

Visual merchandising displays' effect on consumer perceptions in Tshwane: An exploratory study into the South African apparel retail industry

by

Yolandé Hefer

submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

Master of Commerce

In the subject

Business Management

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

Supervisor: Prof. M. C. Cant

Co-supervisor: Mr. R. Machado

August, 2012

Student number: 41745841

I declare that “Visual merchandising displays’ effect on consumer perceptions in Tshwane: An exploratory study into the South African apparel retail industry” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE

(Mrs)

DATE

ABSTRACT

This research study acquired a consumer response centred approach to visual merchandising stimuli, in an attempt to holistically consider this area of the retail industry. Consumers' perceptions towards visual merchandising displays and the effect these displays have on consumer behaviour were exposed. The primary research question that pended from the preliminary literature was to determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer perceptions. Explorative research was performed and qualitative data were collected by means of focus groups and naïve sketches. The data was analysed by means of a thematic analysis process. Perceptions of visual merchandising displays that were identified were subliminal in creating an interest and desire to further peruse the merchandise and aesthetically to beautify the store. Consumers expressed that the impact that visual merchandising displays had on their buying decisions depended on their personal preferences.

Key terms:

Visual merchandising display; display settings; consumer perceptions; marketing stimuli; consumer behaviour; decision making process; apparel; retail industry; retailers; marketing research process

DEDICATION

For my parents, who provided me with the opportunity to study and who have offered me unreserved love and support throughout the course of this research project, as well as during my preceding studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance and the help of several individuals who in one way or another contributed and extended their valuable assistance in the preparation and completion of this study. I would never have been able to complete my dissertation without the guidance of my colleagues, help from friends, and support from my family and husband.

First and foremost I offer my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. M. C. Cant and Mr. R. Machado. They have supported me throughout my thesis with their patience, knowledge, excellent guidance and caring, whilst allowing me the scope to work in my own way; and providing me with an excellent atmosphere in which to complete research. I attribute the level of my Masters degree to their encouragement and effort. Without them this thesis would not have been written or completed. One simply could not wish for better or friendlier supervisors.

I would also like to thank my parents and sister. They have always supported me and encouraged me with their best wishes.

And most of all, I am deeply grateful to my loving, supportive, encouraging, and patient husband, Pieter, whose faithful support during the final stages of this research report is greatly appreciated.

Last but not least, I would like to thank God for the wisdom and perseverance that He has given me during this research project, and indeed, throughout my life: "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4: 13).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	III
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	1
1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE APPAREL RETAIL INDUSTRY	2
1.3.1 Apparel retailing.....	2
1.3.2 The importance of apparel retailing in South Africa	3
1.4 VISUAL MERCHANDISING AND VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS	5
1.4.1 Visual merchandising display.....	6
1.4.2 Uses of visual merchandising displays	6
1.5 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR.....	8
1.5.1 Consumer perception	9
1.6 THE RESEARCH QUESTION	11
1.6.1 Primary objective	11
1.6.2 Secondary objectives.....	11
1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	12
1.8 THE PROPOSED METHODOLOGY	13
1.8.1 Research design.....	13
1.8.2 Sampling techniques	14
1.8.3 Data collection and documentation.....	15
1.8.4 Preparing for the focus group session	18
1.8.5 Data analysis and interpretation	19
1.8.6 Rigor and Ethics	21
1.9 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	21
1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMS	22
1.11 PROPOSED CHAPTER OUTLINE	30
CHAPTER 2: THE RETAIL INDUSTRY.....	32
2.1 INTRODUCTION	32
2.2 RETAILING DEFINED	32
2.3 EVOLUTION OF RETAILING	35
2.3.1 The wheel of retailing.....	38
2.3.2 The retail accordion	39
2.4 LOCATIONS OF RETAILERS	40

2.4.1	Store and non-store retailing	41
2.5	RETAIL LIFE CYCLE.....	47
2.6	CLASSIFICATION OF RETAILERS.....	48
2.6.1	Types of retail organisations.....	50
2.7	FUNCTIONS OF RETAILING	54
2.7.1	Providing assortment.....	55
2.7.2	Breaking bulk.....	55
2.7.3	Holding inventory.....	56
2.7.4	Providing services.....	56
2.7.5	Effecting change in the ownership of goods	57
2.7.6	Causing goods to move through the distribution channel	57
2.7.7	Providing consumers with an opportunity for social intercourse	57
2.8	RETAILING IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	57
2.8.1	An overview of the South African retail industry.....	58
2.8.2	The importance of apparel retailing	64
2.9	TRENDS IN RETAILING.....	65
2.9.1	Trends in apparel retailing	65
2.10	SUMMARY	67
CHAPTER 3:	VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS	69
3.1	INTRODUCTION	69
3.2	VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAY DEFINED.....	69
3.2.1	Merchandising	69
3.2.2	Visual merchandising.....	70
3.2.3	Visual merchandising display.....	71
3.3	BACKGROUND OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAY	73
3.4	FUNCTIONS OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING	75
3.4.1	Supporting sales.....	75
3.4.2	Communicating with consumers and communicating the brand image.....	76
3.4.3	Supporting retail strategies	77
3.5	VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS WITHIN THE RETAIL STRUCTURE.....	78
3.6	DIFFERENT STAGES OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING WITHIN THE RETAIL STRUCTURE	79
3.7	ELEMENTS OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAY	81
3.7.1	Store design	81
3.7.2	Signage and graphics.....	85
3.7.3	Atmospherics.....	89
3.7.4	Display fixtures	91
3.7.5	Mannequins	92
3.7.6	Props and permanent props	95

3.8	TYPES OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS.....	96
3.8.1	On-shelf displays	97
3.8.2	Off-shelf displays	98
3.8.3	Point of purchase displays.....	100
3.8.4	Window displays.....	103
3.9	DISPLAY SETTINGS.....	105
3.9.1	Realistic setting.....	105
3.9.2	Environmental setting	106
3.9.3	Semi-realistic setting.....	107
3.9.4	Fantasy setting	108
3.9.5	Abstract setting.....	109
3.10	GENERAL COMMENTS	110
3.11	SUMMARY	111
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR.....		112
4.1	INTRODUCTION	112
4.2	CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR DEFINED	112
4.3	MARKETING STIMULI	115
4.4	EXTERNAL STIMULI.....	116
4.5	GROUP FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR.....	118
4.5.1	Cultural influences	118
4.5.2	Social class.....	119
4.5.3	Reference groups	119
4.5.4	Family influences.....	120
4.5.5	Opinion leaders.....	120
4.6	INDIVIDUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR...	121
4.6.1	Motivation	121
4.6.2	Personality	121
4.6.3	Learning.....	122
4.6.4	Attitudes.....	122
4.6.5	Perception	123
4.6.6	General comments	123
4.7	PERCEPTION DEFINED.....	124
4.7.1	The process of perception	127
4.8	THE CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.....	130
4.8.1	Stage 1: need/problem recognition	131
4.8.2	Stage 2: information search and processing.....	132
4.8.3	Stage 3: evaluation of alternatives.....	133
4.8.4	Stage 4: response/action	134
4.8.5	Stage 5: post-purchase evaluation	135
4.9	THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTION WITH REGARD TO VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS	136

4.10	SUMMARY	140
CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY.....		141
5.1	INTRODUCTION	141
5.2	THE MARKETING RESEARCH PROCESS	141
5.2.1	STEP 1: Identifying and formulating the research problem.....	143
5.2.2	STEP 2: Determine the research objectives	144
5.2.3	STEP 3: Research design	145
5.2.4	STEP 4: Conduct secondary research.....	148
5.2.5	STEP 5: Select primary research method.....	148
5.2.6	STEP 6: Determine the scope of the research	151
5.2.7	STEP 7: Selecting a sampling method	157
5.2.8	STEP 8: Gather the data	162
5.2.9	STEP 9: Data analysis and interpretation of results.....	170
5.2.10	STEP 10: Reporting the results	171
5.3	RIGOR AND ETHICS	172
5.3.1	Strategies to ensure rigor	172
5.3.2	Ethical strategies	173
5.4	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	175
5.5	SUMMARY	175
CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS.....		176
6.1	INTRODUCTION	176
6.2	RESEARCH TERMS	176
6.3	THE RESEARCH QUESTION	178
6.4	THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	179
6.4.1	Primary objective	179
6.4.2	Secondary objectives.....	179
6.5	PRE-TESTING.....	180
6.6	THE DYNAMICS OF THE FOCUS GROUP AND NAÏVE SKETCHES	180
6.7	FINDINGS.....	181
6.7.1	The central theme.....	181
6.7.2	Themes and categories	182
6.8	SUMMARY	196
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....		198
7.1	INTRODUCTION	198
7.2	CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY	198
7.3	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	201
7.4	THE STUDY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN RETAIL INDUSTRY	204

7.5	LIMITATIONS	205
7.6	SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	205
7.7	SUMMARY	207
	REFERENCES.....	208
	ANNEXURE A: SAMPLE OF CONSENT FORM	216
	ANNEXURE B: FOCUS GROUP PHOTOGRAPHS	217
	ANNEXURE C: SAMPLE OF NAÏVE SKETCH	218
	ANNEXURE D: FOCUS GROUP AGENDA	219
	ANNEXURE E: NAÏVE SKETCH CODING REPORT	220
	ANNEXURE F: COUNTRY ROAD CONSENT.....	221

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 Disadvantages of focus groups	17
Table 1.2 Thematic analysis process	20
Table 2.1 Classification of formal store retailers in South Africa	50
Table 2.2 Contribution of each type of retailer to the percentage change in retail trade sales at constant 2008 prices	61
Table 2.3 Retail trade sales according to type of retailer at current prices (R million).....	62
Table 2.4 Truworth's Divisional Sales	63
Table 2.5 Edcon's apparel retail trade sales	63
Table 4.1 Practical examples of stages in the decision-making process.....	135
Table 4.2 Visual merchandising - affective responses and anticipated action	139
Table 5.1 Characteristics of different types of marketing research.....	147
Table 5.2 Qualitative versus quantitative research.....	150
Table 5.3 Comparison of probability sampling techniques	154
Table 5.4 Comparison of non-probability sampling techniques.....	156
Table 5.5 Comparison of qualitative research techniques.....	164
Table 5.6 Disadvantages of focus groups	167
Table 5.7 The thematic analysis process	170

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1:	Clothing and clothing related items.....	34
Figure 2.2:	Evolution of retailing	36
Figure 2.3:	Development of apparel retail stores	37
Figure 2.4:	The wheel of retailing.....	39
Figure 2.5:	The retail accordion	40
Figure 2.6:	Retail formats for accessing your target market.....	42
Figure 2.7:	Retail life-cycle.....	47
Figure 2.8:	Trend cycle of retail trade sales, 2000-2005 (at constant 2000 prices)	59
Figure 2.9:	Retail trade sales at constant 2008 prices	59
Figure 3.1:	Visual merchandising display.....	73
Figure 3.2:	The visual merchandising communication process.....	77
Figure 3.3:	Grid layout	83
Figure 3.4:	Free-flow layout	84
Figure 3.5:	Race-track/loop layout.....	84
Figure 3.6:	Lifestyle graphic.....	86
Figure 3.7:	Signage used on a window.....	87
Figure 3.8:	Signage used in-store.....	89
Figure 3.9:	The Mehrabian-Russell model.....	91
Figure 3.10:	Cubes and tables used as display fixtures	92
Figure 3.11:	Mannequins used as part of a visual merchandising display	95
Figure 3.12:	Example of on-shelf displays.....	98
Figure 3.13:	Example of an off-shelf display	99
Figure 3.14:	Country Road - Point of purchase display	101
Figure 3.15:	Country Road's Christmas theme - JOY	102
Figure 3.16:	Window tribute to Michael Jackson	103

Figure 3.17:	Realistic setting with realistic mannequins	106
Figure 3.18:	Environmental setting.....	107
Figure 3.19:	Semi-realistic setting	108
Figure 3.20:	Fantasy setting.....	109
Figure 3.21:	Abstract setting	110
Figure 4.1:	Consumer behaviour	113
Figure 4.2:	Model of consumer behaviour.....	115
Figure 4.3:	Perception and visual merchandising	126
Figure 4.4:	Exposure - point of purchase display.....	128
Figure 4.5:	Stages in the consumer decision-making process.....	131
Figure 4.6:	Problem recognition.....	132
Figure 4.7:	Alternatives for purchase decision.....	134
Figure 5.1:	The marketing research process	142
Figure 5.2:	Research approaches.....	146
Figure 5.3:	Selecting a sample method	158

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 of this research report serves to take into account a variety of factors. First, the background of the apparel retail industry will be provided, together with a discussion regarding the importance of the apparel retail industry in society. Second, the importance of visual merchandising displays in the apparel retail industry will be explained. Third, consumer behaviour will be discussed, with the focus on consumers' perceptions. The appropriate theoretical models and methods will be briefly explained by means of practical examples. The main purpose of the study will then be examined and the research problem will be defined. The research objectives that are based on the problem statement will also be explained. A brief explanation of the research methodology that will be used to achieve the objectives set out in this research study will also be provided. A summary of the ensuing chapters will conclude this chapter of the study.

1.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to explore consumers' behaviour with the focus on consumers' perceptions towards visual merchandising displays in the South African apparel retail industry, with the purpose of providing the apparel retailers in Tshwane with the necessary knowledge regarding the necessity of visual merchandising displays used in store.

This research study proceeds from a consumer response centred approach to visual merchandising stimuli, in an attempt to holistically consider this area of the retail industry. This particular research study explores visual merchandising which has, up until now, received limited attention in the literature. The study will benefit apparel retailers in Tshwane as consumers' perceptions towards visual merchandising displays and the effect these displays have on consumer behaviour will be uncovered. The outcome of the research study can be considered by the

Tshwane apparel retailers in South African and the industry will be able to either apply or ignore the findings of this research study to their retail environments.

1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE APPAREL RETAIL INDUSTRY

Retailing (or trading) is already an ancient term in the world of business. It was initially established as an intuitive invention based on the need for food, water, and physical comforts. As people improved their skills at cultivating their land, some found that even after feeding their families and animals and storing up food, there were still excesses. Instead of discarding these excesses, it was traded for other accompaniments such as tools or clothing (Stent, 2001: 1). While certain people enjoyed producing products, others preferred to trade. Trading developed from informal markets to more stable markets and eventually permanent shops were propagated. Out of these concepts, the notion of retailing originated (Stent, 2001: 1).

Retailing can be described as a set of business actions that add value to the products and services sold by an organization to consumers for private or family use (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 6). Consequently, a retailer can be described as a business that sells goods to a consumer, as opposed to a wholesaler or supplier that normally sells their goods to another business (Cant, 2010: 3). In South Africa, Statistics South Africa reported that for an enterprise to qualify as a retailer, the enterprise would have to obtain more than 50% of its revenue from the sale of goods to the public for household use (Statistics South Africa, 2010b: 1).

A more detailed discussion on apparel retailing follows.

1.3.1 Apparel retailing

The focus of this study is on apparel retailers. Therefore, it is essential to clearly understand that apparel retailing includes selling clothing, garments and specifically outerwear (Gilmour, 2010: 47). It can be inferred that an apparel retailer is a business that sells clothing and clothing related products directly to the

consumer for their own use. These products could include clothing, accessories, shoes, hair products, makeup and a variety of accessories.

During the initial stages of retailing, ready-made clothing was not available, therefore consumers bought material and produced clothes themselves; with no consideration for fashion. However, wealthy people were able to afford designers, dressmakers, and tailors to create their clothing. Inasmuch, these occupations became known as the trendsetters of society (Richardson, 2009: 1). Fashion has since snow-balled into a global trend, where both designers and popular culture create style for the masses to monitor and shadow.

For the purpose of this study, the concept of apparel retailing deals exclusively with retailers selling clothing and clothing-related products. It will also include apparel retailers that offer consumers fashion clothing; which can be described as clothing that has a sequence of short term trends or fads (Easey, 2009: 3-4).

The apparel retail industry is divided into three major sections; mainly women's, men's and children's wear (Easey, 2009: 198). The largest section is the women's wear section (including accessories) and second is menswear (including accessories). In recent years, menswear presented greater growth than women's wear due to the fact that men have become more fashion conscious. Even though it seems that menswear displays greater growth than women's wear when the economy is at its best, the opposite is also true. When the economy is at its worst, menswear experiences even greater declines in sales. Children's wear is the smallest of the three retail markets (Easey, 2009: 198).

The importance of apparel retailing, with focus on the South African retail industry, is discussed next.

1.3.2 The importance of apparel retailing in South Africa

The impact that retailing has on the economy and on people's lifestyles is easily overlooked. Retailing allows that individual demands of consumers are met and

therefore retailing is responsible for a large part of a country's economic growth (Lusch, Dunne & Carver, 2011: 2). The retail store sector is important because it is the final connection in the chain of fabrication that begins at the extractive stages, moves through the developing processes and ends by the supplying of goods and services to the final consumer (Cox & Brittain, 2004: 1).

As the latest statistics indicate, the retail industry in South Africa is one of the largest contributors to the economy's total income (Statistics South Africa, 2010b: 1). The retail industry in South Africa has developed and grown in the past 10 years from R19 million in January 2000 to R47000 million in December 2011. Most of the growth has been in the general dealer's category, as well as in the textiles, clothing, and footwear and leather goods categories. This growth has a major effect on the retail industry as a whole (detailed statistics are provided in Chapter 2).

It can be inferred from the statistics that the textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods have a significant impact on the retail industry and that the apparel retail industry is responsible for a significant share of the growth of the retail industry in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2011: 2). It is imperative that the apparel industry continues to find innovative ways to develop.

Currently, apparel retailing ensures that consumers purchase both local and international apparel products at affordable prices (Gopalakrishnan, Sakthivel & Santhoshkumar, 2009: 1). Fashionable apparel is no longer exclusively for the rich and famous. Apparel retail stores have evolved from department stores into magnificently designed stores; some filled with the very latest in fashion trends.

Due to the high competition in the apparel retail industry today, every store strives to entice consumers to enter their shop by having the most exciting and visually appealing retail environments. This cultivates an atmosphere where consumers can shop effortlessly for different colours, fabrics, value and styles of international standards. In order to achieve such visually appealing retail environments,

apparel retailers make use of a technique called *visual merchandising displays* which forms part of one of retailing's crucial components--visual merchandising.

1.4 VISUAL MERCHANDISING AND VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS

Since *visual merchandising display* is a subsection of visual merchandising and forms part of visual merchandising as a whole, it is crucial to clearly understand of visual merchandising. Visual merchandising is defined as the activity that synchronizes effective merchandise assortment with effective merchandise display (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 20). The goal of visual merchandising is to display a store together with its merchandise in such a way that it will draw the attention of a possible consumer and provide the consumers with a pleasing shopping environment.

The concept of visual merchandising developed from merchandising. Merchandising is a technique used by stores to sell products to consumers. It is the procedure whereby a retailer attempts to present the correct quantity of the correct merchandise in the correct place at the correct time while meeting the company's financial objectives (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 642). The term 'visual' refers to an action relating to or using one's sight (Gilmour, 2010: 302). Therefore visual merchandising is defined by Pegler (2010: 3) as "...showing merchandise and concepts at their very best, with the end purpose of making a sale." For some, visual merchandising might be a new initiative; however it has been around from as early as the 18th century (Marie, 2011: 1).

Visual merchandising has different functions in an apparel retail store. These functions include supporting sales, supporting the retail strategies, communicating with consumers and assisting in communicating the apparel retailers' brand image (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 531) (These functions are explained in detail in chapter 3).

Visual merchandising consists of various elements including store design, lighting, product placements, atmospherics, fixtures and permanent props (all the other items inside a store except the merchandise that the store sells). The main

objective of these elements as a whole is to display a store together with its merchandise in such a way that it draws the attention of a possible consumer.

As mentioned earlier, visual merchandising does not only consist of the traditional elements such as store design, lighting, product placements, atmospherics, fixtures and permanent props. Visual merchandising has evolved into being more than product presentation. Visual merchandising contains another facet called visual merchandising *displays* that is discussed subsequently.

1.4.1 Visual merchandising display

The focus of this research study will be on visual merchandising displays that are currently the centre of high levels of passion and consideration in apparel retailing (Tullman, Clark & Rose, 2004: 66-68).

Visual merchandising displays are regarded as visual features that create attention or pleasure in a store (Mathew, 2008: 48). These displays are also known as feature areas. Essentially the displays are used to decorate and beautify a store by adding additional fixtures, props, posters, materials, colours, frills and objects to a store. Displays can generally be broken down into three different categories: on-shelf displays, off-shelf displays and window displays (Mathew, 2008: 48-52) (These different categories are explained in detail in chapter 3).

1.4.2 Uses of visual merchandising displays

Props are the main objects used in visual merchandising displays and can be defined as all the other items inside a store except the merchandise that the store sells (Colborne, 1996: 109). Props could include a variety of items, including antiques, art objects, artificial grass and snow, flowers, ribbons, bows, banners, baskets, boxes, decorative screens and panels, floor coverings, papers and cardboards, pots, pedestals, textiles, and more. Props should be secondary to the merchandise sold in store; it should enhance the merchandise that is sold, not

detract from it, so that the consumer appreciates the merchandise (Colborne, 1996: 109). Ideally, props should never clutter a display.

Apparel retail stores commonly use visual merchandising displays to illustrate a subject matter that is regularly associated with holidays, special days like Valentine's Day and St. Patrick's Day, women's month, mothers' and fathers' day, Easter, Christmas, seasonal changes, and major events such as the FIFA 2010 Soccer World Cup. Displays are also used for the general decoration of a store. The theme that is chosen for a store should be determined by the style, price and the quantity of merchandise available, as well as by the merchandise's relevance to the specific topic (Colborne, 1996: 109).

Depending on the occasion chosen, an apparel retailer's displays can change often. As an example, nearly every retail store (apparel or any other retailer) used some form of display and decoration to illustrate the theme of the FIFA 2010 Soccer World Cup. The props ranged from flags, soccer balls, soccer T-shirts and larger-than-life posters.

Visual merchandising displays are frequently used to create an atmosphere of a distant and exotic land. For example, a Chinese theme would utilise Chinese fans and chopsticks and an Egyptian theme would consider turning the store into a souk complete with belly dancers and camels. By utilising visual merchandising displays a single store can metamorphosise into a *bazaar* of different climates, architectural styles, smells, colours, lights and music. The mood, character and the number of display props that are essential to amaze consumers are dependent on the store's target market, the type of merchandise they sell, as well as the size of the store (Colborne, 1996: 108).

