also said:

> *I stand with my LGBT allies, and similar to the racial injustice issues, there is no place in our society for discrimination based on someone's sexuality and their orientation. Pride events and celebration, like this photo, is what gives us awareness. This is the way forward, since we still have a long journey to promote love and equality.*

She further elaborated:

> *The 'me too' campaign was a movement which is so real and pure and have ignited a fire in so many underrepresented women who face sexual abuse in our society. These issues are appalling, disgusting, and they need to be exposed like this on a huge social platform. Having a viral social campaign like this will*

*hopefully raise awareness to men around the world so that they can make better choices in life.*

Mya was followed during the online observation period: she also shared photographs and content relating to the LBGTQIA+ community and climate change issues. With reference to the typology developed in Study Objective 3, she can be classified as a 'politically sensitive' (im)migrant who chose to share her views and opinions in both online and offline formats (attending Pride events in London) to represent her main interests and passions.

Furthermore, the appreciation and respect for what the host society has given to the ethnic community continued to dominate the discussions, as Heni, a 30-year-old doctorate student compared and contrasted her experience of her host versus home society. She referred to women's rights and the freedom of self-expression through consumption choices such as clothing:

*For me, when it comes to British society, people in the UK are very much more open-minded. They obviously have the freedom to do what they want to do in life. If you compare it to my country, there are a lot of restrictions that were imposed on women.*

She elaborated:

*I also find that the UK law is very well maintained in the sense of protecting women's rights. They have a good security system. For example, back home, women will be looked down on if they are seen drinking or wearing a short skirt. Here in the UK, that is just the norm, and people are so much more accepting of others, which is why I love living here.*

She continued to show her love and desire for multiculturalism when she explained her thoughts and feelings about a photograph presented during the photo-elicitation discussions. She elaborated her views as a Hindu-born woman:

*As I am a liberal and open-minded person, I support my LGBTQ+ friends and family. I believe our society can no longer discriminate or shame people based*

> *on the preference of their sexuality and desire for gender identification. We are incredibly lucky to live in a country where we can openly see and hear these issues. I do feel for other people in a more conservative country or religion where people are still ashamed of their orientation. It makes me sad to be honest.*

Given the complex conceptualisation of identity, the multicultural context is prevalent in this study, with ethnic individuals constantly assessing which identity is more salient in a particular situation, as depicted in Stayman and Deshpande's (1989) concept of situational ethnicity. It is vital to understand how one can juggle and elicit multiple identities and roles without marginalising them, as they are fluid and non-static in nature. Although the majority of the participants were in favour of liberalism and equality, which can be deemed as a by-product of living in and exposing oneself to multicultural Western societies, the findings also indicate some paradoxical views to the above excerpts on the LGBTQIA+ community and movements like the Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign. For example, Tasha, a conservative party supporter, born and raised in London, shared a contrasting view to Heni and Mya. During the photo-elicitation exercise, she commented:

> *I mean, I don't have any gay people in my social circle at all. We don't talk about this stuff within my family – my parents are very conservative, and we never have any discussions about this. My parents are of older generations, so their values are very typical South Asian. I cannot comment much on this. But with BLM campaign, it is ridiculously taken out of the real context. I don't get why so many people would vandalise our streets and fight our police during the street protest. I don't get it.*

The online observation notes are also very helpful to comprehend Tasha's ethnic identity. As a British-born woman in her 20s, many of her photos and online activities showed her desire to live a cosmopolitanism lifestyle. Her choice of clothing and social circles were clearly representative of multiculturalism; however, her rather bold comments and approach on some societal and political issues were conservative in nature. This complements her interview comments on her family bond and values.

Interestingly, Tasha also used her social media to advocate against Covid vaccinations during the first phase of the vaccine rollout in the UK. She also regularly criticised her own political party (the Tories) for their handling of the global pandemic. In addition, during the online observation period, she retweeted and reposted political memes and stories on her social media. For instance, she left a comment saying "hopeless and useless" under a picture of Boris Johnson on Instagram. Moreover, she also posted about Black Lives Matter, accusing the movement's organisers of corruption.

### 4.1.4. The implications of macro-environmental (extrinsic) influences on acculturative political orientation

Semi-structured interviews with photo-elicitation exercises (online) and online observations explored the South Asian (im)migrants' perceptions and experiences of their host society in relation to various contexts. These included initial and post-migration perceptions of Britishness through various contexts, political polarisation, perceptions towards sustainability and climate change, and negative connotations towards immigration. In addition, participants' perceptions of Brexit and the European Union were elaborated, wherein both positive and negative perceptions can be identified. Moreover, excerpts surrounding the notion of the impact of Covid-19 and views on the generational gap also contributed towards a nuanced understanding of extrinsic environmental influences on South Asian (im)migrants.

As mentioned in section 4.1.1, one of the main intrinsic factors identified from the participants was the positive perception of having a better life for their families in the UK (financially, professionally, and personally). When asked what being 'British' meant to them, participants discussed a variety of dimensions and definitions based on life experiences, contextual examples, and associations with tangible and non-tangible items. For instance, Sylvia, an (im)migrant from India who came to the UK for her further studies in 2015, revealed:

> *When I think of being British, the first thing is the Royal Family. British people are very welcoming, accepting, and they respect your privacy and treat you equally, without any discrimination. I can't say it for everyone, but this is what I felt from my engagement with my local mates and work colleagues. Also, London is a diverse and multicultural city where your opinions, the way you*

*dress, your choice of lifestyle and activities were respected. People just mind their own business.*

The majority of the (im)migrants who identified themselves as first generation expressed positive associations or perceptions of Britain. They identified common themes and topics of common daily discussions in the mainstream society, discussing positive affirmations of their choices to move to Britain and expressing appreciation towards the host society. Therefore, the findings from this research provide evidence of acculturation strategies (integration and assimilation), as posited by Li et al. (2021) in their work on SIT and acculturation frameworks.

Priyanka, a university lecturer living with her partner in Manchester, provided her own narrative on Britishness:

*For me, British people always find a way to correctly say or approach issues. They are adventurous and open-minded. They love activities, travelling and all that. They are also very independent. I like how young people get a part-time job on their holidays and earn some money from a young age, which is something quite different to back home. Young people in our country are dependent on their parents. This society encourages independence and self-reliance. So yeah, that's how I can summed up about being British…*

In addition, she also added that she and her partner preferred to have a tight friendship circle with a small group of other Indian people rather than engaging with the wider Indian community from their own background. Her excerpts exhibit a sense of in-group favouritism (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). However, despite their desire to have a sense of in-group (i.e., Indian friends) in their social circle, Priyanka's comments during her interviews showed her identity on a multi-dimensional spectrum (Dey et al., 2019), as she nurtured and supported the concept of multiculturalism and fluidity for wider societal issues. She advocated women's and LGBTQIA+ rights, and possessed a passion for promoting sustainability, such as recycling and reducing food waste.

Another participant, Faris, originally from Bangladesh, who worked in retail, expressed respect and gratitude for British laws and regulations for (im)migrants like him. When asked about what he thought of Britain, he replied:

*I actually get used to living here without thinking it too much. I am very proud to be British. For example, when I hear or see controversial issues in Bangladesh, it makes me realise how lucky I am. I find the rule of law in Britain very much accommodating for immigrants like us.*

However, besides the many positive discussions about Britain amongst the first generation (im)migrants, there was also strong evidence of personal opinions and perceptions, as elaborated by Razin, a naturalised citizen from Bangladesh. He shared his opinions during our interview session as follows:

*Question: You mentioned briefly about British values and what being British is, but I want to ask you if you can elaborate on that matter as a naturalised citizen?*

*Razin: Sure… to be open-minded, liberal, respectful to the value systems, progressive opinion and perceptions: these are the underlying philosophies. I am a republican myself and I do not believe in monarchy. I think that is where I have got doubt in myself, I cannot integrate fully because I am so critical of the Royal Family. But I also consider Britain as a place where [the] Suffragette movement took place more than 100 years ago, where [the] industrial revolution originated, liberty and freedom, so in many respects Britain is much more progressive than many other countries. I have also created an anonymous social media to reflect my own views without any distractions from outsiders.*

The above excerpts show a wide range of opinions within (im)migrant communities. Razin's comments supported his desire to create a different persona on an online platform where he could be expressive without any judgements from his own family and culture. By extracting the deeply-rooted values that are intertwined between ideological values and cosmopolitanism, the findings provide a further understanding of why he decided to compartmentalise his identity using social media to create an 'unapologetic version of himself'. This adds to the complex dynamic layers of multiple identities that can exist amongst South Asian (im)migrants.

On the topic of identity and their observations of what their host society experience has shown them, Javi from Pakistan also argued that British people do not have a clear sense of identity. She described the British people as 'lost', with no sense of community. Her response emphasised the importance of collective societal norms and values:

> *I find British people quite lost in their sense of identity. This is where our ethnic values and beliefs do come into play, as a lot of my British friends do not believe in any values, religion, or belonging to a certain community. I think the connection between their family members is quite different from South Asian collective societies – for example, simple thing like saying 'We' instead of 'I' for a lot of things that we do.*

Javi's responses during the interviews were in line with her social media activities, as she shared a number of Instagram stories in relation to community events and religious celebrations such as Eid. However, her use of social media platforms was solely guided by her desire to share her own personal interest. This was apparent when she claimed that she loved social media for connecting like-minded people but only for meaningful purposes that suited her interests. Gathering her excerpts during the interview about her political engagement and orientations, it emerged that she represented an ethnic (im)migrant who was politically separated and orientated by conformation underpinned by self-interest.

From the findings, tangible items of what the host society can mean to (im)migrants can also be observed. For instance, Gurdi, a 44-year-old working in finance, described how she identified as British through her British passport, which gave her the legal right and freedom to live and work in this country. She also added how she felt integrated (positive evolution) into British society by watching British drama and television, noting and appreciating differences in language and slang.

However, the situation is different for Faris: despite saying that he felt privileged and proud to have become British through naturalisation, he also shared a deeply-rooted personal opinion when he was asked about his personal circumstances in a contextual situation. Due to negative experiences during his post-migration period, he developed a sense of being part of an out-group as a British minority citizen. This meant that the stages of his evolution stages (as posited

in Study Objective 2 – 'acculturative journey') involved a mixture of negative and positive affiliations. He expressed his views by saying:

> *So my experience living here has been a bit of a mix feeling actually. Being an ethnic minority, I feel like the white British population are less warm and welcoming to me. However, being in London, where we have a good number of Bengali community, I always have friends and family to hang out with. For example, when I went to the US, I feel like people are more open-minded and welcoming than in the UK in general. This is my personal experience and I cannot speak for everyone or generalise it.*

In a similar vein, Phil, who was British-born, agreed with some of the points made by Faris. During his interview, he elaborated on what he thought of British culture:

> *British culture is known for its conservative values and being a 'stiff upper lip' society. I get it when people say we are cold and rude sometimes. Although I came from a non-white background, I grew up in a white area. Most of my friends from school and university are white people. I think I am probably thinking of my identity as more mainstream British than my ethnicity. I never think of my skin colour or my appearance when I think of British people. Being born and bred in London, diversity is always there from day one.*

Although the participants in this study were significantly different in terms of age, occupation, religion and ethnic expressions, their responses showed some degree of similarity in their positive affiliations. These include the importance of education, family, faith, and acceptance of the multicultural Western ethos, to a certain extent. However, differences can be highlighted between the younger and older generations of (im)migrants. The idea of acceptance and embracement of a person regardless of their choices in life was noted by the majority of the younger participants. Due to the complex intricacies of South Asian values and ideologies, which were engrained in their attitudes and behaviour from their ancestors, the notion of a generational gap on views and practices is one that cannot be dismissed from the findings. Cathy, a 27-year-old who worked in the beauty industry, explained her frustrations with this issue:

> *Being a millennial who is open-minded and respectful of other people's cultures and backgrounds, I do enjoy and interact with my community to a certain extent. However, I find it difficult when I interact with the older generations in my family – they have a different upbringing where their views are quite limited. They are very rigid and stubborn in their own ways; they will never consider anything other than what they think is right. This is the reason why I rather not get myself into a situation that I can't control much. I think there is a problem in the generation gap.*

Gurdi, from a Gujarati background, described her take on generational differences from a different angle. Determined to champion her liberal values, she revealed that attending occasional drinks after work with her friends was likely to be condemned by her parents, and vowed not to carry these traditional views on to her own children. She elaborated:

> *I want the best for my kids. My parents raised me in a conservative household and I never feel like I truly accept their traditional views. As a mum in her 40s now, I have a completely different approach for my kids. They have been taught to be humble, kind, and hard-working. With determination and belief, they can be anything they want to be. I will always support and give them advice when they needed me.*

Similarly, Karisma, a teacher from North London, described this notion of generational gap and differences in relation her own family and their migration history. She believed that she would always identify as British. As a second-generation immigrant, she also expressed her association and integration into Western society by practising and becoming involved with Christian events such as Christmas holidays and Easter celebrations despite identifying as a practicing Hindu. Her acceptance of Western culture and identity came from her personal experience of socialisation with cultural outsiders throughout her life. For example, meeting people from all walks of life from her time at school, university and in the workplace had made her ethnic identity into a dynamic construct.

### 4.1.5. Attitudes towards societal and political issues

It is vital to unpack the extent of an ethnic individual's degree of involvement in terms of their personal significance and interest, with special attention to attitudes and values, which can act as drivers towards their objectivity of involvement (Evans et al., 2009). This, in turn, can become instrumental in accomplishing their specific values and life goals.


Picture 2: Protest and marches on a global scale (Source: Google Images)

The impetus to examine ethnic (im)migrants' relationships with and engagement in societal and political issues is not only confined to political orientation or voting intentions. For instance, younger people often show a lower level of political talk and engagement (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2022), but they are also the most active and engage in platforms such as social media. In addition, they are also the group who can benefit the most from exposure to political and societal information through engagement. From the findings of the present study, South Asian (im)migrants from the younger generation were seen to show great enthusiasm and passion when discussing issues such as climate change and sustainability.

As a part of the photo-elicitation exercise, Ravi, a marketing manager from a Sikh background, living in Southhall, gave his opinions and views on societal and political issues such as sustainability and workers' rights:

> *Climate change is something I am quite passionate about. I want our future generations to have a cleaner and greener world, so, I personally practice small little things in my personal life. I cut down my waste, recycle most of my stuffs and always find ways to minimise my carbon footprint in one way or another. It might not seem a lot to people but it makes me happy to do my bit in tackling the climate change issues and I will continue to do so.*

When showed images of a farmers' protest in India, he expressed:

> *I feel for the farmers and I think they deserve to have a voice that will give them a fair right to their work and also their mental-wellbeing.*

Cathy, a beautician who lived in Hertfordshire, also elaborated her appreciation for the work that the younger generation had initiated:

> *I think it is such a great initiative that younger generations are making their stance towards climate change to the government. If it wasn't for them, we will not talk about or know about it as much as we do today.*

Parvi, who resided in London, also mentioned her stance on this topic by calling out the relevant authorities:

> *With climate change protest, it is good that we are keeping it alive and our younger generations are taking it up, but it really comes down to the government and people who are responsible for this crisis. They are the ones who can introduce and make a change for a better future.*

However, the responses from some participants conveyed a different approach towards climate change. Drawing upon the recent example of protest, Sammy, a post-graduate student from India, said:

> *I support climate change and I think it is super important that we should reduce our plastic waste and other important stuffs in our daily lives. But, the recent protest of Extinction Rebellion in London was just wrong to me. I think most of this youngsters are just doing it for fun and attention. Why would you disrupt people's lives by blocking roads? It doesn't sit well with me.*

Similarly, Rishil, a musician and law graduate, also pointed out his concerns about protest and marches during our photo-elicitation exercise:

> *If you see all these photos, they represent causes and meanings where are very important for our progressive society. However, when you see protesters who use violence and vandalism in their protest, they destroy the whole point. When I flick through my social media and see these type of videos, particularly Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion, I feel angry and frustrated. It is very annoying.*

In order to capture the various dimensions of extrinsic influences for evaluating ethnic (im)migrants' acculturative political orientation, this research also sought to explore the perspectives of South Asian (im)migrants towards the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their personal lives, their communities, and their well-being. Since Covid-19 was declared a global pandemic in March 2020, there is scope to explore how ethnic (im)migrants perceived the diverse information that was disseminated through social media, such as the impact of lockdown measures and protests such as the anti-mask movement on the ethnic community. In addition, this section will also help the author to identify whether global events such as Covid-19 will complement and/or contrast the participants' political identity, expressions and orientation that were collated and captured during the interview sessions.

Firstly, issues of mental health and psychological well-being were widely expressed by the participants. The findings provide clear evidence that the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown

had an immense impact on their social well-being due to self-isolation and feelings of loneliness. Sylvia, an Indian citizen, who lived far away from her family during the pandemic, said:

> *My mental health was not good at all during the first lockdown. I feel so lonely at times and I was frustrated with the whole situation, and I don't know what to do. It was such a weird period in my life that I don't want to revisit: hopefully it will never happen again. Thank God for technology. I have constantly FaceTime my family and friends on a daily basis; zoom parties and games was such a life saver too. Constantly seeing the same four walls was not fun at all.*

Although the acculturative experience during the Covid-19 pandemic was deemed to be difficult, Sylvia's experience was supported and facilitated by the rising digital consumer culture, which helped to diminish the gap between her virtual and real lives (Dey et al., 2018), thus serving as a coping strategy during the global pandemic.

Regarding the impact of Covid-19, the majority of the participants stated that the guidance and support they received from the UK government was inconsistent and showed no sign of trust, transparency or clarity. Nikita, a second generation (im)migrant, expressed her frustration and disappointment as she commented on how the pandemic was handled by the Tories. Moreover, during the online observation period, Nikita also shared the infamous Tory lockdown garden party photo on her social media. She captioned the photo as 'Shame on all of you'. During her interview, she said:

> *Since that news broke out about many Covid-19 rules being broken by government officials, I think it is fair to say I don't believe in any of these non-sense pity high school drama stuffs. I am quite frustrated in how we are so delusional about the Covid-19 situation. At the time, we all believe that the government are doing the best for us, but we were so wrong. Those rules don't apply for them; it is unbelievable.*

As posited by Smith and French (2009) regarding how a political party can break its credibility and lose the trust of eligible voters, the excerpts above demonstrate an interesting dimension. Nikita was a Brexiteer but a supporter of the Labour party. The findings show the complex

dynamic nature of political orientation that one can possess. She encompassed a political orientation that can be classified as 'complexity with caveats' (Study Objective 1), as she defied the stereotypical notion of Labour party supporters as Remainers in the Brexit referendum. Although her intrinsic ideological values remained unchanged, her stance and opinions on extrinsic influences were fluid and dynamic. This is the reason why value-driven acculturation is an emerging area, where multiple layers of drivers and motivators can be extracted from ethnic (im)migrants. In addition, referring to the online observation notes, Nikita was a 'politically embracive' (typology from Study Objective 3) citizen who had an active social media profile where she posted and commented on several high profile political and societal issues. These personal posts can sometimes be deemed controversial and highly sensitive. She regularly commented and shared tweets and stories to her online followers during the observation period.

In light of the disparity and disappointment faced by some of the participants during the pandemic, the author sought to further elicit and provoke real emotions and feelings towards Covid-19. In so doing, when the author showed a photograph of an anti-mask protest (Picture 2, above) during the photo-elicitation exercise, the majority of the participants strongly disagreed with the anti-mask movement. Despite all the other issues and problems that they had personally felt during the pandemic, wearing masks to reduce the transmission of the virus was a top priority. Hence, it can be argued that the findings show a strong indication towards the importance of having a collective society to benefit the community and the country.

