



# Buying behaviour in the South African clothing retail industry: considering reference groups and culture

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## **Abstract**

It is important for businesses to understand customers' buying behaviour as customers are essential to ensure business profitability and survival. Despite research on variables influencing buying behaviour, such as brand perceptions, brand quality, and customer experiences, there is a research gap concerning the social considerations influencing customers' buying behaviour, especially within the clothing retail environment.

Therefore the primary objective of this study is to investigate the social considerations (such as customers' reference groups and culture) influencing buying behaviour within the South African clothing retail industry. A convenience sample of 207 respondents completed a self-administered questionnaire focusing on how social considerations (as measured by reference groups and culture) have a relationship with buying behaviour.

The results indicated that the relationship cultural clothing, as a cultural consideration, has with buying behaviour is significant. Clothing retailers should ensure that their products relate to customers' cultures to positively increase customers' buying behaviour, which may increase profitability and ultimately improve clothing retailers' success.

## **Key phrases**

*buying behaviour, clothing retail, culture, reference groups, social considerations*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Africa and emerging markets present a strong growth potential for retail, with sub-Saharan Africa being the second fastest growing economic region after East Asia (Global Powers of Retailing 2015:Internet). The Africa/Middle East and Latin America regions recorded compound annual sales growth for 2015 of 19.1% and 11.3% respectively (Global Powers of Retailing 2017:Internet). Furthermore, the Africa/Middle East, China/Hong Kong and Latin America regions had the highest compound annual growth for the period 2010 to 2015 of 16.9%, 12.7% and 12.2% respectively (Global Powers of Retailing 2017:Internet).

With three African countries ranked in the world's 10 fastest growing economies and an increasing middle-class population more avid of technology, luxury products, and fashion, the African continent presents growth opportunities for global clothing retail (Gray 2017:Internet; Jätyri 2012:Internet).

Further growth in the clothing retail industry is clear, as the year-on-year growth in worldwide online sales for the clothing and accessories industry for the 2013 financial year was 21.4% (Global Powers of Retailing 2015:Internet). As evidenced from analysing the world's 250 largest retailers that for the 2015 financial year, the net profit margin for the clothing and accessories industry was 7.1%, with the retail revenue growth at 7.7%, while a retail revenue compound annual growth rate of 6.2% was recorded (Global Powers of Retailing 2017:Internet).

The retail industry is also a growing and profitable field in the South African economy (Quigley 2014:Internet; Smith 2016:Internet). The return on equity (ROE) for the clothing retail industry was 41.1% in 2016 while contributing 15% to the 62% share of the 2016 total retail spend in South Africa (South Africa's retail sector: An overview of 2016 trade 2017:Internet). The industry's contribution towards the national employment has grown from 4.59% in 2006 to 6.44% in 2011 (Euromonitor 2012:Internet). The clothing retail industry is among the 10 highest employers of the South African workforce (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2012:Internet). Furthermore, Moorad (2014:Internet) highlighted that consumer spending in South Africa on clothing and footwear was growing at 8.8% annually since 1994. For the period 2003 to 2013 the retail industry reported an average growth of 5.4% with the clothing and footwear industry contributing the highest percentage (7.4%) towards annual real growth during 2013 (Tustin, Van Aardt, Jordaan, Van Tonder & Meiring 2014:23-24). It is also

forecasted that the South African clothing and footwear industry could experience an increase of approximately 1% year-on-year in real sales terms in 2017 (Smith 2016:Internet).

In order to generate sales, businesses invest heavily in marketing activities in order to increase their profits, as they acknowledge how valuable customers are to businesses' sustainability (Bolton, Lemon & Verhoef 2004:271). Furthermore, it is essential for retailers to focus on customers to adapt to the dynamic business environment successfully (South Africa's retail sector: An overview of 2016 trade 2017:Internet). When placing customers at the cornerstone of the marketing strategy, it is important to understand what factors influence customers' purchasing decisions. A number of studies assessed how brand perceptions, brand quality, customer experiences, sales promotions and social considerations might influence customers' buying decisions and behaviours (Baldauf, Cravens & Binder 2003, Caruana & Ewing 2010, Cretu & Brodie 2007, Grant & Stephen 2005, Keh and Xie 2009, Kim & Choi 2013, Lee and Kacen 2008, Neha & Manoj 2013).

However, despite many international studies addressing those elements in the retail environment, there is a lack of such studies in the South African clothing retail industry, where results and conclusions from previous research could differ to those conducted in other countries. Specifically, social considerations might play a particularly important part in the South African multicultural environment.

Furthermore, despite South Africa's increasing importance in global retail and especially in the clothing retail industry, there is still a lack of research conducted within the South African clothing retail industry. The present study will, therefore, focus on reference groups and culture as social considerations having possible relationships with buying behaviour in the South African clothing retail industry.

## **2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The primary objective of the study is to determine whether relationships exist between selected social considerations (such as customers' reference groups and culture) and buying behaviour within the South African clothing retail industry. Identifying the relationships between social considerations and buying behaviour in the clothing retail industry creates opportunities to influence buying behaviour in the industry. It is also important to establish whether possible correlations exist between the variables of the study.