It has been suggested that good visual merchandising inside a store can sustain consumer interest and persuade consumers to lower their psychological defences and make a purchase (Kerfoot, Davies & Ward, 2003: 144). Therefore retailers use store design to influence consumer buying behaviour and in so doing also influence their perceptions. A question that the South African apparel retail

industry often asks is whether the visual merchandising displays of a store have the same effect on all consumers. Retailers want their stores to attract consumers into their stores, assisting them to find the merchandise they desire and to motivate them to make unplanned, impulse purchases and ultimately provide them with an enjoyable shopping experience (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 509).

The visual merchandising displays and the type of environmental stimuli these displays create could have an effect on consumers' perceptions, which is the practice where a person observes, selects, organises and reacts to environmental stimuli in a significant way (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003: 218). It is therefore important that visual merchandising displays created in an apparel retail store influence a consumer to approach that store and make a purchase, not avoid it. Apparel retailers have to ascertain how their visual merchandising displays are perceived by consumers with the intention to identify what the consumers are actually seeing, how it is interpreted and which features are most important to them.

Consumer behaviour, with the focus on consumer perceptions, is discussed in the next section.

1.5 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Knowledge about consumer behaviour is critical for apparel retailers because a strong understanding of consumer behaviour may help retailers understand what is important to the consumer. It might also suggest the important influences that are present during consumer decision-making.

Consumer behaviour is "... the study of individuals, groups or organisations and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society..." (Cant, van Heerden & Ngambi, 2010: 51). Further questions that retailers often ask of their potential consumers is why do some consumers buy certain products, and why do they buy those specific products at

certain stores and at certain times. Often, environmental factors such as consumer behaviour transform rapidly and it has a huge impact on retailing (Cant, 2010: 7).

As dictated by Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Raghurir & Steward (2009: 24), visual merchandising influences a consumer's emotional state which consecutively drives the consumer's approach or avoidance behaviour. As visual merchandising displays form part of visual merchandising, this principle is also applicable for visual merchandising displays. Therefore, apparel retailers can create visual merchandising displays that they believe will be of value to consumers that will encourage approach and buying behaviour.

According to Turley and Ronald (2000: 193-211), approach behaviour is seen as optimistic responses to a store, such as an aspiration to stay in the particular store and explore it, and ultimately make a purchase. On the other hand, avoidance behaviour comprises of staying away from a store or not wanting to spend time exploring it. Levi and Weitz (2009: 526) argue that consumers see the visual merchandising of a store as a very important element when deciding to approach a store to purchase their products (The concept of approach and avoidance behaviour is discussed in more detail in chapter 4).

In the following section, consumer perceptions will be briefly discussed. A detailed discussion on consumer perceptions can be found in chapter 4.

1.5.1 Consumer perception

The perceptions that form from daily stimuli often act as triggers and thereby influence consumers' behaviour. Consumers make decisions and take actions based on what they perceive to be the truth. It is therefore important that retailers understand the whole concept of perception in order for them to determine what influences consumers to buy (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 54).

Blythe (2008: 91) summarized perceptions as being "... a process of converting sensory input into an understanding of how the world works". The process of

perception consists of four important steps, namely exposure, attention, interpretation and memory (This process will be discussed comprehensively in chapter 4).

Levi and Weitz (2009: 532) explain that the consumer's perception of a store's environment depends on the consumer's shopping goals. When consumers are shopping for something that they deem as an unfulfilling mission, they prefer to be in a soothing and calming environment. However, if consumers are shopping for pleasure they prefer to be in an exciting environment. It can therefore be inferred that consumers' perceptions may have an impact on the way they behave towards a store and its merchandise.

There is a lack of literature that examines the influence that visual merchandising displays engender in consumers and in particular, how these displays influence consumer perceptions. Apparel retailers ought to establish how their visual merchandising displays are perceived by the consumers. It is essential to identify what consumers are actually seeing, how they interpret the displays and which features are most important to them. By doing this, it could benefit the apparel retailer if they align the internal focus of their visual merchandising together with their visual merchandising displays with the consumers' expectations.

Visual merchandising displays are concerned with how the product is visually communicated to a consumer and also whether this message is interpreted in the correct way--ultimately affecting the consumer's behaviour in such a way that it will lead to a decision to purchase.

This research study aims to identify the relative importance of the influential variables from the consumers' perspective. The current marketplace has become increasingly competitive and therefore consumer perceptions are crucial for gaining sustainable competitive advantage in the apparel retail industry. Apparel retailers should be willing to analyse the whole process of how consumers make decisions and how perceptions are formed regarding their visual merchandising displays, from the consumers' perspective.

The research question, together with the primary and secondary objectives, is discussed next.

1.6 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Consumers' perceptions regarding visual merchandising displays are in question. It has previously been proven that the conventional visual merchandising elements (store design, lighting, product placements and atmospherics, fixtures and permanent props) are of high importance to the retail industry (Levy & Weitz, 2009: 527). The existing literature fails to directly recognize the potential that visual merchandising displays have on influencing emotional and behavioural responses and to ascertain what consumers' perceptions are regarding the visual merchandising displays. The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer behaviour with the focus on consumers' perceptions as a way to inform apparel retail theory.

The primary research question pending from the preliminary literature is therefore as follows: How can insight into the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer perceptions inform knowledge in apparel retail? Primary and secondary objectives were derived from the primary research question.

1.6.1 Primary objective

- To determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumers' perceptions.

1.6.2 Secondary objectives

- To determine to what extent consumers' notice the visual merchandising displays presented in stores.
- To determine the important aspects of visual merchandising displays to consumers.

- To determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer behaviour.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The available literature regarding the effectiveness of visual merchandising displays discusses the elements of visual merchandising--its purpose and its intended outcome on consumer behaviour--as well as the theory about visual merchandising displays. There is however little literature regarding the impact of visual merchandising displays on consumer behaviour, specifically on consumers' perceptions.

According to Kerfoot *et al.*, (2003: 143-152), the literature fails to directly recognize the potential of visual merchandising to influence emotional and behavioural response (buying behaviour) in consumers in a comprehensive way. Rather, the literature reviewed suggests that the development of approach or avoidance behaviour (to make and execute a buying decision) is powerfully related to consumers' perceptions. Current research does not sufficiently discuss the influence of visual merchandising displays on affective consumer response behaviour or on their successive (following) behaviour. Searches on various academic databases such as Science Direct, EBSCOHost and Emerald produced numerous articles and information about visual merchandising and displays; however the databases do not produce sufficient information and literature regarding the key facet of *this* study, namely consumers' perceptions towards visual merchandising displays in apparel retail stores.

This research study proceeds with a consumer response centred approach to visual stimuli, in an attempt to consider the area of visual merchandising displays in the apparel retail in a holistic manner. By doing this, this approach explores an area that has received limited attention in literature. Apparel retailers in Tshwane would benefit from a more detailed exploration in terms of the impact that visual merchandising displays have on consumers' behaviour.

The proposed methodology used in the study is discussed in the following section.

1.8 THE PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

In the following section a brief description of the methodology used for this study is provided. The proposed approach, intended steps and methods used for this research study together with the advantages and disadvantages of the methods/approaches used are discussed in detail in chapter 5 of this research study.

1.8.1 Research design

This research study used an *exploratory approach* into the South African apparel retail industry. Exploratory research is performed to illuminate unclear situations (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 50). This research method is not proposed to present definite evidence, as it is more important to receive suggestions and insight than scientific objectivity (Wiid & Diggines, 2009: 199). Therefore, for the purpose of this study and the extent to which visual merchandising displays effect consumers' behaviour (with the focus on perception) was studied by means of exploratory research.

Qualitative research was used during this research study because an in depth understanding of the consumers' perceptions about visual merchandising displays and the influence it has on consumer behaviour is required. Therefore an interpretative technique that describes, decodes, and translates consumers' perceptions is necessary to obtain the required information (Cooper & Schindler, 2008: 214). Qualitative research provides multifaceted textual explanations of how individuals experience a specific research subject. It supplies information about the "human" side of a topic.

The major disadvantage of qualitative research is the fact that a small group of interviewed participants cannot be representative of the whole population (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 131-135). However, given the qualitative nature of the

study, the goal is not to be representative, but to be able to transfer the findings and information towards another study (Krefting, 1991: 14).

1.8.2 Sampling techniques

When using qualitative research, it is not necessary to collect data from everyone in the area of interest in order to retrieve convincing findings. In qualitative research, only a sample of a population is selected for any given study (Cooper & Schindler, 2008: 215). This research study takes on a consumer response centred approach to visual stimuli, in an attempt to consider this area of retail concern in a *holistic* manner. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, non-probability, purposive sampling was used.

Non-probability sampling is a sampling method where the samples are grouped in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population an equal chance of being selected (Tustin, Ligthelp & Martins, 2005: 89). Subjects in a non-probability sample are usually selected on the basis of their accessibility or by the purposive personal judgment of the researcher. The advantages of non-probability sampling are that it is cost effective, it is useful when the population is widely scattered and it is often used in exploratory studies (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 344).

The disadvantages of non-probability are the possible sources of bias. This however does not mean that non-probability sampling methods cannot yield good results; the challenge is that the researcher is unable to give any suggestion of the reliability of the results that are attained from the research (Wiid & Diggines, 2009: 199). However given the exploratory nature of the study, the sample was nevertheless deemed adequate.

In purposive sampling, the researcher samples with a *purpose* in mind (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 432). This is usually the case where the study requires one or more specific predefined group. Purposive sampling can be very useful for situations where one has to reach a targeted sample quickly and where sampling for

proportionality is not the main concern (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 432). With a purposive sample, the researcher is likely to garner the opinions of the target population. However, a disadvantage is that the researcher might use too much of the same subgroup in a population because they are more willingly available (Cooper & Schindler, 2008: 455). However, due to the fact that the research study has a qualitative paradigm (therefore it is not the goal to be representative) and is exploratory in nature, the sample was nonetheless considered sufficient.

The inclusion criteria for the purposive sampling for this research study were as follows:

- People who buy clothing at apparel retail outlets in Tshwane
- People who reside in Tshwane
- People who read, speak and understand English
- People who have a cell phone and who have access to e-mail
- People that are willing and that have the time to participate in the study

1.8.3 Data collection and documentation

Data collection was conducted by means of crystallisation. Crystallisation is a post-modernist development of completing research and it is used in order to find various instances from numerous sources to find union (Huberman & Miles, 1994: 179-210). Crystals are like prisms that reproduce and refract within themselves, in that way creating diverse colours, patterns and displays, shedding off in different directions and therefore allowing the same story to be told from different perspectives. Crystallisation can therefore be termed a research kaleidoscope.

When used in qualitative research, crystallisation begins from a premise that there is no correct way of expressing an experience. Therefore with each story, like light reaching a crystal reflects different perspectives of an experience. As a result, through the use of crystallised focus groups and naïve sketches, an in-depth understanding of consumers' perceptions about visual merchandising displays will be received.

For this research study, focus groups together with naive sketches were used to collect data from the participants. In this way, the researcher was able to compare two forms of data with one another to gain the most data possible from each participant.

Focus groups

This research study used self-reporting as a data source by means of focus groups. A focus group is an unstructured, free flowing interview with a small group of people, usually between six and ten participants (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 144-145). This use of data collection aligns well with an exploratory approach as focus groups enable the researcher to illuminate unclear situations. This specific research topic was discussed in detail and different types of views and perceptions were taken into consideration. This type of research would not be possible with the use of a structured questionnaire. A focus group is a form of qualitative research and was used to ask a group of participants about their perceptions, opinions, and attitudes towards the visual merchandising displays, and whether it has an influence on their buying behaviour.

The focus groups were based around the use of visual stimulus material. Photographs were taken of an apparel retail store in Tshwane and presented to the participants in the focus groups. The participants were then asked questions derived from the research objectives.

Focus groups were chosen for the following reasons (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 141-144):

- It allows the participants to discuss their true feelings, anxieties and frustrations towards the visual merchandising displays in store in their own words.
- It is a relatively fast way of collecting the comprehensive data that was required for this research study.

- It allows the participants to use each other's ideas and present other perspectives and feelings, therefore one consumer could stimulate thoughts among others and create other insights.
- It provides the researcher with multiple outlooks on the research topic. A comment by one participant started a sequence of responses from another consumer.
- It allows flexibility to permit a more detailed description on the topics that needed exploration. Several topics could be talked about and many insights can be achieved, especially regarding the differences in consumer behaviour in different situations.

The disadvantages of using focus groups are summarised in Table 1.1 below. It includes the counteractive measures that will be taken to oppose the disadvantages for the purpose of this study.

Table 1.1 Disadvantages of focus groups

DISADVANTAGE	CORRECTIVE MEASURE
Focus groups are likely to become influenced by one or two overriding participants in the session, therefore making the output very biased	A competent moderator will be appointed that looks after all the participants to ensure that they are all comfortable giving their opinions.
Focus groups are not as effective as IDI's in dealing with sensitive topics.	This research topic is not of personal nature, and the session is completely voluntary.
Focus groups are usually held in a very synthetic environment which might influence the responses from the participants.	The researcher will ensure that all the participants are comfortable with the location of the session.
Focus groups have to have objective, sensitive and efficient moderators.	An independent moderator will be appointed to facilitate the session that will not be influenced. The facilitator has good people skills, training and experience.
It may not be easy to acquire a representative sample of the population.	Given the exploratory nature of the study, the sample is nevertheless deemed adequate.
Focus groups are not fully confidential or anonymous.	There is not any material of a confidential nature. The participants will sign a permission form that allows the participants to see/hear each other and call them by name.

Source: Zikmund, G. & Babin, B. J. 2010. *Exploring marketing research*. 10th ed. China: South Western. p. 142.

As mentioned above, purposive sampling was used for this research study. Initially, it was planned to have two focus groups, each with eight members. However, if the themes were not saturated, a third and a fourth focus group would be held. Eight members for each focus were chosen in order to prevent it from being too small or too big. If the focus group is too small, one or two members could intimidate the other members, and if they are too big, it could have an influence on the participation of the members of the group (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 144-145). Each session was recorded by using a tape recorder in order to record the participants' responses.

In order to encourage conversation in the focus groups, diversity was applied in terms of age and gender. The more diversity there is in a focus group, the better the conversation. This allowed for a more representative sample of the population and diverse views regarding the subject.

Naïve sketches

Naïve sketches were utilized as a second method to illuminate consumers' perceptions towards visual merchandising displays in apparel retail stores. A naïve sketch provides mute evidence of an experience (Hodder, 1994: 703-716). A naïve sketch endures physically and can be separated across space and time from the author. Its significance does not lie in its production, but in its meaning. This provides deeper insights into the internal meanings (Hodder, 1994: 703-716). A naïve sketch was handed to each participant to complete before the focus group starts.

In the following section, the preparations for the focus groups are discussed.

1.8.4 Preparing for the focus group session

First and foremost, the major objective of the gathering was identified by the researcher. The purpose of the focus groups was to examine consumers'

behaviour with the focus on consumer perceptions towards visual merchandising displays in the apparel retail industry of Tshwane, South Africa.

Each member was emailed to invite them to the session and a follow-up invitation was sent to them via e-mail and/or sms (short message sending). This included the session time and the list of questions the group would discuss.

Three to four key questions were developed with sub-questions for the participants to answer and discuss. The length of the focus group was approximately ninety minutes. Therefore each focus group was scheduled for two hours at a time. The sessions took place in a conference room where there is adequate air flow and space, where it is quiet, and where there is enough lighting in order for the participants to clearly see the photos and materials of the apparel retail stores presented to them. The chairs were placed in such a way that all the participants can clearly see each other. Name tags and refreshments were provided.

A few ground rules were established in order to sustain the participation and the focus of the participants. For example, each participant was required to keep focus and energy and to get closure on each of the questions (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 141-150). Another ground rule for recording purposes was that the participants did not interrupt each other. Each question was worded carefully before the question is addressed to the group. After each question was answered, the researcher reflected a review of what was heard. If it is noted that one or two people dominated the meeting, other members were called on. Immediately after each session, the researcher verified that the tape recorder recorded the whole session. If any observations were made during the session, it was noted.

1.8.5 Data analysis and interpretation

Due to the fact that the data is contextual in nature, thematic analysis was utilised. Thematic analysis is an exercise where qualitative research involves searching through data to identify any repeated patterns (Tesch, 1990: 113). The exploratory power of this accepted technique can be improved if the analyst lacks

prior familiarity of the research topic. Therefore the analyst cannot be influenced by prejudice. However, the analyst should have a basic idea about the research topic before the analysis of the data commences.

Table 1.2 below describes the process that was followed in order to analyse the data gathered from the naive sketches and focus group interviews.

Table 1.2 Thematic analysis process

ACTION	DESCRIPTION
Acquire a sense of the storyline by reading through the transcriptions field notes and naïve sketches.	Develop the necessary background information from ideas that are generated from the researcher's mind.
The researcher selects one interesting and short document and reflects on what the interview was all about.	Focusing on the underlying meaning of the text the researcher writes down thoughts in the margin. Repetition of this process is followed throughout all generated data. As there is transition from one topic to another, the researcher distinguishes content from topic. Identified topics are written in the margin of the document.
The researcher pays attention to the underlying meaning rather than the content. As topics emerge, they are noted in the margin, clustering similar topics together.	A connection is made between similar topics by using highlighters. Topics with the same colour are clustered together. All topics are arranged into columns on one sheet of paper, one column per each data document. The best fitting name that captures the substance is chosen for the clustered topics. These topics are then further arranged as major topic, unique topics and leftovers.
Abbreviated topics are written as codes. The clustered major topics as well as the unique topics are abbreviated as codes.	These codes are written next to the appropriate segment of the text. This process shows how well the topic descriptions correspond with what is found in the data. It also leads to the discovery of new topics that were not previously identified.
The researcher refines the organized data.	The most descriptive wording for the topics are found and the topics are turned into categories and sub-categories. Coding refers to the process whereby data is divided into finer parts, conceptualized in a new way.
A final decision is made on the abbreviated category name.	Each code is alphabetized and a coding session is completed.

ACTION	DESCRIPTION
The data material belonging to each category is assembled in one place and a preliminary analysis is performed.	Confusions and contradictions, as well as the missing information with regard to the research topic are identified. This leads to some of the data being discarded, as it is not relevant.

Source: Adapted from Cresswell, J.W. 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage publication. p. 154-155; Merriam, S. B. 2002. *Introduction to qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 3-17 and Tesch, R. 1990. *Qualitative research analysis tapes and software tools*. New York: Wordsworth. p. 113.

Rigour and ethics in qualitative research are discussed next.

1.8.6 Rigor and Ethics

Five strategies to ensure trustworthiness according to Guba's Model of trustworthiness were applied. These include credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability and authenticity (These are discussed in detail in chapter 5 of this study).

The appropriate ethical strategies relevant to this research study's context and design were applied throughout the duration of this research study. These include respect for persons, beneficence and non-maleficence and justice. These are internationally agreed upon ethical principles as stipulated by the Belmont report (Amdur, 2003: 23-31) (These aspects are discussed in detail in chapter 5 of this study). Even though some sources used in this research study are legitimately old, they are still relevant due to the fact that they are classical sources and they are the original authors of the text and/or techniques.

1.9 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The opinions of many outside the chosen participants were not represented. Future research could therefore aim at identifying a more representative sample of South Africans from all walks of life. Similarly, the sample was primarily taken from people living in Tshwane, and thus it was not geographically representative.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it was not the goal to be representative; the goal was for other researchers to be able to transfer the findings. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the sample was nevertheless deemed adequate.

1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Apparel retail: Apparel includes clothing, garments and specifically outerwear (Gilmour, 2010: 47). As stated in the definition of a retailer, a retailer is a business which sells goods to a consumer for their own personal use, therefore it can be inferred that an apparel retailer is a business that sells clothing and related products directly to the consumer for their own use. These products could include clothing, accessories, shoes, hair products, makeup and other accessories.

Approach behaviour: According to Turley and Ronald (2000: 193-211), approach behaviour is seen as an optimistic responses to a store, such as an aspiration to stay in the particular store and explore it.

Assortment: An assortment is a collection or group of various kinds (Gilmour, 2010: 17), and in a retail environment it refers to the depth of merchandise which is "...the number of SKU's (stock keeping units) within a merchandise category". In other words, it is the number of available products that consumers see as substitutes for one another in a store (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 631).

Atmospherics: Atmospherics (also called attention-grabbing devices) refers to the design of the in-store environment through communicating with the consumers by means of senses such as lighting, colour, music and scent (Pegler, 2010: 181).

Avoidance behaviour: Avoidance behaviour comprises of staying away from a store or not wanting to spend time exploring it (Turley and Ronald, 2000: 193-211).

Brand: A brand refers to a particular make or an identifying mark (Gilmour, 2010:32).

Bulk: Bulk refers to large numbers, amounts, or volumes (Gilmour, 2010: 35).

Catalogue and direct mail retailers: Catalogue and direct mail retailing is a non-store retail format in which the retail offering is communicated to a consumer through a catalogue, where direct mail retailers communicate with their consumers using letters and brochures (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 45-58).

Category: A category is a class or group of things, ideas, people, emotions, and beliefs that has some quality or qualities in common (Gilmour, 2010: 40).

Central business district (CBD): A central business district is the focal point of a city. It is the commercial, office, retail, and cultural centre of a city and usually it is the centre point for transportation networks. Often it is the geographic heart of the city (Strydom, 2008: 137).

Consumer behaviour: Consumer behaviour is "... the study of individuals, groups or organisations and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society..." (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 51). Knowledge about consumer buying behaviour is critical for apparel retailers in view of the fact that having a strong understanding of buyer behaviour may help retailers understand what is important to the consumer. It might also suggest the important influences on consumer decision-making. In using the above mentioned information, apparel retailers can create visual merchandising displays that they believe will be of value to consumers.

Convenience store: Convenience stores are small stores that offer a limited variety and assortment of goods at a convenient location (near residential areas) with a swift checkout (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 46).

Deep assortment: A retail merchandising strategy in which the retailer stocks a number of varieties of a particular product line. A deep assortment of a particular

product line may involve the company carrying a variety of colours and add-ons (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 631).