Comments from the participants during the photo-elicitation exercise can be seen in the excerpts below:

> *Question: Do you mind sharing your thoughts and ideas on anti-mask protests?*
>
> *Puia: In regards to no mask movement, I am against that completely. I believe that we all have to do our part in fighting against this awful virus. To be ignorant and being selfish without having any care for the society or the community we live in doesn't sit right with my values.*

Similar views were echoed by Ravi, who prioritised his care and respect for the community and the country. Despite his awareness of democracy and the entitlement to freedom of speech, he made the following comment:

> *From all the pictures you have shown me, the only movement that doesn't resonate to me is anti-mask movement. I believe that our pandemic is real and a lot of our community members I know are suffering from serious illness, and some of them sadly lost their lives. I get that it is a free society where you can have a freedom of speech and opinions, but in this protest, the fact that they go out and about without having a care or respect for public health and safety is not something that I can support.*

Although the majority of the participants disagreed with anti-mask protests, both Raki (British-born) and Javi (first-generation immigrant) expressed different opinions. Both expressed their reasons as follows:

> *Raki: With the anti-mask protest, I am in two minds. Personally, I wear mask to protect my family especially my dad who is vulnerable, so, I will always put safety first. But I do agree that everyone has the right of freedom to spread their opinions and voices. I understand it from that point of view, but I don't necessarily agree with it. Everyone can do what they want, it doesn't bother me.*

> *Javi: I have very mixed feelings about Covid-19 in general. All these political parties use the fear tactic as an advantage, so, the reason why I don't like lockdown is that every message is so mixed and so confusing. The one rule which I cannot take seriously was when you can take your mask off when you sit down to eat at the restaurants. Who comes up with all these silly rules?* [Participant laughs]

Furthermore, the findings also revealed an interesting comment when Rishil, a musician who also worked within legal practice, highlighted the impact of the anti-mask movement on businesses and employees. He explained that he offered legal advice during the pandemic where he observed cases between workers and their employers with regard to mask wearing in the workplace:

> *The employment tribunal has now come out that if you refuse to comply with mask wearing, depending on circumstances, you can be compelled to wear a mask. If you refuse to wear it, it can lead to dismissal. I think it is important to find the right balance here.*

The South Asian (im)migrants' perceptions and understandings of the extrinsic influences of the macro-environment show the distinct and unique challenges that they encountered due to cultural, economic, and political variances. This information can be used as guidance for the formation of strategies (with practical and managerial implications) that can be helpful in policy-making or political marketing towards South Asian communities in Britain.

### 4.1.6. Political acculturative orientation

As discussed earlier, by identifying and understanding the implications and the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, the different dynamics of acculturative orientation towards politics can be drawn from the findings. In order to comprehend and analyse the various categories of political orientation (Figure 6), the author elicited further information by asking about the participants' voting intentions and behaviour. Their political awareness, political interests, and opinions on the Brexit debate and the European Union also shed light on this interesting phenomenon. Data gathered during the research helped the author to understand how South Asian (im)migrants construe their political orientation within the realm of British politics.

In addition to the importance of alignment to personal values and beliefs, the influence of family, friends and social media sources was also a significant factor in understanding and defining where the participants' political interest and assumptions lie.

Abbie, a 34-year-old from London, described her political orientation with reference to how she had voted in past elections. She placed ethnic minority concerns and representation at the top of her list of priorities.

Picture 3: Labour and Conservative party logos (Source: Google Images)

When asked about her political awareness, she was very articulate and knowledgeable about British politics. During the photo-elicitation exercise (Photo 3), she was able to clearly define and identify the two major political parties and their symbols. She also claimed that her political awareness was derived from her desire to educate herself on current political affairs and events. Her excerpts also complemented her social media profile, as she was a keen political follower who shared regular updates that suited her interest (from online observation).

Abbie shared her political views during the interviews:

> *Yes, I have voted in most of the general elections. Me and my partner are quite leaning towards the left, and we have always voted Labour. If we didn't have political party like Labour who represent ethnic minority community like us, I don't think we will be in the same place in our today's society. Also, one more thing, I found it a little bit weird that in the last election, we got a letter from the Tories saying that we will do this and that for our community which is just laughable.*

The same patterns and political orientation can be seen in the response provided by Karisma, from a Hindu background, who also described the influence of her partner, friends and family:

> *A lot of my opinions and voting decisions comes from the influence of my friends, families, and partner. We have always support Labour party. All of the people that I know in our community in North London voted for Labour. As a British South Asian, I never feel conservative or have the mind-set to vote for Conservatives.*

The idea of the Labour party as a political group that represents ethnic minority interests is one that cannot be dismissed from the findings. In line with the existing study conducted by Dean et al. (2015) on the tentative framework of building a narrative to create trust and a sense of belonging, Mya and Ravi, fellow Londoners, also shared their views on Labour with strong propositions:

> *Mya: I am leaning towards Labour and that is how my family votes as well. I feel like Labour policies embrace economic, social justice, equality and diversity. As a liberal person, if there are policies that are against that, I will purposely protest or have a voice against that issues.*

> *Ravi: I live in a very dense Asian community and majority of us have always voted for Labour, so, I guess it came from the support and influence from my own family and community. Also, the fact that Labour party is known as working class party feels right for me. I feel seen and heard, and I can relate to many Labour supporters. I don't personally know any South Asian friends and family who vote for Conservatives.*

As much as the influence of friends and families was evident, the participants also felt strongly about having a political leader who could represent the South Asian community, as they sought community representation in Britain. Using his own personal socio-economic data as his reference, Faris made a comment that showed his resonance with and trust in the behavioural intentions of ex-Labour party leader Jeremy Corbyn (Susila et al., 2015). He said:

> *...I would describe myself as someone slightly lower than middle class family in the UK, so I don't have that much left to make ends meet at the end of the month, which makes me attracted towards Labour. Labour party represents people like me and also people from an ethnic minority background. That is the main reason why I vote for them: my personal values are very much aligned with Labour values. I also admire Jeremy Corbyn, so he makes me want to support Labour as well.*

It is also important to note that the support for political parties and their leaders went beyond the party itself. This reiterates and reifies how individuals' values and ethos can be an important facet for their voting behaviours and political associations. For instance, Puia, from the affluent area of Kingston-upon-Thames, South West London, demonstrated how important it is for a party leader to have the same outlook and ethos as him, which will define his voting intentions:

> *It comes down to who they are as a person and whether you can relate to their values and beliefs. I am quite neutral on political parties, but I strongly believe that if the party leader has no common ground with my beliefs, I don't think I will vote or associate with them. That will make me feel like their intentions and promises are not aligning to my own opinions. I would only vote based on their individual characteristics and what they would do for the community, the country and so on. I don't care about what ethnic group they belong to.*

Shahid, a 45-year-old professional, shared the same views, as he strongly disagreed with voting based on any similarities to his South Asian identity. He described his views passionately:

> *I have always voted and exercise my right to vote. In terms of my political affiliation, I have always voted for the ultimate party manifestos. If you think I will support or vote someone based on ethnicity or common grounds, that is a no for me. I will always vote for what manifestos are in place, such as the acceptance of equality, diversity, and inclusion. I don't care much about who they are or where they come from."*

Beyond the intricate notion of ideology and values, the South Asian (im)migrants showed a strong sense of independence and self-awareness. Similar to Shahid, Sammy, a postgraduate

student, explicitly expressed how he had switched between voting for Labour and the Liberal Democrats during his time in the UK. As a proud Commonwealth citizen, he intended to focus on the party manifestos and their alignment with his interests. He also mentioned that he had voted for the Liberal Democrats in the last general election.

Sammy's excerpts indicate that he believed that he could relate more to the Liberal Democrats' values than to those of any other political party. Despite knowing that there was a slim chance of them winning the majority, he chose to vote for a political party that best suited his self-interest. When prompted about his decision to switch his support, his responses resonated with Kizgin et al.'s (2019) work on the link between online and offline political acculturation. He said:

> *I am a keen social media user; I have used social media for over 10 years now. Since I was a teenager, I am always into politics, as my parents used to talk about it all the time. As I become older and more settled into the UK and its political systems, I have been an active voter. I feel very privileged to vote in the UK as a Commonwealth citizen, and I have always watch and follow political news online. I followed many political profiles on Instagram and Twitter: that is where I gather most of my political information.*

However, not all South Asian (im)migrants showed their support for Labour and its party representatives. Paradoxical and contrasting views can be observed from Rishil, who stated his personal choice and reasons for his alignment with the Tories:

> *Yes, I am aware and quite active on UK political affairs. Unlike most of my family and friends, I have no direct association with Labour party. I do vote for them ages ago, but recently I have voted the Tories. I don't personally like Boris, but, as a whole party, I think they have a stronger implication on a lot of issues, unlike Labour, particularly when Corbyn was in the leadership position. I do get a lot of questions around my support for Tories, but it is not that deep. I feel like people from South Asian background just voted for what their family members are voting. I am very independent, and I do like to make my own informed decisions.*

However, during the online observation, Rishil also posted political events on his social media to condemn the Tories. He condemned issues such as the breaking of the lockdown rules and the stories surrounding the ex-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Matt Hancock), which indicates the extent of the crisis of public trust towards the government (Nardelli, 2014). He shared his stories by using single or multiple emojis and gifs, expressing his emotions and feelings without using any words. For instance, he used a clapping emoji to convey his opinion when Matt Hancock resigned from his position in the government. In addition, Rishil's comments on political party leaders show the significant role of leadership image and reputation for understanding ethnic (im)migrants' political orientation.

Expressing a different opinion, Amarpal, a personal trainer from West London, explained how the recent political and economic issues had shifted her support for her long-term political party (i.e., Labour). She prioritised her best interest as a driver for her desire to change. During our interviews, she elaborated:

> *Since my family immigrate to the UK, we have always been a Labour supporter. I think it is partly due to us believing in the idea that Labour has our best interest at heart, but that is so stereotypical as well. I know I am one of them who voted Labour since I can remember. As I grow older and become independent, I am developing to become my authentic self. Since Covid-19 malarkey, my views on Labour or let's say any political party has shifted quite dramatically. No one really knows what they are doing – all they care about is their own personal political agenda. That is classic politics.*

Ethnic identity and its acculturation, construction and preservation can involve a constant negotiation of identity between host and home country (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019), within which the concept of developing one's conformation and desire to follow one's self-interest can be observed. As seen in the existing literature in the work of Jafari and Suerdem (2012), this acculturative political orientation reflects the concept of 'authorised selection' where South Asian (im)migrants are becoming more aware of their self-worth, independence, and capability without conforming to the pre-conceived traditional idea of ethnic politics in the host society.

Fuelled by macro-environmental factors such as globalisation, immigration, digital technology advancements and others, ethnic (im)migrants' mode and orientation for acculturation are susceptible to change throughout their lives.

The majority of the participants had voted for and expressed support for the Remain campaign in the Brexit referendum. As the author identified a gap in the current political acculturation literature, the semi-structured interviews elicited a nuanced understanding of the real feelings and perceptions towards the Brexit debate amongst the South Asian (im)migrants. Karisma, from North London, described her disappointment at the outcome of the referendum:

> *It was very unfortunate that we voted to leave. Personally, I was a remainer, and most of my close family and friends also believe to stay in the EU. I think the public were fed with lots of lies, scams and false promises on TV and all our digital online applications. I genuinely think people voted without knowing the core consequences of leaving the EU. We have now realised how big of a shambles and messy job it really is, so yeah – it is a shame.*

Ravi from Southall echoed this sentiment:

> *"For me, all I know since I was born is that we are always a part of the EU. I have voted to remain in the Brexit vote – I think there is more to gain than lose if we are a part of the European union. But at the end of the day, I also accepted the votes and try to see the positive sides of it. There is no point in dwelling in the "what if?" situation, as that is not going to resolve any issues for us.*

Although many participants expressed positive perceptions about the EU and its benefits, the findings indicated varying dimensions. For example, some ethnic (im)migrants from the South Asian community presented strong opinions on why they chose to vote for Brexit as an ethnic minority. This form of political orientation juxtaposes the idea of an (im)migrant (non-EU citizen) supporting another (im)migrant from the EU. This notion of voting behaviour by the South Asian (im)migrants provides this study with a fundamental foundation for understanding ethnic political acculturation.

Based on the questions asked, various reasons and motivations to leave the EU have been brought to the interview sessions.

> *Question: Can you also please elaborate your views on the EU and the Brexit vote, if you don't mind me asking?*
>
> *Rishil: I don't have any loyalty to the EU conditions or rights. I have never benefitted personally from any of these rights that comes with the EU apart from freedom of movement. The opportunity to go out of the EU was a chance for us to be more global, and also reduce the negative situation surrounding our immigration. Reforming an equal and fair immigration system for everyone was the right approach. There are so many who misuse the EU membership in the UK: that's the main reason why I believe in Brexit.*

The changes experienced by ethnic (im)migrants in their social interactions with others can ignite worries about social exclusion and inclusion, as they can face problems in their access to several rights and resources that are available to other groups (Inoi et al., 2017). In line with this literature, the comments provided by one Brexiteer (Faris), as set out below, describe his experience of unfair treatment and social exclusion practices in the host society. Drawing upon the issue of disparities in the immigration process between EU and non-EU citizens, he said:

> *Faris: Yes, I voted for Brexit, and I want us to leave. The main reason for me is two or three things, but the one that stands out the most is immigration disparity for us and European citizens. For example, around the Brexit referendum campaign, I have applied for a spouse visa for my wife to come to the UK from Bangladesh. I have to accumulate more than £3000 for visa fees. On the other hand, an EU citizen can bring their partners just for a fraction of that price. That situation makes me feel so disappointed in our immigration disparity and unequal treatment towards non-EU people. That was the main reason: I believe everyone should have a fair chance to immigrate to Britain.*

Interestingly, Faris's decision to vote for Brexit was underpinned by his personal experience of the immigration rules in the host society, but his ideology and values were still predominantly left-leaning (i.e., he was still a Labour supporter), as described above. His

narrative is a prime example and depiction of a multiple complex identity. As a Labour party supporter who voted for Brexit and who was neutral on LGBTQIA+ rights, Faris demonstrated the orientation of 'complexity with caveats' as coined by the author.

Another angle of opinions towards becoming a Brexiteer involves the topic of integration issues, as shared by Nikita:

> *In my opinion, they don't integrate into the British society. They have their own agenda: they claim benefits without working and contributing to the society. How can they do that from the day they immigrate? Non-EU citizens have to work so hard and spend so much money on visa applications and work permits to gain their right to live here. This is a big concern for me, I cannot get my head around with the fact that they have all these entitlements from the start without contributing anything to the UK economy.*

From the findings, it is clear that personal and familial issues and experiences over the residency period were prevalent. The issues of visa sponsorships, lack of equality between EU and non-EU citizens, issues of integration into British society and misuse of government schemes and funding were the prominent drivers. Interestingly, participants who fell into the 'complexity with caveats' category were mostly first-generation immigrants, who had moved to the UK for further studies and job opportunities.

***Data display for assessing South Asian (im)migrants' disposition and expression of their values and their political orientation:***

| Key insights into data codes | Selected Sample Quote |
|---|---|
| Motivations/reasons for migration | *"I came here to pursue my education and get a proper career. I genuinely believe that studying and living in the UK offers me a great platform for my career ambitions. I have always wanted to be an entrepreneur in my life, and I believe that UK has given me that opportunity. I am very integrated into the British culture and I [have] fulfilled my lifelong dream of owning a business regardless of my background." (Puia)*<br><br>*"So, firstly, my dad came to this country in the 70s to study. Around the same time, we had a civil war in Sri Lanka. Because we are from a Tamil background, which is a minority in Sri Lanka, my parents, along* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *with a lot of others, left Sri Lanka to escape the war. They came here in the 80s. I was born in 1986 in London and have been living in North London pretty much all my life. In fact, my mum still works for our primary school as a teaching assistant after all these years." (Mya)* |
| Components of ethnic identity | *"Being a Muslim girl in her 20s, I am also very aware of my own ethnic roots despite us living in a world where online exposure is a norm. So, my sense of identity could perhaps be a combination of traditional and modern, in a way. I have a very good upbringing, and being a millennial, I have a lot of freedom, education, and political awareness. The one thing that have worked for me is that I have not become an extremist in my views and opinions. That has made me understand how to make a rational decision without insulting anyone." (Javi)*<br><br>*"I have a very pragmatic approach towards it: being a non-practicing religion background, it has given me the opportunity to adopt various lifestyles and elements of the UK culture. So, my flexibility with food habits, mixing with other people, going out for a pint with friends or have bacon and cheese burger has been with me from the start. The other thing that I also realised was that coming to this country as a very proud nationalist person, that sense of national pride is also gradually disappearing. I have now started to see the difference between nationalism and patriotism, and that has certainly made me think and change over time." (Razin)* |
| Extrinsic influences on acculturative political orientation | *"So my experience living here has been a bit of a mix feeling actually. Being an ethnic minority, I feel like the white British population are less warm and welcoming to me. However, being in London, where we have a good number of Bengali community, I always have friends and family to hang out with. For example, when I went to the US, I feel like people are more open-minded and welcoming than in the UK in general. This is my personal experience and I cannot speak for everyone or generalise it." (Faris)*<br><br>*"Being a millennial who is open-minded and respectful of other people's cultures and backgrounds, I do enjoy and interact with my community to a certain extent. However, I find it difficult when I interact with the older generations in my family – they have a different upbringing where their views are quite limited. They are very rigid and stubborn in their own ways; they will never consider anything other than what they think is right. This is the reason why I rather not get myself into a situation that I can't control much. I think there is a problem in the generation gap." (Cathy)*<br><br>*"I want the best for my kids. My parents raised me in a conservative household and I never feel like I truly* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *accept their traditional views. As a mum in her 40s now, I have a completely different approach for my kids. They have been taught to be humble, kind, and hard-working. With determination and belief, they can be anything they want to be. I will always support and give them advice when they needed me." (Gurdy)* |
| Attitudes towards societal and political issues | *"If you see all these photos, they represent causes and meanings where are very important for our progressive society. However, when you see protesters who use violence and vandalism in their protest, they destroy the whole point. When I flick through my social media and see these type of videos, particularly Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion, I feel angry and frustrated. It is very annoying." (Rishil)*<br><br>*"I support climate change and I think it is super important that we should reduce our plastic waste and other important stuffs in our daily lives. But, the recent protest of Extinction Rebellion in London was just wrong to me. I think most of this youngsters are just doing it for fun and attention. Why would you disrupt people's lives by blocking roads? It doesn't sit well with me." (Sammy)* |
| Political acculturative orientation | *"A lot of my opinions and voting decisions comes from the influence of my friends, families, and partner. We have always support Labour party. All of the people that I know in our community in North London voted for Labour. As a British South Asian, I never feel conservative or have the mind-set to vote for Conservatives." (Karisma)*<br><br>*"I have always voted and exercise my right to vote. In terms of my political affiliation, I have always voted for the ultimate party manifestos. If you think I will support or vote someone based on ethnicity or common grounds, that is a no for me. I will always vote for what manifestos are in place, such as the acceptance of equality, diversity, and inclusion. I don't care much about who they are or where they come from." (Shahid)*<br><br>*"Since my family immigrate to the UK, we have always been a Labour supporter. I think it is partly due to us believing in the idea that Labour has our best interest at heart, but that is so stereotypical as well. I know I am one of them who voted Labour since I can remember. As I grow older and become independent, I am developing to become my authentic self. Since Covid-19 malarkey, my views on Labour or let's say any political party has shifted quite dramatically. No one really knows what they* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *are doing – all they care about is their own personal political agenda. That is classic politics." (Amarpal)*<br><br>*"Yes, I voted for Brexit, and I want us to leave. The main reason for me is two or three things, but the one that stands out the most is immigration disparity for us and European citizens. For example, around the Brexit referendum campaign, I have applied for a spouse visa for my wife to come to the UK from Bangladesh. I have to accumulate more than £3000 for visa fees. On the other hand, an EU citizen can bring their partners just for a fraction of that price. That situation makes me feel so disappointed in our immigration disparity and unequal treatment towards non-EU people. That was the main reason: I believe everyone should have a fair chance to immigrate to Britain." (Faris)*<br><br>*"In my opinion, they don't integrate into the British society. They have their own agenda: they claim benefits without working and contributing to the society. How can they do that from the day they immigrate? Non-EU citizens have to work so hard and spend so much money on visa applications and work permits to gain their right to live here. This is a big concern for me, I cannot get my head around with the fact that they have all these entitlements from the start without contributing anything to the UK economy." (Nikita)* |

## 4.2: South Asian (im)migrants' acculturation journey in the host society

After identifying the emerging themes from the value-driven acculturative political orientation, the following questions can be raised: how did the South Asian (im)migrants perceive their migration journey from the start to their current state? Did they experience any difficulties? In answering these questions, account needs to be taken of three important stages encountered by the participants. Their personal stories and how they navigate these stages were captured in the findings. In order to explore the fundamental underlying drivers that can perpetuate the notion of how easy or difficult their acculturation journey is, the findings indicate three stages of ethnic (im)migrants' acculturative process.