In addition, the study aims to establish whether respondents from different gender, age and population groups have different perceptions regarding the study's significant variables. Therefore, the study aims to propose recommendations to clothing retailers on how to use aspects relating to customers' reference groups, culture, and demographics to influence buying behaviour, which may ultimately improve these businesses' profits and performance.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) suggests that three aspects lead to an individual's intentions and behaviours, namely attitudes towards a behaviour, subjective norms regarding a behaviour and perceived behaviour control over a behaviour (Ajzen 1991:188). Subjective norms refer to an individual's perceptions of social pressures in favour of or against a behaviour (Ariff, Bidin, Sharif & Ahmad 2010:3-4). This study draws on the TPB and specifically investigates the possible relationships between selected subjective norms and a specific behaviour, being the intention to buy or buying behaviour. The study focusses on the clothing retail industry in South Africa.

#### **3.1 The clothing retail industry**

The retail industry is a set of activities encompassing selling products/services to individuals, ultimately termed as customers of the business once they have made a purchase (Reddy & Reddy 2010:122). Various authors concur that the retail industry presents a dynamic environment driven by shifting customer behaviours and the addition of new distribution channels and technologies (Kwak 2013:Internet; Pookulangara & Shepard 2013; Tendai & Crispin 2009). The more aggressive use of social media, the seeking for multi-channel retailing and new markets, and the better use of customer data to understand customers' preferences constitute the main drivers of the global retail industry (Crampton 2017:Internet; Global Powers of Retailing 2015:Internet). The South African market displays specific trends within the retail industry and some of these trends are the change from monthly bulk shopping by customers to more frequent shopping sprees and retailers having extended shopping hours (Prinsloo 2004:Internet). Therefore, consumers make purchases in smaller volumes due to economic conditions and their financial circumstances, thus giving fewer alternatives for discretionary expenses (SA commercial property news 2013a:Internet).

Expansion of shopping malls also drives the South African retail market. The expansion translates into the higher demand in retail space across the country, as noticed in the Eastern Cape, especially in Port Elizabeth, East London, Sterkspruit and Mthata (SA commercial property news 2013b:Internet). South African consumers prefer the convenience of shopping at nearby shopping centres more than once a week, and this leads retailers to keep less stock and restock under changing buying behaviours (SA commercial property news 2013a:Internet).

The introduction of the Internet has also been identified as a driver of global and South African retail expansion. Retailers are progressively becoming e-retailers by promoting and selling their products on websites (Prinsloo 2004:Internet). According to Goldstuck (2016:Internet), there were 3.225 million online shoppers in South Africa representing 60.8% of the Internet users identified to be ready to shop online.

In addition, as reported in 2015, online retail sales reached R7.5 billion in South Africa. Furthermore, an online sales growth rate of 26% was recorded in South Africa for 2015 and forecasts show that retail sales in the country will double from 2016 to 2020 (Goldstuck 2016:Internet). Blaine (2015:Internet) reported that a magazine-style online store (Spree.co.za) grew almost 250% within one year while the number of visitors to the site grew by nearly 200%. Several surveys also highlighted that South Africans use their mobile phones for online shopping, and that in the period of 2009 to 2012 the number of consumers shopping online grew from 14% to 58% (Duncan 2013:Internet). Furthermore, Global Powers of Retailing (2015:Internet) highlighted the use of technology as an enabler within the retail industry.

Research has revealed that South Africans spend one and a half times more on clothing than on education, with about 10% of their expenditures on clothing, mostly due to easy credit access (Moorad 2013:Internet). South Africans' buying on credit by means of credit or store cards rose by 2% year-on-year in the second quarter of 2016 (Skade 2016:Internet). A 2013 report on the South African clothing retail industry highlights that the spread of clothing credit is contributing to increased sales in the industry (Euromonitor 2013:Internet). In addition, a link has been established between perceived social statuses and clothing expenditures, as some South Africans increase their spending on clothing to maintain specific social status standards (Lamprecht 2013:Internet).

It is evident that the South African retail industry is growing as sales have increased over the last number of years (Erasmus & Grabowski 2013:3). In addition, the spending on clothing and footwear showed the greatest growth within all the sectors (Quarterly Bulletin 2017:Internet). According to Van Staden and Van Aardt (2011:47), the South African clothing industry is dynamic and diverse – presenting many opportunities for clothing manufacturers and retailers.

### **3.2 Consumers' buying behaviour**

The consumer behaviour model explains buying behaviour, as this model comprises three parts, namely the factors influencing buying behaviour (individual factors, social factors and purchasing situations), the consumer decision-making process (comprising of five steps) and the final decision to buy or not to buy (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff, Terblanche, Elliott & Klopper 2015:83-84). Therefore, the consumer buying behaviour process displays the route a customer goes through when deciding on whether to buy a product or not and the ultimate final buying decision of the customer.

Buying behaviour is a process during which customers search, evaluate and process the information linked to a purchase, decide whether they should make the purchase and conclude with a post-purchase assessment (Constantinides 2004:111). In addition, Horner and Swarbrooke (2016:6) concur and refers to buying behaviour as the psychological process where customers move from the pre-purchase to the post-purchase stages after obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services.

Individual factors, social factors, and purchase situations influence customers' decision-making process and ultimately their decisions to buy or not buy product/services (Lamb *et al.* 2015:84). Rani (2014:53) agrees and adds that psychological factors also influence buying behaviour. For this exploratory study, the focus will only be on the relationship of social factors or considerations (and not individual factors or purchasing situations) with the buying behaviour of consumers.