Department store: Department stores carry a broad diversity and deep variety of products; each line is operated as a separate department in the store. Department stores offer consumer service and categorize stores into different departments for presenting their goods and products (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 47).

Discount stores: Discount stores are retailers that offer a broad variety of merchandise, limited service and low prices. In South Africa, discount stores have been in operation since the early sixties, offering consumers products at lower prices by accepting lower margins and by selling bigger volumes. The merchandise is less fashion oriented than the brands in department and speciality stores (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 45-58).

Display fixtures: Display fixtures are pieces of equipment or furniture that are used in a store for visual merchandising display purposes (Pegler, 2010: 125).

Distribution channel: A distribution channel is a sequence of organisations or individuals who contribute in the flow of goods and services from producer to the consumer (Cox & Brittain, 2004: 4).

Diversity: The state or quality of being different or varied. It is a point of difference (Gilmour, 2010: 84).

Electronic retailing: Electronic retailing is also called e-tailing, online retailing and internet retailing. An electronic retailer communicates with consumers and offer products and services for sale over the internet (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 45-58).

Fashion retailing: Fashion retailing is the selling of the latest fashion products directly to the consumer. It also includes apparel retailers which offer consumers fashion clothing, which in essence is clothing that has a sequence of short term

trends or fads (Easey, 2009: 3-4). These products could include clothing, accessories, shoes, hair products, makeup, etc.

Focus group: A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept or idea. Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 141-149).

Free-flow layout: A free-flow layout is a type of store design where the merchandise is arranged in an asymmetrical manner. It allows consumers to move freely throughout the store and this type of layout encourages consumers to browse (Pradhan, 2008: 351).

Graphics: Graphics are referring to as drawings, paintings, and lettering or the reproductive arts of engraving, etching, and lithography (Pegler, 2010: 255).

Grid layout: A grid layout is a type of store design where one area of display is along the walls of the store, where the other merchandise is displayed in an equivalent way (Pradhan, 2008: 351). A grid layout permits consumers to move without restraint within the area and it uses space effectively.

Hypermarket: A hypermarket is the fastest growing retail category. These stores are larger than the supermarket. Hypermarkets are stores that sell groceries and fashion apparel, home fashions and other categories. They are large stores that combine a supermarket with a full line discount store (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 45-58).

Mall: A mall is where several stores are connected under one roof, with interconnecting walkways that enables consumers to easily walk from one store to the other (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 231).

Merchandising: The concept 'merchandising' refers to the techniques used by stores to sell products to consumers. It is the procedure whereby a retailer

attempts to present the correct quantity of the correct merchandise in the correct place at the correct time while meeting the company's financial objectives (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 642).

Naive sketch: A naïve sketch is an approach that provides mute evidence of an experience (Hodder, 1994: 703-716). Simply put, a naïve sketch is an open-ended questionnaire that asks participants questions relating to a specific study.

Neighbourhood business district: A neighbourhood business district is a shopping area that evolves to please the convenience-oriented shopping needs of a district; it usually contains numerous small stores, with the main retailer being a supermarket or a variety store, and is situated on a major road within a residential area (Strydom, 2008: 137).

Non-store retailing: Non-store retailing is a form of retail that is conducted without the conventional store based location (Cant, 2010: 5-6).

Off-shelf displays: Off-shelf displays are intended to have additional impact by displaying the merchandise as it could be used, or possibly next to other merchandise to suggest corresponding purchases. They are not used in the regular selling process and are therefore made to make a major visual impact. They are often creatively arranged and are only changed by the visual merchandising team. These types of displays may include props (Mathew, 2008: 48-52).

On-shelf displays: On-shelf displays are the "normal" displays that are found in a store and that demonstrate the variations of products on offer in some kind of rational order (Mathew, 2008: 48-52).

Perceptions: A perception is a judgment that one has created as a result of perceiving something (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003: 218). Therefore it is the judgement that is formed by the consumer after perceiving the apparel retailers' visual merchandising decorations and displays.

Point of purchase displays: Point of purchase displays are displays or fixtures used by stores to assist in selling their products, also known as feature areas (Pegler, 2010: 312).

Props: Props are defined as all the other items in a retail store except for the merchandise that is sold in a store (Colborne, 1996:109). Props could include any of the following: antiques, art objects, artificial grass and snow, flowers, ribbons, bows, banners, baskets, boxes, decorative screens and panels, floor coverings, papers and cardboards, pots, pedestals, textiles, and more.

Racetrack layout: The race-track layout is a type of store design that is also known as the loop layout. As the name suggests, the display is in the form of a racetrack or a loop with a main aisle running through the store (Pradhan, 2008: 351). This type of layout is popularly found in department stores.

Retailer: A retailer can be described as a business that sells goods to a consumer, as opposed to a wholesaler or supplier that normally sells their goods to another business (Cant, 2010: 3). For an enterprise to qualify as a retailer, the enterprise would have to obtain more than 50% of its revenue from sales of goods to the public for household use (Statistics South Africa, 2010b: 1).

Retailing: Retailing is a set of business actions that add value to the products and services sold by an organization to consumers for private or family use (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 6).

Secondary business districts: A secondary business district is located away from the core of the city. These locations house smaller retailers such as offices, banks and theatres. It is much easier to find parking and the rent is significantly lower than the CBD (Strydom, 2008: 138). Secondary business districts are shopping areas that are smaller than a CBD, and it circles around one (at least) department or variety store at key crossroads. These locations house smaller retailers such as offices, banks and theatres.

Speciality stores: Speciality stores carry a narrow product line with a deep assortment. They concentrate on a limited number of complementary merchandise categories and provide a high level of service in relatively small stores Cox and Brittain (2004: 9-10).

Signage: Signage can be referred to as visual graphics created to present information to consumers (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 190).

Spin-offs: Something, such as a product, that is derived from something larger and more or less unrelated; a by-product (Diamond, 2006: 23-24).

Store design: Store design refers to aspects that include visual displays, window displays and interior design as well as fixtures, fittings and lighting (Morgan, 2008: 30).

Store retailing: Store retailing is also known as a “brick and mortar” business. It refers to retail outlets that are housed in real stores with a commercial address where consumers can interact on a face to face basis (Cant, 2010: 5-6).

Supermarket: Supermarkets are large, low cost, low margin and high volume stores that provide a wide variety of food, clothing, meat, produce and household goods. These are self service stores with limited sales of non-food items such as health and beauty aids (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 41).

Television home shopping: Television home shopping is also known as T-commerce or teleshopping. This is a retail format in which consumers watch a television program that demonstrates merchandise and then place orders for that merchandise, usually by telephone (Easey, 2009: 202-208).

Thematic analysis: Thematic analysis is an exercise in qualitative research which involves searching through qualitative data to identify any repeated patterns (Tesch, 1990: 113). These patterns are then sorted into themes and

categories. It is a process that organises and describes data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82).

Theme: A theme is a cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings and usually emerges through the inductive analytic process which characterises the qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82).

Trend: The general direction in which something tends to move (Gilmour, 2010: 291).

Variety chain stores: Chain stores are retail channels that share a brand and the same management and they sell a variety of merchandise. They usually have consistent methods and practices, and usually have standardized business methods and practices (Strydom, 2008: 12-14).

Visual merchandising: Visual merchandising is the activity that synchronizes effective merchandise assortment with effective merchandise display (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 20). The goal of visual merchandising is to display a store together with its merchandise in such a way that it will draw the attention of a possible consumer.

Visual merchandising displays: Visual merchandising displays can be regarded as visual features that create attention or pleasure in a store (Mathew, 2008: 48). Visual merchandising displays are used to decorate and beautify a store by adding additional fixtures, props, posters, materials, colours, frills and objects to a store. It can be conceptualized as adding decoration to a store by means of additional fixtures, props, posters, materials, colours, frills and objects that illustrate a theme of a current event, day or season. It could also be used for the general decoration of a store.

Warehouse clubs: Warehouse clubs are retailers that offer a limited and irregular assortment of food and general merchandise with little service at low prices for consumers and small businesses (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 45-58).

Window display: A window display is a window outside a retail outlet that is used by retailers to display merchandise for sale or otherwise designed to attract consumers to their store (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 290).

1.11 PROPOSED CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 is the introduction to the research study. The introduction includes the introduction and rationale of the study that includes the preliminary literature review. The primary research question, as well as its intent and purposes were discussed. The research methodology planned for this research study was also described in chapter one. The first chapter concluded with a list of definitions of key terms and concepts as well as a chapter outline for the study.

Chapter 2 encompasses all the relevant aspects of the apparel retail industry in South Africa and retailing as a whole. Aspects such as retail history, the importance of retailing and how apparel retailing originated are covered.

Chapter 3 discusses the origins and evolution of visual merchandising and visual merchandising displays. This chapter also covers the purpose, functions and importance of visual merchandising for apparel retailers.

Chapter 4 describes consumer behaviour with the focus on consumer perceptions, the role consumer perceptions have in the apparel retail industry and how visual merchandising displays could possibly affect consumer behaviour. The theory of consumer behaviour and perceptions are supported by various academic models.

Chapter 5 explains the methodology relevant to this research study. It explains the research design, the sampling, the data collection and documentation by means of a marketing research model.

Chapter 6 focuses on the results of the explorative study as mentioned in chapter 5. The findings that were obtained are discussed in a clear and meaningful way to answer the objectives of this research study as outlined in chapter 1.

Chapter 7 covers the conclusion and recommendations of the study and is also the final chapter. How the study could make a contribution to the apparel retail industry is discussed, together with recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a short discussion of the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: THE RETAIL INDUSTRY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the background of the general retail industry, with the focus on the apparel retail industry. Retailing is defined and then an overview of the evolution of retailing is provided, together with the retail locations, the retail accordion and the wheel of retailing. The basic classification systems of retailing are examined, as well as the different types of retailers. The functions of retailing are also discussed. Thereafter, retailing and retailers are explained in detail with regard to their role and purpose within South Africa. The links between the general retail industry and the apparel retail industry are drawn, because the focus of this study falls on the apparel retail industry.

2.2 RETAILING DEFINED

Various definitions of retailing exist, each with their own core attributes. Retailing can be defined as a set of business actions that add value to the products and services sold by an organization to consumers for private or family use (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 6). Consequently, a retailer can be described as a business that sells goods to a consumer, as opposed to a wholesaler or supplier that normally sells their goods to another business (Cant, 2010: 3). Lusch *et al.*, (2011: 4) suggest that retailing consists of the final activities and steps required either to place a product in the hands of the consumer or to supply a service to a consumer. Lusch *et al.*, (2011: 4) also propose that the retailer is the last step in the supply chain. Therefore, any organisation that sells a product or a service to the final consumer is executing a retailing function.

According to Statistics South Africa, for a retailer to qualify as such, an organisation would have to receive more than 50% of its turnover from the sales of goods to the public for household use (Statistics South Africa, 2010b: 1). Statistics South Africa defines retail trade as follows (Statistics South Africa, 2010a: 289):

“Retail trade is selling of goods and products to the general public for household use.” Retail trade is the resale (sale without transformation) of new and used goods to the general public, for personal and household consumption or utilisation, by shops, department stores, stalls, mail-order houses, petrol filling stations, retail motor vehicle dealers, hawkers and pedlars, consumer co-operatives, etc. Establishments engaged in selling to the general public are also included, from displayed merchandise products such as typewriters, stationary, lumber or petrol, or undertaking repair for the general public, are classified as retailers, though these sales or repairs may not be for personal or household consumption or use. However, establishments that sell such merchandise primarily to institutional or industrial users are classified as wholesalers (Strydom, 2008: 5).

As the focus of this study is on apparel retailers, it is essential to clearly understand apparel retailing. For the purpose of this study, apparel includes clothing, garments and specifically outerwear. As stated in the definition of a retailer, a retailer is a business that sells goods to a consumer for their own personal use, therefore it can be inferred that an apparel retailer is a business which sells clothing and related products (as indicated by figure 2.1 below), directly to the consumer for their own use. These products could include clothing, accessories, shoes, hair products, makeup and more.

For the purpose of this study, the concept of apparel retailing refers to retailers selling clothing and clothing-related products as shown in figure 2.1 below. This list is however by no means extensive. The study also includes apparel retailers that offer consumers fashion clothing, this is essentially clothing that follows a sequence of short term trends or fads (Easey, 2009: 3-4).

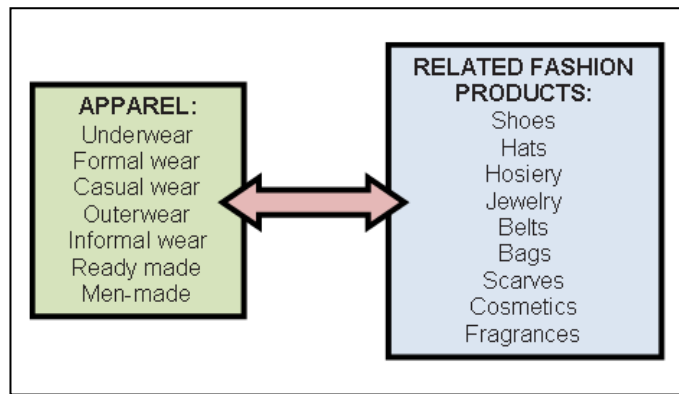


Figure 2.1: Clothing and clothing related items

Source: Adapted from Easey, M. 2009. *Fashion marketing*. United Kingdom: Wiley Blackwell. p. 3-4.

The apparel retail industry can be divided into three major sections namely women's wear, menswear and children's wear (Easey, 2009: 198). The largest section based on sales is the women's wear section (including accessories) and second is menswear (including accessories). In recent years, menswear has displayed greater growth than women's wear because men are becoming more fashion conscious. Even though it seems that menswear displays greater growth than women's wear when the economy is at its best, the opposite is also true. When the economy is at its worst, menswear experiences even larger declines in sales. Children's wear is the smallest of the three retail markets (Easey, 2009: 198).

When referring to the 'apparel retail industry', or where the statistics refer to 'retailers in textiles, clothing, and footwear and leather goods', it includes the following retailers (Statistics South Africa, 2006: 9) that ultimately make up the focus of this study:

- Retailers in ladies', girls' and infants clothing
- General outfitters
- Retailers in men's and boy's clothing
- Retailers in footwear
- Retailers selling fashion/apparel accessories

South Africa is a very diverse country and in some form or another, the trade of goods and services (including clothing) involves practically every single individual in the country. The evolution of retailing and how apparel retailing originated is discussed in the subsequent section.

2.3 EVOLUTION OF RETAILING

Practically everybody shops, whether it is for business or for pleasure. Retailing was established many years ago as a spontaneous development based on the need for food, water, and physical comforts (Stent, 2001: 1). As people improved their skills at cultivating their land, some people found that even after feeding their families and animals and storing goods, there were still some excesses. Instead of throwing these excesses away, they were traded for other accessories such as plates, jewellery, cups or objects such as clothing. While some people enjoyed producing products, others preferred to trade. Trading developed from informal markets such as peddlers to more established markets and eventually developed into permanent shops. Out of these concepts, the notion of retailing originated (Richardson, 2009: 1).

When retailing first commenced, the consumers stood in front of a counter and pointed towards the products they wanted and the helper of the store brought it forward. The helpers usually had to measure the food and merchandise due to the fact that it did not come in individually wrapped packages as products do today. In this way the consumer could stipulate exactly how much they were willing to pay, and that amount was measured out. It was however labour intensive to sell products in this way and therefore rather costly. Due to the fact that the number of consumers that could be helped at a time was limited to the number of available helpers, the shopping process was slow (Stent, 2001: 1).

During these early stages, general stores only supplied a variety of products ranging from food to fabrics. As an example, people bought fabrics and transformed the fabric into clothing; with no consideration for fashion. Since the wealthy people of this time were able to afford designers, dressmakers, and tailors

to create their clothing, they were deemed the trendsetters of society (Richardson, 2009: 1).

Figure 2.2 below indicates the evolution of retailing from the 1500s up to today. Retailing originated as peddlers and general trading, up to department stores, chain stores, convenience stores, supermarkets and hypermarkets. These different retailers are all discussed in the following section.

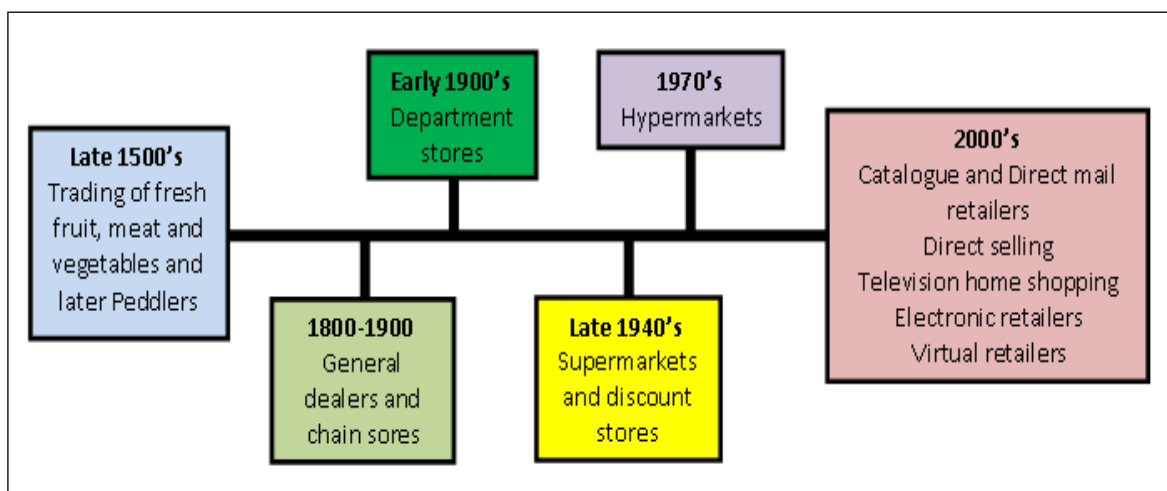


Figure 2.2: Evolution of retailing

Source: Adapted from Strydom, J. W. 2008. *The South African retail environment*. University of South Africa. p. 22-26.

In the 1800s, limited-line apparel stores joined the general retail stores. As the name suggests, the merchandise was limited to a distinct categorisation, such as women’s wear. In due course, these limited-line stores became speciality stores (they are still known by this name today). Speciality stores’ attractiveness started as more finished merchandise was produced and consumers were able to choose from a larger variety. Soon merchants opened additional locations of their stores, heralding the launch of the chain organization.

Chain stores originated from the fact that the demand for speciality stores grew and the merchants opened more stores in different locations. Merchants then recognized that they could serve their consumers better if they could offer them a variety of products under one roof. This is how the department store originated. In the twentieth century, department stores and speciality stores’ attention moved

to consumer service and they focused their attentiveness to meet the consumers' demands for fashionable products. The source of power behind the triumph of the apparel retail industry was the emphasis on fashion (Richardson, 2009: 1).

Figure 2.3 below illustrates how the retail stores developed from the 1800s to the twentieth century. During the twentieth century, apparel-oriented retail operations thrived. As people moved away from the cities to the suburbs, the stores tagged along in order for shoppers to avoid the downtown or the central shopping district. Conventional chains grew by opening numerous units, and department stores increased with branches (Diamond, 2006: 4).

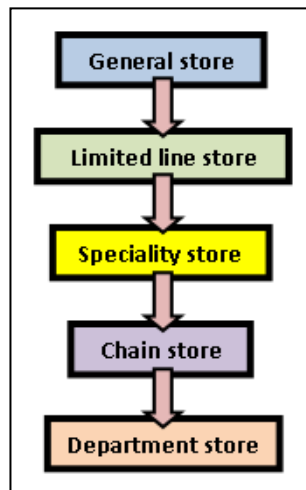


Figure 2.3: Development of apparel retail stores

Source: Adapted from Diamond, E. 2006. *Fashion Retailing: A Multi-Channel Approach*. 2nd ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education. p. 4.

At this point in time, South Africa had a refined retail infrastructure in the inner-city areas which measured up to first world retailers. The rural areas and the townships were not developed to their full potential because much confidence was still being placed on the older forms of retailing, for instance the general dealer, while in the rural areas the pedlar was still being used to provide to the retailer and to sell directly to the consumer. The townships and the rural areas are also the places where the best growth opportunities exist because of the redeployment of income to consumers living in these townships. These areas are however underserved with a shortage of suitable retailers such as supermarkets and general shopping centres.

It is important to analyse the reasons for the evolution of retailing in South Africa by referring to the wheel of retailing and the retail accordion.

2.3.1 The wheel of retailing

The wheel of retailing theory suggests that retail operators start small while offering real advantages, such as specific merchandise or low prices. By doing this it enables the retailers to take consumers away from the more recognized competitors. As they begin to show profit, the retailers develop their business by offering a bigger range--more elaborate facilities, resulting in increased costs and increased mark-ups (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 127). This “trading up” occurs as the retailer becomes established in its own right. However, not all retailers can be categorized according to the wheel of retailing. The rise and the fall of the department store with its later revival could be used as an example. In some countries, the department store was only introduced in its trading-up phase or in its vulnerability phase (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 127). See figure 2.4 below for an illustration of the wheel of retailing.