The first of these steps involved South Asian (im)migrants' exposure to the host society by using contextual situations: social, personal, and work settings. The second was their personal experience: making sense of digital consumer culture and social media participation. Finally,

evolution as a phase incorporated positive and negative evolution, which work in tandem, where both sides feed back into the overall outcome of individual evolutions. Evolution includes adjustments to lifestyle and progression towards embracing multiculturalism; on the other hand, acknowledgement and existence of prejudice and discrimination were also noted.

### 4.2.1. Social, personal, and work settings

The emerging themes from the data encompassed the notion of personal, social, and work contexts to evaluate the stages of exposure. The process of community engagement amongst the South Asian community as a collective celebration resonated with Abbie. She described how she and her family had rebuilt the fundamental aspects of being South Asian through exposure to and creation of new connections with like-minded people in the host communities. She explained how her passion as a classical musician had brought this sense of belonging and social inclusion:

> *I certainly engage with my South Asian friends and community, mainly through my music hobbies and passion. I used to work for a prolific British Pakistani artist, so I engage with that community as well. A lot of my close friends are from South Asian background. With my musical background and network, we build a great social circle who have the same musical interest.*

Following such discussions of exposure, Sammy, a post-graduate student, explained his acculturation journey by using an example of his own education in the UK. He said:

> *I have been in the UK for almost a decade. Because of the opportunity and the high quality of education that I have received over the years, I am a different man in every way now. My confidence, my communication and social skills have gone through the roof. Studying, working, and socialising with people from multiple backgrounds changed my life. I am who I am today because I have the platform to put myself out there.*

Coming from a different angle, Razin, a British Bangladeshi, also shared how he and his family had compartmentalised their exposure. He said:

*When it comes to community engagement, me and my partner engage differently with the wider community on a personal and professional level.*

He also added that community engagement and socialisation practices can be viewed differently between the South Asian community and the mainstream society:

*OK, so two ways: one is personal or social and then one is professional. So, in our personal interaction, it is still very defined and confined within our own community. As a family, we celebrate all kinds of festivals and cultural events. For example, during Christmas season, we will try to go away and enjoy the festivities. In 2015, we went to the countryside and stayed in a nice hotel, and we quite enjoyed that.*

He further elaborated:

*We would love to connect with non-South Asian people, but because, you know, in London, people are so scattered. The other thing is English people don't really invite you to their homes. They usually socialise in restaurants and pubs, and it can be very expensive for many people. In our South Asian culture, our interactions are based on visiting someone else's house. Also, what I noticed over the years is that people keep their professional network in their workplace. I find that British people only visit relatives in their houses, but in our community, it is quite the opposite.*

From the above excerpts, the South Asian (im)migrants strongly advocated social support networks, social inclusion and community belonging in their personal and social settings. However, some of the participants had different views on this issue. Their responses demonstrate their determination to challenge their ethnic boundaries and expose themselves to the wider society. Priyanka, a 41-year-old lecturer of Indian origin and a naturalised British citizen, explained her view towards community engagement in the host country:

*For the past 12 years, we have try to take the positives of what Britain has taught us. Where I came from, everything is all socially defined and constructed. But, in the UK, we have the freedom to create our own individual identity, so*

> *we have adopted that approach as a part of our identity over time. I find it very difficult to socialise with people who don't appreciate or have the same mind-set as us. We certainly have adopted British culture in the way we speak, our change of accents and understanding local Manchester slangs. All our social circles have a very similar outlook and mind-set which makes it easier for compatibility.*

The situation was similar for Heni, who was also of Indian origin but had been raised in Mauritius. She expressed the same attitudes and perceptions as Priyanka. When she was asked about her exposure to the development of an ethnic identity in a mainstream society, she replied:

> *I was born and raised in Mauritius from an Indian background. I find it difficult to connect with people or find similar people like myself. Maybe I haven't ventured out much, but I would say I am not a huge fan of community engagement with my own people. Most of my friends are from multicultural background from various countries. That is why London is the best place to live – you get the best of everything.*

These views and perceptions provided by the participants show a diverse set of ways in which one can choose to expose oneself to the wider society. This knowledge enhances our understanding of diverse ethno-cultural communities, and also exhibits a broader social, political, and economic understanding of respondents' barriers and experiences as (im)migrants within the host communities. Furthermore, socialisation and interaction with cultural outsiders from multiple backgrounds also had a strong bearing on (im)migrants' motivation to stay in the UK. This can be linked to their cultural and lived experiences, such as time spent in the UK as a student.

The desire for multi-cultural interactions was a priority for many of the participants. Javi, from Pakistan, decided to stay in London after her studies. Her responses reflect her desire to become a global citizen through the exposure and opportunities that came in her direction. She passionately described her appreciation for this matter in a work context:

*I have lived here for a number of years. The fact that I enjoyed my life and have friends from multicultural background is what makes me want to settle here. I have successfully built my career and have amazing work experiences and colleagues so far. I only go back to Pakistan for holidays to meet my family and friends. I come from a country where we don't really have a huge tourism which means that we are not exposed to various cultures as we do here. Every time I go back to Pakistan, I can see why UK is so much more progressive than my home country.*

In line with Javi, Faris, a first generation (im)migrant from Bangladesh and Raki, a second generation (im)migrant from Sri Lanka, also shed a light on how their socialisation with different cultures had shaped and formed their sense of knowledge through their exposure at their respective workplaces.

*Raki: When it comes to work environment, I met and work with people from all walks of life. I engage with everyone and get the opportunity to learn other cultures through my work as well. This really balance and remind me to appreciate my life. I have learnt so much over the years at work by just simply working with people from different background. That's the beauty of living in London: it is a such an amazing inspirational place.*

*Faris: As a worker in retail, you basically meet anyone and everyone. I have worked with amazing and inspiring people over the course of my career. I don't think I will have this opportunity in Bangladesh. You never stop learning and that's what makes it exciting for me.*

Another participant, Phil – a British Indian who worked in higher education – also explained his story through his work context:

*As you can imagine, working in higher education is like the pinnacle for experiencing multicultural society and values. Being in the industry for over 20 years, I can honestly say the exposure and opportunity is endless. I have managed to work and support students and staff from all backgrounds. Although you will certainly face challenges at work, I find that these challenges*

*are a part of my personal development. When you see your students graduate and succeed in life, it is a feeling that makes everything so worth it.*

The findings from the data reveal the modern politics of identity as an inclusive plural society where exposure (in personal, work, and social settings) and boundary spanning can facilitate ethnic (im)migrants' development. It can provide creativity and opportunities for them to link with out-group members to negotiate their multiple identities (Dokko et al., 2013; Schotter and Abdelzaher, 2013).

### 4.2.2. Digital consumer culture and social media

As part of this research, it is important to elicit a further understanding of how the convenience and connectedness provided by social media and other forms of digital technologies promote acculturation beyond the user's own community (Yen and Dey, 2019). Coinciding with the surge in popularity of radical left- and right-wing political views across the West (Dey et al., 2020), the lifestyle led by post-modern ethnic consumers is becoming bolder and more transparent. Facilitated by the advancements in social media platforms, it enables ethnic (im)migrants to break traditional barriers to have their voices heard (Ali et al., 2019). This notion of digital consumer culture brings a new perspective for the ethnic community where it does not matter if it lacks or contravenes their liberal ethos (Jamal et al., 2019).

This research found that the majority of participants' motivation and presence on online platforms rested on their desire and aspirations to educate themselves and to develop their knowledge from online sources by seeking new information: for instance, consuming the latest trends and news by engaging, listening, or simply absorbing information from the online (virtual) communities. This new wave of digital power can give rise to a multiple identity existence amongst ethnic (im)migrants. In particular, younger generations as a segment stood out, as their social media activities and purpose represented a different layer of complexity which warranted further analysis.

Parvi, a British Indian, admitted that social media was the foundation for her knowledge and an avenue to keep up with the latest trends. Interestingly, as a vivid social media user, she was very cautious and aware of the negative implications of online platforms. She stressed the

importance of seeing the positive sides of online media, thereby compartmentalising her usage of online apps in a way that suited her needs. Parvi reflected on her personal journey by saying:

> *I find the visualisations on these apps very engaging. They can trigger your feelings and emotions. It educates me in different ways. There are negative sides to using social media. I made sure that I will not be addicted to it and only follow content that I enjoy. When it comes to social media addiction, I was a victim a few years ago. For example, when I went out for a meal in a restaurant with my friends, I will always be on Instagram and constantly take pictures to share on my social channels. I am a lot better with my relationship to social media now, [but] it went to a bad place.*

When prompted to further elaborate her responses, she said:

> *I was constantly comparing my life to others on Instagram and become really unhappy. I was unproductive at work; I lost my confidence and have no excitement with life. Then, I seek help from my family and friends, which is the best thing I have done. Without their support, I don't know where I will be today.*

Interesting findings also emerged in relation to the nature of social media usage as an addictive and appealing factor (negative experience). Talking about his perceptions towards the constant exposure and consumption of online content, Amitab, from North London elaborated:

> *I don't admit that I am addicted to my social media, but frankly speaking, I am. If you look at the amount of hours spend on Instagram and TikTok on my phone, it is shocking. The worrying thing is I don't even realise this is a problem. It is a part of my daily routine. It is pretty sad that I live like this. The weirdest thing is, although I know it is bad, I still do it.*

Use of social media platforms also presents an intriguing method of digital compartmentalisation. Rishil, a participant from an Indian background, sought compartmentalisation in his own way. Although he remained open-minded about discussing his views offline, his approach to the use of online platforms was different. He stated:

*Being on social media makes me filter or compartmentalise my behaviour, as there are certain things that I will not share online. I will happily discuss this stuff with my close friends or a family member over a catch-up coffee. It is one of those things that is really hard to give a definite answer. I guess I am afraid to say the wrong thing or if my views were twisted from its original posts. I like to keep many aspects of my work and personal life to myself.*

Rishil's experience of compartmentalising his activities on an online platform denotes the notion of 'Face-to-Facers', as suggested by Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2022), where individuals will only express their experiences to a small circle of people within their social and personal groups. Similarly, Phil, a British-born Indian, preferred to take extra caution when it came to absorbing news and information from a viral social media campaign. He stressed the importance of transparency and clarity, which he achieved by discussing the subjects with his friends and family before posting any contents on his personal social profile. He shared a similar concern to Rishil.

*Phil: With social media viral post and videos, you have to be on your best alert. As we have seen in the past few months, there will be so many false stories circulating our social media, such as conspiracy theories. For example, when Covid-19 first came around, my mum will constantly post random conspiracy posts about the virus on our family WhatsApp. I have a word with her to stop reading non-credible sources online.*

Despite the evidence of negative experiences in relation to digital consumer culture, the data also revealed how most of the ethnic (im)migrants were finding ways to navigate and balance their decisions and choices regarding their online participation. Sheena commented on her own take on social media:

*Every couple of months, I will have a detox on my social media. I am quite a sensitive person, so I will filter my following if I feel like my personality doesn't match with someone that I follow. I think you have to have a thick skin, and sometimes what we see can affect us in a negative way. Also, when you are a mum with kids, the amount of vile and inappropriate post that I come across*

*really shock me. It really scares me when my kids will be old enough to use social media.*

Along the same lines as the excerpts above, Sammy, a postgraduate student, had a strong feeling towards categorising his usage of social media platforms for his own benefits and values:

*I use Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp. I also use Twitter and LinkedIn from time to time. It is funny how each platform delivers different functionality for me. For example, Instagram for inspiration and ideas, Facebook for connecting with family and friends and LinkedIn for work related stuffs.*

During the online observation period, Sammy followed a number of high-profile politicians and was a regular user of Instagram. He was very keen to retweet posts from a variety of sources. Sammy shared a number of Instagram stories about his views on political affairs in the UK, with his posts reflecting his support for left-wing political views. He expressed his emotions and feelings through the use of emojis such as sad faces and prayer signs on his social media page. This included sharing a number of pictures, articles, and stories to condemn the UK government (Tories). In addition, his comments on his use of various social channels for different functionalities were in line with his digital footprint. For instance, he regularly engaged with his professional network on LinkedIn by liking their comments and posts.

The idea of compartmentalisation has a key role when it comes to embracing and using social media features for the right reasons. Therefore, the data suggest that the blurry boundaries created by digital consumer culture (Dey et al., 2020) between individuals' private, social, and occupational lives can be challenge and revisited. The findings provide clear evidence that the majority of South Asian (im)migrants are educated and become digitally savvy in the host society, taking rational and curated considerations of to their digital presence.

In order to capture the extent to which the existence of social media and the use of technological devices have impacted the South Asian community, a number of other opinions were gathered during the interviews.

*Q: As we all use and consume digital media in our life, I wonder if your presence and usage of social media has influenced your attitudes, perceptions and opinions within yourself? Has it changed over the past few years?*

*Sylvia: I will say it does have an influence on who I am. As we live in a digital world where we are exposed to digital activities in our daily lives, I am affected in one way or another. If someone say it doesn't affect them, I will not believe them. The things that we read, watch, and consume will be with us subconsciously. I will give you an example: I love animals of all kind. I have followed so many dogs' and cats' profiles on my Instagram during lockdown. I am always afraid to take that step to own a pet. But recently, I had a long chat with my partner and we decided to adopt a cat. The best thing we have done. I suppose social media play a big part in this.*

In a similar vein, Puia, who was a fitness fanatic, shared his own narrative on social media. He followed a number of fitness influencers and participated in online home workouts via a subscription to an online fitness class. The author observed him posting a number of his workout sessions during the online observation period. He expressed his views on this question by saying:

*If someone posts content that you can relate to on Instagram or Facebook, you will read them and sometimes implement them in your own life in a positive way. Personally, I am a huge fitness fanatic. I struggle when the gyms were all closed down during lockdown one. I turned to Instagram to see if any of my following have a decent workout program. I found one through a recommendation from a friend, and I have been subscribing ever since. It totally shifts my mind towards my own fitness journey. Without social media, this will not happen to me.*

The majority of the participants' views and feelings towards digital culture were overwhelmingly positive. Ben, who migrated to the UK from India, shared how his digital presence in the host society had change his personal opinions during the post-migration period. Ben proclaimed that he had changed in every way, from an uptight and conservative person to someone who embraces diversity and inclusion. His exposure and experience of social media

played a vital role in his acculturation to British society. When asked about his opinions during the photo-elicitation exercise, he said:

> *This might be a bit controversial to some people. Before I came to the UK many years ago, I will say I am low-key racist. Back home, if you see a white person in the street, people will literally worship you and take your pictures. They will give you the best hospitality experience. You can imagine what it will be like for the opposite colour. So, when I came to London and see how diverse it is, I am in shock. Over the years, I have build up so much network from all walks of life and made connections with my social channels. I continue to learn and grow. This is so true when BLM movement came along – I learn to educate myself on Black history, and this is all happening because I am active on Instagram and Twitter.*

Following Ben's excerpts, while the South Asian (im)migrants voiced their reasoning and motivation to achieve a healthy balance in their social media usage, they also held strong perceptions of the recent protests and events that had occurred during the data collection period. As mentioned in the methodology section, the author elicited in-depth details on how participants had formed their attitudes, opinions and behaviour based on social media news and sources. As this research addresses acculturative journeys as one of the research gaps, the findings posit that online exposure and presence play a significant role in the formation of (im)migrants' multi-dimensional identities.

Razin, a naturalised British citizen from Bangladesh, reflected upon his journey over 16 years of residency in the UK. He explained his multiple layers of identity and his desire for change. From his own narrative of going through the stages of exposure, experience, and evolution, stages, his experience was clear:

> *I am a vivid social media user. For example, I used to support Russia, as I was brought up in a communist family. So, I always have that feeling and I was always anti-US, particularly Putin against the US. I even done some interviews back in 2012 to 2013, but gradually, I came to see that if I continue to support Russia, it would be against my acceptance of liberal views. I decided to come away from that mind-set.*

The above excerpt from Razin shows how an ethnic (im)migrant who claims to have conservative values in his early years of migration can shift and negotiate his identity over time.

Communication on social media enables political discourse from a traditional media to a social media platform, which has led to some new heights of traction and penetration within the Western democratic societies (Heo et al., 2016; Mosca and Quaranta, 2016). During the photo-elicitation exercise, Cathy, one of the participants, showed her appreciation for online platforms by saying:

> *The Black Lives Matter protest blew up on social media. Because of that, I feel so much more educated and aware of racial injustice, and the amount of work that we still have to do. I pay my respect to the BLM movement by posting BLM pictures and videos on my social media. Without our social media, it would not have the same effect as it does now.*

Sylvia also shared her opinions about online presence and experience by reflecting on the photographs shown to her:

> *I support all of these causes. The amount of how much change and progress a protest can bring is enormous. Think about gay rights – because of our older generations and their fight for equality, we now live in a society where gay people can live without any fear or discrimination. This is huge. That's why protest is very important. I also regular attend gay pride. I love it – it is so much fun.*

However, not all of the participants in this research shared the same values and outlook. Faris made a neutral comment during the photo-elicitation exercises. He shared his opinions on the LGBTQIA+ community, briefly describing their orientation as a lifestyle. When prompted by the author about his views, he decided to make no more comments. On a similar note, Ben, who claimed to have had a positive acculturation journey through his exposure and experience, articulated that he did not necessarily endorse the LGBTQIA+ community, although he stated that he would be respectful and mindful of their personal choices.

### 4.2.3. Acculturation as an evolution: positive and negative aspects

Social integration is a key aspect of community life, and is particularly important for (im)migrants as a means to interact with the majority population in various contexts. Social support and recognition from both the host and co-ethnic sources can be an important source that promotes adaptation and buffers the effects of adjusting to the host society when one feels foreign to one's new environment.

Online observations and interviews identified that the participants' values and beliefs did not appear to limit their flexibility and acknowledgement of embracing diversity and inclusion. As discussed before, the findings reiterate the impact of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism that one can experience through exposure. Talking about their migration journey by using various contextual examples, a mixture of positive and negative allegiance to evolution can be drawn from the data.

Despite coming from a religious Christian society in North East India, Puia had fully adapted and balanced his views and behaviour between the host and home society. Reflecting upon the last decade of his time in London, he expressed his feelings about liberalism and diversity:

> *Being an Indian resident from a tiny state, you can still practice what you believe in, such as your faith and culture. At the same time, you can also be your authentic self. That is the highlight of living in Britain for me. I can live in harmony with various cultural beliefs, religions, and values. Although I call London home now, it doesn't mean I disregard my own background and cultural roots. My patriotic feeling for UK and India is very much on the balance.*

The situation was similar for Razin, a first-generation immigrant from Bangladesh. Razin's parents lived in Bangladesh, and he lived in the UK with his wife and children. He explained his views towards embracing diversity and liberalism through his own life experiences:

> *Question: So, do you think possessing all these multiple identities has allowed you to integrate smoothly into the British culture?*

*Razin: It is a good question. It is paradoxical. Since it was not automated and gradually nurtured, I have to rationalise myself, and that requires me to be increasingly politically correct. I am always conscious that my behaviour should be integrative and inclusive. This means that I will have to minimise any form of xenophobia, which makes me extremely conscious of my social media integration. If I think back of a few years ago, I was quite vocal about certain political events, which is not good for integration. I realised later that upholding those stereotypical thoughts will not be good for me.*

*Question: Were there any particular turning points for you, then?*

*Razin: By meeting other people from different background, I realised that we cannot change each other views. I get on very well with so many people from different cultures, and it was a nice feeling. I cannot jeopardise that relationship.*

Both Razin and Puia demonstrated their desire to expand and challenge their own ethnic cultural values and family views, which happened through the scope of interaction with members of other ethnic communities and mainstream society. This notion of embracing an open mind towards liberalism and diversity during the post-migration period is undeniable from the findings: that is, positive experiences can lead to a positive evolution phase.