In addition, the consumer decision-making process and final decision to buy or not to buy will be jointly considered as describing customers' buying behaviour. Therefore, for this study, buying behaviour refers to the process customers go through before, during and after a purchase. This buying behaviour definition was formulated by considering numerous

authors' (Constantinides 2004; Horner & Swarbrooke 2016; Lamb *et al.* 2015; Rani 2014) descriptions of what buying behaviour, and the consumer decision-making process, entail.

It is important to identify the variables that lead customers to opt for specific products, as it enables business managers to adapt their offerings in a way which matches customers' needs (Khalifa 2004:653). Jackson, Stoel and Brantley (2010:7), and Park and Sullivan (2009:182), highlight the importance of understanding the buying patterns pertaining to different customer groups.

Therefore, understanding how social considerations have a relationship with customers' buying behaviour will assist retailers to serve different groups of customers, focusing on each group's unique preferences. As mentioned, numerous factors have been reported to have a relationship with customers' buying behaviour.

### **3.3 Social considerations relevant to the clothing retail industry**

As the TPB explains that subjective norms refer to an individual's perceptions of social pressures in favour of or against a behaviour (Ariff, Bidin, Sharif & Ahmad 2010:3-4), these subjective norms could also be social considerations. Social considerations influence the products customers buy, where and when customers buy products, how effective retailers' marketing efforts are and how much customers will spend on products (Lamb *et al.* 2015:49, Rani 2014:53-54). The social environment should be effectively managed to improve customers' shopping experience, and thus lead to positive buying behaviour (Lindsey-Mullikin & Munger 2011:11).

Lamb *et al.* (2015:107) therefore state that social considerations influence customers' buying decisions, and thus behaviour. Although the study focused on online buying behaviour, Lee, Shi, Cheung, Lim, and Sia (2011:189,190) also found that social influences have an impact on customers' intentions to buy. Social factors, influences or considerations include those aspects influencing buying behaviour as a result of interactions between customers and the external environment, for example with reference groups, one's culture, opinion leaders and one's social class (Lamb *et al.* 2015:107). Although various social considerations might influence consumers' buying behaviour, this study only focused on reference groups and culture, as one could argue that the clothes one wear are seen by, judged and form opinions and perceptions from the groups one are associated with.

Although differently categorised, Kotler, Armstrong and Tait (2016:137, 140) also concur that reference groups and culture influence buyers. Furthermore, Park and Cho (2012:402) regard reference groups and culture as two components part of the social-cultural factors influencing customers' buying decisions. The impact of social considerations is also evident in the clothing retail industry, as Apeagyei (2011:247) states that customers use social considerations to meet their clothing needs, and make their clothing purchasing decisions.

All the formal and informal groups that influence a customer's buying behaviour fits into that customer's reference groups (Lamb *et al.* 2015:111). Reference groups are social groups a customer refers to when making decisions (Kotler *et al.* 2016:140), and the influence of such a reference group varies across products and brands (Rani 2014:55).

Customers obtain information to make buying decisions by communicating with people they trust and respect, and those whose opinions they value (Van Staden & Van Aardt 2011:38). Customers buy and use products to associate themselves with or become members of a reference group (Lamb *et al.* 2015:111). Customers relate to the values and norms of a reference group (Van Staden & Van Aardt 2011:38). Reference groups may include a customer's family, friends, colleagues, sporting teammates or fellow church members who create pressures on the customer to adapt to the group's choices of products and/or brands. Therefore, opinion leaders such as celebrities are also used as brand ambassadors who may influence product and/or brand choices. (Kotler *et al.* 201:140-141).

According to Lee *et al.* (2011:186), Lawan and Zanna (2013:525) and Rani (2014:55), the opinions of others (such as opinion leaders, friends, and family) influence customers' purchasing intent, in other words, their buying behaviour. In addition, Penz and Hogg (2011:108) regard reference groups as a social influence affecting customers' retail experiences, and consequently their decisions to buy products.

Other authors (Blazevic, Hammedi, Garnefeld, Rust, Keiningham, Andreassen, Donthu & Carl 2013:295) also mention that customers seldom make buying decisions on their own – others influence their buying decision processes and final buying decisions. Research has also shown that celebrities, as opinion leaders, have an influence on buying behaviour as customers feel the need to belong, although it is a one-sided relationship (Escalas & Bettman 2017:305-306; Tahmasbi 2017:14-15). It is thus clear that reference groups influence customers' purchases (Lindsey-Mullikin & Munger 2011:8).



Customers often believe other people they have close relationships with, including family members, friends, and other peer group members, favour specific styles, also specific clothing styles (Park & Cho 2012:403). Peers and family members form reference groups influencing the buying behaviours of customers (Joung & Park-Poaps 2013:107). A peer group, especially a customer's "friendship group", has a large influence on the actual products a clothing retail customer buys (Park & Cho 2012:407). A South African study (Van Staden & Van Aardt 2011:44) revealed that clothing retail customers often use friends (44.64%) and colleagues (37.50%) as sources of information when making buying decisions.

A study by Apeageyi (2011:247) revealed that 56% of males and 68% of females consider what other people are wearing before they make clothing purchases. In addition, 81% of females admitted that they buy clothing they know celebrities are wearing (Apeageyi 2011:247). This study confirms that celebrity sponsorships drive customers' buying decisions in the clothing retail industry. Lindsey-Mullikin and Munger (2011:16,22) also found that companion shoppers, often part of customers' reference groups, advise customers on purchases, and often direct the shopping activities or buying behaviour of customers.