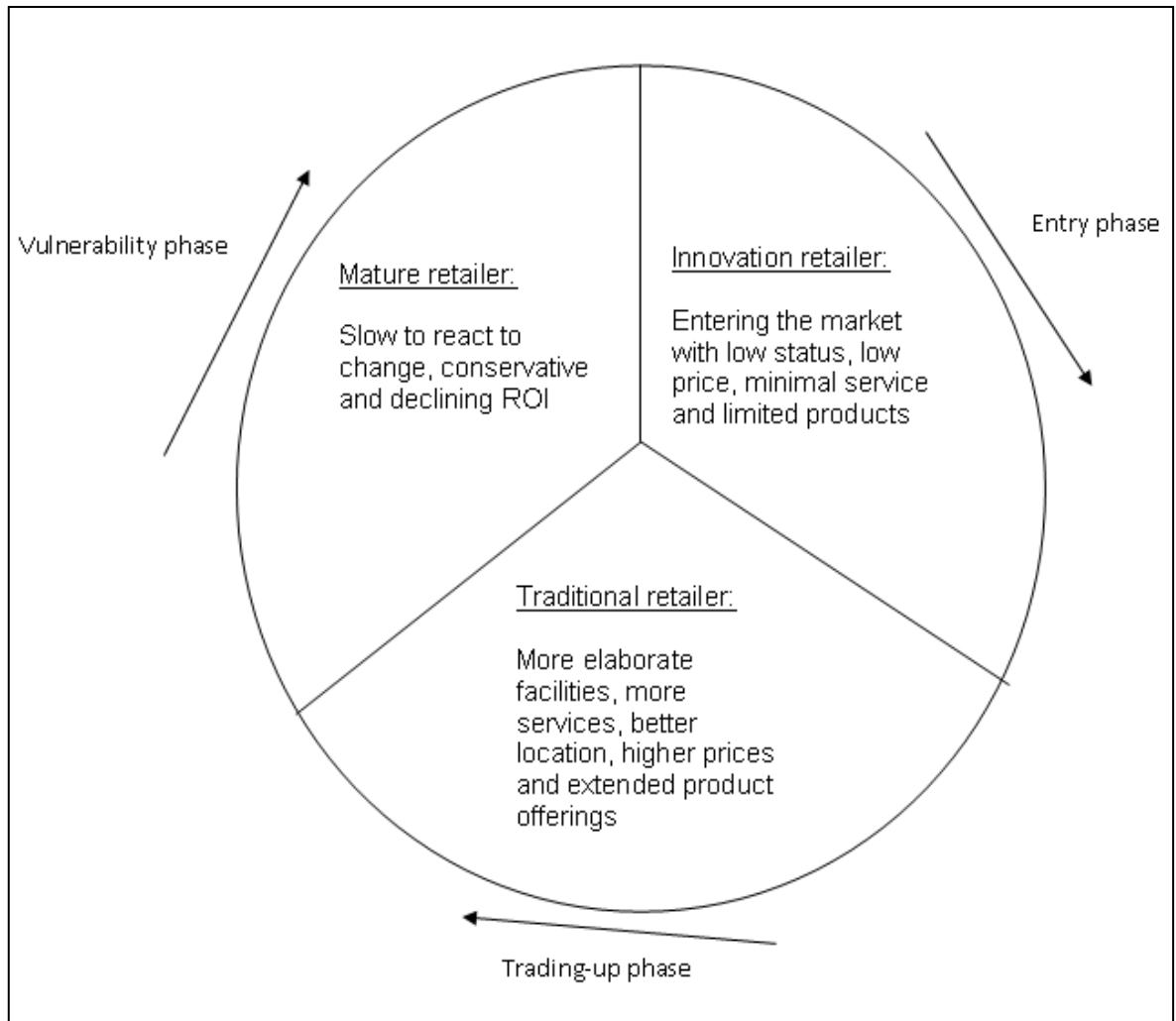


Figure 2.4: The wheel of retailing

Source: Strydom, J. W., Cant, M. C. & Jooste, C. J. 2004. *Marketing Management*. Cape Town: Juta. p. 332.

2.3.2 The retail accordion

According to the retail accordion theory, retail outlets evolved from outlets selling a wide variety of products, to specialising by offering a narrow assortment and then returning to a wider assortment again (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 127). See figure 2.5 below. In the South African market, general dealers were first established with a very wide assortment, and then a contraction phase came in with specialist stores and smaller assortments. In the 1970s a wide assortment, such as hypermarkets returned. The trend in the 1990s slipped back to specialisation again.

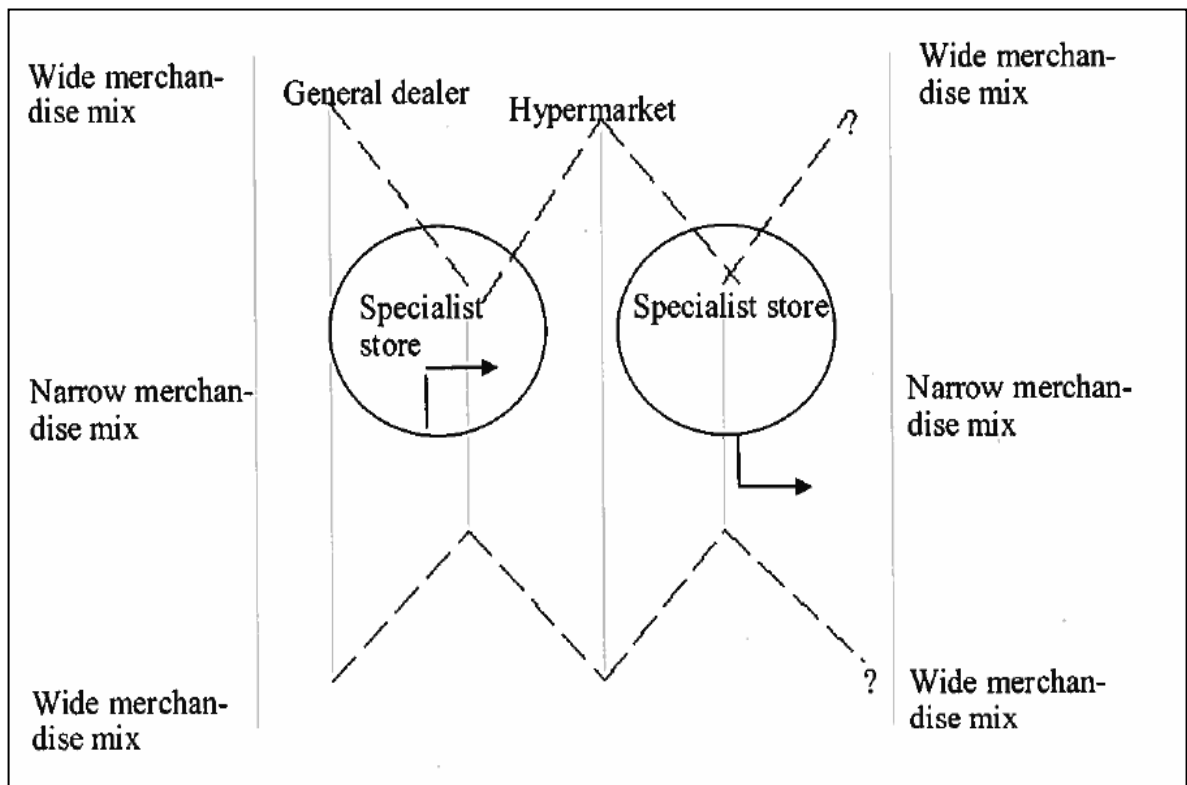


Figure 2.5: The retail accordion

Source: Strydom, J. W. 2008. *The South African retail environment*. University of South Africa. p. 31.

The conventional manner to facilitate contact with goods and services was to place retail sites in areas that represented the highest quantity of possible consumers. Traditionally, that was always in residential areas, such as rural communities, towns and cities. In this way, potential consumers were always guaranteed to be ready and they had convenient access to their daily needs, and retailers were guaranteed a firm supply of consumers (Harry, 2004: 1).

It is therefore fitting to discuss the location of retailers and how it evolved over the years as part of the evolution of retail. The location of retailers is discussed in the next section.

2.4 LOCATIONS OF RETAILERS

Location is usually one of the most powerful considerations in a consumer's store selection. "Reilly's law of retail gravitation" was formulated in 1920 and it was

used to determine the exact and the most profitable location for a retailer by using two variables: population and distance. The closer a large number of consumers are to the retailer, the better the retailer's drawing power (Strydom, 2008: 139). Special consideration should be given to the location of a retail store because it is a key success factor for the success of any retail establishment (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 193). Location decisions have strategic significance because they can be used to create a sustainable competitive advantage. If a retailer has the location that is the most attractive to consumers, competitors will find it difficult to duplicate this advantage (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 193). The two essential kinds of retail locations are discussed subsequently, namely store and non-store retail locations.

2.4.1 Store and non-store retailing

One can differentiate between two basic kinds of retailers: store retailers and non-store retailers (Cant, 2010: 5-6). Non-store retailing is a form of retail that is conducted without the conventional store based location. According to Lusch *et al.*, (2011: 228), five types of non-store retailing can be identified namely, street pending, mail order, automated systems, direct selling and the internet (see figure 2.6). Direct marketing uses the advertising media to invoke the consumers to respond to an advertisement. Direct mail is one of the options of direct marketing where letters and samples are mailed to the possible consumer. Catalogue marketing entails selling by posting catalogues to certain consumers. Another type of direct marketing is telemarketing where the telephone is used to sell straight to the consumer.

The last form of direct marketing is electronic shopping. This is a form of shopping that is growing rapidly in South Africa because electronic shopping permits consumers to buy goods or services without having to visit a physical store or leave their house. This could be due to (amongst others) time constraints or lack of motivation to go to a crowded store. Electronic shopping can be done via the Internet, over the television or the phone. Shoppers buy products online, through catalogues or by watching home shopping channels marketing products on the television. With the arrival of the Internet, many e-merchants started. Some

merchants sell unique products; where others, like Kalahari.net, serve as a virtual-age department store offering an assortment of products. To adjust with the times, many leading stores, such as Woolworths, have built online stores to increase their consumer base further than their physical locations.

Store retailing on the other hand, also known as a “brick and mortar” business, refers to retail outlets that are housed in real stores with a commercial address where consumers can interact on a face to face basis. Retail stores come in all sizes, from small to very large. Store retailers can be classified according to various characteristics such as their functions and services, the variety of the product assortment, their pricing structures and the type of store cluster. These will be discussed in detail in the next section as the focus of this study is on store retailing.

Figure 2.6 below illustrates the four basic types of store-based retail locations: business districts, shopping centres and malls, freestanding units and non-traditional locations. The focus of this study is on the store based retail locations and is discussed individually in the following sections.

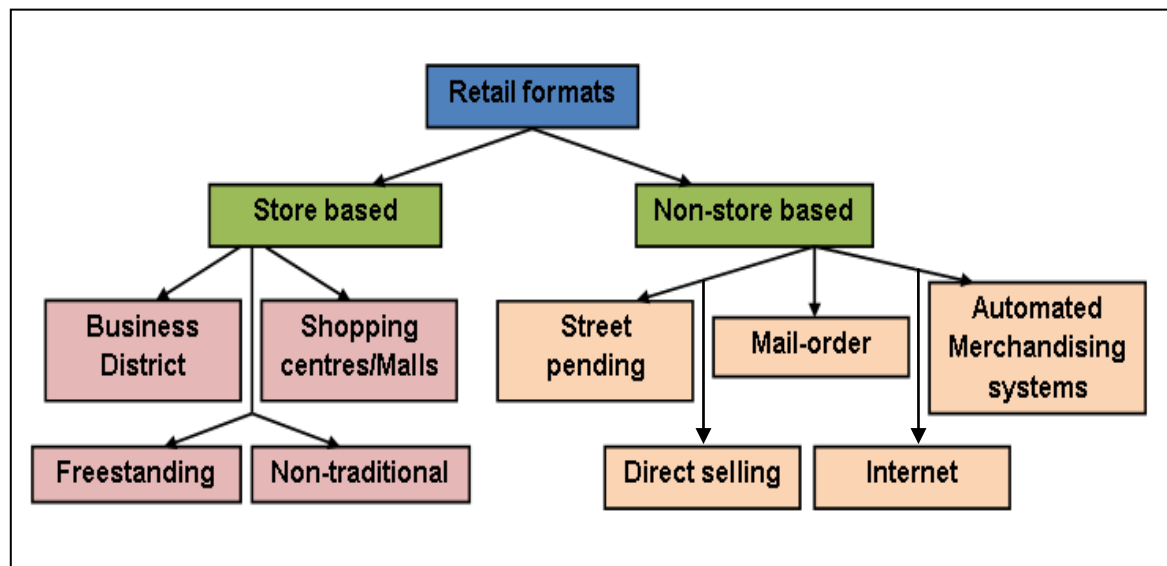


Figure 2.6: Retail formats for accessing your target market

Source: Adapted from Lusch, R. F., Dunne, P. M. & Carver, J. R. 2011. *Introduction to retailing*. 7th ed. China: South Western. p. 228.

- **Shopping districts**

From the first stages of retailing, a general trading area was selected and the specific shopping district within the area was decided upon. The downtown central shopping districts were the most popular location for retailers, due to the high density of people living in and around the area (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 242). The downtown central shopping district location made it easy for people to shop because most shopping was done on foot, and having your own vehicle was not as popular as it is today. People would stroll endlessly for hours in the streets of the city while doing their shopping. However, the cities became over-populated and over-crowded and therefore, the people moved away from the city--and the retailers followed.

Due to residential districts with their scattered and uneven development patterns and low concentrations of people, it made it nearly impossible for retailers to achieve traditional closeness to a consumer base of satisfactory scale to sustain a feasible retail area. Therefore, retailers positioned themselves away from the residential areas and simply waited for their consumers to come to them.

A potential retailer can choose a location for their store in different trading areas such as the down town streets as discussed above, or in a shopping centre or in malls. The **central business district (CBD)**, which is often in the geographic heart of a city, was once popular for retail locations in South Africa; however its popularity has declined in recent years due to the following reasons (Strydom, 2008: 137):

- Prime property in the CBD has higher rates and taxes, therefore the selling prices are higher for consumer products.
- There are many old and unattractive buildings.
- There is limited parking.
- There is a trend where less wealthy people live in the old buildings of the CBD. This is quite accurate in South Africa in cities such as Johannesburg and Tshwane.

- The shopping environment is less attractive with the crowdedness of the streets and people are concerned about their safety.

Another location for retailers is the **secondary business districts**, which are located away from the core of the city. Secondary business districts are shopping areas that are smaller than a CBD, and it circles around one (at least) department or variety store at key crossroads. These locations house smaller retailers such as offices, bands and theatres. It is much easier to find parking and the rent is significantly lower than the CBD (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 231). An example of a secondary business district in Tshwane is Hatfield.

Other locations include **neighbourhood shopping streets** (also known as neighbourhood business district) which are found in practically all suburbs. A neighbourhood business district is a shopping area that evolves to please the convenience-oriented shopping needs of a district; it usually contains numerous small stores, with the main retailer being a supermarket or a variety store, and is situated on a major road of a residential area (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 231). These locations generally house convenience type retail outlets such as a corner cafe, a hairdresser, a dry cleaner, banks, small supermarkets and a steakhouse. Shopping street locations offer new retailers opportunities and they can become well known and attract consumers from other cities (Strydom, 2008: 138).

In the overseas markets such as California, England and France, the downtown shopping areas are still flourishing. Some streets are well known for designer label and haute couture fashion, boutiques and shops that stretches over two to three blocks, and some stretches further north and south. Examples of these districts are Rodeo Drive in California, Oxford Street in England and Champs des l'elysées in France. However, in South Africa the trend has moved away from shopping in the CBD, to shopping in malls and shopping centres.

- **Shopping centres and malls**

Business retail locations are available in various different forms. **Shopping complexes** are very popular in all the large cities in South Africa. The shopping complexes usually reflect the economic status of the area; therefore the stores in a higher class area will present a more elite image. According to Lusch *et al.*, (2011: 231), a shopping centre (or mall) is a centrally owned or managed shopping district that is planned, has even-handed occupancy (the stores harmonize with one another in merchandise offerings) and is enclosed by parking conveniences. The complexes usually have a logo, corporate colours and a marketing manager. The rent is generally very high and therefore the product prices are also high (Colborne, 1996:24-26 & About.com, 2011: 1).

Even though downtown central shopping districts are still of vast retailing importance, retailers progressed to consider suburban malls in order to expand their businesses. The downtown stores were being subjected to more and more competition from large regional shopping malls. After that, many urban department stores have been both adding to and taking advantage of this trend by locating their branch stores in suburban malls. The success of the suburban shopping mall has been primarily due to the following factors (adapted from Lusch *et al.*, (2011: 231-232) & Diamond (2006: 134-135):

- In 1945, there was a massive population migration from the cities to less populated areas. Therefore retailers decided to move to suburban locations.
- The trend to own a vehicle increased, therefore many shoppers went to the down town stores with their own vehicles. As a result, traffic overcrowding and unavailability of parking increased. Therefore suburban stores, where travelling and parking are relatively effortless, benefitted from this trend.
- Traffic increased due to the wide range of product offerings in the shopping malls.
- Decreased crime rates.

- A clean and tidy environment.
- As the trend toward suburban living continues, the close-by suburbia became crowded and homeowners were forced even further away from the city. Consequently, many homeowners were too far from the city to do their shopping in the city.
- Due to the fact that the availability of space in the suburbs decreased immensely over the years, an increase in retailing activity in the distant districts came about.

A shopping centre's image, preferences and character attracts a variety of consumers, thereby giving the retailers that are located at the heart of the shopping centre (or mall) a competitive advantage above the other retailers (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 232). It is therefore very important that a retailer must be aware of the makeup, image, preferences and personality of a centre, before choosing a location.

- **Freestanding location**

Retailers can also choose a **free standing location**. This type of retail location is essentially any stand-alone, unconnected building. It can be tucked away in a district location or be located directly off a busy highway. It usually has plenty of parking. Contrasting to the attached retail locations where consumers may stroll in because they were shopping close by, the retailer of a free standing site has actively perform marketing activities to get the consumer inside (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 235 and Colborne, 1996: 24-26). Pick 'n Pay Hypermarket in Faerie Glen in the east of Pretoria is an example of a free standing retailer.

If a retailer has a location that is most attractive to consumers, competitors will not be able to duplicate this advantage (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 193). However, even though location plays a crucial role in the success of a retailer, location is not the only aspect to take into consideration. Retailers have to constantly examine their environments to become aware of any changes in the environment. Retailers then have to familiarize themselves with the changes in order for them to prosper in the

changed environment and to stay in the retail life cycle. The different retail life-cycles are discussed in the following section.

2.5 RETAIL LIFE CYCLE

Just as a product has a life cycle, a retailer also has a life cycle and it is based on the product life-cycle theory. The product life cycle theory argues that a new product will develop through four stages before it reaches the end of its life cycle. A new product develops through a series of phases from introduction (when a product is offered on the market for the first time) to growth (during which product sales gradually increase), maturity (when product sales reach their peak) and decline (when stagnation and decreasing sales set in). Figure 2.7 below illustrates the retail life-cycle.

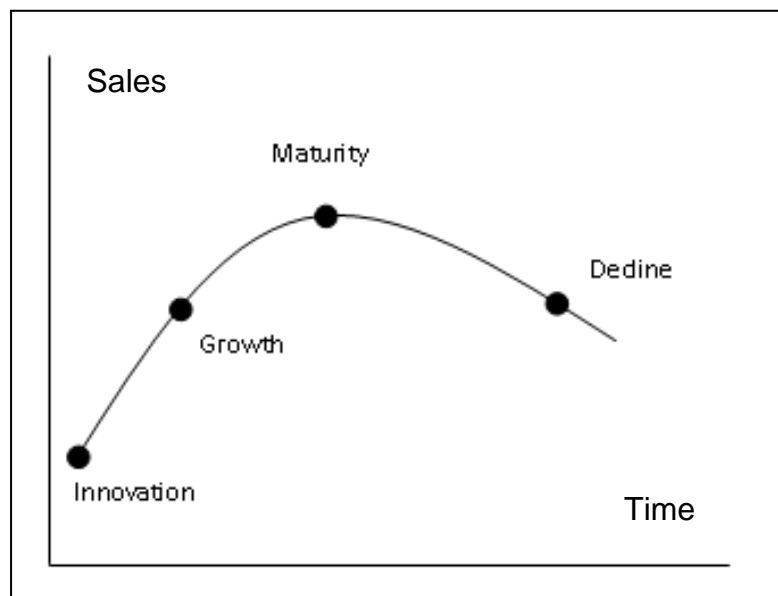


Figure 2.7: Retail life-cycle

Source: Adapted from Lusch, R. F., Dunne, P. M. & Carver, J. R. 2011. *Introduction to retailing*. 7th ed. China: South Western. p.128.

The retail life cycle theory suggests that retail institutions also have a certain life cycle which can be divided into the same four phases (Cox & Brittain, 2004: 7):

- a) Innovation phase – In the innovation stage the new retailer will only have a few competitors, with rapid growth in their sales and a low profitability due to start-up costs.
- b) Growth phase – In the growth phase the retailer's sales growth will still be rapid and profitability will be high due to the potential economies of scale.
- c) Maturity phase – In the maturity phase a retailer has many competitors, therefore sales growth will decline and profitability is only moderate.
- d) Final decline phase – In the final decline phase the retailer's sales and profits decrease and more innovatory retailers are developing and growing.

During the retail life cycle, the retailer finds itself in diverse competitive market environments that demands changes to the retailer's strategy. Depending on the degree of and relative growth rate in the retailer's sales, an introductory, growth, maturity and decline phase can generally be identified in the life of the retailer.

The classification of retailers is discussed in the subsequent section.

2.6 CLASSIFICATION OF RETAILERS

The retail industry is extremely diverse in terms of its product offerings and it is therefore important to classify the different retailers in terms of their characteristics. Due to the fact that there are so many different apparel retailers, it is almost impossible to propose a single categorization structure that will be appropriate to all the apparel retailers. One classification of retailers is done by Cox and Brittain (2004: 9-10). They classify retailers in the following categories:

- Range of merchandise/product assortment: Retailers can be classified according to the width and the depth of their product assortment. Some retail businesses offer a wide range of goods, for example Woolworths. They offer consumers a range of foods, apparel and home ware. Others concentrate on narrow ranges like health foods, accessories and baby clothes; these are called speciality stores or niche retailers.

- Degree of service: Classifying retailers by means of the amount of service is a well-known and established custom for retailers. One can distinguish between self-service, partial service and full service retailers. Even though many retail outlets have been converted or built to self-service or self-evaluation standards, other retailers present consumers with additional services such as free delivery, credit, free gift wrapping and free repairs. Truworths, for example, offers their consumers a service where they will deliver a desired product either to the consumer's nearest store, or to their front door.
- Pricing policy/structure: Classifying retailers according to their pricing structure is another way of distinguishing between different retailers. Some retailers choose to highlight their low prices rather than the service element of their retailing mix. The use of price to distinguish between retailers has been used by retailers for an extended period of time. For example, discount retailers such as Pep and Jet uses their low prices to attract consumers.
- Method of consumer contact: A large number of retail transactions are conducted by face-to-face contact in retail stores. However, non-store retailing such as mail order, telephone selling, vending machines and the internet are becoming increasingly popular.