It is very clear that South Asian (im)migrants have formed multiple layers of identity throughout their post-migration period. This involves learning, acknowledging, appreciating, and embracing change within themselves to become multicultural citizens in their host society. As seen in the case of Razin's transformation story, similar thoughts can be echoed in Sylvia's comments:

*When I first arrived to the UK, I tend to hang around with people of my own background and origin. But over time, I made lots of new connections from university and my workplace. I believe it is incredibly important to form a new friendship with people outside your own circle. It also makes life easier, in a way: sometimes a sense of grouping or a team, if you like, can be quite challenging and negative. This is so true in my own community. There is so*

*much petty talk and jealousy, which is not my vibe at all. I move here to become independent and be free of what society would want me to be back home. I will also be eligible to apply for permanent residency soon, which I am super excited about – it has been a long time coming.*

In light of the overwhelming responses towards inclusivity, diversity and liberalism during the interviews and online observations, the findings also indicate how a certain contextual situation arising from personal or inter-group experience can lead to what the author terms 'negative evolution'. Negative evolution can stem from threats to social or national identity (Tsukamoto and Fiske, 2017) and the increased visibility of the out-group (majority members). The feeling of socially inadequacy can cause ethnic (im)migrants to heighten their commitment to their ideologies, which can lead to increased levels of prejudice towards the host society. During the interviews, Sheena, a mother of three, shared her opinions on the concept of negative evolution:

*I have tried so hard when it comes to having the right balance of maintaining our culture and the British culture with my kids. Because we live in a white majority area, it is nearly impossible for my kids to embrace my culture and language. I do feel a bit disappointed in myself. I sometimes feel embarrassed when people ask me why my kids cannot speak their mother tongue.*

Importantly, some of the negative responses and connotations derived from the participants also stemmed from their personal experiences of racial discrimination, which shaped and formed their sense of attitude and behaviour. The findings indicate that living in a diverse ethnic city such as London can help in reducing potential racial hate or confrontation. For instance, Razin highlighted how his move to London and a change in his financial position had enabled him to buy his own car and thus removed the need to travel on public transport, thereby reducing his exposure to issues of discrimination regarding his race and physical features. In this case, his career progression and financial position over his residency period enabled him to avoid racial discrimination in the later stages of his migration journey.

Another issue was the recent global pandemic (Covid-19), which was highlighted Cathy, whose physical features are somewhat oriental despite her nationality as an Indian living in London. She expressed her concerns:

> *I definitely have some horrible memories when I was younger. As a kid, I always receive nasty comments on my physical features. My time in school was not fun at all. I do feel isolated and bullied, but we don't talk about those stuffs like we do now. Now, I don't really face any type of discrimination as such. But, the beginning of Covid-19 was a horrible time for me. People will stare at me on the tube and buses, and they will move away from me. One time in the supermarket, I was called Wuhan by a member of public. That's when I know racism still do very much exist.*

Heni, an Indian Mauritian, also expressed sympathy for her friends, as she recognised the effect of Covid-19 on her social circle. Due to the media representation of the Asian community during the pandemic (particularly those from an oriental background), bias and racism towards this community resurfaced. Reflecting on this issue and voicing her concerns, Heni reiterated her own experience within her social circle:

> *In London, I feel like everyone is accepting of who you are, no matter what. My whole perceptions on racial discrimination changes after Covid-19. When Covid-19 starts to circulate, a friend of mine rang me saying that she doesn't feel safe after reading the news on targeted hate crime on Asian people. It makes me feel so sad. I never thought London will be a place where people will feel unsafe because of what they look like. I feel like there is still a lot of work to do, I think it is unacceptable to see racial hate because of a pandemic.*

During our photo-elicitation discussion, she elaborated:

> *This is why protest and education is still needed. Racial hate, homophobia, xenophobia is not going to solve by itself. This is why people go out and march for their voices and rights. Unacceptable behaviour and attitudes need to be challenged, they need to be plastered all over our social media – these people need to learn the hard way.*

As seen from the findings, positive and negative aspects of evolution can be intertwined to create an overall identity evolution of a South Asian (im)migrant. Raki, a British Sri Lankan,

also shared how she had felt different from a young age due to her family and cultural background:

> *I know I look different from such a young age. I was very isolated when I was younger – I don't have much friends and I play a lot of video games. My parents are typical Sri Lankan, so I have grown up with that cultural outlook in my house. In our community, you don't even marry outside your own ethnic community. I don't really have a multicultural outlook for a long time.*

Although Raki's childhood experience was associated with the feeling of belonging to an out-group minority, the in-depth data obtained from her is consistent with the research on the mediating role of threat between contact and intergroup attitudes (Al Ramiah et al., 2014). Over the course of her lifetime, she went through a journey that made her shift her perspective. As she started to become independent by going to university, her intergroup contacts and network started to grow. This decreased her prejudice towards out-groups by reducing levels of perceived symbolic threat. She added how her views on being a South Asian woman had shifted significantly from her younger days:

> *Going to university was the biggest change in my life. I will not be where I am without the exposure and experience of university. As a South Asian woman, I am so proud that I have achieved my educational goals and made my parents proud. The little girl who was so socially awkward is flying high now. As I grow older and gain more experience, I learn to embrace my identity and I am super proud to be British Asian. I love our dynamic multi-cultural place, and I feel very privilege that my parents came to this country for a better opportunity.*

***Data display for South Asian (im)migrants' acculturation journey:***

| Key insights into data codes | Selected Sample Quote |
|---|---|
| Social, personal and work settings | *"We would love to connect with non-South Asian people, but because, you know, in London, people are so scattered. The other thing is English people don't really invite you to their homes. They usually socialise in restaurants and pubs, and it can be very expensive for many people. In our South Asian culture, our interactions are based on visiting someone else's house. Also, what I noticed over the* |

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| | *years is that people keep their professional network in their workplace. I find that British people only visit relatives in their houses, but in our community, it is quite the opposite." (Razin)*<br><br>*"For the past 12 years, we have try to take the positives of what Britain has taught us. Where I came from, everything is all socially defined and constructed. But, in the UK, we have the freedom to create our own individual identity, so we have adopted that approach as a part of our identity over time. I find it very difficult to socialise with people who don't appreciate or have the same mind-set as us. We certainly have adopted British culture in the way we speak, our change of accents and understanding local Manchester slangs. All our social circles have a very similar outlook and mind-set which makes it easier for compatibility." (Priyanka)*<br><br>*"When it comes to work environment, I met and work with people from all walks of life. I engage with everyone and get the opportunity to learn other cultures through my work as well. This really balance and remind me to appreciate my life. I have learnt so much over the years at work by just simply working with people from different background. That's the beauty of living in London: it is a such an amazing inspirational place." (Raki)* |
| Digital consumer culture | *"I was constantly comparing my life to others on Instagram and become really unhappy. I was unproductive at work; I lost my confidence and have no excitement with life. Then, I seek help from my family and friends, which is the best thing I have done. Without their support, I don't know where I will be today." (Parvi)*<br><br>*"Being on social media makes me filter or compartmentalise my behaviour, as there are certain things that I will not share online. I will happily discuss this stuff with my close friends or a family member over a catch-up coffee. It is one of those things that is really hard to give a definite answer. I guess I am afraid to say the wrong thing or if my views were twisted from its original posts. I like to keep many aspects of my work and personal life to myself." (Rishil)*<br><br>*"Every couple of months, I will have a detox on my social media. I am quite a sensitive person, so I will filter my following if I feel like my personality doesn't match with someone that I follow. I think you have to have a thick skin, and sometimes what we see can affect us in a negative way. Also, when you are a mum with kids, the amount of vile and inappropriate post that I come across really shock me. It really* |

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|---|---|
| | *scares me when my kids will be old enough to use social media." (Sheena)*<br><br>*"If someone posts content that you can relate to on Instagram or Facebook, you will read them and sometimes implement them in your own life in a positive way. Personally, I am a huge fitness fanatic. I struggle when the gyms were all closed down during lockdown one. I turned to Instagram to see if any of my following have a decent workout program. I found one through a recommendation from a friend, and I have been subscribing ever since. It totally shifts my mind towards my own fitness journey. Without social media, this will not happen to me." (Puia)*<br><br>*"I am a vivid social media user. For example, I used to support Russia, as I was brought up in a communist family. So, I always have that feeling and I was always anti-US, particularly Putin against the US. I even done some interviews back in 2012 to 2013, but gradually, I came to see that if I continue to support Russia, it would be against my acceptance of liberal views. I decided to come away from that mind-set." (Razin)* |
| Acculturation as an evolution | *"It is a good question. It is paradoxical. Since it was not automated and gradually nurtured, I have to rationalise myself, and that requires me to be increasingly politically correct. I am always conscious that my behaviour should be integrative and inclusive. This means that I will have to minimise any form of xenophobia, which makes me extremely conscious of my social media integration. If I think back of a few years ago, I was quite vocal about certain political events, which is not good for integration. I realised later that upholding those stereotypical thoughts will not be good for me." (Razin)*<br><br>*"When I first arrived to the UK, I tend to hang around with people of my own background and origin. But over time, I made lots of new connections from university and my workplace. I believe it is incredibly important to form a new friendship with people outside your own circle. It also makes life easier, in a way: sometimes a sense of grouping or a team, if you like, can be quite challenging and negative. This is so true in my own community. There is so much petty talk and jealousy, which is not my vibe at all. I move here to become independent and be free of what society would want me to be back home." (Sylvia)*<br><br>*"I definitely have some horrible memories when I was younger. As a kid, I always receive nasty* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *comments on my physical features. My time in school was not fun at all. I do feel isolated and bullied, but we don't talk about those stuffs like we do now. Now, I don't really face any type of discrimination as such. But, the beginning of Covid-19 was a horrible time for me. People will stare at me on the tube and buses, and they will move away from me. One time in the supermarket, I was called Wuhan by a member of public. That's when I know racism still do very much exist." (Cathy)* |

## 4.3: To capture the dynamics and kinetics of South Asian (im)migrants' engagement with politics as an acculturative expression.

The focus on the challenging aspects of the political debate and engagement with local politics raises the question of whether such engagement may be rooted in a specific cultural context. There is a paucity of a qualitative work that examines the nuances of how South Asian (im)migrants perceive their relationship to British politics, and in what ways they choose to express their political engagement. Furthermore, there is a need to address the complicated matters of how practices and norms around ethnic political acculturation are applied to various contexts on online and offline platforms.

From the findings, the derived typology was constructed to showcase the different types of political expression in the data. These expressions encompassed personal experiences and examples from various contexts where different areas of expressions were captured and categorised. Once the types of pattern had been identified, the author categorised participants based on their remarks. The types identified were: politically embracive, politically sensitive, politically reticent, and politically separated.

### 4.3.1. Politically embracive

South Asian (im)migrants in this category expressed their local political views with little regard for the norms and values of their own cultural background. They were not afraid to speak their minds in both online and offline formats, and were not bounded by their ideological values or familial bonds. They had a strong insistence that (im)migrants should not be reserved about expressing their political opinions and perceptions. They believed that any local political issues can be challenged and debated if one has a reason to do so. For example, when Zachary, a

young professional who spent his early years in the United States and now works in London, was asked about his political expression, he replied:

> *I was spending my early student years in the US. I was heavily involved and become interested in US and UK politics and followed it quite closely. I am politically active online and also in my day-to-day life too. Me and a lot of my friends are leftist, so what we follow and post is very much leaning towards the left side. I have voted in the past couple of elections, I am member of Labour of three or four years, but I gave up my membership knowing that Labour has a slim chance to win elections. Also, the systematic rule in the UK that if one person gets one more vote than the other candidates and end up winning the election is crazy to me.*

In this excerpt, Zachary showed his disappointment with the political stance in the UK, and insisted that he had no hope that the Labour party would win the next general election. He admitted that he did not have a strong contrary solution or opinions, but that he was keen to continue to express his political alliances and thoughts in both online and offline formats. He further elaborated:

> *I don't keep my political views to myself. I have shared how disappointed I was with Labour on my social media all the time. I also share funny memes and stories about our political leaders. Twitter is great for political news: it is a great source to update myself. I followed all the major parties on there; I don't have any favourite at the moment. I don't know who I will vote in the next election.*

Similarly, Ben, originally from India, said that he liked to continuously make himself aware of the latest political news by using digital media sources. Ben regularly posted on his social media about the local politics, where he criticised and shared his opinions on various matters:

> *Question: What kind of political views do you share online?*

*Ben: Since lockdown 1, my interest in local politics has grown massively. A lot of the lockdown politics makes me cringe and laugh about our current Prime Minister.*

*Question: Can you please elaborate more?*

*Ben: Sure. Boris Johnson is a joke to me. I have shared a number of his unacceptable lies and behaviour on my social channels: he lied to us throughout the pandemic. The fact that they have the audacity to charge people for breaking the lockdown laws while they have a laugh inside No. 10 is beyond me.*

*Question: Okay, so, apart from sharing your views online, are you politically active, as in, did you attend protests during the past year?*

*Ben: Yes, when Black Lives Matter started to circulate on social media, I saw that protest is going to happen on my Instagram. I cannot sit still at home: I have to be a part of it. I went down with my partner to support my Black friends who suffered racial injustice in our society.*

*Question: As the protest happened during the peak of Covid-19, do you feel guilty about attending it?*

*Ben: To be honest, yes, a little apprehensive about it. I didn't tell my parents in India at all: they will not approve that sort of thing. But, looking back now and hearing all the mess the government made, I am so happy that I went and participate.*

Another participant, Amarpal, from West London, also shared how she was not reluctant about posting controversial political news and issues on her own social media. She claimed that she also actively joined political protests in the offline world, like Ben. She had a strong insistence that commonly held political views should not be plainly accepted without questions or doubts. During the online observation period, she shared a number of high-profile political issues and news on her social media where she actively re-posted content in a certain way. She repeatedly used emojis as a way to convey her political stance to her followers on Instagram. The findings

indicate that younger participants preferred to convey their political engagement and views without posting elaborative messages. For instance, Amarpal reiterated during the interviews that the use of emojis on social media can convey a thousand words without having to elaborate the details.

Interestingly, politically embracive (im)migrants can be actively engaged with local politics by navigating their own means of expression. For instance, (im)migrants who find it difficult to be upfront with their immediate family and friends might resort to creating an anonymous online profile to separate their identity in the offline world. As discussed in the findings above, this was the case with Razin. Originally from Bangladesh, he saw himself as someone with a strong interest in local politics, but he also wished to create an online persona to protect his real identity. He described his position as follows:

> *I followed major political leaders. I don't follow Boris or Trump. But I followed No. 10, leading political leaders from both sides, and I follow journalists. I have a secret account, as I don't want to show my identity. I have my personal Facebook; I don't share any of my political views on there – this is where my anonymous Twitter comes in handy.*

When prompted about his decision to create an anonymous social media profile, he elaborated:

> *So that I can be politically incorrect. In the UK, I understand you do not propagate your strong political views unless you are an activist. Also, I have students and I don't want my students to have a perception of my political views. For example, in the past, I have criticised the monarchy in Saudi Arabia and some countries, so that would be quite risky if my identity is not hidden, particularly in a professional workplace. Every country is not as tolerant to your political stance like we do in the UK, so those are the reasons behind it.*

This sense of anonymity that can be provided by the functionality of advanced digital media has given (im)migrants like Razin a platform to politically express their perceptions. This allows them to have a cross-cutting exposure and dialogue, without any fear of intervention from their normal life. The digital compartmentalisation-seeking behaviour is clearly evident from the findings, and is influenced by the social, work, and personal contexts. The findings

can be argued to provide evidence against the de-compartmentalisation of identities posited by Dey et al. (2020). However, this is highly dependent on how savvy the individual is with regard to handling their digital footprint and presence on various social media platforms.

### 4.3.2. Politically sensitive

(Im)migrants in this category made considered choices with regard to which topics they should and should not talk about, and what expression practices they should use if they chose to express their views. They enjoyed the freedom to choose their own times to do so; however, they were also extremely aware of the perceived risks of their political expressions. Most of the participants in this category only expressed their political allegiance when it was relevant to their own personal issues (issue-based expressers). For example, Karisma, a teacher in North London, explained that she made carefully considered choices on her approach and use of social media for political expressions. She elaborated:

> *As a teacher, it is super important to understand and monitor what you posted on your social media. What you said can be used against you in some ways, so, my attitudes, behaviour and perceptions are very much shaped and controlled by the nature of my workplace. One thing I will say is, although I don't post much of any political issues, I have recently posted political views that I care about. I posted online about my views towards Covid vaccinations, lockdown shambles and racism issues, as it hits home and they are very personal to me.*

Here, there is a clear indication from Razin and Karisma that their workplaces and their settings had a direct impact on their behaviour and use of social media. The way they chose to express their political views takes into account the perceived risks that can impact their personal life. Similar behaviour can be seen in the following excerpt from Amitab, a 28-year-old professional who cared strongly about having meaningful political conversations by using the right platform:

> *I don't normally go out of my own way to post political stuffs online. For the most part, I will stay away from it. Firstly, it is not worthy of your time to have a debate over politics, I don't have the time for that. But, what I will say is, if it*

*is a political event that directly impacts your life, sometimes you have to speak out.*

In order to fully comprehend and capture his views, the author asked Amitab if he could share more. He replied:

*The last time I shared a big political news was about Brexit vote. I have seen some mutual friends who celebrate the Leave vote, and I just can't keep my mouth shut. I went on to my Facebook and I post a long status on why South Asian people are so delusional and whitewash by the British society. I still believe in the EU.*

In addition, Mya, who worked as a campaign and planning officer, also expressed her political allegiance when issues that evoked her personal interest arose. She said:

*Why stay silent when you know deep down that it is against your moral and values? I am not going to be silenced in any way or form. We are fortunate to live in Britain – if you feel like you have something important to say, action them and be proud of it. As long as your purpose will do good for the common people, do it.*

The findings also indicate an interesting dimension: political expression and its capacity are susceptible to change over time as ethnic (im)migrants' exposure and experiences evolve. Javi, from Pakistan, had scaled up her interest from being politically separated to politically sensitive and subsequently changed her behaviour and stance towards UK politics over the years:

*A few years ago, I have zero ideas as to what politics is about. Moving to the UK is one of the best things that I have done: I have learned to appreciate how politics and economics have impacted our lives in so many ways. I found a new interest for wanting to understand current international affairs, the Brexit vote situation, and many more. All of these issues made me want to be more aware of what's going on in the UK and abroad.*

The majority of the first-generation participants shared the same migration journey as Javi. Over the course of their residency, they had built their awareness and knowledge of host society political affairs and their impact on their personal lives. Although their patterns of political expressions varied from one person to another, their personal journeys had shaped their formation of political knowledge and engagement. Sammy articulated this point:

> *From the moment I knew that I can vote in this country as a Commonwealth citizen, I have been politically active ever since. I don't post much online, but I am active as a voter. I have voted in the past two general elections and Brexit referendum. I don't know what it is, it makes me feel very inclusive and significant that I can cast my vote in the UK. I will definitely continue to vote in the future.*

Such responses may go as far as to make ethnic (im)migrants switch their political expression from one type to another, as seen in the case of Javi. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge that the current stage of one's life has a direct implication on one's choices of political expressions. The typology derived in this research denotes that there is a dynamic process by which South Asian (im)migrants can evolve as they continue to learn and develop their political identity over time. Therefore, one may have the desire to swap and switch one's political allegiance to suit one's current lifestyle.