The study of Mauri and Minazzi (2013:105) conducted within the hospitality industry showed that even product and shopping reviews by other customers influence customers' decision-making processes and buying intentions. According to Park and Cho (2012:401), more clothing retail customers are nowadays sharing product-related information using social network online communities. In addition, customers regard peers' product reviews and product ratings as buying information sources (Park & Cho 2012:401). A study by Mauri and Minazzi (2013:103) confirmed the importance of reference groups, as 75% of the respondents indicated that they consult the comments of other customers before making buying decisions.

A study by Wang, Yu and Wei (2012:204) revealed that peer communication, clearly linked to the impact of reference groups, enhance customers' intention to buy products. Specifically, the study by Wang *et al.* (2012:205) showed that peer communication through social media positively and directly influences customers' intentions to buy, as customers aim to conform to peers. Social networks through technology have influenced customers' purchase consideration phase and therefore buying behaviour (Pookulangara & Koesler

2011:348). This suggests that social groups, as part of customers' reference groups, have a relationship with consumers' buying behaviour.

In addition to reference groups, customers' cultures influence their behaviours (Pookulangara & Koesler 2013:350). Kotler *et al.* (2010:148) mention that to increase product sales, products should be positioned in a context relevant to customers' cultures. Therefore, it is important to understand how culture influence customers' buying behaviours. Culture is the set of values, norms, perceptions and attitudes that shape a person's behaviour, including its relation to products as a result of the behaviour, as it is transmitted from one generation to the following generation (Kotler *et al.* 2016:137-137; Lamb *et al.* 2015:107). Furthermore, culture can be described as all the traits and characteristics that distinguish one group of people from other groups (Idang 2015: 98) or as the distinctive arrangement of shared assumptions, values and norms shaping socialisation activities, language, symbols, rites and ceremonies of a specific group of people (Hellriegel, Slocum, Jackson, Louw, Staude, Amos, Klopper, Louw, Oosthuizen, Perks & Zindiye 2012:505).

Since culture relates to other people's (different generations) opinions and how these can shape one's behaviour, it can be argued that one's social context or environment (which includes one's interaction with others) is linked to one's culture. Therefore, culture could be regarded as a social consideration. Furthermore, South Africa is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world (Kotler *et al.* 2016:137), with each unique culture having their own clothing style. Culture is also associated with clothing retail customers' buying behaviour (Apeageyi 2011:247). Nearly 70% of respondents that participated in a study by Apeageyi (2011:247) indicated that the clothing they wear reflects their lifestyles, which links to their culture.

A study by Donthu and Yoo (1998:185) found that the cultural orientation of customers influences the expectations of their buying process, implying that their culture does influence their buying behaviour. The results of a study conducted in Nigeria also found that cultural factors have a significant influence on buying behaviour (Lawan & Zanna 2013:526). Muruganantham and Bhakat (2013:157) concur that the culture of customers has an influence on buying behaviour, especially impulse buying behaviour. Therefore, various studies recommend that retailers should use different marketing strategies for different cultural orientations. As evident from previous research, retailers should pay attention to the

cultural orientation of their customers as the cultural orientation may have an influence on customers' buying process.

From the literature discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H<sup>1</sup>:** There is a significant relationship between reference groups and buying behaviour.

**H<sup>2</sup>:** There is a significant relationship between culture and buying behaviour.

#### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A quantitative research approach was adopted for this exploratory study to determine the relationships between reference groups and culture, and buying behaviour. By using a structured questionnaire to gather responses from a large number of respondents, and to statistically test the set hypotheses, the quantitative research design was deemed most appropriate (Struwig & Stead 2013:3-4).

The target population was all customers of clothing retailers in South Africa. However, as no sampling frame was available and due to geographic location, the sample was confined to clothing retail customers in Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa. To be cost and time efficient, the non-probability convenience sampling technique was used (Struwig & Stead 2013:116).

Respondents were approached within or in close proximity to shopping centres where all major and a variety of clothing retail stores operate. Prior to the encounter with customers, institutional ethics clearance was obtained. Potential respondents were informed about the study's purpose before completing the questionnaire. The study was voluntary, anonymous, all data treated confidentially and respondents could withdraw at any stage without penalty. In addition, verbal consent to approach customers on premises was obtained from the relevant shopping centres' management and management from different clothing retail outlets.

The questionnaire was self-developed; however, questionnaire items were constructed based on the literature review conducted. The language of communication was English. Section A of the self-administered questionnaire, using nominal scales, gathered data pertaining to the respondents' biographic and demographic data such as their gender, age, and population group. In addition, section A also gathered data relating to respondents' shopping habits when buying clothing products. Section B comprised of 38 items using an

ordinal scale relating to the study's variables (reference groups, culture and buying behaviour) in the form of a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (7) (see Annexure 1 for questionnaire items and sources of items).

The face validity of the questionnaire was ensured, as academic experts in marketing were approached to examine and assess the questionnaire beforehand. To ensure content validity, a pilot study was conducted to pre-test the measuring instrument and changes were made accordingly to ensure that respondents understand the questionnaire items.