Some of the above categories overlap in terms of classification criteria; however they are all important in specific marketing situations. The most general classification of retail organisations is based mainly on the range of merchandise. Due to the fact that the overlap between categories continues to change as the environment does, it is fitting to consider the main types of retail organisations.

The classification system of the formal retailers in South Africa is summarized in table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Classification of formal store retailers in South Africa

LEVEL OF SERVICE	PRODUCT LINE SOLD	RELATIVE PRICE EMPHASIS	CONTROL OF OUTLETS	TYPE OF STORE CLUSTER
Self service	Speciality store	Discount store	Corporate Chain	Central business districts
Limited service	Department store		Voluntary Chain	Regional shopping centre
Full service	Supermarket Convenience store Superstore Hypermarket Service business	Catalogue showroom	Franchise organisation	Community shopping centre Neighbourhood shopping centre

Source: Strydom, J. W., Cant, M. C. & Jooste, C. J. 2004. *Marketing Management*. Cape Town: Juta. p. 321.

2.6.1 Types of retail organisations

Due to the fact that there are so many different retailers, it is almost impossible to propose a single categorisation structure that will be appropriate to all retailers. As mentioned in the previous section, retailers are classified in terms of different categories which include different types of retailers. The different type of retailers includes (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 45-58; Strydom, 2008: 12-14 & Easey, 2009: 202-208):

- Department store:* Department stores carry a broad diversity and deep variety of products; each line is operated as a separate department in the store. Department stores offer consumer service and categorize stores into different departments for presenting their goods and products (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 47). According to Lusch *et al.*, (2011: 12), department stores are decreasing in their store sizes and they are closing their downtown locations. Even though the downtown locations (such as the central business district) housed their largest stores, many downtown locations have become “ghost towns”. This could be owing to the fact that consumers prefer to shop at locations closer to their homes.

Also, what initially made the department stores so successful was the fact that they held great selections of different merchandise categories under one roof. This was however outdated by the opening of the shopping mall, where consumers would also find what they are looking for under one roof, just not necessarily in the same store. Examples of department stores in South Africa are large hardware stores such as Builders Warehouse.

Department stores offer consumer service and categorize stores into different departments for presenting their goods and products. Department stores offer consumers multiple merchandise lines at variable prices in all categories. Products sold could include apparel, home appliances, toiletries, cosmetics, jewellery and toys. An example of an apparel department store in South Africa is Edgars. They offer their consumers apparel (ladies, men's, children and baby), accessories, home ware, cosmetics and much more under one roof.

- *Convenience store:* Convenience stores are small stores that offer a limited variety and assortment of goods at a convenient location (near residential areas) with a swift checkout (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 46). They are open for most of the hours of a day, seven days a week. Products could include milk, bread and cigarettes. The Engen Quick Shop at the petrol station is an example of a convenience store in South Africa.
- *Supermarket:* Supermarkets are large, low cost, low margin and high volume stores that provide a wide variety of food, clothing, meat, produce and household goods. These are self-service stores with limited sales of non-food items such as health and beauty aids (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 41). In South Africa the best examples of supermarkets are the Pick 'n Pay, Checkers and Spar groups. In the past, supermarket groups did not see the need of having apparel fashion as part of their market. They preferred to concentrate their experience on food. However this soon changed due to competitive pressures. Pick 'n Pay and Hyperama are examples of supermarkets that stock clothing. Pick 'n Pay also extended this part of

their business by having their own fashion label--*Real Clothing*. This brand offers the consumer basic items that are 'fashion right', that offers the consumer value for money and that makes them feel comfortable (Pick 'n Pay, 2012: 1).

- *Hypermarket:* A hypermarket is the fastest growing retail category. A hypermarket is larger than a supermarket, but hypermarkets are stores that sell groceries and fashion apparel, home fashions and other categories. They are large stores that combine a supermarket with a full line discount store. The Checkers Hyper and the Pick 'n Pay Hypermarket are well known examples of hypermarkets in South Africa.
- *Warehouse clubs:* Warehouse clubs are retailers that offer a limited and irregular assortment of food and general merchandise with little service at low prices for consumers and small businesses. They feature value priced products for the budget consumer. An example of a warehouse club in South Africa is Trade Centre.
- *Discount stores:* Discount stores are retailers that offer a broad variety of merchandise, limited service and low prices. In South Africa, discount stores have been in operation since the early sixties, offering consumers products at lower prices by accepting lower margins and by selling larger volumes. The merchandise is less fashion oriented than the brands in department and speciality stores. An example of a full line discount store in South Africa is Game. These retailers supply the lower end of the market with cheaper alternatives. They are mostly located in low-cost areas and offer discounted prices on apparel and accessories such as shoes of a lower quality than what is available in other stores. Examples of discount retailers in South Africa include Pep, Jet (which is the discount retailer of Edgars) and Identity (which is the discount retailer of Truworths).
- *Speciality stores:* Speciality stores carry a narrow product line with a deep assortment. They concentrate on a limited number of complementary

merchandise categories and provide a high level of service in relatively small stores. An example of a speciality store in South Africa is La Senza Lingerie, Safari and Outdoor, Catherine Moore and the Toy Shop.

- *Electronic retailers:* Electronic retailing is also called e-tailing, online retailing and internet retailing. An electronic retailer communicates with consumers and offer products and services for sale over the internet. An example of electronic retailers in South Africa is Bid or buy, Kalahari and Amazon.
- *Catalogue and direct mail retailers:* Catalogue retailing is a non-store retail format in which the retail offering is communicated to a consumer through a catalogue, where direct mail retailers communicate with their consumers using letters and brochures. An example of catalogue and direct mail retailers in South Africa are Annique skincare products and Honey accessories. The mail order sector has declined in importance because the main advantages are now offered by the stores as well. These include the availability of credit as well as a liberal return policy. Since the 1970s the conventional mail order sector, provided big catalogues, some with up to a 1000 pages. This sector tends to suffer from a lasting 'down market image', even though its image is improving. Retailers such as Edgars and Woolworths sends out catalogues to their consumers with the latest on offer, however consumers cannot order items from the catalogues. Accessories on the other hand are very popular to order via mail, such as Honey and Miglio. They send catalogues that encompass the products together with their prices to consumers/potential consumers, where they have the freedom to choose and to order from their own home.
- *Television home shopping:* Television home shopping is also known as T-commerce or teleshopping. This is a retail format where consumers watch television programs that demonstrate merchandise and then the consumers are given the opportunity to place orders for that merchandise, usually telephonically. The three forms of electronic home shopping retailing are

channels dedicated to television shopping, infomercials and direct-response advertising. *Infomercials* are programs that are more or less 30 minutes long that seek orders by telephone. *Direct response advertising* includes advertisements on television and radio that describes products and provide an opportunity for consumers to order these products. Examples of television home shopping in South Africa are Glomail, Verimark and Homemark. These retailers have been so successful over the years that they opened physical stores where they sell the products that are advertised on the television in an actual store.

- *Variety chain stores*: Chain stores are retail channels that share a brand and the same management and they sell a variety of merchandise. They usually have consistent methods and practices, and usually have standardized business methods and practices. Examples of chain stores in South Africa include Foschini, Truworths and Mr. Price. These stores offer their consumers fashion ranging from apparel, to including underwear, shoes and accessories.

For the purpose of this study, the focus is on all the apparel retailer types mentioned above with the exception of mail order and convenience stores. This is because visual merchandising is only possible in retailers that make use of the conventional store location, and actually sells apparel and apparel related products.

The various types of retailers create value for the consumer by providing the consumer with different functions. The functions increase the value of the products and services sold to consumers. It is now appropriate to discuss the different functions of retailers.

2.7 FUNCTIONS OF RETAILING

Levi & Weitz (2009: 7-8), explain that even though it is sometimes easier and cheaper to buy products directly from manufacturers, retailers provide important

functions to consumers that increases the value of the products and services sold. It also facilitates the distribution of those products and services for the manufacturers that produce them. According to Levi & Weitz (2009:7-8), the functions of retailing include the breaking of bulk, holding inventory, providing assortment and providing services. Cox and Brittain (2004: 4) add that retailing helps to effect change in the ownership of goods, it causes goods to move through the distribution system and it provides consumers with a facility for social interaction. These functions are discussed below:

2.7.1 Providing assortment

One of the main functions that a retailer provides is the providing of assortment. An assortment is a collection or group of various kinds (Gilmour, 2010: 17), and in a retail environment it can be referred to as the depth of merchandise which is "...the number of SKU's (stock keeping units) within a merchandise category". In other words, it is the number of products that consumers see as substitutes for one another that are for sale in a store (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 631). Offering consumers an assortment of products allows them to choose from a wide variety of brands, designs, sizes, colours and prices at one place. All retailers offer consumers assortments of products; however they specialize and differ in the assortments they offer. Supermarkets like Pick 'n Pay provide an assortment of food, health and beauty care, whereas Truworths provides assortments of clothing and accessories.

2.7.2 Breaking bulk

The term bulk refers to large numbers, amounts, or volumes. Retailers purchase goods in bulk quantities to receive discount from the manufacturers (Gilmour, 2010: 35). In order to lessen transportation costs, manufacturers and wholesalers usually ship containers of frozen foods or boxes of clothing to retailers. Retailers then offer the products in lesser quantities that are modified to individual consumers' needs. For example, instead of buying 50 cans of sweet corn, the consumer can choose to only buy one can in a size that is convenient for them.

Or instead of buying 20 blouses of the same size and colour, the consumer can buy only one blouse in the colour and size that fits them best.

2.7.3 Holding inventory

Another major function of retailers is to keep inventory that has been broken into smaller quantities so that the products will be available at a later stage when consumers want/need them (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 631-632). By upholding inventory, retailers provide a very significant benefit to consumers. Therefore consumers can keep smaller inventory of products at home due to the fact that the retailer has the products readily available. They lessen the cost consumers would have to pay to store the products themselves (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 631-632).

2.7.4 Providing services

Retailers provide a range of services that make it easier for consumers to buy and use products. One of the major services retailers provide consumers with is credit facilities. This ensures that consumers can have a product immediately while they pay for it later. Many retailers have trained sales consultants in store to assist consumers with questions and information on the products. Other services offered to consumers by retailers are mentioned below (Cox & Brittain, 2004: 4). The retail industry is very diverse, so services differ in terms of the classification of the retailer. Among others, these services could include:

- Helping to effect change in ownership of goods.
- Causing goods to move through the distribution system.
- Product guarantees, after-sales service and dealing with consumer complaints.
- Hire-purchase facilities.
- Some provision of social interaction.
- Location, the majority of retailers are very conveniently located in order for consumers to reach them easily.

2.7.5 Effecting change in the ownership of goods

When a consumer purchases a product from a retailer, the consumer becomes the owner of that specific product once the consumer has paid for it. Therefore the retailer closes the ownership gap between the product and the manufacturer. For example, when a consumer purchases a pair of denim jeans from Edgars, the ownership of the jeans changes from Edgars to the consumer.

2.7.6 Causing goods to move through the distribution channel

In order for a product to reach a consumer, it has to go through the necessary channels. A distribution channel is a series of firms or individuals who participate in the flow of goods and services from producer to final user or consumer. A retailer is the link between the product and the consumer. Therefore, apparel retailers make it possible for consumers to purchase clothing and clothing related products because they bring the products to the consumers.

2.7.7 Providing consumers with an opportunity for social intercourse

When consumers visit a retailer, the retailer provides them with an opportunity to mix with other consumers and people such as the staff. Friends could decide to “go shopping” together, or they could bump into one another unexpectedly. Therefore, going to a retail store is a means of social interaction.

It is fitting to discuss the South African retail industry in order to put the apparel industry in perspective.

2.8 RETAILING IN SOUTH AFRICA

The impact that retailing has on the economy and on people’s lifestyles is easily taken for granted. It is due to retailing that individual demands of consumers are met and therefore retailing contributes to a large part of a country’s economic

growth (Lusch *et al.*, 2011: 2). The retail store sector is important because it is the final connection in the chain of fabrication that begins at the extractive stages, moves through the developing processes and ends in the supplying of goods and services to the final consumer (Cox & Brittain, 2004: 1).

2.8.1 An overview of the South African retail industry

Going back as far as the year 2000, the retail industry has shown significant growth in all the retail categories. Between January 2000 and December 2005 there was a faintly downward drift from the beginning of 2000 until the middle of 2000 and a rising tendency emerged thereafter up to the end of 2004 (see figure 2.8). The beginning of 2005 saw a concise levelling of the trend, but that began to increase from middle of 2005 up to the end of 2005 (Statistics South Africa, 2005: 2). In 2009, there was a downturn in the retail trade sales, however it picked up in 2010 and the retail trade sales increased and continued to grow to 2011 (see figure 2.9).

The retail industry in South Africa has developed and grown over the past 10 years from R19 million in January 2000 to R47000 million in December 2011 (see figure 2.8 and 2.9 below). Most of the growth has been in the general dealer's category, as well as in the textiles, clothing, and footwear and leather goods categories. Therefore it can be inferred from the statistics that the apparel industry has grown in the past and the latest statistics indicate that the apparel retail industry is still growing. This growth has a major effect on the retail industry as a whole.

Figure 2.8 below shows the trend cycle for the retail trade sales, at constant (2000) prices, from January 2000 to September 2005.

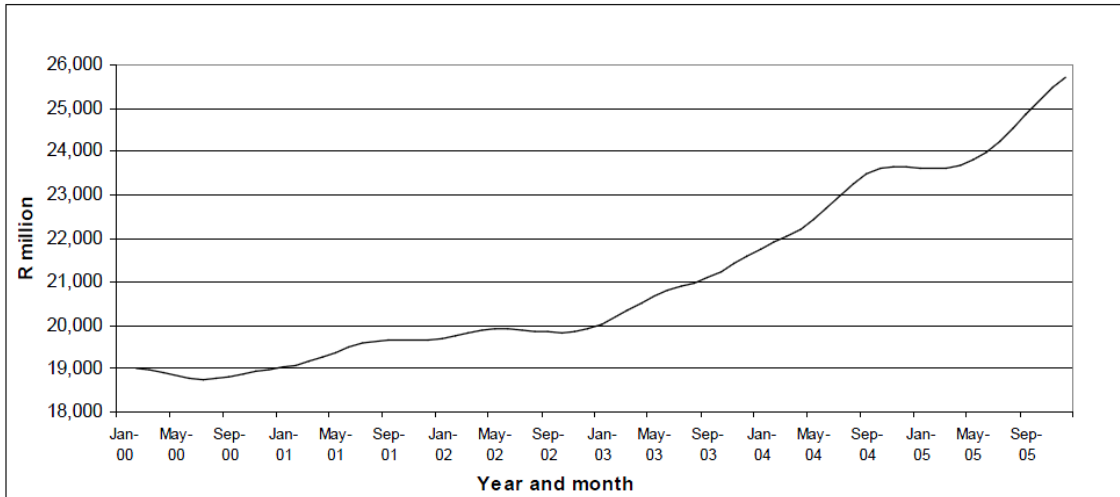


Figure 2.8: Trend cycle of retail trade sales, 2000-2005 (at constant 2000 prices)

Source: Statistics South Africa. 2005. *Retail trade sales*. Statistical release P6242.1. December. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. p. 2.

Figure 2.9 below shows the retail trade sales, at constant 2008 prices, from January 2005 to December 2011.

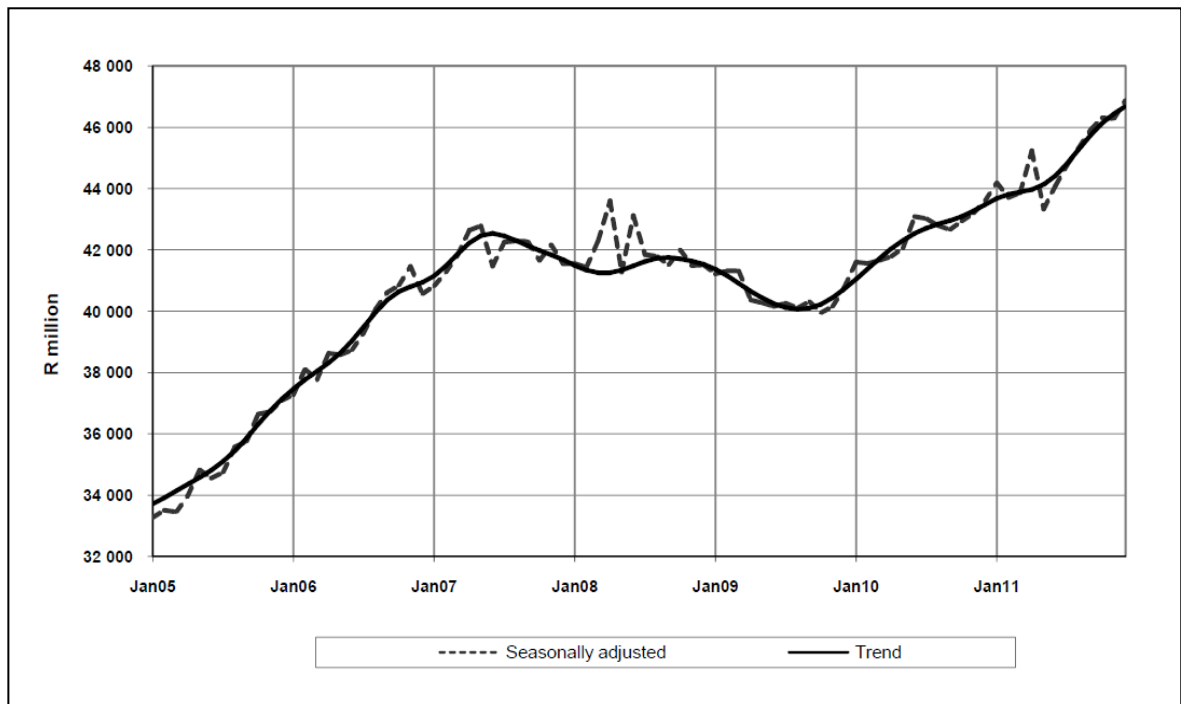


Figure 2.9: Retail trade sales at constant 2008 prices

Source: Statistics South Africa. 2011. *Retail trade sales*. Statistical release P6242.1. December. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. p. 4.

As the latest statistics indicate, the retail industry in South Africa is one of the largest contributors to the economy's total income (Statistics South Africa, 2010b: 1). In real terms, retail trade sales for the fourth quarter of 2011 revealed an increase of 7,9% compared with the fourth quarter of 2010. The largest contributors to the 7,9% increase were 'retailers in textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods' (10,5% and contributing 2,4 percentage points), 'general dealers' (6,6% and contributing 2,4 percentage points) and 'all other retailers' (8,5% and contributing 1,0 percentage point) (Statistics South Africa, 2011: 2). See table 2.2 below.

Retail trade sales in real terms increased by 8,7% year-on-year in December 2011. The highest annual growth rate was recorded for 'retailers in textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods' (11,3%), followed by 'all other retailers' (10,9%) and 'retailers in household furniture, appliances and equipment' (9,7%) (Statistics South Africa, 2011: 2).

Table 2.2 Contribution of each type of retailer to the percentage change in retail trade sales at constant 2008 prices

Type of retailer	October to December 2010 (R million)	Weight 1/	October to December 2011 (R million)	Difference between October to December 2010 and October to December 2011 (R million)	% change between October to December 2010 and October to December 2011	Contribution (% points) to the % change in total sales 2/
General dealers	53 972	36,7	57 522	3 550	6,6	2,4
Retailers of food, beverages and tobacco in specialised stores	14 506	9,9	15 006	500	3,4	0,3
Retailers in pharmaceutical and medical goods, cosmetics and toiletries	8 848	6,0	9 176	328	3,7	0,2
Retailers in textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods	32 946	22,4	36 417	3 471	10,5	2,4
Retailers in household furniture, appliances and equipment	10 053	6,8	11 188	1 135	11,3	0,8
Retailers in hardware, paint and glass	9 888	6,7	11 044	1 156	11,7	0,8
All other retailers	16 953	11,5	18 393	1 440	8,5	1,0
Total 3/	147 166	100,0	158 746	11 580	7,9	7,9

1/ Weight is the percentage contribution of each type of dealer to the total retail trade sales for the three months up to the current month of the previous year.

2/ The contribution to the percentage change is calculated by multiplying the percentage change of each type of dealer with its corresponding weight, divided by 100.

3/ Figures have been rounded off. Therefore discrepancies may occur between the sums of the component items and the totals.

Source: Statistics South Africa. 2011. *Retail trade sales*. Statistical release P6242.1. December. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. p. 3.

Table 2.3 indicates the latest retail trade sales according to type of retailer at current prices from January 2010 to December 2011. The types of retailers are listed below. For the purpose of this study, type D is the focus:

- Type A: General dealers
- Type B: Retailers of food, beverages and tobacco in specialized stores
- Type C: Retailers in pharmaceutical and medical goods, cosmetics and toiletries
- Type D: Retailers in textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods
- Type E: Retailers in household furniture, appliances and equipment
- Type F: Retailers in hardware, paint and glass
- Type G: All other retailers

Table 2.3 Retail trade sales according to type of retailer at current prices (R million)

Year and month 1/	Type A	Type B	Type C	Type D	Type E	Type F	Type G	Total 2/	
2010	January	16 642	4 399	2 925	8 646	2 309	2 749	5 249	42 918
	February	16 695	4 263	2 864	7 649	2 185	3 031	5 220	41 906
	March	18 124	4 893	3 244	7 835	2 223	3 342	5 311	44 970
	April	16 791	4 653	3 195	9 380	2 363	3 038	4 775	44 194
	May	17 236	4 776	3 180	9 419	2 441	3 612	4 979	45 643
	June	18 524	4 590	3 138	8 519	2 471	3 446	5 123	45 809
	July	18 245	4 710	3 442	9 016	2 472	3 531	5 334	46 749
	August	17 449	4 537	3 144	8 189	2 427	3 590	5 162	44 498
	September	18 545	4 659	3 224	8 208	2 427	3 440	5 222	45 726
	October	17 909	4 804	3 452	9 369	2 571	3 720	5 607	47 431
	November	18 720	4 790	3 400	10 150	2 998	3 949	5 747	49 754
	December	25 116	6 948	3 825	15 341	4 141	3 922	6 706	65 998
Total	219 996	58 022	39 033	111 721	31 028	41 370	64 435	565 596	
2011	January	17 799	4 446	3 465	9 182	2 442	3 328	5 567	46 228
	February	17 858	4 381	3 230	8 063	2 216	3 706	5 461	44 913
	March	19 884	4 804	3 483	8 109	2 337	3 747	5 637	48 000
	April	18 808	5 101	3 585	10 893	2 492	3 369	5 280	49 528
	May	18 829	4 570	3 411	9 293	2 494	3 564	5 220	47 382
	June	19 874	4 709	3 411	8 876	2 541	3 702	5 184	48 295
	July	19 035	4 939	3 674	9 786	2 655	4 019	5 505	49 613
	August	19 540	4 882	3 462	8 872	2 690	4 015	6 012	49 471
	September	20 973	4 949	3 515	8 933	2 552	4 123	6 015	51 059
	October	19 820	5 457	3 668	10 591	2 866	4 466	6 146	53 015
	November	21 119	5 415	3 616	11 362	3 162	4 767	6 065	55 506
	December	29 155	7 919	4 118	17 519	4 343	4 226	7 468	74 748
	Total	242 694	61 572	42 638	121 479	32 790	47 032	69 560	617 758

1/ Figures are preliminary.