### 4.3.3. Politically reticent

(Im)migrants in this typology said that they were interested in and politically aware of the current affairs in Britain. They expressed a strong insistence on keeping their political views to themselves, although they were very conversant with the issues of politics. They were highly engaged in the private domain, where they felt comfortable to absorb political news and debate. Their engagement with politics did not require them to be vocal about their opinions, unlike the politically embracive or politically sensitive groups. During the interviews, Cathy from Hertfordshire admitted that she did not talk about politics with anyone at all. She explained further:

> *I keep it all to myself. A lot of my friends and even family members do not know the extent of my political knowledge. Different people have different opinions. I*

*am not an extrovert either, so I don't overshare anything at all. I always try to stay away from negativity, so putting out your political views isn't the one for me. Don't get me wrong – I am fully aware of the important political stuffs though.*

Cathy's desire to keep her political identity within her private space shows how different participants have construed their expressions to meet their needs. During the photo-elicitation exercise, Cathy was able to identify and discuss all the political logos and pictures that were shown to her. This observation confirms her political familiarity, which complements her interview responses. Similarly, Heni also shared her opinions on her own version of self-expression:

*Believe it or not, social media is one of the place where I consume a lot of political events that interest me. I engaged with my followers and friends all the time. For example, you can simply spark a conversation by commenting one emoji or shares some memes which can connect you to people who are like-minded. It is also a great place to gain knowledge and information, but all of my social media interactions has nothing to do with my political opinions. It might sound selfish, but my motto is you don't have to share everything to everyone.*

Interestingly, the interview with Priyanka from India also shed light on how one can navigate between one's multifaceted reasons and perceptions for one's political expression. For example, Priyanka did not consider herself as someone who liked to talk about political news and agenda, but she felt that she had a moral responsibility to cast her vote for the sake of social desirability and to fulfil the norms of being a responsible citizen. She said:

*I have voted but I have no interest in politics. This is not just in the UK but also in India. Since I have less interest in politics, I have also refrain myself from having a political debate with anyone. I do make sure that I will exercise my right to vote, because not every immigrant can have an opportunity like this. I have always supported Labour and voted against Brexit, as fundamentally I think it is very wrong.*

Moreover, across different generations from various South Asian countries, the driving factor behind (im)migrants' decisions to avoid political talk and debate was often related to personal concerns about the divergent and opposing views that people may hold. These concerns stemmed from having perceived negative connotations and emotions towards politics in the host society. As a result, the fear of displaying emotions such as anger or frustration was prevalent in the findings. In so doing, (im)migrants within this typology tended to avoid offensive arguments that could prevail from exposing their political allegiance.

As discussed above, Tasha was a South Asian Brexiteer who had decided to switch her political expression from politically embracive to politically reticent in recent years. When prompted about her decisions, she responded as follows:

> *"I used to heavily share my political opinions. I have a strong and bold comments, and I used to post my own political views on my social media. Some of these can sometimes be quite controversial matters – for example, my decision to vote for Brexit and my strong opinions on anti-covid vaccinations – but recently everything change.*

The author wanted to further explore why Tasha had decided to avoid political talk and to discover her underlying reasons for avoiding further engagement and expressions. Following the above excerpt, the following responses were captured:

> *Question: Do you mind telling me what you mean by "everything change"?*

> *Tasha: I don't really see eye-to-eye with anyone in my family when it comes to my political views. This is from a young age. I am not a person who will follow what everything their parents will say – you can probably call me rebellious teenager. But things got a lot worse after Covid-19. I ended up in a very heated debate with a family member, which has caused me to break down and has affected my mental health.*

> *Question: I am so sorry about that. So since then, you decide to limit your social media activities, or…?*

*Tasha: Yes, exactly. It's not worth falling out with your family. I don't change my views at all: I just change the way I share my opinions now. If it wasn't for family, I will still do it. I try to maintain respect for my elderly family members. Culture stuffs, you know it.*

In line with Tasha's excerpts, another participant went further to claim that sharing political opinions online can take a serious toll on one's emotional and mental health. Dorothy, from London, shared how she had scaled down her political participation:

*Online trolls is a real thing. Because I decide to publicly criticise some of the political figures in the UK and back home, I have suffered verbal abuse consistently through private messages on my profile. Sometimes it will be from random strangers who are in their 50s or 60s. I ignore them for ages, but the trolls keep coming back time and time again.*

As previously discussed, social harmony plays a vital role in avoiding political conflicts amongst the South Asian (im)migrants in Britain. The findings show that political reticence appears in various forms, and is prevalent when the context in discussion is closer to their personal lives: that is, the preservation of family bonds, their community and reputation.

### 4.3.4. Politically separated

This typology represents a group in which (im)migrants feel that local politics bear no significance to their lives, and thus they have very little motivation for expressing their political concerns. This group comprised mainly participants who felt inundated with the political agenda and promises. This group represents South Asian (im)migrants whose perceptions were guided by their beliefs on false political promises and fake manifestos. Most of the participants within this category shared the assumption that political parties in Britain do not reflect or care about their presence in the host society. For example, Sylvia, from India, described why she had never voted in the UK:

*My political affiliations back home were purely base on what my family have taught me from a young age. I have seen so many corruptions where these political parties have no care towards their political promises. When I moved*

> *to the UK, my attitude does not change at all. We might not see political corruption as much as we do in India, but the overall political situation is the same. Let's not talk about the political shambles and issues we have faced from Boris government. I don't trust anyone, and I don't want to vote for anyone.*

In addition, some of the participants developed a way to consciously avoid any political participation at all costs. Javi, from Pakistan, shared her views on this matter:

> *I just don't like politics. Who cares about what these political leaders say? They don't deserve our vote. As a regular social media user with a good number of followers, I have been exposed to political stories and news on my social media feed on a daily basis. I think it is all a part of their tick list. In this way, they can manipulate younger generations like us. I block most of these pages online.*

Similarly, Jawad, a 36-year-old operations manager in Sheffield, also articulated his opinions on his voting decisions:

> *Although I have the right to vote, I haven't voted. I personally don't believe in political agenda. For example, when Tories come in power, Labour will oppose everything, and vice versa. I am a common man who is quite neutral on political things. I think politics is so much more deep-rooted than what a common man or woman assumptions are. I don't say it is a conspiracy issues, but it definitely has a concrete element to what we don't see from the public side. That's why I don't vote.*

Although the type of politically separated group formed a minority in this research, their ideas and construction of their political views were rooted in their personal assumptions and beliefs towards the host politics. Lack of trust and credibility was a major concern for them. Their overwhelming exposure to political sources (inclusive of digital environments) made them feel separated and isolated. Furthermore, measurements and implementations of political promises remained a high priority for them.

This typology highlights how various (im)migrants from the South Asian continent can approach this issue, illuminating the differences in perceptions and values from one (im)migrant to another.

***Data display for South Asian (im)migrants' engagement with politics as an acculturative expression:***

| Key insights from data codes | Selected Sample Quotes |
|---|---|
| Politically embracive | *"I don't keep my political views to myself. I have shared how disappointed I was with Labour on my social media all the time. I also share funny memes and stories about our political leaders. Twitter is great for political news: it is a great source to update myself. I followed all the major parties on there; I don't have any favourite at the moment. I don't know who I will vote in the next election." (Zachary)*<br><br>*"Yes, when Black Lives Matter started to circulate on social media, I saw that protest is going to happen on my Instagram. I cannot sit still at home: I have to be a part of it. I went down with my partner to support my Black friends who suffered racial injustice in our society." (Ben)*<br><br>*"In the UK, I understand you do not propagate your strong political views unless you are an activist. Also, I have students and I don't want my students to have a perception of my political views. For example, in the past, I have criticised the monarchy in Saudi Arabia and some countries, so that would be quite risky if my identity is not hidden, particularly in a professional workplace. Every country is not as tolerant to your political stance like we do in the UK, so those are the reasons behind it." (Razin)* |
| Politically sensitive | *"As a teacher, it is super important to understand and monitor what you posted on your social media. What you said can be used against you in some ways, so, my attitudes, behaviour and perceptions are very much shaped and controlled by the nature of my workplace. One thing I will say is, although I don't post much of any political issues, I have recently posted political views that I care about. I posted online about my views towards Covid vaccinations, lockdown shambles and racism issues, as it hits home and they are very personal to me." (Karisma)*<br><br>*"The last time I shared a big political news was about Brexit vote. I have seen some mutual friends who celebrate the Leave vote, and I just can't keep my mouth shut. I went on to my Facebook and I post a long status on why South Asian people are so* |

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|---|---|
| | *delusional and whitewash by the British society. I still believe in the EU." (Amitab)*<br><br>*"Why stay silent when you know deep down that it is against your moral and values? I am not going to be silenced in any way or form. We are fortunate to live in Britain – if you feel like you have something important to say, action them and be proud of it. As long as your purpose will do good for the common people, do it." (Mya)*<br><br>*"From the moment I knew that I can vote in this country as a Commonwealth citizen, I have been politically active ever since. I don't post much online, but I am active as a voter. I have voted in the past two general elections and Brexit referendum. I don't know what it is, it makes me feel very inclusive and significant that I can cast my vote in the UK. I will definitely continue to vote in the future." (Sammy)* |
| Politically reticent | *"Believe it or not, social media is one of the place where I consume a lot of political events that interest me. I engaged with my followers and friends all the time. For example, you can simply spark a conversation by commenting one emoji or shares some memes which can connect you to people who are like-minded. It is also a great place to gain knowledge and information, but all of my social media interactions has nothing to do with my political opinions. It might sound selfish, but my motto is you don't have to share everything to everyone." (Heni)*<br><br>*"I have voted but I have no interest in politics. This is not just in the UK but also in India. Since I have less interest in politics, I have also refrain myself from having a political debate with anyone. I do make sure that I will exercise my right to vote, because not every immigrant can have an opportunity like this. I have always supported Labour and voted against Brexit, as fundamentally I think it is very wrong." (Priyanka)*<br><br>*"I don't really see eye-to-eye with anyone in my family when it comes to my political views. This is from a young age. I am not a person who will follow what everything their parents will say – you can probably call me rebellious teenager. But things got a lot worse after Covid-19. I ended up in a very heated debate with a family member, which has caused me to break down and has affected my mental health." (Tasha)* |

| | |
|---|---|
| Politically separated | *"I just don't like politics. Who cares about what these political leaders say? They don't deserve our vote. As a regular social media user with a good number of followers, I have been exposed to political stories and news on my social media feed on a daily basis. I think it is all a part of their tick list. In this way, they can manipulate younger generations like us. I block most of these pages online." (Javi)*<br><br>*"Although I have the right to vote, I haven't voted. I personally don't believe in political agenda. For example, when Tories come in power, Labour will oppose everything, and vice versa. I am a common man who is quite neutral on political things. I think politics is so much more deep-rooted than what a common man or woman assumptions are. I don't say it is a conspiracy issues, but it definitely has a concrete element to what we don't see from the public side. That's why I don't vote." (Jawad)* |

## 4.4. Summary of Findings

The following table 6 provides a brief summary of the key findings. It identifies the different components of acculturative political orientation and the stages of the acculturative journey, and creates a typology of acculturation as a political expression with local politics. The findings are constructed in relation to the base theory of acculturation and social identity theory: hence, they explain South Asian (im)migrants' political orientation, acculturation journey and their political expressions within the host society.

*Table 6. Summary of the key findings*

| Components of ethnic acculturation studies | Emerging themes and codes | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|
| Acculturative Political Orientation (Study 1) | • Higher education, job opportunities, family, lifestyle, multiculturalism.<br>• Intrinsic values: community engagement, religion, perceptions towards the LGBTQIA+ community, and other societal issues.<br>• Extrinsic factors: Brexit debate and views towards eco-preneurship, climate change, sustainability, Covid-19. Voting intentions were explored and | The nature and outcome of acculturative orientation within the realm of local politics have been classified and categorised. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | generational gaps in views and practices were noted. | This classification can be conceptualised as the 3 C's: compelled by ideology, conformation underpinned by self-interest, and complexity with caveats. |
| Acculturative Journeys (Study 2) | • Learning and educating oneself through one's social circles, workplace and life experiences serves as a vital source for eliciting and juggling multiple identities.<br>• The influence and use of social media and digital platforms can be intertwined to meet the needs and desire for exposure and experience at the individual and collective levels. The findings also indicate that positive and negative evolution can occur in tandem. | The three stages of the ethnic acculturative journey can be analysed through the context of exposure, experience, and evolution. All of these phases were dynamic and non-static in nature throughout the post-migration period. Future changes to these stages are underpinned by the impact of socio-cultural, political, economic, and technological factors. |
| Political Expression (Study 3) | The different elements of value-driven political orientation and the acculturative journey can be interwoven to explain the classification of various political expressions with local politics. | South Asian (im)migrants' expression and engagement with the context of local politics was classified into four types:<br>• Politically embracive<br>• Politically sensitive<br>• Politically reticent<br>• Politically separated<br><br>The findings revealed the paradoxes and intricacies that can facilitate and/or inhibit South Asian (im)migrants' political engagement and practices with British politics. |

These findings still need to be analysed in relation to existing theories. The next section (Chapter 5) will discuss the theoretical implication of these findings.

# 5. Discussion

In line with the objectives and findings of this research, the discussion chapter is divided into three major parts:

1. Assessing and identifying the role of intrinsic values and macro-environmental factors (extrinsic influences) that lead to acculturative political orientation.
2. Developing a deeper understanding of the drivers that determine the acculturative journey in the host society.
3. Examining the phenomenon of acculturation as a political expression in relation to local politics.

This research has investigated a contextual phenomenon in the form of socio-cultural, political, and economic issues that define South Asian (im)migrants' contextualised responses. Accordingly, it endeavours to make a meaningful contribution to the acculturation literature. As such, this chapter starts with a model developed by the researcher (Figure 6). This model showcases the dynamics of the value-driven approach to ethnic political acculturation and identity. Subsequently, acculturative journeys in the host society are analysed through the lens of exposure, experience, and evolution. In addition, a 2x2 matrix is developed to explain the various dimensions of political expressions based on political engagement with local politics. Current scholarships on acculturation and social identity are consulted and applied to the findings to ascertain the theoretical contributions of this research. Finally, a comprehensive framework is developed to capture the overall dynamics and processes of acculturation.

## 5.1. Model for assessing the value-driven dynamic approach to political orientation

Based on the findings presented in the previous chapter, this research develops a framework to assess the various elements of the intrinsic values and extrinsic influences amongst the South Asian (im)migrants. It employs a three-step process, as shown in Figure 6, below. Guided by the findings, each of the steps incorporates emerging themes from the data, which have been deemed as vital tools for the identification of personal and social resources to understand (im)migrants' value-driven identities (Oppenheim-Weller et al., 2018). In order to capture the series of continuous and iterative interactions, the three steps need to be meticulously analysed

to understand South Asian (im)migrants' stance on their political orientation. The model in Figure 6, below, sets the tone for further discussions.

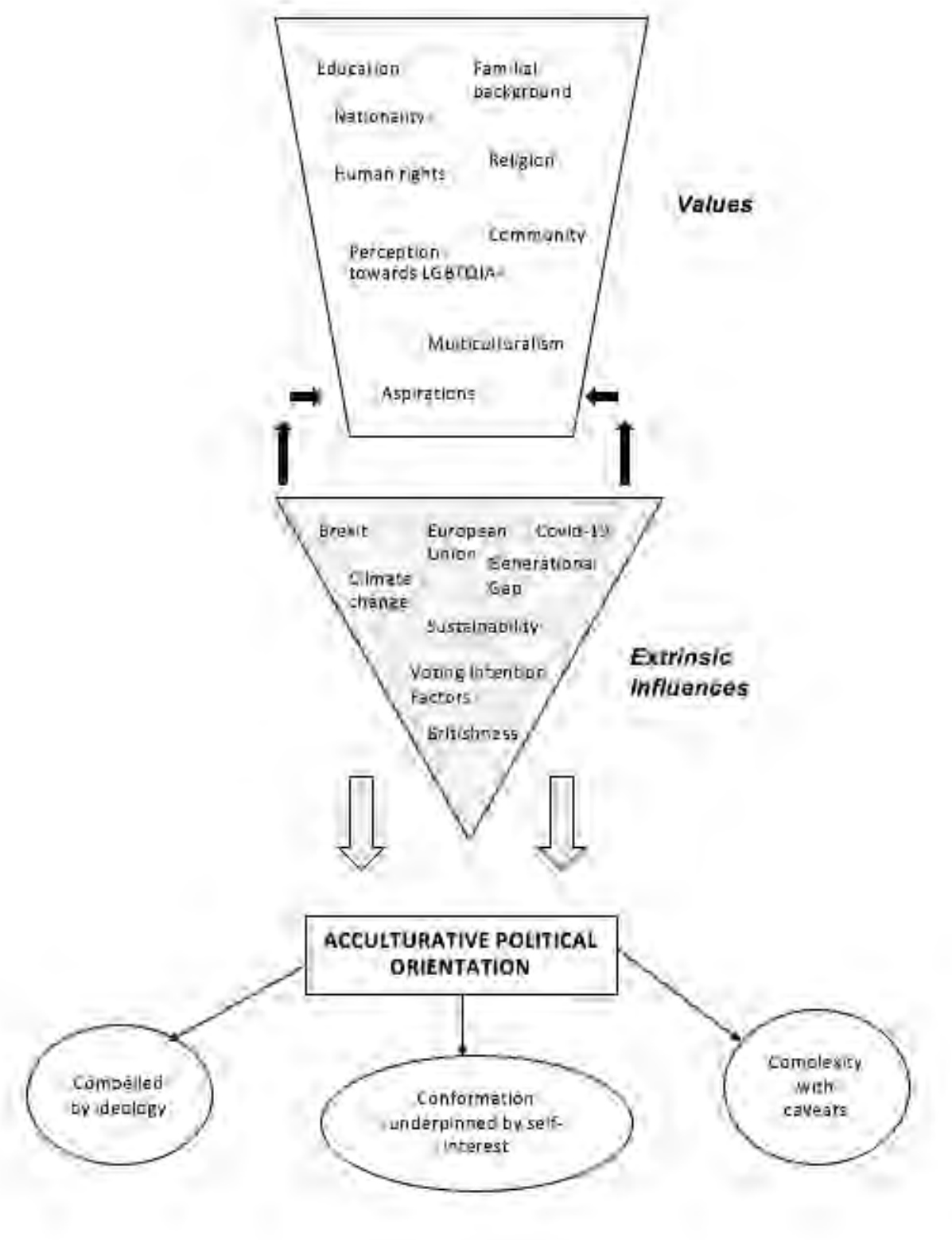


*Figure 6. Value-Driven Acculturative Political Orientation*

The overall findings provide significant insight into the assessment of the value-driven approach to ethnic identity and its influence on acculturative political orientation. Decades of research findings suggest that ethnic (im)migrants constantly negotiate between their ethnic and host country identities (Berry, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2010), and this has become a perennial concern for (im)migrants (Bhatia, 2002). Understandably, due to the complexity of self-identity as an overarching term for who one is or may become, the dyadic interrelationship between values and extrinsic influences can feed into the formation of acculturative political orientation.

### 5.1.1. Step 1: Exploration of what constitutes values

As discussed in the literature review, values constitute an important aspect of people's personality. Values can reflect the deliberate intentions by which individuals direct and pursue their lives and provide directions to their acculturation process and orientations (Assor et al., 2020). Due to the constant fluctuations of (im)migrants' sense-making and accumulation of knowledge from the pre- to the post-migration period, their intrinsic values can be shaped and/or reshaped as an outcome of dialectic interpretations of their preconceptions, knowledge, and experiences, which are influenced by their innate cultural upbringing and what they experience and learn from the host country.

With regard to the agents of acculturation, this research found that individual interactions with family, religion, societal issues, and various other factors (Figure 6) lead to individuals' orientation towards political acculturation. They also determine the extent to which an individual's intrinsic values can play a role in the recursive and dynamic multilevel fluid interactions between exposure, experience, and evolution (Figure 7), as identified in the findings. For instance, South Asian (im)migrants' perceptions of values and their prominence in their personal lives were mostly guided by acknowledgment and respect for their own cultural ethos and heritage. The dual processes of cultural and psychological change that occur as a result of contact between different cultural groups was evident amongst the South Asian (im)migrants. Their goals and characteristics were intrinsically linked to their social roles or group membership (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), as they were subjected to a motivation pull on their actions and cognitions. For instance, when one experiences a cross-cultural contact, one's representation of oneself with regard to one's social environment and exposure involves regulating and monitoring one's actions (Yu et al., 2019). It is also essential to remember that

individuals' interactions with cultural outsiders influence their lifestyle and socio-cultural practices.

South Asian (im)migrants' desire to pursue higher education to achieve their aspirations was prevalent within the findings. They regarded education as a pathway and a motivational factor to gain a better life for themselves and their families, which can be seen in their pursuit of value-fulfilling careers in the host society. This is in line with Gunasekara et al.'s (2021) analysis of value- driven careers in skilled (im)migrants. The amount of money, time and effort spent on building their aspirations solidifies their intentions to acculturate in the host society. The idea of creating a better future for their families was also a major priority for the participants. They believed that job opportunities and higher education could facilitate their aspirations.