The computer programmes Microsoft Excel and Statistica were used for data analysis. Validity and the reliability analyses of the measuring instrument were conducted. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to measure the questionnaire's construct validity, as all items were adapted from several previous scales. Items with EFA factor loadings of at least 0.5 were considered as valid (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson 2014:115). The study used Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficients to assess the reliability of the questionnaire, with 0.7 coefficients regarded as reliable (Hair *et al.* 2014:123).

To consider the possible correlations and statistically significant relationships between variables, Pearson's product moment correlation coefficients were calculated and a multiple regression analysis conducted. Pearson's correlations identify whether links exist between the variables (Lind, Marchal & Wathen 2012:463). The multiple regression analysis determines whether significant relationships exist between the independent and dependent variables (Hair *et al.* 2014:157). In addition, where applicable, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post-hoc tests were conducted to determine differences in the responses from various respondent groups (Hair *et al.* 2014:670).

## **5. EMPIRICAL RESULTS**

### **5.1 Sample description**

A total of 232 questionnaires were distributed of which 207 were usable for analysis. This reflects a response rate of 89.2%. The majority of the respondents were female (67.1%), while 32.9% of the sample was males. Most of the respondents were younger than 35 years (86.4%), with 60.3% aged between 18 and 24 years, and 26.1% aged between 25 and 34

years respectively. The majority of the respondents were from the Black population group (54.6%).

Respondents use cash to pay retailers when buying clothing (69.1%), while 15.9% prefer using their credit or debit card to make clothing purchases. Only 14% of the respondents use store accounts for clothing payment purposes, and the majority of the respondents (96.7%) does their clothing shopping themselves. In the South African clothing retail environment, most of the respondents (62.8%) prefer to shop for clothing at Edgars, followed by Mr Price and Woolworths.

## 5.2 Validity and reliability results

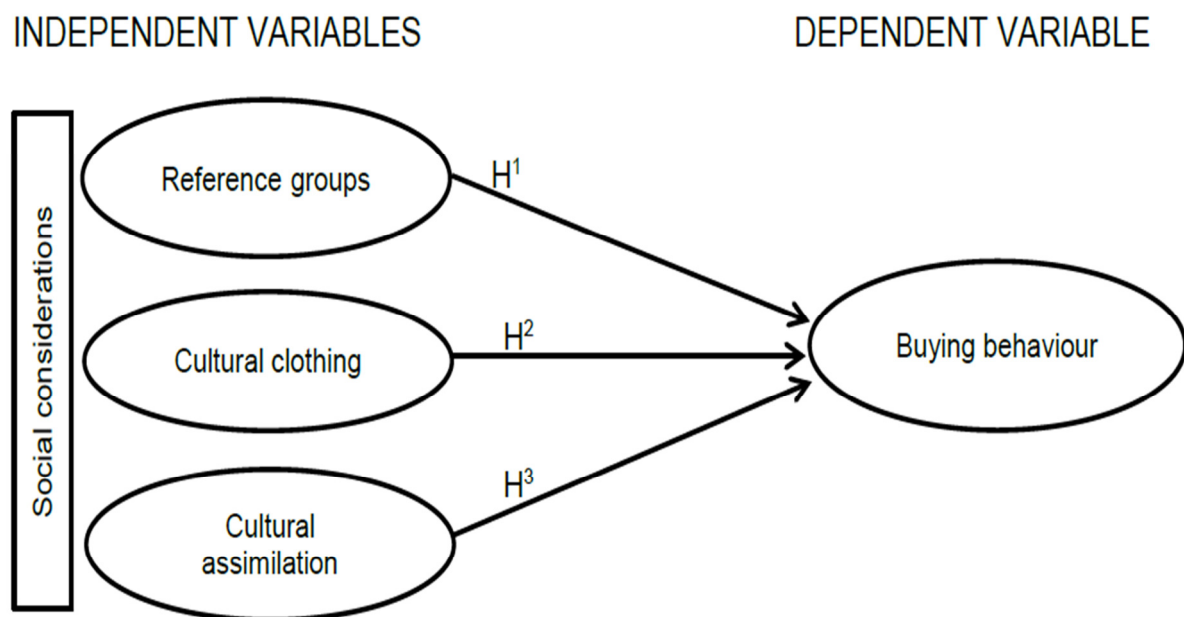
To identify the number of factors for the EFA, eigenvalues were determined. The results identified that four factors should be retained. In terms of the EFA results (see Annexure 1), items loaded onto four distinct factors. All six items developed to measure reference groups loaded onto a single factor with factor loadings ranging from 0.554 to 0.870. As all the items that loaded onto this factor focused on reference groups, this factor was labelled *reference groups*. Based on the EFA results, for this study, *reference groups* refer to groups of people within the social environment of a person whose opinion is important to the person, as these groups will give him/her a sense of belonging. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for *reference groups* was 0.855.

The nine items originally developed to measure the construct culture loaded onto two factors. Six of these items loaded together, and these six items related to people's clothing style linked to their culture. Therefore, this factor was labelled *cultural clothing*. The factor loadings ranged from 0.505 to 0.890 and *cultural clothing's* Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.855. Based on the items that loaded together in the EFA, *cultural clothing* is defined as when cultural conformation acts as the driver of dressing style and clothing shopping.

The other three items originally developed to measure culture loaded onto a separate factor. These three items posed culture as part of a person's identity, which affects one's openness to other cultures. Therefore, this factor was labelled *cultural assimilation*. Factor loadings ranged from 0.678 to 0.816 and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for *cultural assimilation* was 0.724. Based on the EFA results, *cultural assimilation* is defined as cultural openness and self-identification.