2/ Figures have been rounded off. Therefore, discrepancies may occur between the sums of the component items and the totals.

Source: Statistics South Africa. 2011. *Retail trade sales*. Statistical release P6242.1. December. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa. p. 7.

Using two of South Africa's most popular fashion retailers as examples (Truworths and Edgars), it can be inferred from their statistics that their sales are growing constantly. Truworths' sales have increased by 15% in 2010 to R4 232 million, relative to the period ended 27 December 2009. Similar store retail sales grew 11% in 2010 where they grew by only 3% in 2009.

Truworths has increased their trading space by 4% to 538 stores since 27 December 2009, following the opening of 7 Truworths, 5 Truworths Man, 10 Identity and 6 Uzzi stores. See table 2.4 below.

Table 2.4 Truworths Divisional Sales

Division	2010 Rm	2009 Rm	% Change
Truworths ladies wear	1615	1415	14
Truworths menswear	865	736	18
Identity	595	519	15
Daniel Hechter	542	478	13
Elements	223	207	8
Inwear	204	183	11
LTD	187	143	31
Retail sales	4355	3778	15

Source: Truworths (2010: 1). [Online]

As another example, apparel retailers of the Edcon group's sales have increased extensively over the years. The Edgars division (Edgars, Prato, Edgars Active and Temptations) and the discount division (Jet, Jet Mart, Legit and Jet shoes) makes up the apparel retailers of the Edcon group and is targeted at middle to upper-income consumers and lower to middle income consumers respectively.

The Edgars division accounted for 51% of the Edcon retail sales, where the discount division accounted for 40% of Edcon's retail sales. The largest chain in Edcon's discount division is Jet. Jet and its coupled chains, which include Jet Mart, Jet Shoes and Jet Home, encompass 431 stores and generated 33% of Edcon's retail sales in fiscal 2010 (Edcon, 2010:76). See table 2.5 below for the Edcon's group apparel retail trade sales.

Table 2.5 Edcon's apparel retail trade sales

Product line	2010 Rm	2009 Rm	2008 Rm
Clothing	10 197	9 974	8 403
Footwear	3 066	2 870	2 372

Source: Edcon (2010: 76). [Online]

Through the years retailing has evolved and competition has become cut-throat. The demands of consumers and the options presented to them within the apparel retail industry are countless, while individual expenditures are being compressed by difficult economic conditions. Nevertheless, the South African retail industry is still growing and it is responsible for a large part of the country's economic growth.

During the years of change, retailing took on a general direction in which it was developing and/or changing, which had a long term effect on the industry. This can be seen as retail trends. The important retail trends are discussed in the next section.

2.8.2 The importance of apparel retailing

The apparel retailers were one of the main contributors to the increase of 7, 7% in the South African retail industry mentioned earlier (Statistics South Africa, 2010a: 289). Apparel retailers added approximately two percentage points to the overall growth of the retail industry from 2009 to 2010 (Statistics South Africa, 2010a: 289). It is evident from the statistics that apparel retailing is one of the leading South African retail markets and that they generate sales that make businesses thrive.

Most importantly, apparel retailers are the mechanism through which fashion/apparel reaches the consumers (Easey, 2009: 202). Apparel retailing today makes it possible for consumers to purchase local and international fashion products at affordable prices (Gopalakrishnan *et al.*, 2009: 1). Fashion is no longer exclusively available to the rich and famous.

Due to the fact that the retail industry in South Africa is one of the largest contributors to the economy's total income, it is understandable that a large part of South Africa's employment comes from the retail industry. Statistics South Africa explains that the total number of persons employed in the retail trade industry of South Africa at the end of June 2009 was 597 370. Out of this number, 'textiles,

clothing, footwear and leather goods' contributed 130 781 employees which is 22% of the overall number (Statistics South Africa, 2009: 4-5).

2.9 TRENDS IN RETAILING

When retailers entered the twentieth century, they were faced with various challenges that required changes in the ways they performed business. One of the most important changes that the twentieth century brought along was the growth of off-site selling. Catalogue offerings increased and e-tailing influenced in-store sales. Many stores realized that they had to take on the competition in an aggressive fashion. Listed below are some of the trends that were followed at the beginning of the twenty-first century that continue to be used today (Diamond, 2006: 23-24).

2.9.1 Trends in apparel retailing

1. Development of spin-offs. Sales in traditional department stores had declined and therefore it was decided to open specialty units. The main reason for this trend is due to the competition from speciality stores. There are many consumers who do not have the time to shop in a department store and find it better to shop at a speciality retailer.
2. Expansion of value-oriented chains. High volumes of sales are seen at discount companies such as Mr. Price, Edgars and Pick 'n Pay hyper market. These retailers are also known as value-oriented retailers. These retailers offer apparel merchandise at bargain prices. Due to the stumbling economy, consumers think twice before they spend their money. Therefore, retailers that offer value shopping have flourished.
3. Private labels and brands. Various numbers of apparel retailers offer their own private label and brands in their stores. By having their own private brand and labels, they offer consumers exclusivity and they have an advantage to their competitors. Woolworths has been successful using this

path and other retailers such as Truworths and Stuttafords are joining them in this concept.

4. Shops within shops. Some department stores have smaller shops inside their stores. These “shop within a shop” stores take the names of the fashion designers or the manufacturers. Shop layouts such as these allow retailers to attract different consumers into their stores. This trend originated through Ralph Lauren, a designer that demanded that his merchandise had to be separated from the rest in the department store. Apparel retailers such as Woolworths and Truworths make use of this concept. Woolworths has the following stores inside their stores: *Country Road* and *Twist*, whereas Truworths holds *Ltd* and *Daniel Hector*.
5. Multichannel expansion. While the brick-and-mortar operations continue to develop, retailers are also expanding their domains by using catalogues and internet websites. By doing this they cater for consumers that prefer online shopping.
6. Expansion via new concepts. Many retailers, especially retailers in the FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) industry, are looking for new ways to expand their operations because they have reached saturation in their trading areas. Department stores will open where fashion merchandise will dominate the products that are offered in store.
7. Expansion through acquisition. Many retail companies effectively extended their procedures by acquiring other companies during the twentieth century; therefore more retailers are likely to take this route in the future. It lessens operating costs and decreases merchandise costs because it deals with large quantities. Even though it is apparent that apparel retailing is subjugated by large department stores and chain organizations, it does not mean that entrepreneurs are no longer possible operators of apparel businesses. Small fashion boutiques and fashion specialty stores can still flourish.

Retailing is a global practice and the majority of the major retailers are based in the United States, the largest company being Wall Mart, which also recently made its appearance in South Africa. When looking at the global retail market environment, Ystats (2010: 1) identified five global retail trends:

1. In key markets such as the US and the UK, retail spending is likely to decline, where up-and-coming markets like China were expected to grow in 2010.
2. Signs of improvement for consumers in the United States are emerging, however the recent damage to affluence is likely to limit consumer spending.
3. It is believed that Asia will have embodied the best growth projection for retailers and consumer-products companies in the year 2010.
4. It is believed that in India, garments, fashion accessories and cosmetics will have maintained the uptrend of 2009 in 2010 and afar.
5. It is predicted that there would be a growth of functional food in 2010, due to the fact that consumers are more focused on nutritional value.

2.10 SUMMARY

This chapter encompassed the retail industry as a whole. It discussed the retail industry, with the focus on the apparel retail industry. Retailing was defined and an overview of the evolution of retailing was discussed, together with the arguments concerning retail locations. Descriptive tools were used to illuminate the processes of retail--mainly through the illustrations of the retail accordion and the wheel of retailing. The basic classification systems of retailing were examined, as well as the different types of retailers that exist today. The functions of retailing were emphasised and the role and purpose retailing plays within South Africa was mentioned. The latest statistics were revealed in order to verify the importance of retail within South Africa. Connections were made between the general retail industry and the apparel retail industry, to enhance the focus of this study, being the apparel retail industry.

In order to make consumers' shopping experiences more pleasurable in retail stores, apparel retailers have evolved into magnificently designed stores. Apparel retailers make use of merchandising techniques (merchandising is a practice that adds to the sale of products) such as visual merchandising and visual merchandising displays to create these environments. Visual merchandising and visual merchandising displays are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss visual merchandising with the focus on visual merchandising displays in a comprehensive manner. The concept of merchandising is explained to depict how visual merchandising developed and evolved. Visual merchandising is defined and discussed, paying attention to its elements as well as its role within the retail industry. A brief history of visual merchandising is provided to provide a broader view of visual merchandising. Lastly, visual merchandising displays are intricately discussed, as they form the crucial focus area of this study.

3.2 VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAY DEFINED

In order to comprehend and define visual merchandising displays, it is necessary to understand the origin and development of the concept.

3.2.1 Merchandising

The concept 'merchandising' refers to the techniques used by stores to sell products to consumers. It is the procedure by which a retailer attempts to present the correct quantity of the correct merchandise in the correct place at the correct time while meeting the company's financial objectives (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 642).

Merchandising is most popular as a business function among organisations that deal with products that experience high consumer demand for regular product change. Even though the general public see merchandising mainly as a retailing function, it has been practiced by apparel retailers to plan, develop and present product lines at wholesale to retail buyers (Kunz, 2010: xvii). Merchandising is the process of preparing, developing and presenting product lines for target consumers pertaining to pricing, varieties, styling and timing (Kunz, 2010: xvii).

Merchandising is defined by Kunz (2010: 6) as: "... careful planning, capable styling and producing or selecting and buying, and effective selling". In this definition, no reference is made to a particular product; therefore it can be applied to all products. The primary mission of today's merchandisers is to create exchanges between an organisation and its consumers by providing products for consumption, understanding consumer demands, analysing sales trends and selecting and presenting saleable products. LaPerriere and Christiansen (2008: xiv) define merchandising as the presentation of a product and any supporting material in the best possible manner. The fore mentioned researchers further explain merchandising as the artistic use of space to promote a product.

In the broadest sense, merchandising is any exercise which adds to the sale of products to a retail consumer. On a retail level, merchandising refers to the assortment of products available for sale and the display of those products in such a way that it promotes interest and attracts consumers to make a purchase (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 642).

3.2.2 Visual merchandising

Visual merchandising is defined by Pegler (2010: 3) as "...showing merchandise and concepts at their very best, with the end purpose of making a sale." It is the activity which synchronizes effective merchandise assortment with effective merchandise displays (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 20). The goal of visual merchandising is to display a store together with its merchandise in such a way that it will draw the attention of a possible consumer (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 527). According to Mathew (2008: 2), visual merchandising is the creation of visual displays and the arrangement of merchandise assortments within a store to improve the layout and the presentation of the store in order to increase store traffic and sales.

It is no longer merely a matter of making merchandise look beautiful for the consumer; it is about selling merchandise by means of visual communication. For some retailers, visual merchandising might be a new initiative; however it has been around as early as the 18th century (Marie, 2011: 1).

Visual merchandising has evolved into being more than just product presentation. It encompasses an additional facet called visual merchandising displays which is used to adorn and beautify a store in order to create interest or pleasure for the consumer. Visual merchandising displays are discussed in the following section.

3.2.3 Visual merchandising display

Visual merchandising displays (the focal point of this research study) are a subsection of visual merchandising as a whole. Visual merchandising displays can be regarded as visual features that create attention or pleasure in a store (Mathew, 2008: 48). Visual merchandising displays are used to decorate and beautify a store by adding additional fixtures, props, posters, materials, colours, frills and objects to a store. Visual merchandising displays can generally be broken down into three different categories: on-shelf displays, off-shelf displays and window displays (Mathew, 2008: 48-52). These different categories are discussed later in this chapter.

Visual merchandising and visual merchandising displays are often used synonymously; however they are in fact different from one another. LaPerriere and Christiansen (2008: xiv) state that visual merchandising is the presentation of products in such a way that it encourages consumers to buy, where visual merchandising displays are staged three-dimensional settings that generate an opportunity for consumers to experience the product themselves.

Figure 3.1 below illustrates an apparel retail store in the South of Tshwane that makes extensive use of visual merchandising displays. Examples of how visual merchandising displays are used are encircled in red.

Visual merchandising uses visual merchandising displays to introduce new products to consumers and to decorate a store, and therefore increases change through a planned and systematic approach by displaying the available stock. Visual merchandising displays are therefore (Bhalla & Anuraag, 2010: 20 & Pegler, 2010: 5):

- A tool to reach sales and targets.
- A device to improve the merchandise on the floor.
- A mechanism to 'talk' to a consumer and influence his or her decision to purchase a product or service (visual communication).
- Used for seasonal displays to introduce new arrivals to consumers, for example the launch of spring or summer.
- Used to increase change through a planned and efficient approach by displaying stock on hand.
- Educating the consumers about the product or service in an efficient and imaginative way, for example using lifestyle graphics to inform consumers how products could be worn together.
- Establishing an inventive medium to display merchandise in a 3D environment, allowing long lasting impact and recall value.
- Setting the company apart in an elite position.
- Establishing relationships between fashions, product design and marketing by keeping the product in key focus.
- Combining the creative, technical and operational features of a product and the store.



Figure 3.1: Visual merchandising display

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

The background of visual merchandising display is discussed in the following section.

3.3 BACKGROUND OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAY

In the preliminary stages of retailing, before visual merchandising became an important function, consumers would enter a store and speak with the owner or the manager of the store to inform them what they were looking for. The owner or the manager of the store would then search out the merchandise for the consumer that was stored in a back room. Sales talk was crucial in the initial stages of retail due to the fact that the owner or the manager had to persuade the consumer of the quality of the products they were selling (Bhalla & Anuraag, 2010: 22). The evolution of visual merchandising brought forth a new process of shopping--it was no longer a verbal engagement between retailers and consumers, it

metamorphosed into being a visual and sensory experience (Bhalla & Anuraag, 2010: 22).

During these first stages of visual merchandising, shopkeepers attracted consumers into their stores by either pretentiously showing their names or by displaying their products in their windows or on tables in the street (Morgan, 2008: 11). For example, florists packed their windows with the best blossoms as well as showcased them outside their stores. By means of colour and scent they lured the consumers into their stores. Similarly, apparel stores would pack their merchandise on tables outside their stores or in the window to attract consumers by means of colour and texture of the clothes. In these preliminary stages of retailing, windows were small as glass was not a ready-made or easily available product.

The arrival of new technology in the 1840s allowed for the production of large sheets of glass. Therefore it was possible for retailers to create large windows where they could display their merchandise to the public. Due to the department stores' assortment of merchandise and immense amount of space, it is said that they were the pioneers of window displays (Morgan, 2008: 11). The department store first began in Paris, France and the concept then spread to the United States, where famous stores such as Macy's (opened in New York in 1858) made its appearance. Retailers started using their windows and turned them into a stage with exotic and exciting displays.

Displaying merchandise in windows was the first sign of visual merchandising displays and the role of visual merchandising was born: to increase sales by first attracting shoppers into the store through the power of window displays, and then through in-store visual merchandising displays. These displays encouraged the consumers to remain in the store, purchase the product and have a positive retail experience in order for them to return to the same store.

In due course, retailers realized that the way in which they used visual merchandising displays had the power to create images about the products in the

mind of the consumers. The intentional displaying of merchandise became a significant tool for retailers in order to attract and entice consumers into their stores.

The intentional displaying of merchandise was accomplished by means of visual merchandising and visual merchandising displays. Since visual merchandising display is a subsection of visual merchandising and forms part of visual merchandising as a whole, it is fitting to discuss the functions of visual merchandising as they relate directly to visual merchandising display.

3.4 FUNCTIONS OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING

Where visual merchandising was once called 'display', it has evolved into a store's decorative arts department, and now in its current state as a sales-supportive unit. The visual merchandising department is currently not only responsible for making a store beautiful, but also to assist sales (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 20). In a large corporate retail operation, the visual merchandising department is generally part of the advertising and marketing department. Some organisations, such as Truworths (Pty) Ltd are so large that they have their own visual merchandising department that operates independently from the main business.

Visual merchandising and visual merchandising displays perform different functions in an apparel retail outlet; these include supporting sales, to support the retail strategies, to communicate with consumers and to assist in communicating the fashion retailers' brand image (Levi & Weitz, 2009:531 and Bell & Turnus, 2008: 20-22).

3.4.1 Supporting sales

A major function of visual merchandising is to support sales. When the merchandise presentation supports the selling process, it is possible for less sales personnel to assist more consumers at any given time. According to Bell and Ternus (2006:20), this process is called "silent selling". Bell and Ternus (2006: 20)

continue by stating that by displaying merchandise and working with the different elements of visual merchandising, the product will sell itself.

“Silent selling” is one of the many reasons apparel retail outlets make use of visual merchandising. It is a means of supporting the sales staff in store by making use of design elements and permanent in-store props such as signage and mannequins. A mannequin is a life-sized representation of the human body, used mainly in the advertising of apparel items (Maier, 2010: 1). For example, by placing a high fashion dress on a mannequin, a consumer will be able to see how the dress looks on the human body compared to seeing it on a hanger. Therefore, fashion retailers make use of visual merchandising techniques such as mannequins in order to lower their operating costs by having less sales staff on the floor.

3.4.2 Communicating with consumers and communicating the brand image

A retailer’s brand image is a blend of the tangible and the intangible factors that express what a shopper thinks about his or her association with a store--it is the retailer’s identity in the mind of the shopper (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 22). It includes the merchandise and the store environment that is created by the visual merchandising.

As communications with consumers vitally important to a retailer’s success, visual merchandising assists with the communication process between the consumer and the retailer to form the correct brand image in the mind of the consumer. Basic communication has three fundamentals--the sender, the message and the receiver. Unless all three elements are there, communication will not be successful. Figure 3.2 below illustrates the visual merchandising communication process. The retailer communicates to the consumer by means of their store, the store’s interior design, the floor layout, the atmospherics, the merchandise presentation and the selling services.

A great deal of communication between the retailer and the consumer takes place through the use of signage. Brand image could be carried through on the signs used in the store, from operational signs to merchandise signs. Operational signs relate to the everyday business of a retailer.

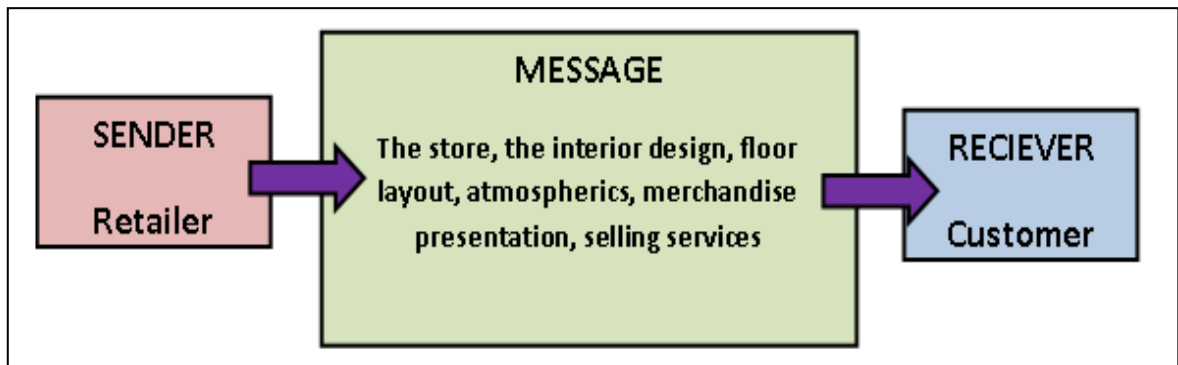


Figure 3.2: The visual merchandising communication process

Source: Adapted from Bell & Ternus 2006. *Silent selling*. 3rd ed. New York: Fairchild Publications. p. 21.

3.4.3 Supporting retail strategies

Visual merchandising supports retail strategies by being part of the store's total promotional mix. Visual merchandising works as part of a close relationship with advertising, in-store marketing, special events and personal selling. Visual merchandisers actually accomplish a store's promotional selling strategies by (Bell & Turnus, 2008: 20-22):

- Designing and executing window and interior displays that support advertising goals.
- Installing promotional signing for in-store selling.
- Producing workable departmental layouts and interior décor.
- Devising merchandise fixture layouts for day to day operations.

The next section focuses on how these functions impact the apparel retail industry.

3.5 VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS WITHIN THE RETAIL STRUCTURE

The design of a retail store involves its exterior and its interior, the merchandise and fixture arrangement on the selling floor as well as the visual merchandising displays. If one thinks about a retail store as four walls and a roof, the total effect of these elements creates a statement of what the consumers will find within these walls (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 60). Effective store design links the store atmospherics (lighting, colours, music and scent) and the visual merchandising display elements (discussed in section 3.6) to offer a pleasant, productive shopping experience to the consumer. Consumers do not only buy the products the retailer sells, but they also buy the retail experience created in-store by the visual merchandiser (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 60).

Just as brands exist within a store, the stores themselves have become brands. Consumers do not want to see the same merchandise at various retailers. Visual merchandisers are given the task of communicating the store's image through the visual merchandising and the visual merchandising displays. This is increasingly becoming more challenging for them because they are faced with exceptional competition that was not present in the past.