The findings also revealed an interesting pointer with regard to (im)migrants' engagement with their own community. South Asian (im)migrants' practices of their faith and religion expressed their sense of belonging to their community. Religion is an important aspect of life, particularly for (im)migrants from South Asia. A number of prior studies have reflected that religion and ethnic community shape people's beliefs about the society and their moral values (Schwartz, 2015). Community engagement within their own ethnic group is also seen as a platform to teach and guide the younger generation about their faith and cultural background. Therefore, partial evidence can be seen that participants who possessed a strong association with their faith and cultural teachings exhibited a strong ethnic identity which concurs with Jung et al. (2017) findings of how our ideologies and values can play a vital part in our behaviour. Hence, younger (im)migrants have the impression that it is the responsibility of the older generation to protect their culture of origin and pass it on to the younger generations. This foundation of knowledge suggests that younger (im)migrants will acculturate more to the western values and society. However, age, religion, and their influences on acculturation and self-identity are complicated (Lindridge, 2010). Although most of the participants in the present study acknowledged cultural heritage and community, identity negotiation based on individual situations and circumstances was also a prominent factor for the acculturation process in the host society.

South Asian (im)migrants strive to re-construct and re-visit their self-narratives in a complex way. Their consumption is also influenced by their desire to hold and exhibit ethnic

identifications depending on the contexts involved (Chattaraman and Lennon, 2008). For example, individual perceptions towards multiculturalism determine the nature and opinions towards societal and political issues. South Asian (im)migrants who lived in multicultural cities expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to embrace their freedom to express their self-identity without conforming to standards set by their cultural heritage. In line with this, time (duration of residence in host countries) was a major factor in the participants' decisions and sense of adoption between their ancestral culture and the attributes of the host society. Some of the participants maintained their levels of familial and collective bonds in some aspects; however, their representations and interpretations of living in a host society often changed their stance on political and societal matters over time. Hence, identity negotiation can be explained as a continuous process, which in turn can influence the intrinsic values of ethnic individuals based on the prominence of the external stimuli.

Reference can also be made here to participants' attitudes towards the impact of protest and political events. On the grounds of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism, the deeply rooted notion of South Asian (im)migrants' values can be extracted from the findings, as evidenced by their perceptions and views towards protests and events in the UK, which elucidate contrasting views. Most of the participants from the South Asian community demonstrated their support and love for protests such as the LGBTQIA+ Pride event, BLM and women's rights. In addition, online observation notes further articulated the notion of liberalism and fluidity. However, some of the first-generation South Asian (im)migrants offered contrasting personal views, with one preferring not to comment too much on LGBTQIA+ Pride photos. He referred to the photos as reflecting 'a personal choice made by Western people'. This notion represents how heterosexism and religious beliefs from (im)migrants' culture of origin are rooted in their values, which they find hard to override, despite their conscious efforts to acculturate. Despite the awareness and acceptance of cosmopolitan living, their stance on gender and sexual identity remains firm during and after their migration.

South Asian (im)migrants who move to Britain also have a strong insistence that their determination and resilience are fuelled by their recognition of inequality and unfair treatment from the mainstream society. Their interpretations and responses to social situations (Oyserman et al., 2017) play a vital role for their acculturative orientations. For example, in the present study, participants' lived experiences of inequality between EU and non-EU

citizens (i.e., in the visa application process) revealed the tensions and emotions felt towards immigration in Britain.

By identifying the various aspects of intrinsic values amongst the South Asian (im)migrants, it becomes possible to analyse and understand their acculturative orientation beyond the majority-minority dichotomy. To summarise, this research identifies the different components of intrinsic values which highlights the inconsistent nature of our value to behaviour alignment (Dey et al., 2022). Participants' informed decisions emanated from various avenues, as can be seen in Figure 6. The unveiling and unpacking of values can be conceptualised as a vital process that can assist in capturing the different dynamics of the acculturation approach. Hence, the assessment of the intrinsic context is a prerequisite for evaluating the logical process of acculturative political orientations.

### 5.1.2. Step 2: Understanding the extrinsic factors determining acculturative orientation (analysing macro-environmental impact)

Every individual has the ability to construct a unique identity, in which their values, norms, and beliefs play a major role in their self-identification (Chasserio et al., 2014). The findings indicate that South Asian (im)migrants can change and evolve throughout their lives, based on the experiences and the way they interact with the wider society. For instance, the way in which they determine and interpret a social situation or context can be dependent upon the types of external influences with which they choose to identify and associate (Oyserman et al., 2017). Various elements of extrinsic influences, such as values for success and admiration, can be seen from the excerpts presented in the findings chapter. However, influences from the external environmental go beyond self-enhancement-based values, as can be seen in Schwartz et al.'s (2012) value theories.

The findings explore South Asian (im)migrants' perceptions and experiences of the host society in relation to various contexts. These include initial and post-migration perceptions of Britishness through various contexts, political polarisation, perceptions towards sustainability and climate change, and negative connotations of immigration. In addition, participants' perceptions of Brexit and their opinions on the European Union were also captured, with both positive and negative perceptions being identified. Moreover, excerpts surrounding the impact of Covid-19 and views on the generational gap also contribute towards the development of a

nuanced understanding of the extrinsic influences affecting the South Asian (im)migrants. Having identified the connections between values and external influences, as depicted in Figure 6, the dyadic interrelationship between them merits further discussion and analysis.

It has been revealed in this research that many South Asian (im)migrants have very different contextual impressions of the British culture and people. Their discussions and thoughts encapsulate the use of different consumption practices such as food, football, the British monarchy, the weather, and other contextual examples. The findings also confirm that the idea of Britishness is conceived through a pre-requisite knowledge of Britain before migration. As they continue to learn and develop their self-identity, they are also aware of their identity evolution process through their acceptance of Western liberalism, as suggested by previous scholars on cultural hybridity (Askegaard et al., 2005; Dey et al., 2017; Oswald, 1999). However, despite this acknowledgement, the findings reveal how personal ideology and values can remain solid throughout the post-migration stage. It is important to understand the paradoxes of one's identity. For instance, a liberal (im)migrant who willingly accept various norms of Western values can also possess a strong radical view towards British institutions such as the monarchy. This supports the notion of frames of reference and self-knowledge (Li et al., 2021), as aspects of identity can encompass different facets based on different situations.

In addition, there is also strong evidence for the importance of the goal of obtaining British passports and citizenship through the naturalisation process. This can be seen as an achievement and an important milestone for South Asian (im)migrants, as it gives them the legal right to live and work in Britain. This sense of acquiring a tangible item (i.e., a British passport) serves as a fundamental tool for integration and acculturation in the mainstream society.

Due to the variations in the participants' ages, occupations and professions, the notion of generational gaps and their implications cannot be dismissed. In a similar vein to the findings from previous studies (Cleveland and Chang, 2009), younger participants in this research showed a complex and intricate set of aspects of identity that were driven by external influences, such as passion and enthusiasm for climate change and sustainability issues. By referring back to the literature review, this behaviour exhibits a desire to invent and improvise rather than a traditionalist perspective. The findings comply with the claims made by previous scholars on boundary-spanning behaviour, such that individuals can creatively link with out-

group members to negotiate their multiple identities (Dokko et al., 2013; Schotter and Abdelzaher, 2013). This type of association and identification can be conceptualised as the individuals' desire to explore various cultural attributes with an open mind, free from prejudices and judgement.

Furthermore, this research also explored South Asian (im)migrants' perspectives and views on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on their personal lives, their communities, and their well-being. Mental health issues and diminished psychological wellbeing were widely expressed by the participants, and there was also clear evidence of experiences of racial discrimination (Yitmen and Verkuyten, 2018) caused by the pandemic. Participants expressed that the new visibility made them feel stigmatised, which led to high levels of anxiety and fear (Vandrevala et al., 2022). Moreover, with the unveiling of many highly debated political events, such as the breaking of lockdown laws and Covid-19 vaccinations, there was a loss of trust and credibility (Dean et al., 2015) in the Tory government and the political party as a whole. Therefore, the South Asian (im)migrants' perceptions and understanding of the global pandemic reveal the distinct and unique challenges faced due to cultural, economic, and political variances. Better understanding is needed as to how to support ethnic minority communities, as there is already deep mistrust, anger, loss and fear due to structural racism and inequities. This understanding can then be utilised as guidance for the formation of strategies that can be initiated and perpetuated by the government and political parties, by collaborating with the ethnic communities to find a solution.

### 5.1.3. Step 3: Political Acculturative Orientation

In common with certain branches of the acculturation literature (Dey et al., 2019; Penaloza, 1994), the author seeks not to theorise acculturation strategies but to conceptualise the value orientations that lie at the core of the political acculturation or enculturation process. In order to fully comprehend and analyse the co-existence of the dyadic inter-relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic values, which exist simultaneously and in tandem, this research has sought to investigate South Asian (im)migrants' acculturative political orientation. In so doing, the nature and outcome of acculturative orientation within the realm of local politics have been classified and categorised. By concurring with the current literature on political ideology and values (Carmines and D'Amico, 2015; Wright, 1998; Jost, 2006; Federico and Schneider, 2007). This classification can be conceptualised as the 3 Cs:

1) **Compelled by ideology**: Ethnic (im)migrants' political orientation is guided and supported by their view of the world, which informs their system of values and beliefs about politics.
2) **Conformation underpinned by self-interest:** Ethnic (im)migrants seek to follow their self-interest at the heart of their political orientation by overcoming any emotional attachment or loyalty to any political ideology.
3) **Complexity with caveats:** Ethnic (im)migrants' political orientation is influenced and attributed by their personal and issue-based experiences, which direct their sense of knowledge, affiliation, and voting intentions within the local politics.

In many contemporary Western societies, ethnic individuals have preferences in terms of how cultural diversity should be managed. Given that social identities provide a lens through which people make sense of the world (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), the way in which members of a minority group construe their sense of political orientation can be guided by their support for a particular ideology.

The findings indicate how cultural and familial ideological stance can have a direct implication on how individuals describe their political interest. For example, the idea of Labour as a party that represents ethnic minority interests is one that cannot be dismissed or unaccounted for. In line with the existing work by Dean et al. (2015) on a tentative framework for building a narrative to create trust and a sense of belonging, the proposition of family, ancestral and community values is very significant. For instance, some (im)migrants questioned the validity of Labour as a party that represented their best interest. As such, the way they construed and constructed their political orientation and voting behaviour could not surpass their deeply-rooted ideological knowledge (i.e., they were compelled by ideology). Respondents falling within this group appeared to have a long tradition of supporting left-leaning ideologies in the UK and back in their home countries. They appreciated social justice and equality and harboured progressive views. Although there are contextual differences between the West and South Asia in terms of what should be construed as 'secular', this group normally adheres to a pragmatic perspective toward the role of religion in personal, social, and national spheres. It should be mentioned that in South Asian countries, religion is heavily used in politics and is a key denominator for political polarisation.

On the other hand, the aspects of political orientation can have a different facet where ethnic individuals will embrace the idea of developing political interests and views purely from their self-interest. Following Kizgin et al.'s (2019) work on the role of acculturation in political engagement, the findings revealed the role of acculturative orientations in explaining political engagement among South Asian (im)migrants in Britain. In so doing, it was found that South Asian (im)migrants developed their confidence and improved their ways of life (i.e., securing a good job, buying a house, and starting a family) during the post-migration period. Their political orientation was bounded by their desire to express their voice and opinions, free from cultural teaching, religion, and community. In this category, ethnic individuals expressed the freedom to change the political parties they supported by channelling the notion of being independent from any in-group affiliations. For instance, certain individuals would deliberately choose to adopt the attributes of political interests that were not part of their mainstream community party (i.e., conformation underpinned by self-interest).

Furthermore, the position of ethnic identity is exposed to a constant dialogue, where intrinsic and extrinsic influences can move from one stage to another within the multiple layers of the multi-dimensional acculturation process (Dey et al., 2019). Although elements of positive evaluation towards perceptions of EU citizens were evident in some of the responses, some participants had strong views towards the Brexit vote. This in turn fundamentally served as a tool for their political orientation. In line with the current literature (Inoi et al., 2017), comments that aligned with the category of 'complexity with caveats' can be unpacked.

The changes experienced by ethnic (im)migrants in their social interactions with others can ignite worries about social exclusion and inclusion, as ethnic (im)migrants can face discrepancies in access to several rights and resources that are available to different groups. For example, there were several discussions on the disparity between non-EU (im)migrants' and EU citizens' rights. This constitutes the fundamental aspect of political orientation, where personal circumstances and perceptions can shape the ethnic individual's sense of political identity. From the data, one participant explained that he was happy to vote for Brexit as a South Asian (im)migrant. This participant strongly insisted that the EU is a white-wash region with no signs of real inclusivity for South Asian communities. This finding is in line with Koburtay et al.'s (2020) conception of acculturative orientations: these authors report that the orientations that (im)migrants hold are impacted by acculturation conditions, which involve social exclusion practices and limitations. There were also instances where some respondents

who were regular Labour voters chose to support Remain. However, with regard to highly nuanced issues such as abortion and LGBT rights, they were not fully aligned with Labour and EU principles. One of them mentioned that they supported a centre-right religion-based party in their home country, alluding to contradictory political positions in two different contexts.

## 5.2. Acculturative journeys and their components

The construction and preservation of one's ethnic identity is an integral part of the individual social identity and self-concept (Dey et al., 2019). (Im)migrants' engagement in constant negotiation between their home and host country culture groups can be used as an acculturation approach (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019). This research suggests an acculturative journey model which investigates the post-migration journey by using the concept of exposure, experience, and evolution. Based on the findings of this research, the acculturative journey of South Asian (im)migrants in the host society can be captured in the following diagram (Figure 7). These identity development stages are grouped into three chronological categories, which incorporate all the key emerging themes and milestones in the acculturation journey.

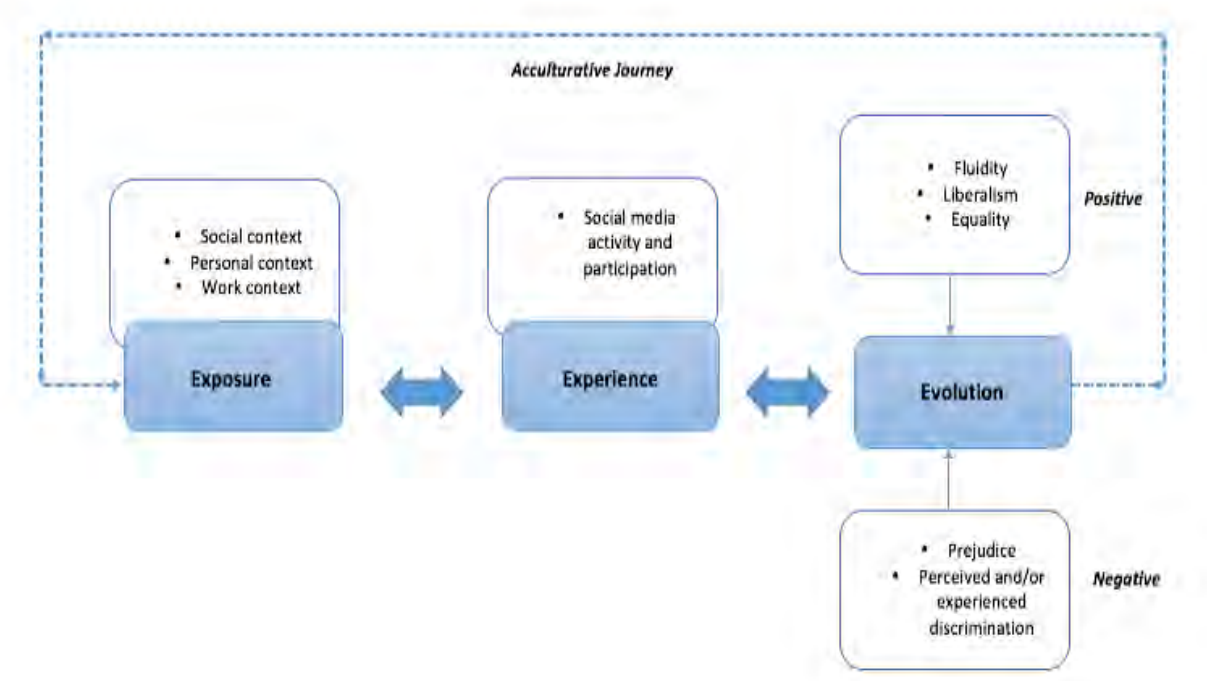


*Figure 7. The three phases of the acculturation journey in the host society*

### 5.2.1. Exposure

In the consumer acculturation scholarship, different concepts have been used to define and explain ethnic consumers' identities, such as socio-economic, institutional, and spatial contexts (Banerjee et al., 2021). As such, this concept has been widely used to analyse the impact of situational context on ethnic consumption choices (Stayman and Deshpande, 1989). A number of previous scholars have argued for the influence of situational ethnicity with regard to physical and social surroundings, temporal perspective, task definition and antecedent states that immediately precede choice (Belk, 1975). Although recent research on acculturation and migration encapsulates the idea of a multidimensional approach (Cleveland and Balakrishnan, 2019), current scholarship on identity negotiation amongst South Asian (im)migrants merits further advancement in relation to their work, social and personal settings.

As discussed in the literature review, exposure to multiculturalism can vary across different ethnic groups of various status. It enables ethnic individuals to creatively link themselves with and expose themselves to out-group members (Dokko et al., 2013), thereby reinforcing their multiple identities in various contexts. The findings indicate that South Asian (im)migrants negotiate their identity based on their environment and cultural settings. The findings also strengthen the role of self-construal (Banerjee et al., 2021) as a prominent driver for negotiation between social, personal, and work settings. In the present study, it was evident that South Asian (im)migrants were exposed to various cultural out-groups, and in so doing, they held mixed perceptions. They consciously or subconsciously assessed their priorities and balanced their notions of fitting in and standing out. The findings also support previous observations (Kizgin et al., 2021) that South Asian (im)migrants may reinterpret aspects of their inherited cultural practices and norms. This demonstrates ethnic individuals' propensity to interact with cultural outsiders in a national or global context.

A growing body of research investigates how people deal with increasing diversity and their attitudes towards multiculturalism and migration. Most of these studies report several factors associated with multiculturalism, including advantages and disadvantages of living in culturally diverse societies (Stuart and Ward, 2019), and the acculturation preferences of different ethnic groups (Arends-Tóth and Van de Vijver, 2003). In the present study, it was noted that South Asian (im)migrants had a positive outlook on multiculturalism, to which they were exposed through their education, work, personal relationships, and social settings. Their

motivations (values) to stay in the UK were linked to their lived experiences from their time as (im)migrants in Britain.

Participants' perceptions and behaviours exhibited different acculturation approaches for different contexts, as identified in the findings. For this reason, it appears that South Asian (im)migrants will often favour interpretations of mainstream society that resonate with their own culture. They construe and recreate their perceptions of British culture through their own exposure. For example, different approaches to socialising practices can be seen, such as consumption of food and drinking culture in the host society, as opposed to inviting friends to one's home for socialising purposes. Many of the participants found ways to balance their exposure. For instance, they decided to engage with the wider community in work settings, as they were convinced that the potential positive outcomes would outweigh the negatives. They negotiated their identity by navigating their approach to various situations. One participant learnt to develop ways to accommodate socialisation in the workplace without crossing her ethnic cultural boundaries. The findings are in line with 'refrainment' acculturation strategies, as coined by Dey et al. (2019).

The ethnic diversity and multicultural environment enable (im)migrants to expose themselves to a wide range of different cultures and situational contexts, which influence their overall acculturation journey. From the findings, it appears that Britain attracts (im)migrants because it provides a platform for various ethnic communities to create lively co-existing identities. This is also motivated by individuals' desire and efforts to be a part of a multicultural environment. However, not all exposure to multiculturalism has positive links to identity affiliation with home or host societies. The narratives in the findings reinforce the current literature on identity indifference (Banerjee et al., 2021). The desire to neither fit in nor stand out as a coping mechanism was also relevant. Many of the participant preferred to take a neutral stance between host and home society exposure without having a firm conviction towards either.

### 5.2.2. Experience

With the emergence of globalisation, disruptive technologies and multi-polarity in the world, the acculturation process and outcomes are not restricted to inter-cultural and inter-social group contacts within a host-migrant set up (Askegaard et al., 2005; Cleveland and Laroche, 2012).