Finally, four of the five items originally developed to measure buying behaviour loaded together. The one item that did not load had a factor loading less than the 0.5 cut-off and was therefore removed from further analysis. The four items that loaded together all focused on buying behaviour, therefore this fourth factor was labelled *buying behaviour*. *Buying behaviour's* factor loadings ranged from 0.728 to 0.829, and the reliability analysis revealed a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.779. Based on the EFA item loadings, for this study, *buying behaviour* is defined as customers' shopping preferences at specific retailers, loyalty to these retailers and their recommendations of these retailers to other customers.

Based on the results from the EFA and the Cronbach's alpha coefficients, the validity and reliability of all four factors were confirmed. The measuring instrument was thus regarded as valid and reliable. Based on the EFA results, the revised hypothesised model is presented in Figure 1.



**FIGURE 1: Revised hypothesised model of selected variables having possible relationships with buying behaviour in the clothing retail industry**

Source: Researchers' own construct

As evident in Figure 1, the revised hypotheses are:

- H<sup>1</sup>: There is a significant relationship between *reference groups* and *buying behaviour*.  
H<sup>2</sup>: There is a significant relationship between *cultural clothing* and *buying behaviour*.  
H<sup>3</sup>: There is a significant relationship between *cultural assimilation* and *buying behaviour*.

### 5.3 Descriptive statistics and relationships between variables

The descriptive statistics of the variables as measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale are summarised in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: Descriptive statistics of the independent and dependent variables**

Variable	Mean	Std dev	Disagree <sup>a</sup>	Neutral <sup>b</sup>	Agree <sup>c</sup>
Reference groups	2.978	1.316	62.32%	21.26%	12.59%
Cultural clothing	5.688	1.126	4.35%	13.04%	82.61%
Cultural assimilation	3.345	1.263	51.69%	29.47%	18.84%
Buying behaviour	5.246	1.041	3.86%	18.84%	77.29%

<sup>a</sup> comprises strongly disagree, disagree and somewhat disagree responses

<sup>b</sup> comprises neutral or no opinion responses

<sup>c</sup> comprises somewhat agree, agree and strongly agree responses

*Cultural clothing* obtained the highest mean score of 5.688 where most of the respondents (82.61%) agree that they buy and wear branded clothing that represents their culture from shops that employ members of their culture, as it is important to dress similarly to other members of their specific culture. *Buying behaviour* returned the second highest mean score of 5.246, with most of the respondents (77.29%) agreeing that they frequently visit, remain loyal and recommend relevant clothing retailers to other customers.

The mean score of 3.345 for *cultural assimilation* implies that more than half of the respondents (51.69%) disagrees that they are proud to be identified with their culture, regard

their culture as important and like to be exposed to other cultures. The mean for reference groups (2.978) shows that nearly two-thirds of the number of respondents (62.32%) were in disagreement that they consult and follow friends, family, and community members when making decisions regarding clothing purchases.

Excluding the means for *reference groups* and *cultural assimilation*, the means showed that respondents were mainly in agreement with the questionnaire items relating to cultural clothing and buying behaviour. Thus, respondents currently do shop for clothing where, according to their perceptions, retailers' stores and clothing reflect and relate to their culture. In addition, respondents are currently frequent and loyal buyers, as well as recommend specific clothing retailers to others.

Furthermore, the responses for each of the variables are closely knitted together as evident from the small standard deviations ranging from 1.041 for *buying behaviour* to 1.316 for *reference groups*. These standard deviations show that respondents mostly differed in their viewpoints on both *reference groups* and *cultural assimilation*. This is also evident when considering the percentage of neutral responses for these two variables of 21.26% and 29.47% respectively.

According to the Pearson's product moment correlation coefficients, no significant correlations were found between *reference groups* and *cultural clothing* ( $r = 0.042$ ;  $p = 0.550$ ), between *reference groups* and *buying behaviour* ( $r = 0.034$ ;  $p = 0.623$ ) and between *cultural assimilation* and *buying behaviour* ( $r = 0.079$ ;  $p = 0.256$ ).

However, significant positive correlations exist between all the other variables used in the study (reference groups and cultural assimilation; cultural clothing and cultural assimilation; cultural clothing and buying behaviour). Therefore, any increase in any one of the variables where significant correlations were found, will have a positive influence, either a moderate or weak influence, on any other variable.

The highest moderate positive correlation exist between *reference groups* and *cultural assimilation* ( $r = 0.455$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). This shows that respondents' reference groups and their cultural assimilation are strongly linked. Thus, people's cultural identity and openness to other cultures are linked to their reference groups' opinions. Two weak positive correlations exist between *cultural clothing* and *cultural assimilation* ( $r = 0.273$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ) and between



*cultural clothing* and *buying behaviour* ( $r = 0.248$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). These correlations imply that respondents buy clothing that conforms to a specific culture and has a cultural orientation.

The assumptions of multiple regression analysis were tested. The skewness and kurtosis values were calculated to check for normality. The variance inflation factors (VIFs) were calculated and as all VIFs were less than 10 (ranging from 1.16 to 3.49) no multi-collinearity was evident. The Durbin-Watson value of 2.15 indicates that no autocorrelation exists, while the Cook's Distance of 0.079 indicates that there are no significant outliers in the data set.