Retailers should keep in mind that the visual merchandising displays of a store are the 'invisible force' that does most of the hard work in the store (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 30). A well designed retail store is similar to a good story with a beginning, middle and conclusion (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 507). The retail store's "story" begins at the entrance, which immediately creates expectations and offers promises. The message that is received at the entrance of a store is the most successful approach to create a positive store image. The retail store's design leads the consumer on an expedition through the store, by using lighting, signage and displays. The story comes to an end when the consumer purchases a product at the pay points.

Visual merchandising and visual merchandising displays could serve as an investment for apparel retailers. Visual merchandising and visual merchandising

displays can benefit the retailer by increasing the operational efficiencies of the store and therefore making effort that results in increased sales, especially with the use of add-on sales. Visual merchandising displays uses creative techniques in order to save the sales person's and the shopper's time by making shopping effortless. The visual merchandising display process is often referred to as the "silent salesperson" by providing the consumers with information through visual mediums as well as by suggestive selling (suggestions to add items to a consumers' original purchase) (Bhalla & Anuraag, 2010: 21).

As discussed in Chapter 2, the retail industry has changed significantly over the years and this has posed (and continues to do so) a number of challenges to retailers in the form of visual merchandising. New formats translate into new ideas and creativity. For example, Pegler (2010: 306-307) pointed out that due to the size of super stores and department stores, they need to be "warmed up" by using the correct lighting and display techniques. It is therefore necessary to make use of large and clear signage in order to guide consumers through stores. These tactics were not necessary in the initial stages of visual merchandising due to the fact that retail stores were much smaller back then (Pegler, 2010: 306-307).

How the visual merchandising displays of apparel retail stores are perceived will depend on how it is processed by the consumer. The different stages of visual merchandising are discussed in the following section.

3.6 DIFFERENT STAGES OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING WITHIN THE RETAIL STRUCTURE

The goal of visual merchandising in apparel retail stores is to expose fashion merchandise to their potential consumers. The ways that the visual merchandising is perceived in stores are processed in eight different stages (Bell and Ternus, 2006: 28). These stages are:

Stage 1 - Exposure: When a consumer walks into an apparel retail store with the intention of purchasing a jacket, he/she is exposed to a variety of merchandise

that is displayed on rails and on mannequins. He/she is also exposed to the environment of the store that is created by the visual merchandising displays.

Stage 2 - Attention: When he/she browses through the merchandise, he/she notices the posters and signs in the store, together with the displays that appear throughout the store and it immediately draws his/her attention towards a specific display and the merchandise that surrounds it.

Stage 3 - Comprehension: The consumer starts wondering and thinking about where he/she can wear the merchandise and how he/she can accessorize it.

Stage 4 - Agreement: The consumer realizes that the specific merchandise is credible and that it is compatible with his/her wardrobe and values.

Stage 5 - Retention: He/she walks away to look for the jacket, however the display and the merchandise that he/she saw in the beginning is still bright in his/her mind.

Stage 6 - Retrieval: After buying the jacket that he/she originally came for, he/she still remembers exactly where he/she saw the display and the relevant merchandise.

Stage 7 - Consumer decision making: The consumer makes a mental decision to buy or not to buy that specific merchandise.

Stage 8 - Action taken: When he/she decides to purchase or decides to leave the store.

There is a series of events that usually takes place for visual merchandising displays to result in an actual purchase (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 27). To determine whether a store's visual merchandising displays has an impact on a consumer's purchasing decisions, certain questions that could be asked include the following:

- Why did you decide to go to that specific store?
- What did you see as you walked up to the store's entrance?
- Did the store's exterior send you any messages about what would be inside?
- Was the view through the storefront appealing and informative?
- When you entered was the lighting pleasant to your eyes?
- Do you remember any particular scents or sounds?
- How welcoming did the store's interior feel once you stepped inside?
- Did you get the impression that the store was selling merchandise that you would want to buy?
- Based on your first impression, did you decide to explore further?
- Were you drawn to the merchandise?

By using the elements of visual merchandising displays, what was once seen as visually unappealing stores to consumers, slowly became exciting shopping environments.

3.7 ELEMENTS OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAY

The main objective of the elements of visual merchandising is to display a store together with its merchandise in such a way that it will draw the attention of a possible consumer (Bell & Turnus, 2008: 20-22). The elements of visual merchandising displays, among others, include store design, signage and graphics, atmospherics, fixtures, and props. These elements are used in the process of visual merchandising display.

3.7.1 Store design

Store design includes all the aspects of visual merchandising. These aspects include visual displays, window displays and interior design as well as fixtures, fittings and lighting (Morgan, 2008: 30). The main purpose of store design is to execute the retailer's strategy; the design must be consistent with and support the

retailer's strategy by meeting the needs of the target market and building a sustainable competitive advantage (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 508).

Store design is important for retailers due to the fact that it can help support the brand image as well as strengthen a successful retail strategy. Retailers rely on the design of a store to attract consumers inside; some retailers choose a more delicate design while others like to surprise and motivate. A retailer's store design encompasses different floor plans and store layouts (grid layout, racetrack layout, free-form layout) and feature areas (displays). A floor plan is a flat illustration of two dimensions, with the length and width of an area as seen from overhead (Pegler, 2010: 284). The most popular floor plans are discussed below.

- **Grid layout:** The grid layout is the most popular layout used in supermarkets and discount stores, especially stores that adopt self-service. One area of display is along the walls of the store, where the other merchandise is displayed in an equivalent way (Pradhan, 2008: 351). A grid layout permits consumers to move without restraint within the area and it uses space effectively. Please see figure 3.3 below for an illustration of a grid layout.
- **The free-flow layout:** In a free-flow layout, the merchandise is arranged in an asymmetrical manner. It allows the consumers to move freely throughout the store and this type of layout encourages consumers to browse (Pradhan, 2008: 351). Please see figure 3.4 below for an illustration of the free-flow layout.
- **The racetrack layout:** The race-track layout is also known as the loop layout. As the name suggests, the display is in the form of a racetrack or a loop with a main aisle running through the store (Pradhan, 2008: 351). This type of layout is most often found in department stores. Please see figure 3.5 below for an illustration of the racetrack layout.

It is important for the store design to incorporate specific locations dedicated for visual merchandising displays.

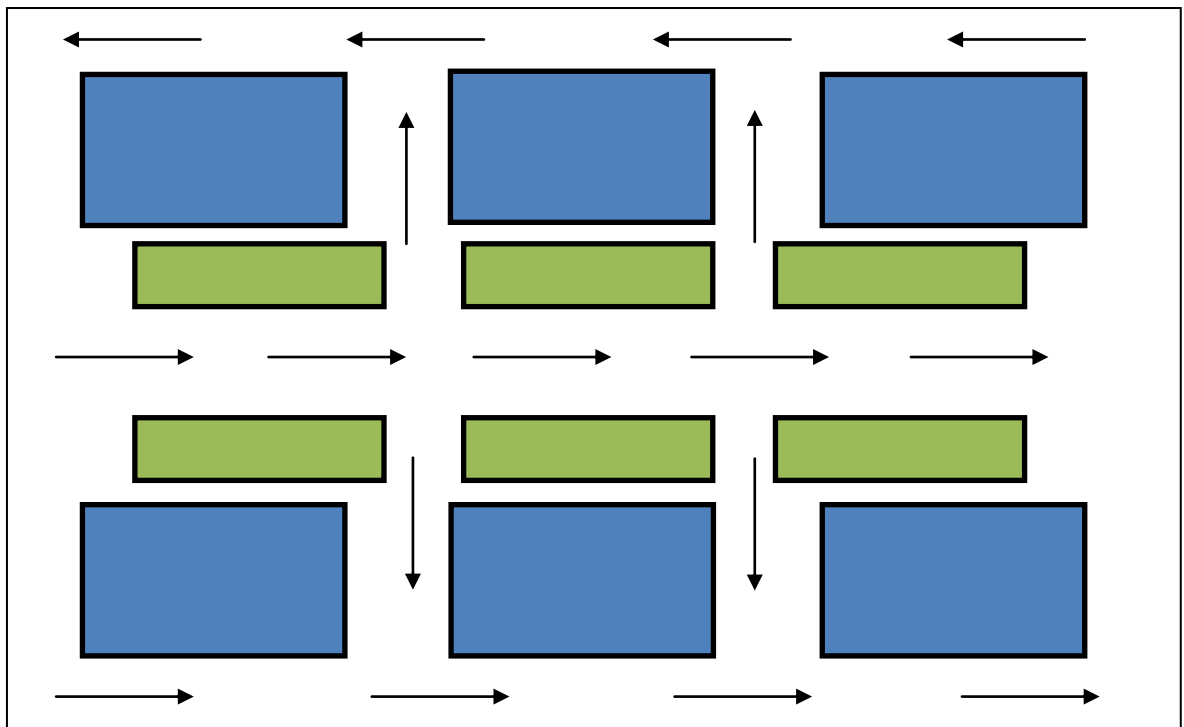


Figure 3.3: Grid layout

Source: Adapted from Pegler, M. 2010. *Visual merchandising and display*. 5th ed. China: Fairchild publications. p. 284-292.

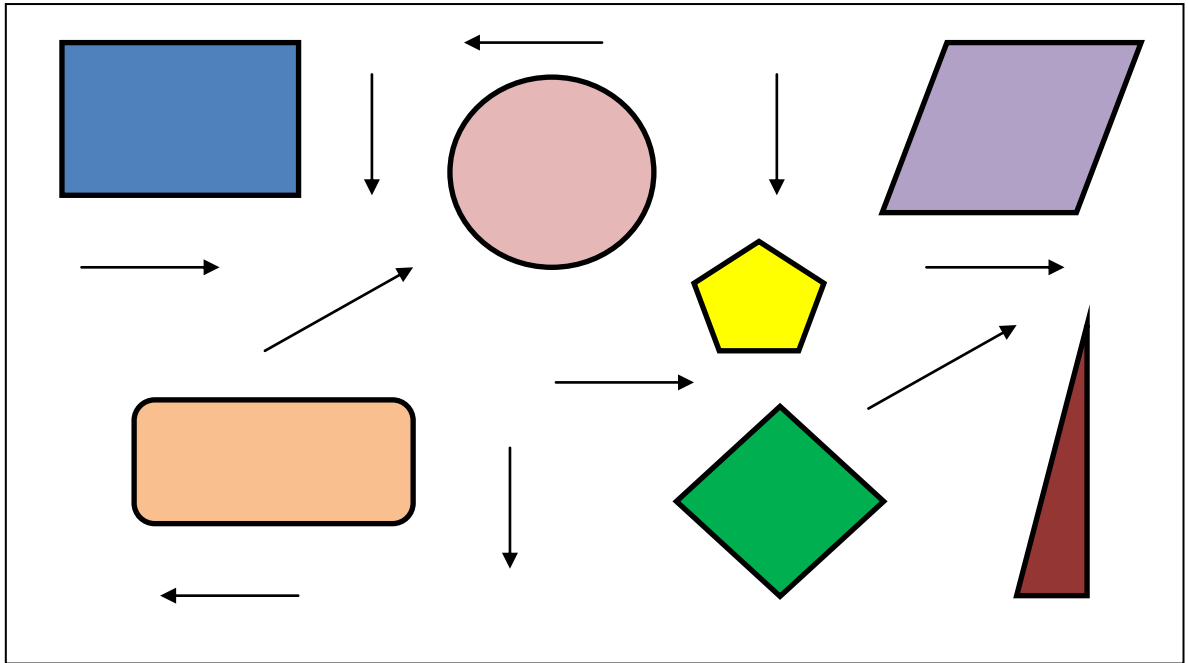


Figure 3.4: Free-flow layout

Source: Adapted from Pegler, M. 2010. *Visual merchandising and display*. 5th ed. China: Fairchild publications. p. 284-292.

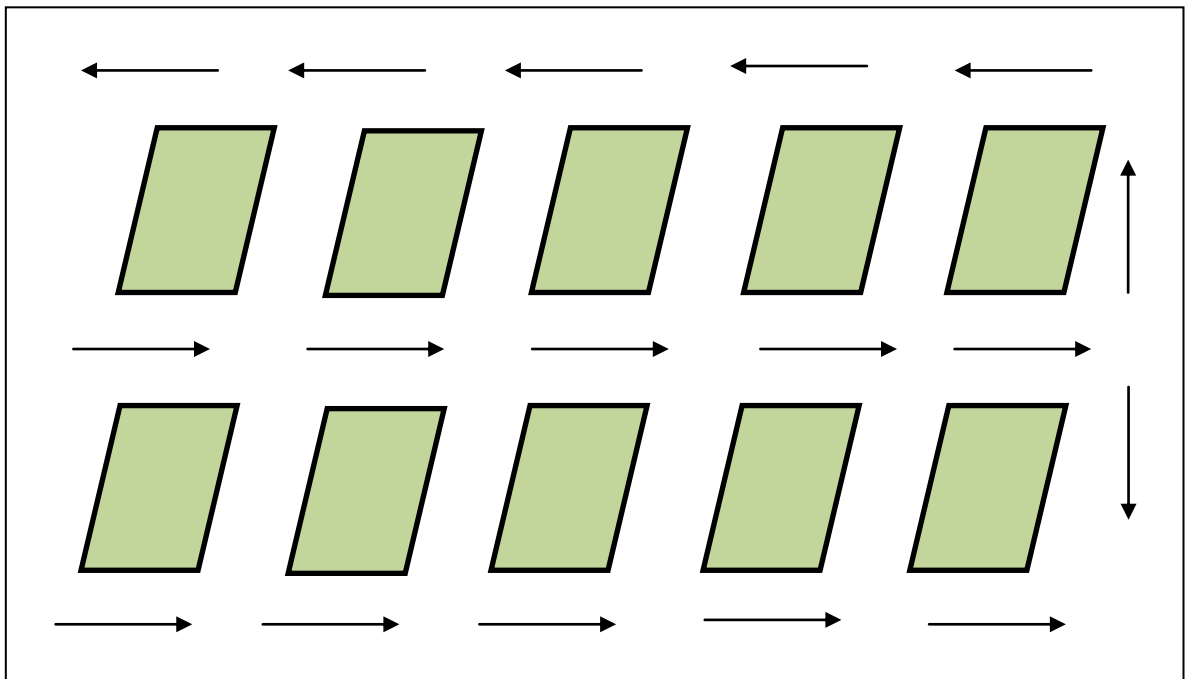


Figure 3.5: Race-track/loop layout

Source: Adapted from Pegler, M. 2010. *Visual merchandising and display*. 5th ed. China: Fairchild publications. p. 284-292.

3.7.2 Signage and graphics

Signage and graphics are used by retailers to help consumers locate particular products and departments in a store. An effective sign/graphic attracts the shopper's attention and conveys the brand identity, thereby shaping the consumer's first impression of what they will find inside the store (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 190).

Graphics are defined as "...referring to drawings, paintings, and lettering or the reproductive arts of engraving, etching, lithography, etcetera" (Pegler, 2010: 255). In apparel retail stores, graphics usually refers to oversized photos, blow-ups or light box art. Where words cannot be read by everyone, photos and pictures are understood throughout society. Graphics are usually photo blow-ups of people doing things or people who are dressed for a specific occasion. Graphics show people living a particular kind of life and dressing in that life's style. Graphics can add personality and beauty to a store (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 516). In retail stores, photo blow-ups usually appear as a framed or unframed background panel, or in a light box lighted from behind (Pegler, 2010: 255).

All retailers, and in particular apparel retailers, start communicating with consumers even before they enter the store. From the second that consumers read the store's name or see the logos on the store front, they receive a message. Signage can be referred to as visual graphics created to present information to consumers. Signage and graphics are used by apparel retailers to help consumers locate particular products and departments. An effective sign attracts the shoppers' attention and conveys the brand identity, shaping the consumers' first impressions of what they will find inside the store (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 190).

Large department stores often need to display directional signage to direct consumers through the store and to indicate where the different departments are (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 516). Apparel retail stores could use signage in order to indicate the location of certain merchandise, to indicate different categories, and to indicate prices.

Graphics are used to strengthen and emphasize a current promotion or an advertising campaign. A specific photograph may sometimes be the foundation for a complete promotion. A lifestyle graphic is used as a selling device, such as shown in figure 3.6 below. It usually describes how different items of merchandise are placed together and how a desired look could be created.

Even though a picture is worth a thousand words, it is sometimes better when a message is read as well as seen. Signs are often a consumer's first contact with a store. Effective signs identify the store and these signs are used to inform consumers of special events (Colborne, 1996: 234). Signs could also be used to describe the theme of a window or an in-store display.



Figure 3.6: Lifestyle graphic

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

According to Levi and Weitz (2009: 516-517), signage can be used as a form of visual communication, and it can be used in the following ways:

- Promotional signage: The goal of promotional signage is to attract the consumer into the store. It describes the special offers on display.

- Lifestyle images: The apparel retailer could use different images to create moods that encourage consumers to buy the products.

As mentioned earlier in this section, signage is used to inform shoppers about merchandise characteristics. This could include price, use, size, fabric content, lifestyle, construction or other benefits. Signs can be made from plastic, metal, paper, straw, branches and other materials, depending on where the sign will be placed. Alternatively, stick-on lettering (decals) could also be used. Stick-on letters are available in a variety of typefaces, colours and sizes. They can be made from plastic, wood, metal, foam, acrylic and other materials (Colborne, 1996: 237).

Figure 3.7 below illustrates how Country Road used decals on their display window to communicate the month's theme: ESSENTIALS. Country Road uses a typeface (bold, capital letters) that represents their image for natural simplicity with a relaxed, spontaneous style.



Figure 3.7: Signage used on a window

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

In order for apparel retailers to effectively use their signage and graphics, they could use the following techniques (Pegler, 2010: 256):

- Coordinate signs and graphics. The fashion retailer should choose graphics and signage that acts as a link between the merchandise and the retailer's target market.
- Inform consumers. Educational signs and graphics make merchandise more attractive. For example, having the price and the type of material the knits are made of help consumers to differentiate between different merchandise.
- Use signs and graphics as props. Signage and graphics are used as props to merge a theme of the fashion retail store.
- Keep signs and graphics fresh. The signs and graphics used should be relevant to the merchandise displayed in-store. New signs imply new merchandise.
- Limit the text on signs. Signs that have too much text will not be read. Consumers should be able to seize the information on the sign rapidly as they browse through the store.

Figure 3.8 below demonstrates how signage could be used in-store. In this specific display, Country Road made a wall display of the frames they sell to illustrate how they will look on a wall and how they could be used. The display includes signage that reads: "Wall frames: Be inspired by our new collection of wall frames. A gallery of new styles and looks to mix, match and coordinate". This display together with the signage was therefore used to describe the lifestyle associated with the brand together with the use of the frames to the consumer.

A sign should include lettering that enhances the store design and sends a message about the store's image and merchandise. Elements such as colour, texture, size, location, style and balance are some of the design principles to mull over before choosing a sign (Colborne, 1996: 234).



Figure 3.8: Signage used in-store

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

3.7.3 Atmospherics

Atmospherics (also called attention-grabbing devices) refers to the design of the in-store environment through communicating with the consumers by means of senses such as lighting, colour, music and scent (Pegler, 2010: 181). Bell and Ternus (2006: 36) explain that atmospherics that appeal to the five senses of humans can be 'layered' into the store to improve the shopping environment and build the brand image of the store. Layering means including several sensory elements to accomplish a particular atmosphere for the store environment--concurrent use of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell.

Creating the perfect store environment has become a progressively more important method of retail positioning. Stores have individual environments and marketers have to understand that the environment of a store is a significant part of the shopping experience. A consumer's decision to visit/revisit a store can be

influenced by the environment offered by the store and the retail environment can guide consumer's conclusions about merchandise, service quality and satisfaction of the store. Recent experiential results suggest that signals in the store environment add to consumers' perceptions of that specific store (Sharma & Stafford, 2000: 183).

Atmospherics include, but are not limited to, the following (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 530-532):

- Lighting: Lighting refers to the method used to provide artificial illumination (Gilmour, 2010:166). Lighting is used to highlight merchandise and to create a mood or a feeling. Lighting can also be used to improve a store's image.
- Colour: The inventive use of colour can improve a retailer's image and help form a mood as well. Warm colours such as red, gold and yellow can create emotional, lively, hot and active responses, where cool colours such as white, blue and green have a more serene, tender and soothing effect on consumers.
- Music: Music, just as colour and lighting, has an effect on a retailer's image. Music is also used to influence a consumer's behaviour. Music can direct the pace of the store "traffic" and it can entice or direct consumer's attention.
- Scent: As smell has a huge impact on consumer's emotions, many purchasing decisions are based on scent. Natural scents create better perceptions in the mind of the consumer than no scent at all. Scented stores give consumers the perception that they are spending less time in the store while browsing through merchandise or waiting for an assistant. Scent, together with music, has an optimistic impact on impulse buying behaviour and consumer contentment.

These devices are used to stimulate consumer's perceptions and responses to affect their purchase behaviour. For example, lighting in a retail store involves more than just lighting up an area. If lighting is used effectively it may catch the

eye of the consumer and it has been illustrated that lighting can positively influence consumer shopping behaviour (Pegler, 2010: 181 and Levi & Weitz, 2009: 530).

A variety of studies have focused on atmospherics and their effects on consumer behaviour (Jang & Namkung, 2009: 451). All of these studies used the Mehrabian-Russell model (M-R model). The M-R model is one of the most effective models that explain the effect that the physical store environment has on consumer behaviour (Jang & Namkung, 2009: 451). This model suggests that environmental stimuli (S) lead to emotional reactions (O) that influence consumers' behavioural responses (R) (Jang & Namkung, 2009: 451). Figure 3.9 below is a representation of the M-R model.