Despite the advancements of digital technologies and borderless boundaries, the role of digital media in consumer acculturation is an evolving and dynamic process. As a result, it leaves an opportunity for a new conceptual scaffolding and empirical application of acculturation in a digital world. As a part of the acculturation journey, this research reveals how experience in the host society can be constructed by co-creating values with digital media. This research found that a majority of participants' motivations and presence on online platforms was dependent on their willingness to learn from online sources. They sought new information and consumed the latest trends and news by engaging, listening, or simply absorbing information from virtual communities. This supports the argument that information technologies can exist as mediums and determinants of identity (Carter and Grover, 2015). This new wave of digital power can give rise to a multiple identity existence amongst ethnic (im)migrants, with younger generations forming a prominent segment with higher levels of complexity and fluid identity. Thus, ethnic individuals may or may not behave in a certain way to maintain or amend their identification within a group or outside their group affiliation (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Zourrig et al., 2015).

Here, the idea of digital compartmentalisation with regard to the use of specific online platforms to satisfy one's needs is significant. Some of the South Asian (im)migrants in the present study preferred to compartmentalise their online existence to specific contextual situations. For instance, the drivers for digital compartmentalisation in this research reflected Kligler-Vilenchik et al.'s (2022) notion of 'Face-to-Facers', where (im)migrants would only express their views and opinions to a small circle of social and personal contacts. Moreover, besides the obvious benefits of social media applications and platforms, the opportunity to express their opinions without limiting societal norms was an attractive option for the participants. Hence, the creation of an anonymous social media profile to create a different persona was exciting and liberating for some (im)migrants. This was afforded through various tools and practices, such as liking, posting, sharing, or joining closed groups (Panteli and Marder, 2017). In doing so, (im)migrants aligned themselves with content that reflected their intrinsic values, and in some areas, they might even avoid external influences (including their own family and close friends) that might distract them from creating their online persona.

Analysis of the collected data also shows that digital platforms can be utilised as a tool to be politically authentic as opposed to being a politically correct citizen. This notion of anonymity provided by digital platforms facilitates authenticity and self-expression. It can also eliminate

the pressure and concerns that one will encounter during the phase of exposure through work, personal or social settings. Despite the awareness and acknowledgement, self-authenticity in its purest form, without interference from any external or internal influences, requires societal and cultural progression from its current state. Although the findings indicate that the majority of participants supported the concept of fluidity and liberalism (positive evolution), it is still treated as a taboo and culturally inappropriate in many South Asian communities.

Based on the research findings, it can also be argued that digital awareness and acquirement of knowledge and education in an online platform can facilitate and support the acculturation journey of an ethnic (im)migrant. The positive affiliation and narratives from the data suggest that there is a strong tendency for South Asian (im)migrants to develop their self-awareness. This in turn reflects the existence of the participants' gratitude for easy access to digital platforms through which they could raise and voice their own concerns and issues, which might not be possible in their home country. From the online observations, many South Asian (im)migrants exhibited their own political views and orientations on their own social media. Current political debate on the Covid-19 lockdowns, Covid vaccinations and protests such as the BLM movement were prevalent topics during the data collection period. The findings offer context-based support for the interrelated nature and role of social media as a medium in constructing identities (Yu et al., 2019). The availability of resources, infrastructure, and freedom of speech in a democratic society has brought political and societal debates closer to the wider audience, including the South Asian community. They build their social capital (Park et al., 2015), invest their time, and engage with people with similar interests who share the same values as them (Elliot and Yusuf, 2014). Therefore, online socialisation positively impacts ethnic individuals' awareness and knowledge, making this experience stage a critical part of their acculturation journey.

Furthermore, there is strong evidence for how individuals can navigate their digital experiences to suit their perceptions, opinions, and stages of life. Although some negative points were made in relation to online existence, such as addiction to social media, the data reveal how participants were making a rational decision to create room for digital detox (i.e., taking time away from social media or unfollowing content that created jealously or anxiety) in order to improve their psychological and mental well-being. Similarly, using social media to improve physical and mental well-being (such as subscription to online fitness workouts) was also noted

amongst the participants. This articulates the digital savviness portrayed and exhibited by South Asian (im)migrants.

### 5.2.3. Evolution

Following the current acculturation scholarships and the key findings from the exposure and experience stages of the acculturative journey, it appears that acculturation is not a linear phenomenon. Instead, it involves a complex and dynamic process with multi-faceted layers of agents, drivers, and factors. Due to the dynamic and evolving nature of our global economy, ethnic identity is exposed to constant dialogue. From this research, the majority of the participants enjoyed learning about other cultures and having a diverse circle of friends and family in Britain. Although some participants still had strong roots in their heritage cultures, most reported feeling that they had integrated equally to their home and host cultures. Some participants even noted the feeling of being more British in terms of their self-identification. The freedom to express themselves without the restrictions of societal and cultural norms made them feel accepted and comfortable. Therefore, this approach reifies and reinforces the importance of fluidity in personal views (including sexual orientation).

Online observations and interviews identified that ethnic values and beliefs did not appear to limit many of the participants' flexibility and acknowledgement of embracing diversity and inclusion in Britain. The findings demonstrated that participants from the LGBTQIA+ community found validation and acceptance of their gender identity in Britain, which was impossible for some of them in their countries of origin. Interestingly, positive evolution also encompassed how participants developed their outlook toward and perceptions of Western liberalism. As South Asian (im)migrants underwent the stages of exposure, experience, and evolution, many learned to rationalise their outlook through a gradual process. Over time, their choices of lifestyle and consumption practices were dictated by their desire and priority to live an authentic life.

The majority of the participants in this research revealed that positive evolution was an outcome of their acculturative journey. However, given the ethnic hierarchies in many host societies, which place ethnic and religious minorities at the bottom, (im)migrants are still susceptible to recurrent threats. From the findings, the feeling of social inadequacy can cause ethnic (im)migrants to heighten their commitment to their ideologies, which can lead to

increased levels of prejudice towards the host society. Hostile and unfair treatment due to one's membership of particular ethnic or religious groups can signal to (im)migrants that their existence and validity lack recognition amongst the wider society (Schulz and Leszczensky, 2016). For example, in response to racial discrimination, South Asian (im)migrants navigated their perceived discrimination by seeking ways to avoid the conflicting issues. The fear of discrimination from past experiences had a significant impact on their perceptions of host communities. Their evolution encompassed negative experiences that one cannot dismiss. For instance, they sought to improve their financial means through work settings as a way to reduce discrimination against them in the mainstream society. However, such resentment towards host society attributes can decrease over time due to the intergroup contacts that can be established through various avenues, such as their social circles (Al Ramiah et al., 2014). This was echoed in Raki's narrative, as shown in section 4.2.3.

Although negative evolution can hamper their overall acculturative journey, this research found evidence of a dynamic change in ethnic (im)migrants' evolution where both the positive and negative aspects can simultaneously feed back into the formation of an individual evolution. For some (im)migrants, their acculturative journey may not involve or reach the evolution stage. Due to the interplay of various intrinsic and extrinsic influences, individuals' acculturative journeys vary, as they are unique and complex. The diagram above (Figure 7) also exhibits that the three stages in the acculturative journey are interconnected in a loop which is subjected to constant dynamic change. Individuals can move from one stage to another as deemed appropriate and acceptable by the individual themselves.

## 5.3. Engagement with politics as an acculturative expression

Interest in and acculturation of political engagement amongst South Asian (im)migrants seem to have undergone a conceptual change, from a rather unequivocal notion focusing on voting behaviour towards a more complex notion of political engagement which rests heavily upon one ideological foundation or another. Following previous scholars (Esser, 2015), political participation is an indicator of the degree of (im)migrants' integration and incorporation into their host societies as well as of their willingness to engage in civic life. Investigating ethnic differences in political integration is crucial to our understanding of not only (im)migrants' representation in the political sphere, but also their contribution to the cohesion and systemic integration of the wider society (Dollmann, 2021).

By identifying the South Asian (im)migrants' political acculturative orientation and acculturative journeys, this research classifies ethnic (im)migrants' expression and engagement in the context of local politics into four types, presented in the form of a 2x2 matrix, as shown in Table 7, below.

*Table 7. 2x2 matrix showcasing the typology of political expression by South Asian (im)migrants*

| | **High Expression** | **Low Expression** |
|---|---|---|
| **High Engagement with mainstream local politics** | **Politically embracive** | **Politically reticent** |
| **Low Engagement with mainstream local politics** | **Politically sensitive** | **Politically separated** |

By following the current scholarship of Kligler-Vilenchik et al. (2022), these typologies depict a coherent and cohesive set of types in relation to South Asian (im)migrants' willingness to engage in political talk or debate within the host society:

1) **Politically embracive**: Ethnic (im)migrants who will regularly discuss and engage in politics through various platforms (online and offline).
2) **Politically sensitive:** Ethnic (im)migrants who will engage with and express political opinions, but only participate in issues relating to their personal interests (issue-base political news and affairs). For instance, one respondent who hardly followed and engaged with local politics supported Brexit, as they thought it could create more job opportunities for them.
3) **Politically reticent:** Ethnic (im)migrants who maintain political awareness and knowledge through various sources but are hesitant to share and express their views in a public space.
4) **Politically separated:** Ethnic (im)migrants who regards themselves as politically uninterested and do not engage in any form of political expression in the host country context.

The data from this research show that politically embracive (im)migrants are those who are willing to renounce and share their perceived values, beliefs, and norms around appropriate political expression (past, present, and future political implications) in an online or offline format. They are not afraid to speak up or share their political opinions, with little regard for others' opinions or reactions to them. In relation to their digital presence, they enjoy an element of sharing controversial issues or political stories on their social media platform, whilst entertaining post and comments through online platforms or virtual communities. They have a desire to repost and retweet graphic images and text, which sometimes involves highly sensitive political news. Some of the (im)migrants in this typology also indicated that they experienced a degree of enjoyment from evoking and creating commotions and debate (Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2022), either in an online or an offline environment.

Interestingly, politically embracive (im)migrants were not necessarily those with the greatest transparency, or the most adamant about their own political views. Whilst this type of expression was relatively rare, commendable and useful information can be drawn from the findings. As discussed above, the advancement of digital technology facilitates and supports (im)migrants who want to become politically embracive. For example, the existence of deep fake anonymous profiles has solidified the prevalence of ethnic cultural ideology and values. This supports the notion of secondary identity-seeking behaviour, which can be recognised as one of the key factors for becoming politically embracive.

Secondly, politically sensitive expressers are those who will express and engage with local politics, but will make curated and considered rational choices around the type of topic. They also exhibit sensitivity to personal circumstances, the affordances of online platforms to use for certain purposes, and which practices to employ when they choose to do so. Moreover, they are also aware of the possible risks of political expression. They respond to their perceived risks differently based on the issues that they encounter. Ethnic (im)migrants in this group will strategically devise a time and place to share political news or issues that resonate to their intrinsic values (personal issue-based only). They put great effort and care into picking the right types of platforms and messages (online or offline) to reach their target audiences (online followers or communities) (Mor et al., 2015). During ethnic (im)migrants' post-migration journey (exposure, experience, and evolution), as posited in Study Objective 2, the narratives surrounding their political interests were found to be subjected to change over time (length of

residency period). Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge that the categorisation of political expression with local politics is non-static in nature and is subject to change with the advancements in socio-cultural, political, and technological factors (external environmental influences on personal matters).

Thirdly, politically reticent expressers say that they are interested in and will engage with local politics such as current political news and affairs, but they do not feel comfortable to share their political ideologies and perceptions with others, either online or offline. From the findings, this category mostly comprised (im)migrants in the early years of their migration journey (i.e., the exposure and experience stages in Study Objective 2). Across different generations from various South Asian countries, the driving factor behind (im)migrants' choices to avoid political talk and debate is often related to personal concerns about the divergent and opposing views that people may hold. These concerns stem from having perceived negative connotations and emotions towards politics in a general space, where emotions such as anger or offensive arguments can prevail from exposing their political alignment and perceptions. The sense of social fear about talking politics appears to be a concern when (im)migrants experience a negative backlash in their acculturative journey in the host society. This finding supports the claims made by Hayes and Matthes (2017) in their work on political communications of self-censorship and silence to maintain social harmony.

Finally, politically separated expressers are those who represent ethnic (im)migrants who are apathetic towards local politics and feel either that their ideas or political opinions bear no significance to their personal lives or that local politics is only for White British people. From the data, this category mostly comprised (im)migrants who held strong perceptions and beliefs about general politics from the host and home societies. Their reasons for political separation spanned a long period of time (i.e., the formation of values, ideology, and perceptions towards politics from their home country) and had not been adjusted or influence by any foreign environment. The preconceived notions and ideas of home country political affairs and systems, the influence of family and friends, and negative experiences of political engagement in the host society were prominent. Furthermore, the loss of trust and credibility in the government also contributed towards the formation of the politically separated group.

## 5.4. Inter-relationship and interactions between the three empirical findings:

As discussed in the findings chapter, acculturative political orientations are constituted through (im)migrants' intrinsic values and extrinsic influences (see Figure 6). The three types of political orientations found in this research depend upon the nature and terrain of cultural instability. Following Hall (1990), the cultural identities developed by South Asian (im)migrants are fluid and dynamic, as they depend upon the memories and the versions of narratives upon which they are based. As described in detail in Figure 6, the dyadic inter-relationship between (im)migrants' personal values and their views of the world (external factors) is a continuous process which feeds into classifying and understanding their political orientation. Therefore, South Asian (im)migrants' political orientation can be categorised into the 3 C's: compelled by ideology, conformation underpinned by self-interest, and complexity with caveats.

The components of values and extrinsic influences are determined by a number of factors, as previously discussed. From the findings, it is also understood that South Asian (im)migrants' exposure, experience, and evolution of the acculturation journey can also be influenced by their acculturative political orientations. The different steps of individuals' acculturation journeys cannot be generalised or streamlined as a smooth and flowing process. At any given point, it is a possibility that South Asian (im)migrants will amend, adapt, or swap their identity affiliation and choices. For instance, in the long term, ethnic individuals may stop aligning their orientations and identity to a certain political party due to a change in their lifestyle, economic, political, and/or socio-cultural factors. For example, a loyal Labour supporter may decide to stop voting for their party due to their current personal experience and exposure to the host society.

In addition, the data also highlights how the experience stages of acculturation journey can impact the political expressions of an ethnic (im)migrants as advocated by Razin where he described his political acculturation was predominantly guided and compelled by his ideology. Moreover, it is important to note that the evolution stage in the acculturation journey is also multi-faceted in nature. As such, this research provides a valuable insight into the nature of the acculturation journey, as it acknowledges the importance of positive and negative outcomes. Therefore, it can be argued that not all of South Asian (im)migrants experience a positive or negative evolution. For example, length of residency and purpose of stay in the UK (i.e.

acculturation journey) can play a role in framing individual's acculturative political orientation and expressions.

The dynamics of value-driven political acculturation underscore the recursive interactions between (im)migrants' political orientation and acculturation journey. In so doing, the dyadic relationship between them leads to the identification of the various types of acculturative political expressions. As discussed in this chapter, this research has focused on local (British) politics, which helps to construct the components of political identity as an acculturative expression. This is why an (im)migrant who grew up in a traditional South Asian family could now exercise their political expressions without the stigma or fear that is embedded into their lives from their ancestors. For instance, the freedom and the opportunity to be critical of their political views are underpinned by the reiterative and continuous loop of their acculturation journey. As a result, this research shows the various types of political expressions that can be utilised by the South Asian (im)migrant communities: politically embracive, politically sensitive, politically reticent, and politically separated.

Following the discussions of how various political typology can be categorised in 5.3, the interactions between the three empirical data and their components is dynamic and fluid in nature. The findings reveal a significant pattern in the variability of (im)migrants' perceptions of political debates and discourses, which in turn shapes their political orientation. Their political intent within the UK is often driven by their political alignment from their country of origin. This research thus propose a typology that facilitates the segmentation of (im)migrants by their political orientation and intended political behaviour. For instance, data from one of the participant shows how the three components of the empirical studies can be linked from one another (express as politically sensitive guided by their conformation underpinned by self-interest which they developed during their exposure and experience) in the host society.

The findings of this thesis also go beyond anecdotal evidence and demonstrate how political identity is integrated within the daily lives of ethnic (im)migrants. The political orientations, acculturation journeys and political expressions of South Asian (im)migrants explained in this research provide a useful understanding and contribution towards the current acculturation scholarships, particularly in areas of ethnic minority studies. The empirical findings and conceptual novelty can enable political marketers to develop targeted strategies to engage with

ever increasing (im)migrant populations in Europe, North America and Australia. There are also significant policy implications for supporting social and political inclusivity.

## 5.5. Theoretical Contributions

This research has theorised and contributed to the acculturation literature in three ways. By addressing the research gaps identified in Chapter 1, this thesis adds to the existing acculturation literature by exploring and theorising a relatively under-researched concept: the role of (im)migrants' values and ideologies in shaping their acculturation in the host society. In doing so, this research focus on the political expressions and engagement of South Asian (im)migrants in Britain. Evident within the data is the nature of the dyadic inter-relationship between the values and extrinsic environmental influences that lead to acculturative political orientation. As discussed earlier, Western societies are becoming increasingly multicultural and diverse, while ethnic communities are starting to develop their stance on their political views and representation in the host society. Ethnic (im)migrants' interactions with local politics and their influence on their acculturation experience merits an exciting research area, which this thesis has thoroughly explored and analysed. Therefore, this research argues for the prominence of value-driven analysis of ethnic acculturation in the host society. The findings provide a valuable opportunity to unveil the intricate details of multi-dimensional acculturation. Hence, the fluidity, ambiguity, and dialectical nature of the participants support the argument that political acculturation from a value-driven perspective is not a monolith.

Unpacking the multi-faceted layers of ethnic values by incorporating the notions of macro-environmental factors highlights the rigorous and robust data. It presents an understanding of how and to what extent an (im)migrant's values and ideologies can interplay in the formation of their identities. Ranging from their practices of faith and religion to education as a motivational factor, this research contributes to the acculturation theory by looking beyond the mere outcome of acculturation. It suggests that more attention should be paid to the agents of extrinsic influences, such as opinions and attitudes towards the Brexit debate and other recent economic and political events in Britain. As presented in 5.4, the dynamic nature of (im)migrants' values and extrinsic influences provides a lens through which the antecedents of acculturative political orientations can be examined. By identifying the dialectical influence of the values and extrinsic influences amongst the South Asian (im)migrants, the research demonstrates the flow of acculturative orientation that leads to the conceptualisation of the

3Cs. The framework presented (Figure 6) can be consulted to assess value-based acculturation studies. The assessment of values and extrinsic influences work in tandem. It is a dynamic and recursive loop, which highlights the fact that values and external influences undergo a continuous and iterative series of interactions among different components. Therefore, the careful analysis and evaluation of both areas can assist in the categorisation of acculturative political orientation.

Secondly, the researcher explores the acculturation journey through the context of exposure, experience, and evolution. The findings posit that the phases of an (im)migrant's acculturation journey are not one-way traffic; instead, they are exposed to constant dialogue and are reciprocally interwoven. Whilst this process presents as non-static in nature, it nonetheless represents an understanding of how an ethnic (im)migrant can appropriate their own views of their acculturation journey in the host society. Driven by multiculturalism and the desire to be part of the wider society, South Asian (im)migrants constantly negotiate their identity based on their exposure to various environments: work, social, and personal settings. This thesis also contributes to a further understanding of the emerging culture of digital media and its applications amongst the (im)migrant population in Britain. For instance, it examines how ethnic individuals co-create their values with digital media. As a result, experience of digital consumer culture (Dey et al., 2020) serves as a determinant for constructing their self-identity and existence in the host society. The findings from this thesis also reveal the multi-faceted notion of multi-dimensional acculturation. As can be seen in Chapters 4 and 5, the incorporation of in-depth discussions reveals a complex and conflicting prominence of ethnic values and ideologies throughout the participants' acculturation journey.

Finally, the research goes beyond the existing acculturation literature (Dey et al., 2019; Kizgin et al., 2019) by identifying and classifying engagement and expression with local politics as an acculturative expression rather than an acculturation strategy. As discussed in this chapter, the typology developed in this study, comprising four types of political expression – politically embracive, politically reticent, politically sensitive and politically separated – has captured the essence of political expression and engagement through the lens of value-driven identity. The findings of this thesis also go beyond anecdotal evidence and demonstrate how political identity is integrated within the daily lives of ethnic (im)migrants. The political orientations, acculturation journeys and political expressions of South Asian (im)migrants explained in this

research provide a useful understanding and contribution towards the current acculturation scholarships, particularly in areas of ethnic minority studies and political marketing.