A multiple regression was run to determine whether *reference groups*, *cultural clothing*, and *cultural assimilation* predict *buying behaviour*. The results showed that only *cultural clothing* statistically significantly predicts *buying behaviour*, where  $F(3.302) = 4.466$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $R^2 = 0.048$ . However, both *reference groups* ( $p = 0.761$ ) and *cultural assimilation* ( $p = 0.985$ ) do not statistically significantly predict *buying behaviour*.

Based on the multiple regression results hypothesis  $H^2$  is accepted ( $p < 0.05$ ), as a significant positive relationship was found between *cultural clothing* and *buying behaviour*. Customer perceptions that retailers offer *cultural clothing* are likely to have a positive influence on these customers' *buying behaviour* at these retailers. Although positive relationships were revealed, hypotheses  $H^1$  and  $H^3$  are rejected as both are found to be statistically non-significant ( $p > 0.05$ ).

#### 5.4 Results from the t-test, ANOVA tests and post-hoc tests

A t-test and ANOVA tests were conducted to establish whether respondents from different gender, age and population groups have different perceptions regarding *buying behaviour* and *cultural clothing* (the only independent variable showing a statistically significant relationship with *buying behaviour*). To identify the nature of the differences, post-hoc tests were conducted (Hair *et al.* 2014:670,699).

The results showed that there is no significant difference in the responses concerning *cultural clothing* ( $p = 0.871$ ) and *buying behaviour* ( $p = 0.457$ ) based on the gender of respondents. Therefore, male and female respondents do not have different perceptions that are statistically significant, regarding the purchasing and wearing of cultural clothing nor do they have different buying behaviour regarding the acquisition of cultural clothing. This result

is in line with the results presented by Lawan and Zanna (2013:525), where it was found that gender has an insignificant influence on the buying behaviour of clothing.

The study found that significant differences exist in the perceptions of the various *age groups* (18 to 24; 25 to 34; 35 to 44; 45 to 54; 55+) regarding *cultural clothing* ( $F = 2.665.193$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This result is in line with the results reported by Lawan and Zanna (2013:527), where age was found to have a significant influence on customers' buying behaviour of clothing. A post-hoc Scheffe test was undertaken to determine where the differences in perceptions lie.

The post-hoc test revealed a significant difference in the perceptions regarding cultural clothing between respondents in the age group 18 to 24 years and respondents aged 55 years and older. The mean scores showed that respondents in the age group 18 to 24 (mean = 5.776) regard the purchase of cultural clothing more important than those of the 55 years and older age group (mean = 4.458).

Significant differences were also found between the perceptions of the various *population groups* (based on Stats SA's classification: Asian, Black, Coloured, and White) regarding *cultural clothing* ( $F = 5.193$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The post-hoc Scheffe test indicated a significant difference between the Black and White population groups concerning their *cultural clothing* perceptions. This difference is translated by the mean scores, suggesting that the respondents of the Black population group (mean = 5.935) regard the purchase of cultural clothing more important than respondents of the White population group (mean = 5.194).

## 6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The primary objective of the study was to determine whether relationships exist between social considerations (such as customers' reference groups and culture) and buying behaviour within the South African clothing retail industry. The main empirical results indicated that a significant positive relationship exists between *cultural clothing* and *buying behaviour*. Therefore, whether retail stores' clothing relate to customers' culture plays a major role in the buying behaviour of clothing retail customers. This indicates that when shopping for clothing, respondents are interested in buying clothing connected to, and representative of their culture.

Some practical recommendations can be provided to clothing retail stores to increase customers' buying behaviour by focusing on specific aspects to ensure perceptions that their stores offer cultural clothing. Ultimately, this study's recommendations and suggestions should help clothing retailers in stimulating customers' purchasing decisions positively.

The following managerial implications relate to the clothing retailers offer, based on the results for the social consideration cultural clothing:

- To ensure that clothing products link to and reflect the South African nation's cultures, the first recommendation emphasise that clothing retailers should be in close contact and agreement with suppliers. This is critical to ensure that the suppliers producing clothing understand the objectives of the retailer in terms of ensuring that products reflect their focus on offering cultural clothing. However, if cost-effective, retailers could also consider, instead of outsourcing, manufacturing cultural clothing themselves.
- South Africa is regarded as "The Rainbow Nation" due to the ability of the country's citizens to come together as people from different population groups, cultures and backgrounds to live together as one nation for the best (Seekings 2008:6). Elements illustrating the "The Rainbow Nation" could be incorporated in the production and marketing of clothing in South Africa. Therefore, clothing will reflect the pride of the various cultures associated with being South African.
- To reach culture-conscious customers, retailers should develop clothing lines or brands displaying popular expressions, messages, and values linked to specific cultures. While doing this, clothing retailers could ensure that they cover the range of different South African cultures to ensure diversity in their offerings. Therefore, it is important for retailers to know the expectation of their culture-conscious customers and offer appropriate products meeting these expectations.
- Clothing retailers could portray the diverse South African population by associating different brands with different public figures from a variety of population groups, cultures, and backgrounds to gain customers from each South African cultural segment, as customers associate themselves with the different public figures. However, care should be taken when selecting public figures for a specific culture to avoid any form of resentment towards this specific culture amongst the other cultures.