## 5.6. Chapter Conclusion

In summary, this chapter provides clear guidelines and understanding for the assessment of the dynamics of value-driven ethnic political acculturation in the host society. Three areas of investigation have been identified for the analysis of political acculturation: political orientations, acculturation journeys, and political expressions in relation to British politics. The model presented in Figure 6 illustrates that the political acculturative orientation discussed in this research can be categorised into three types of orientation. These orientations, derived from the data, are the ideological values-driven approach, the self-interest conformation approach, and complexity with caveats, underpinned by personal experiences and narratives.

The next stage of the analysis investigates the acculturation stages by identifying the various factors that influence South Asian (im)migrants' behavioural intentions. In so doing, it offers a framework for the acculturation journey, as shown in Figure 7. It describes the three stages of acculturation through the conceptual lens of exposure, experience, and evolution. These stages of acculturation have a dyadic interrelationship with the acculturative political orientations, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Further to the assessment of political acculturation, this chapter also analyses political acculturation as an expression in relation to local politics. It incorporates the Brexit debate, perceptions of the European Union, and other political and economic events in Britain. This is complemented by constructing a 2x2 matrix of political expression typology with reference to (im)migrants' political engagement and expressions. Finally, a comprehensive narrative of how the three empirical studies interact with each other can be found in 5.4. (i.e. value-driven political acculturation). This is a significant contribution of this research, as it advances and contributes to the existing acculturation scholarships within the studies of an ethnic (im)migrant population. It also develops a comprehensive definition and understanding of ethnic political acculturation from a qualitative perspective.

# 6. Conclusion

In this thesis, the researcher has contributed to the existing acculturation literature by conceptualising and introducing a value-based approach to acculturative political orientation, journeys, and political expressions, as described in Chapters 4 and 5. By using SIT as a theoretical lens, this research analysed how and to what extent local politics have construed and constructed the political expressions and orientations of South Asian (im)migrants in Britain.

This chapter summarises the whole thesis by presenting the key research findings and their contributions to relevant theories. In doing so, it also sets out a meticulous curation of how and to what extent the research aims and objectives have been met. The chapter also includes a range of political marketing and managerial implications. It also offers indications for future research and addresses the limitations of this thesis. Moreover, the findings from this research also confirm the significance and prominence of the value-based approach to ethnic acculturation studies.

## 6.1. Key research findings

This thesis was motivated by the notion of having a nuanced understanding of South Asian (im)migrants' acculturative expressions and their cultural disposition in Britain. By extracting the intricate details of the various dimensions within the value systems, the findings from this study provide a new perspective on (im)migrants' involvement with local politics, which can sometimes be deemed as an unwelcome topic or subject to explore. The data from this study contributes to the existing research on ethnic political acculturation studies. Moreover, it will also help to advance the broader aspects of acculturation and consumer research. As seen in Chapter 1, this thesis set out three major research objectives, which have been addressed with the consultation of the existing theories.

From the findings, the most important aspects of acculturation towards the host society were associated with the notions of multiculturalism, religion, family, and community. Participants' actions and motivations were guided by their preconceived knowledge of their own cultural heritage, which stemmed from the constant negotiation and change of their own psychological

and cultural values. Through a thorough investigation of South Asian (im)migrants' social, work, and personal practices, this thesis presents the various motivational reasons for migration to Britain. For example, the findings reveal how the history of the participants' own migration stories elicited and evoked their thoughts and feelings, which were embedded within their formation of values and self-identity. The conversations ranged from believing in the hope of creating a better future for their families through the pursuit of education to reflecting upon experiences of civil war.

It is also understood that due to the exposure to and experiences of multiculturalism in Western society, ethnic individuals' perceptions and opinions towards the societal and political issues are fluid and non-static. By incorporating the current political, economic, and societal issues that encapsulate our way of life, this study develops a new perspective on how ethnic values and ideologies can be navigated and negotiated by the South Asian (im)migrants. For instance, although the majority of the participants favoured the idea of acceptance and liberalism towards the notion of sexuality, women's rights and political protest, their backgrounds and values undeniably appeared to have a direct impact on their outlook and political orientation. However, their identity associations and negotiation remain a continuous process which can be subjected to change with time and experience.

In addition to using values as a foundation to elicit a deeper insight into political orientations, the findings incorporate another dimension. Current literature (Oyserman et al., 2017) posits that extrinsic influences can perhaps impede one's interpretation of social and cultural situations. To complement the responses from the value-based systems, Figure 6, presented in the previous chapter, shows a dyadic interrelationship between values and external environmental influences. By capturing the perceptions and attitudes towards the impact of sustainability, climate change and political polarisation in British society, South Asian (im)migrants revealed various contextual examples from their own personal experiences: for instance, the knowledge and idea of Britishness was intrinsically linked to an (im)migrant's aspirations and desires, such as the acquirement of a British passport and citizenship rights.

In addition, the loss of trust and credibility in the UK government and politics can be seen from the study's findings. It was noted that participants' voting intentions and political party affiliations were driven by the current external environmental and global issues, such as Covid-19 and the Brexit debate. Discussions of the Brexit referendum and the handling of the Covid-

19 pandemic played a role in the classification of acculturative political orientations. Therefore, the findings provide a conceptual understanding and scaffolding for South Asian (im)migrants' political acculturation by presenting three types of political orientation (Figure 6). The three different aspects of this orientation demonstrate the complexity of the dynamic dialectical alignment of values and political orientations. Nonetheless, it offers a new perspective on how value-based acculturation studies can be utilised in wider consumer research.

Study Objective 2 assessed the determinants of the post-migration acculturation journey by using the concepts of exposure, experience, and evolution. The analysis of the acculturation journey was based on the various phases of the identity development journey. As mentioned above, the diversity and multicultural nature of the Western liberal societies have enabled South Asian (im)migrants to co-create their values and identity through exposure to and interaction with multiple cultural backgrounds. Social, personal, and work contexts were used as a way to further understand the multi-faceted nature of (im)migrants' approach to creating their own exposure within the host society. South Asian (im)migrants negotiate their identity in all of the three contexts. In doing so, they are striving to favour an interpretation of the mainstream society practices that can resonate with their own culture. For example, as seen in Chapters 4 and 5, they engage with the wider community in work settings through the creation of their own boundaries within these settings. Through this navigation approach, they maintain their dignity and respect for their cultural beliefs and ethos without the need to marginalise or separate themselves from the wider community.

Further investigations identified a number of factors that influenced South Asian (im)migrants' experiences of mainstream society. For this study, within the experience dimensions, the role of social media and their emerging digital culture contributes to the ongoing scholarship on digital consumer culture and digital acculturation studies. While digital media and their applications do bring benefits and positive associations, there are also valid and significant concerns related to social and personal risks. Some (im)migrants expressed their concerns about addiction to social media and the impact of digital presence on one's mental health and well-being. Nonetheless, positive influences in the form of seeking education and learning from online sources cannot be dismissed. It was interesting to note the existence of multiple identities that participants chose to adopt to suit their desire for authenticity. For example, the idea of compartmentalising their digital identity was a great way for some of the (im)migrants to express their authentic selves without distractions and expectations from the outside world.

The opportunities that digital culture has provided to conservative (im)migrants can be identified as an important avenue for accommodating their real feelings and values without the need to conform to societal or ethnic community standards. For instance, the freedom to be politically embracive and to freely express their own political and socio-economic issues on their social channels encapsulated the importance of digital media to some of the participants. As a result, the experience of using digital applications and tools has played a fundamental part in shaping or reshaping their acculturation journey in the host society.

Most of the South Asian (im)migrants were keen to create a positive evolution for their acculturation journeys. By and large, through the phases of exposure and experience, many of the participants learned to rationalise their opinions and perceptions over time. They received substantial knowledge and awareness from their families, friends, community, and work colleagues. They decided to embrace the positive functionality of social media and their applications. The findings also indicate overwhelming support for liberalism and equality for all communities amongst the South Asian (im)migrants. However, the participants' personal experiences and stories conveyed a level of concern about racial discrimination amongst the South Asian community. The resulting negative perceptions towards the host society stemmed from multiple layers of contextual situations, such as school, the workplace, Covid-19, and physical appearance. Although small in number, the instances of unacceptable treatment and experiences of discrimination can be transmitted to the formation and notion of prejudice and hate towards the host community. However, due to the potential for dynamic shifts and changes in (im)migrants' life journeys in the host society, the acculturative journey can move from one phase to another. In fact, positive and negative evolution can also facilitate and support the overall perceptions of an (im)migrant's views on their own versions of acculturation stories and their dynamic journey.

The major goal of Study Objective 3 was to investigate the dynamics and kinetics of political engagement as an acculturative expression amongst South Asian (im)migrants. By following through the findings and analysis of Study Objectives 1 and 2, the findings of this study led to the creation of a 2x2 matrix classification of South Asian (im)migrants' expressions and engagement with local politics. Facilitated by the digital consumer culture during the experience phases of their acculturation journey, politically embracive (im)migrants from the South Asian community used the same practices and approach to express their political stance in both online and offline formats. Information and knowledge gathered from their online

sources was transmitted to their activities in the offline world. For instance, many of the participants' views and their sense-making on worldwide issues such as the BLM campaign came from the easy accessibility of online content and materials. With this knowledge in hand, some of them subsequently decided to join physical protests. Moreover, these developments exhibit the gradual transformation of the narrow boundaries between our online and offline worlds. Another form of political engagement and expression can also be noted. Despite sharing some commonality in terms of political interest and affiliations, politically sensitive expressers approached the expression of politics from a different angle. By carefully analysing the risks and benefits of expressing their political voices, ethnic (im)migrants in this group chose to become politically expressive only when the issues at hand resonated with their personal beliefs and values.

Finally, the effective use of political voices and expressions also rests on the individual's circumstances and acculturation journey. This study identified that (im)migrants who were in their early years of acculturation were mostly guided by the stigma and fear of accidentally placing their political allegiances in the public space. Driven by their own perceived or lived experiences of discrimination, politically reticent (im)migrants chose to avoid political talks at all costs to maintain social harmony and existence with other cultural groups. In a similar vein but with a different twist, some of the participants from the South Asian community exhibited a strong stance on local politics by creating a boundary to separate themselves from any associations with British politics. Following the focus and approach of this thesis, political separation desires were driven by the multi-faceted layers of values and beliefs that these (im)migrants had acquired and retained over time. It can also be argued that political separation is deeply rooted and engraved within the ethnic individual. It emanates from the loss of trust and credibility, and detachment from the general political activities.

## 6.2. Practical and Managerial Implications

Following the extant literature and insights on acculturation and social identity, the researcher feels that conducting exploratory research on a relatively under-researched concept (i.e., value-driven political acculturation) would further benefit this field. The findings from this research provide useful directions and suggestions for practitioners and marketers. The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 5 can be used as a springboard to explore these areas further.

The recent economic and political turbulence around the world has solidified the prominence of politics and its impact on our daily activities. In Britain, since the start of the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, political issues and debate have been the highlight of the national newspapers and social media outlets. In addition, with the war in Ukraine and the impact of Brexit, these are turbulent times in the UK. As the cost of living continues to rise, we can see the emergence of new perceptions and validation for political discussions, even amongst people who are not interested in politics. With this in mind, this research offers several future directions for marketers, particularly in areas of political marketing.

The concept of value-driven political acculturation can be used to explore and understand the dyadic interrelationship between values and behaviour in various ethnic communities. For instance, the findings from this research offer a valuable insight to practitioners within the area of political marketing (content developers, policy-makers, campaign planners, not-for-profit organisations, local community leaders, activists, etc.). The tendency to stereotype ethnic (im)migrants as Remainers in the Brexit referendum may not be an uncommon theme amongst the wider society, but the findings indicate that they have created their own versions of political allegiance and associations based on their acculturation experiences. For example, an (im)migrant from Bangladesh who voted for Brexit remained loyal to their voting intentions for the Labour party. Therefore, marketing communications for political brands and products need to go beyond the facets of an individual's background and country of origin. Following the evidence of how values can interplay in the specifics of political debate, political marketers can incorporate the notion of emotional and aspirational stories in their political campaigns. In order to develop an inclusive and diverse brand, the importance of simple marketing messages and campaigns on social media platforms was clearly highlighted by the participants. Increased representation and visibility in the mainstream society can evoke the essence of belonging and resonance amongst ethnic communities.

In addition to marketing communications, the research findings indicate potential benefits that could be achieved through extracting the use and significance of socio-cultural issues. Questions pertaining to social issues and concerns need to be challenged and addressed. How can a political party segment and target ethnic communities beyond the stereotypical assumptions of ethnic beliefs and their consumption practices? With this approach, political parties can address many of the latent emotional and value-driven issues, such as radicalisation, bigotry, and hate crimes. For instance, the recent incidents of violence and vandalism between

the Hindu and Muslim communities in Leicester were unprecedented, but the underlying differences and tensions can be traced back to decades of conflicting historical backgrounds. Therefore, in order to address these ongoing challenges, understanding (im)migrants' value systems and how they actually express their behaviour would be helpful to enable politicians to quell any potential disturbances or political unrest in the future. Moreover, besides the direct implications for political marketing, the findings have also identified some practical implications for general marketing. In a consumer behaviour context, for example, the consumption of Cobra Beer can promote a nostalgic reminder of one's ethnic identity. As ethnic flavour can be rooted within the realm of the cultural ethos of the sub-continent, these value and behaviour dynamics can play out in all different types of product marketing. In doing so, they can help to harness new ideas for creating benefits through products and services. The dynamics of the value-driven approach to marketing in this research can be comprehended and consulted to design and implement effective marketing policies and strategies.

## 6.3. Limitations and scope for future research

By concurring with previous scholarly works (Dey et al., 2019; Kizgin et al., 2019; Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2022), the researcher has contributed to the acculturation literature and studies by conceptualising a value-driven approach to political acculturation orientation, journeys, and expressions. However, as mentioned in section 3.8, no research is without its limitations and constraints. Since the research was exploratory in nature, it is important to note that the derived findings and theoretical contributions need to be validated through another research method such as quantitative enquiry. Although this research has sought a deeper insight into (im)migrants' acculturation in the host society, the primary data was collected online due to the nature of the global Covid-19 pandemic during the research period. Therefore, it does not provide a physical ethnographic observation of the participants' activities. Future research could address these issues. For instance, physical observation on an offline platform could perhaps provide prompts or clues to evoke another dimension of discussions that could enrich the findings of this study.

In light of the findings of this research, future researchers could also undertake similar studies among ethnic consumers outside South Asian communities. For example, further studies could explore and analyse various sub-cultural ethnic groups from different socio-cultural, political, and economic backgrounds. In addition, acculturation studies using a value-based approach

could be employed for various consumption practices and contexts. This would help to create a broader and more inclusive exclusive understanding of the significant role of values in shaping and/or reshaping the acculturation journey of ethnic consumers in the host society. In this stream of research, it would also be interesting to explore the categorisation of values, perceptions, and cultural awareness amongst the members of the mainstream society. This approach would reveal emerging and interesting findings, which could further contribute to the conceptual underpinning of acculturation studies through the eyes of mainstream society.

Another limitation of this research was the cross-sectional nature of the study. The findings and theoretical contributions were drawn based upon the participants' current acculturation experiences and life stages. As mentioned within the theoretical contributions in section 5.5, the consumption, perceptions, and practices of South Asian (im)migrants can significantly shift during their post-migration period. Due to the dynamic nature of their tendency to adjust during their acculturation journey, a longitudinal study may be appropriate to ascertain how and to what extent ethnic consumers' acculturation orientations and expressions can change over time.

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# Appendix A (Demographic profile of participants)

*Table 8. Demographic profile of the participants*

| Participant's pseudonyms | Age | Gender | Occupation | Ethnicity/Country of Origin | Length of Residency in UK (number of years) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Heni** | 30 | Female | Doctorate student | Indian origin living in Mauritius | 9 |
| **Sylvia** | 32 | Female | Procurement Manager | India | 7 |
| **Puia** | 33 | Male | Entrepreneur | India | 12 |
| **Sheena** | 55 | Female | | British Indian (naturalised citizen) | 15 |
| **Parvi** | 29 | Female | Marketing Executive | British Indian | Born in UK |
| **Mya** | 26 | Female | Operations Assistant | British Sri-Lankan | Born in UK |
| **Abbie** | 34 | Female | Dentist | British Indian | Born in UK |
| **Ravi** | | Male | Marketing manager | British Indian | Born in UK |
| **Javi** | 27 | Female | Office Administrator/Part-time Lecturer | Pakistan | 8 |
| **Ben** | 32 | Male | British Army | British Indian (naturalised citizen) | 10 |
| **Razin** | 43 | Male | Lecturer | British Bangladeshi (naturalised citizen) | 16 |
| **Tasha** | 30 | Female | Sales Manager | British Indian | Born in UK |
| **Priyanka** | 41 | Female | Lecturer | Indian | 12 |
| **Faris** | 43 | Male | Retail | British Bangladeshi (naturalised citizen) | 17 |
| **Gurdi** | 44 | Female | Finance | British Indian | Born in UK |
| **Phil** | 40 | Male | Higher Education Lecturer | British Indian | Born in UK |
| **Cathy** | 27 | Female | Beautician | British Indian | Born in UK |
| **Karisma** | 27 | Female | Teacher | British Indian | Born in UK |
| **Sammy** | 31 | Male | Post-graduate student | India | 9 |
| **Rishil** | 26 | Male | Musician and law graduate | Indian | 8 |
| **Nikita** | 33 | Female | Teacher | British Sri-Lankan | Born in UK |
| **Raki** | 27 | Female | Recruitment Adviser | British Sri-Lankan | Born in UK |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Shahid** | 45 | Male | Senior Lecturer | Pakistan | 17 |
| **Amarpal** | 30 | Female | Personal Trainer | British Indian | Born in UK |
| **Amitab** | 28 | Male | Accountant | India | 5 |
| **Zachary** | 45 | Male | Economist | India | 17 |
| **Jawad** | 36 | Male | Operations manager | India | 12 |

# Appendix B

*Semi-Structured Interview (Online) Sample Questions*

The following lists are a sample set of questions that will be use for the semi-structured interviews for my PhD thesis. The interview discussion will be based on South Asian ethnic minority involvement with British politics where the researcher will identify the formation of value based acculturation to political orientations and political expressions. The theoretical lens of social identity theory will also be used to examine the acculturation experience in the host society. These sample questions will be used as a point of reference and is not intended to provide the exact list of questions to be asked to the participants. For this reason, the researcher has opted for a semi-structured interviews where the questions will be guided by the participants and prompted by the researcher when it is appropriate to do so.

*Sample Question Lists:*

Opening Questions:

- Aims of the interview
- Basic Demographic Questions: Age, Gender, Occupation, Length of UK Residence, Ethnicity.

Personal Experience Related:

- Can you tell me a brief summary of when you move to the UK and the reasons behind your choice of residing in the UK?

Questions Lists:

1. Can you please tell me what ethnic identity means to you?
2. How would you describe your identity as a minority resident in the UK?
3. How often do you use engage with your own ethnic community? If yes/no, can you please tell me your reasons for it?
4. How important is your ethnic identity and culture to you? Do your ethnic community or organisations' try to promote your own culture in Britain?
5. How would you describe what being British is? Do you think you shared the same essence and values as the mainstream society? Please elaborate.
6. Do you think your ancestral values such as family and community is important for you?
7. Do you think your perceptions on your identity (social, ethnic and political) is influenced by your consumption of technology and online media?
8. Which social media platform do you use the most and why?
9. Do you follow any political parties from your home country? If yes, do you continue to follow your political interest and get involved in the UK political elections/campaigns?

10. Do you follow politics on social media? If yes, do you share your knowledge and experiences with others on social media?
11. What is your views on Brexit results as an ethnic minority?
12. Do you follow any particular page/profile that resonates to your political beliefs and values?
13. Have you ever vote in a political election in Britain? And, what do you think is important for you to associate with your chosen political party?
14. Do you personally have a preference to vote for a political candidate from your social and ethnic background?
15. Who or what influences your decisions on your political choices and identity? Can you give me an example?
16. Do you face any problems of discrimination as an ethnic minority resident?
17. Do you have any suggestions for marketers who are responsible for targeting ethnic minority group (particularly in areas of social media and political campaigns)?