- Clothing retailers could associate their brands with cultural media programmes to increase brand awareness among culture-conscious audiences. For example, a clothing retailer could sponsor the clothing of a cultural programme's presenter and market this to increase brand awareness and support from customers following the programme.

The results showed no significant relationships between reference groups and cultural clothing, reference groups and buying behaviour as well as between cultural assimilation and buying behaviour. Therefore, it is important for role players in the clothing industry to take note that the opinions of reference groups may not change the opinions of consumers in terms cultural clothing and their actual buying behaviour from a specific clothing store. In addition, clothing that identifies with specific cultures (cultural assimilation) also may not necessarily increase consumers' buying behaviour.

Based on the results concerning demographic aspects, it can be recommended to retailers to add a cultural value to the style of clothing designed for customers aged between 18 to 24 years, as they appear to be more culture-conscious than other age groups. This result is consistent with literature as Grant and Stephen (2005:455) noted that at different age/life stages, customers perceive different social influences as important and therefore base their buying behaviour, and thus purchasing decisions, upon those social considerations.

In addition, it was evident from the empirical investigation that customers from the Black population group are more culture-conscious than customers from the White population group. Thus, the offering of cultural clothing by retailers is more important to the Black population. Clothing retailers could engage in communities' social activities, by for example acting as sponsors for sporting and musical events, in areas dominated by the Black population as this would result in an awareness of cultural clothing linked to the clothing retailers, and ultimately improve buying behaviour.

Although the study reported a sufficient response rate (89%) using a valid and reliable measuring instrument, the sample of the study was limited to one geographical area in South Africa. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalised and future research on social considerations in the clothing retail industry could include respondents from a wider geographical reach. It should also be noted that only reference groups and culture, with specific reference to cultural clothing and cultural assimilation, were investigated as social considerations. Other social considerations, for example, how opinion leaders and one's

social class influence buying behaviour in the clothing industry, could be investigated in future studies. In addition, this study highlighted a link between cultural clothing and cultural assimilation, therefore the existence of a possible significant relationship between these two variables could be further explored.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, this study highlighted that social considerations with the specific focus on reference groups and culture can influence customers to purchase clothing more frequently and encourage them to remain loyal to clothing retailers. Recommendations to clothing retailers were practically adapted to the South African context, based on the perceptions expressed by clothing retail customers in this study's empirical investigation. The application of this study's recommendations could assist retailers in ensuring that their offerings relate to customers' cultures in order to influence customers' buying behaviour positively. This may ultimately lead to more profitable and successful clothing retailers and more satisfied customers.

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**ANNEXURE 1 – SCALE ITEMS AND FACTOR LOADINGS**

SCALE ITEM	SOURCE ADAPTED FROM	FACTOR LOADING
<b>BUYING BEHAVIOUR (Variance explained = 0.127)</b>		
I recommend this store to other customers.	Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009:64)	0.751
I frequently visit this store.	He and Mukherjee (2007:450)	0.728
I remain loyal to this store when shopping for clothing.	Brakus et al. (2009:64)	0.755
I prefer buying well-known brands of clothing.	Essoo and Dibb (2004:697), Seock and Sauls (2008:477)	0.335*
I prefer shopping in this store.	Singh (2006:190)	0.829
<b>REFERENCE GROUPS (Variance explained = 0.197)</b>		
I seek my friends' opinion before shopping.	Essoo and Dibb (2004:697), Murali et al. (2005:173)	0.554
I dress similar to those in my community.	Cleveland and Laroche (2007:255), McKinney, Legette-Taylor, Kincade and Holloman (2004:398)	0.568
It is important that other people like the products I buy.	Grant and Stephen (2005:461), Murali, Laroche and Pons (2005:173), Silvera, Lavack and Kropp (2008:27), Singh (2006:190)	0.834
It is important that other people like the brands I buy.	Grant and Stephen (2005:461), Murali, Laroche and Pons (2005:173), Singh (2006:191), Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009:320)	0.870
I achieve a sense of belonging by buying the same brands my friends buy.	Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007:407), Murali et al. (2005:173), Singh (2006:191), Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009:320)	0.809

I buy from stores where people who are important to me encourage me to buy.	Ha (2004:341), Hsu and Lin (2008:73),	0.756
<b>CULTURAL CLOTHING (Variance = 0.107)</b>		
I regard my culture as important.	Cleveland, Laroche, Pons and Kastoun (2009:210)	0.890
I am proud to be identified with my culture.	Cleveland et al. (2009:210)	0.888
I like to be exposed to other cultures.	Cleveland and Laroche (2007:254)	0.505
<b>CULTURAL ASSIMILATION (Variance explained = 0.178)</b>		
I shop in stores where members of my culture are employed.	Lerman, Maldonado and Luna (2009:405)	0.678
I buy local brands that relate to my culture.	Cleveland and Laroche (2007:255)	0.730
The way I dress is influenced by my culture.	Cleveland and Laroche (2007:255)	0.691
I prefer wearing clothes representing my culture.	Cleveland and Laroche (2007:255)	0.816
I find it necessary to dress similarly to other members of my culture.	Cleveland and Laroche (2007:255), Mourali et al. (2005:173)	0.753
I change my buying opinions to conform to those of my culture.	Cleveland and Laroche (2007:255), Mourali et al. (2005:173)	0.688

\*Item not included in further analysis (factor loading < 0.5)

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