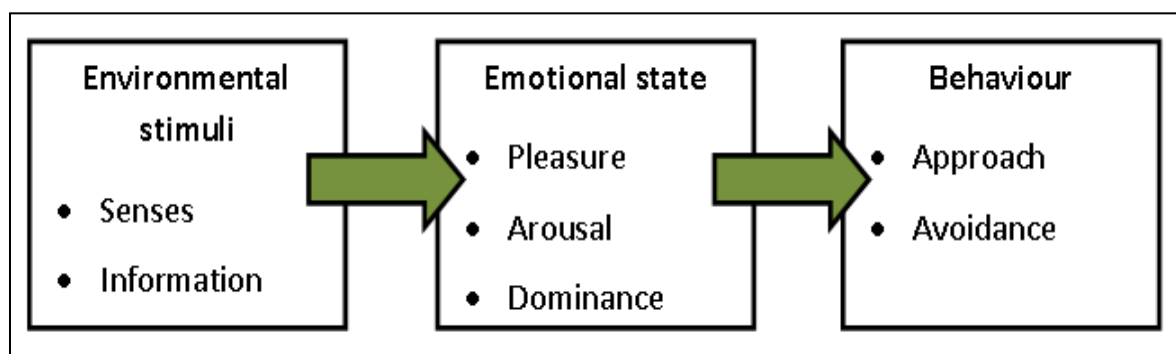


Figure 3.9: The Mehrabian-Russell model

Source: Jang, S.S. & Namkung, Y. 2009. Perceived quality, emotions and behavioural intentions: Application of an extended mehrabian-russell model to restaurants. *Journal of Business Research*. 62: 451.

3.7.4 Display fixtures

Display fixtures are pieces of equipment or furniture that is used in a store for visual merchandising display purposes (Pegler, 2010: 125). The main functions of display fixtures are to effectively hold and display merchandise or props (Pegler, 2010: 125). Display fixtures changes as the displays do, depending on the theme or promotion of the store.

Platforms and elevations are commonly used as display fixtures. It is used to provide interest and to help separate merchandise in mass displays. Platforms and elevations can be cubes, cylinders or saddles of any shape and size (Pegler, 2010: 126). Elevations could also include tables and chairs and other pieces of furniture that are used to raise mannequins or arrangements of merchandise. Figure 3.10 below illustrates how Country Road makes use of cubes and different shapes and forms in their “top-of-shelf” displays, as well as tables with different heights to elevate certain pieces of merchandise.



Figure 3.10: Cubes and tables used as display fixtures

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

3.7.5 Mannequins

A mannequin is a life-sized representation of the human body, used mainly in the promotion of apparel items (Maier, 2010: 1). Mannequins are silent salespeople. They stand determinedly for hours and months, in the same position with the same

attitude--always pleasing. Mannequins that are well dressed make an impressive fashion presentation. Visual merchandisers that dress their mannequins with style and place them correctly will create a strong initiator for sales (Colborne, 1996: 186). According to Pegler (2010: 91), a mannequin may be a store's most valuable asset.

Consumers gain more fashion knowledge from merchandise displayed on mannequins than from fashion shows, magazines and advertising. Due to the fact that mannequins are a strong sales tool, visual merchandisers should dress mannequins in the latest fashion merchandise available in store, together with complementary accessories. Shoppers look to mannequins to gain knowledge of combining separates and accessories (Colborne, 1996: 193). Pegler (2010: 91) explains that there are different types of mannequins that can be used in a retail store:

- Realistic mannequins are mannequins that resemble the human being best. They have heads, hair and they are "wearing" make-up. In the past, realistic mannequins looked like gorgeous movie stars – perfect body, hair and make-up. Today, realistic mannequins look more like the everyday person. Fashion retailers such as Truworths, makes use of realistic mannequins in their displays. Realistic mannequins come in all shapes and positions, from infant to grown-up, male and female. Positions can vary from sitting down with crossed legs or flat on the ground, to leaning against a wall or standing upright. Poses vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, but mostly anything is possible.
- Semi-realistic mannequins are proportioned and sculpted similar to realistic mannequins, however their make-up and hair is not natural, but more decorative or stylized. Sometimes, the entire mannequin could be all black or all red, depending on the store.
- Semi-abstract mannequins are "doll-like" and decorative. They are not as expensive as the realistic or semi-realistic mannequins, as they might have

a bump for a nose, a hint of pursed lips and painted on hair, if any hair at all.

- Abstract mannequins could have excessively long or short arms and legs. These mannequins are not concerned with duplicating natural lines and proportions.
- Headless mannequins are very similar to the realistic and semi-realistic mannequins when it comes to body shape, but these do not have heads. This mannequin does not offer a face, therefore no personality and no “image” are provided. Headless mannequins are becoming increasingly important with retailers due to the fact that they do not have wigs to go askew and their make-up will not fade or date.
- Ready to wear forms are headless bust forms with a stand. It is similar to a dressmaker’s torso. These are cheaper than the rest of the mannequin types and easy to dress. Ready to wear forms are alternatives to mannequins for both genders and all ages Bell and Ternus (2006: 311). They could be mounted on flat bases for tables and fixture top use, or on bases and pedestals for floor displays. These forms are frequently used to display only a shirt or a blouse, or a suit jacket.

Mannequins can be used in conjunction with visual merchandising displays in order to display and promote merchandise together with the props and/or display fixtures. Figure 3.11 below illustrates where mannequins are used as part of a visual merchandising display.



Figure 3.11: Mannequins used as part of a visual merchandising display

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

3.7.6 Props and permanent props

Props are very important objects that are used in visual merchandising displays and can be defined as all the other items inside a store except the floor fixtures and the merchandise that the store sells (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 117). Floor fixtures are pieces of equipment or furniture that are in a permanent position in a store. The main functions of floor fixtures are to effectively hold and display the merchandise sold in store (Pegler, 2010: 125).

Props could include any of the following depending on the type of store design: antiques, art objects, artificial grass and snow, flowers, ribbons, bows, banners, baskets, boxes, decorative screens and panels, floor coverings, papers and cardboards, pots, pedestals, textiles, and more. Props are secondary to the merchandise sold in store; the main purpose is to decorate a store, to create a

mood and to create an image for a store as well as to boost the amount of merchandise that is sold (Colborne, 1996: 109). The props that are used in visual merchandising displays change as the displays alter, depending on the theme or current promotion of the store.

Pegler (2010: 193) explains that props originate from an industry that do nothing else but produce props, devices and gimmicks to improve visual merchandising display presentations. The manufacturing companies vary from specialising in mannequins and forms, fixtures, displayer units, backgrounds and much more. Some manufacturers specialise in plants, while others specialise in raw materials from all over the world and supply them to visual merchandisers. For example, props such as crates and cartons can say “import” or “new arrival”. A broom and a shovel could convey “clearance”. Sources of props could include furniture stores, toy stores, garden centres, travel agents, luggage shops, hardware stores, galleries, antique shops, and more. Props can be bought, rented, borrowed or improvised from whatever the visual merchandiser has available.

The mood, character and amount of display props required for a display depends on the target market of the store, the type of merchandise sold, and the image the store would like to portray. When visual merchandisers choose props for their displays, they have to remember the relationship between the theme and the fashion. Props that are chosen well could be the distinguishing factor between a great visual merchandising display and an average one (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 117). The different visual merchandising display elements used in store will depend on the type of visual merchandising display.

3.8 TYPES OF VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS

The main function of a display is to present and promote the merchandise that is sold in store. Displays can generally be broken down into four different categories: on-shelf displays, off-shelf displays, point of purchase displays and window displays (Mathew, 2008: 48-52).

3.8.1 On-shelf displays

On-shelf displays are the “normal” displays that are found in a store and that show different variations of products on offer in some kind of rational order (Mathew, 2008: 48-52). They combine functionality with aesthetic sensibility. On-shelf displays are a visual merchandising necessity in displaying merchandise sold in store. The ways in which products are presented depend on the type of fixtures available; basically this could include:

- Vertical stacking: magazines or CDs
- Horizontal stacking: folded garments (see figure 3.12 below, the T-shirts is folded on the table on the left.)
- Hanging on hangers or hooks: front faced hangers or side hang hangers (see figure 3.12 below, the merchandise is presented to the consumers by front facing them or by side hanging them on the rails.)
- On shelf displays: makes use of floor fixtures (as discussed in section 3.6.2) such as hang rails, four-way stands and rounders.



Figure 3.12: Example of on-shelf displays

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

On-shelf displays are not the focus area of this study as this type of display's primary concern is product presentation. Even though this form of display forms part of visual merchandising display, the focus of this study lies in the other forms of displays that are discussed subsequently that makes use of additional fixtures, props, mannequins and signage that changes as the season, event or theme changes.

3.8.2 Off-shelf displays

Off-shelf displays are intended to have added impact by showing the merchandise as it could be used, or possibly next to other merchandise to suggest complementary purchases. They are not used in the regular selling process and

are therefore made to create a major visual impact. They are often creatively arranged and are only changed by the visual merchandising team. These types of displays may include props. Props are secondary to the merchandise sold in store; their main purpose is to improve the amount of merchandise that is sold, not to upstage it in order for the consumer to capture the merchandise (Colborne, 1996:109). It is very important that props should never clutter a display. See figure 3.13 below for an example of an off-shelf display.



Figure 3.13: Example of an off-shelf display

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

Off-shelf displays are also used for promotional purposes. Depending on the season, event or special day, a fashion retail store's displays can change on a weekly or monthly basis. The mood, character and the number of display props that are essential to amaze consumers are dependent on the store's target market, the type of merchandise they sell, as well as the size of the store (Colborne, 1996: 108).

3.8.3 Point of purchase displays

Point of purchase displays used to be associated with merchandise sold at the checkout counter. Today point of purchase displays can be displays or fixtures used by stores to assist in selling their products. The displays, fixtures and assorted signage can appear outside the store, in windows, and inside the store on ledges, counters, shelves, on the floor or hanging from the roof. These types of displays can be made of cardboard, paper, wood, plastic and metal, or a combination of these materials. Usually point of purchase displays are designed to be part of a promotion or a theme that involves many harmonized elements (the elements will be discussed in the next section)--each one specifically positioned and doing its work in another part of the store (Pegler, 2010: 312).

According to Pegler (2010: 312), some of the reasons retail stores use points of purchase displays are:

- The appearance of a sign or a display in the retail store could persuade the consumer to make an impulse decision to purchase.
- The sign or display draws attention and directs the consumer to the product.
- Point of purchase displays improves the product's image and it explains the product to the consumer, therefore informing the consumer.
- Harmonized promotions could stimulate the consumer to buy the product and to buy other products that are being promoted together with it.
- Point of purchase displays can motivate an instant action response from the consumer.

The point of purchase displays can be permanent, semi-permanent, temporary or promotional. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on the temporary and promotional point of purchase displays. Temporary and promotional displays could for example be created for an important rugby game, Valentine's Day, Mothers' and Fathers' Day, Christmas, a new colour, a new season and much more. It could also be used for the general decoration of a store. The display could include an endless number of props which could include banners, posters,

mannequins and other facets. Once the event or special day has passed, the point of purchase display's "life" is over (Pegler, 2010: 316).

Figure 3.14 below is an example of promotional point of purchase displays of Country Road. This was used to promote the new season's theme and colours. The picture illustrates how the point of purchase display was used in the entrance of the store to entice consumers and to provide them with a sneak preview of what they would find inside the store. If the point of purchase display is part of an overall promotion, like the launching of Christmas, it has to tie in with the basic concept of the promotion. The same 'tag-lines', images and elements should be used.



Figure 3.14: Country Road - Point of purchase display

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

Country Road's flagship store in Hyde Park, Johannesburg used a theme entitled "Joy" for their Christmas launch in December 2010. The entire store's decorations and point of purchase displays were connected to the theme and the word "JOY" was used continuously.

Figure 3.15 below illustrates the “JOY” theme. It should also be decided whether the point of purchase displays will be enhanced with light, decoratives or motion. These elements add to the cost of the point of purchase unit (Pegler, 2010: 317).



Figure 3.15: Country Road's Christmas theme - JOY

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

A promotional display is a display that is used by a store to promote. For example, if Mothers' Day is coming up and the fashion retailer has decided to promote the day, the theme being created will have to be carried out throughout the store--in the windows as well as the in-store decorations, trimmings and props. A sale could also be used as the basis for a promotional display. It can either be a pre- or post-holiday sale, an end-of-season sale or an anniversary sale. On the other hand, institutional displays can also be used. This specific display promotes a thought rather than an item or a product. For example, when the pop star Michael Jackson died on 25 June 2009, many retailers dedicated their shop windows to

honour his memory. Menswear label Buckler created a window tribute to Michael Jackson made of white tape and vinyl.

The simple Michael Jackson tribute within displays honoured the star and his iconic style. Even though Buckler does not sell single sparkly gloves or wild military jackets, they loved Michael Jackson and made a last tribute to him. No saleable merchandise is included in an institutional display. Please see figure 3.16 below.



Figure 3.16: Window tribute to Michael Jackson

Source: Racked. 2011. [Online]

3.8.4 Window displays

A window display is a window outside a retail outlet that is used by retailers to display merchandise for sale or otherwise designed to attract consumers to their

store (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 290). Window displays are used to communicate to the consumers--what the retailer stands for as well as the image of the retailer; it makes consumers aware of the type of merchandise being sold and therefore creates interest with the consumer (Mathew, 2008: 45). Creative window displays may have the power to stop anyone in their tracks. As mixes of art, fashion, design and marketing, window displays have to rapidly grab the consumer's interest and they must be created in such a way that they compel consumers into a store. By providing people with an experience, these displays also have the important duty of helping to define a brand's image. Window displays have started to become remarkable art mechanisms, although it takes significant time to conceptualize, plan and install these artistic displays (Mathew, 2008: 45).

Typically, fashion retailers have one of two window styles: enclosed windows or open-back windows (Bell & Ternus, 2006: 277-280). An enclosed window has a solid back wall, two side walls and a glass front that faces the aisle of the mall or that faces the street. These windows have hidden doors where the visual merchandisers can enter to change them. An open-back window does not have a back wall, therefore people who are walking in the aisles of the mall or on the street will not only see the merchandise displayed in the window, but they will also see the merchandise in the rest of the store. Open-back windows should use props carefully or viewers will miss the message the window is attempting to send due to visual clutter.

According to Pegler (2010: 69-72), there are several "special windows" that can be identified:

- A shadow box. A shadow box is a small, raised window used for the close-up presentation of unique merchandise or accessories. It has a smaller window surface and the shadow box is often shallower and it is higher than the standard display window.
- An elevated window. Elevated windows may have the floor raised up to about 3 meters above street level. A regular mannequin would not be able to stand up straight in this window; however it can sit, kneel or lie down.

- Deep windows. Deep windows require a great deal of merchandise to fill the space, and much lighting to light the back area of the window.
- Tall windows. In a very tall window, the lighting is very far from the merchandise or mannequins that are used. The visual merchandiser has to use lighting on the sides for emphasis and use the overhead lights for atmospheric purposes.

Now that the types of visual merchandising displays have been explained, it is important to understand the various visual merchandising display settings.

3.9 DISPLAY SETTINGS

Display settings are different approaches a visual merchandiser can make use of when presenting a display. These could include anyone of the following: realistic setting, environmental setting, semi-realistic setting, fantasy setting and an abstract setting (Pegler, 2010: 46). These settings are discussed in the following sections.

3.9.1 Realistic setting

A realistic setting is the representation of a room or an area that is reinterpreted in the display area. These settings are most effective in a closed window display where the visual merchandiser can recreate a miniature stage setting. When realism is used, it is very important that the scale is perfect. The props should be the correct size for the display area. Figure 3.17 below is an example of a realistic setting created by Zara; people waiting in an airport lounge. Every single prop is in proportion with the mannequins used. Zara opened in Sandton City in 2010 and another store opened in Pretoria in September 2011.



Figure 3.17: Realistic setting with realistic mannequins

Source: The window display blog. 2010. [Online].

3.9.2 Environmental setting

An environmental setting is used when the retailer wants to illustrate how and where the merchandise could be used. For example, Mr. Price Home used the display in figure 3.18 below to demonstrate how the various bedroom merchandise sold in store would look like when used together in a room.



Figure 3.18: Environmental setting

Source: Mr. Price Home. 2011. [Online].

3.9.3 Semi-realistic setting

When retail stores do not have enough space or a large enough budget, the visual merchandiser may use a semi-realistic or “vignette” setting. The visual merchandiser only shows what is necessary and leaves the rest to the shopper’s imagination. For example, Truworths used a beach/sailing setting to promote summer. However, the setting is not completely realistic and leaves plenty for the shopper to think about, such as in figure 3.19 below.



Figure 3.19: Semi-realistic setting

Source: Ingrid Elisabeth Summers. 2010. [Online].

3.9.4 Fantasy setting

Fantasy is a genre of fiction that uses magic and other supernatural phenomena as a primary element of a setting. A fantasy setting is dependent on the visual merchandising budget, the amount of time available and the type of store. A good imagination goes hand in hand with a fantasy setting. Figure 3.20 below is an example of a fantasy setting where the International retailer, Macy's, used Alice in Wonderland as the basis for their window displays.



Figure 3.20: Fantasy setting

Source: Trendland. 2011. [Online].

3.9.5 Abstract setting

In an abstract setting, the merchandise is the central feature and the setting sustains and strengthens the message. In an abstract setting, the display is mostly an arrangement of lines and shapes, panels, cubes, triangles, curves and circles. Figure 3.21 below is an example of an abstract setting where the merchandise is the central feature of the display.



Figure 3.21: Abstract setting

Source: Sign works. 2007. [Online].

3.10 GENERAL COMMENTS

It has been suggested that good visual merchandising inside a store can sustain consumer interest and persuade them to lower their psychological defences and make a purchase (Kerfoot *et al.*, 2003: 144), therefore retailers use store design to influence consumer buying behaviour. However, do the visual merchandising displays of a store have the same effect? Retailers want the store design to attract consumers into their stores, assisting them to find the merchandise they desire and to motivate them to make unplanned, impulse purchases and ultimately provide them with an enjoyable shopping experience (Levi & Weitz, 2009: 509).

The visual merchandising displays and the environmental stimuli of an apparel retail store could have an effect on a consumer's perceptions. It is therefore important that visual merchandising displays created in an apparel retail store should influence a consumer to approach that store and make a purchase, not avoid it. Apparel retailers need to find out how their visual merchandising displays

are perceived by consumers with the intention to identify what the consumers are actually seeing, how it is interpreted and which features are most important to them. Chapter 4 that follows focuses on consumer behaviour with the focus on consumer perceptions.

3.11 SUMMARY

In this chapter visual merchandising displays were defined and discussed together with the different elements and functions thereof. Visual merchandising displays within the retail structure were discussed. The chapter concluded with an argument regarding the different types of visual merchandising displays and display settings.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss consumer behaviour with the focus on consumers' perceptions. First, consumer behaviour is discussed by using a consumer behaviour model. The individual and group factors that influence consumer decision-making is discussed thereafter. The discussion commences with a description of marketing and external stimuli, and follows with a discussion about the group and individual factors that influence consumer behaviour. A comprehensive discussion about perception follows as part of the individual factors influencing consumer behaviour, as this is the focus of this study. The consumer decision-making process is discussed next, and the chapter concludes with a brief discussion regarding the importance of consumer behaviour in the apparel retail industry, with relation to visual merchandising displays.

4.2 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR DEFINED

A retailer is a business that sells goods to consumers (Cant, 2010: 3) and therefore consumers are the focal point of any retail business. For this reason it can be stated that without a consumer to buy an organisation's products and services, an organisation will not survive. It is very important that retailers understand their consumers' needs and wants in order to make a success of their business and ensure their survival. Together with knowing consumers' needs and wants, the retailers have to know how the consumer makes his/her buying decisions. Therefore, the study of consumer behaviour is very significant.

Consumer behaviour can be defined as "... the study of individuals, groups or organisations and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impact that these processes have on the consumer and society..." (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 51). Blythe (2008: 5) defines consumer behaviour as "...the activities people undertake

when obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services”. In the above definition, ‘obtaining’ includes all the activities which lead up to making a purchase; where ‘consuming’ includes the ways in which people use the products that they have purchased. Kardes, Cline and Cronley (2011: 8) added to this definition by stating that consumer behaviour also includes the consumer’s emotional, mental and behavioural responses that lead, establish or follow these responses. This is demonstrated in figure 4.1.

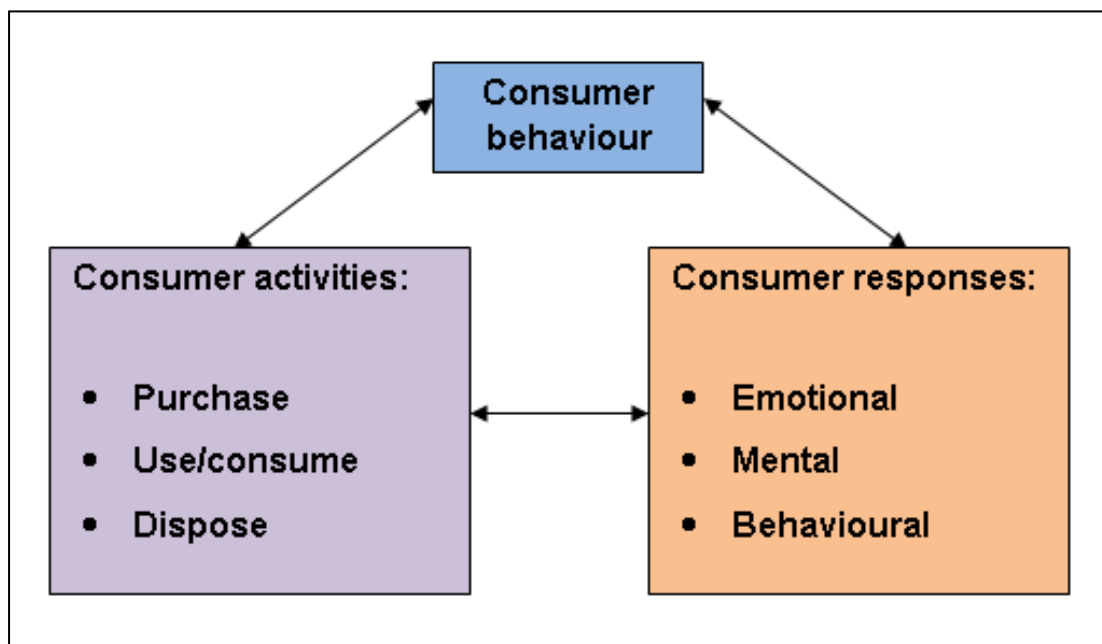


Figure 4.1: Consumer behaviour

Source: Kardes, F. R., Cline, T. W. & Cronley, M. L. 2011. *Consumer behaviour: Science and practice*. China: South-Western. p. 8.

Figure 4.1 indicates that consumer behaviour consists of consumer activities and consumer responses that both influence each other. Therefore, a consumer’s emotional, mental and behavioural responses are able to have an influence on a consumer’s purchase, usage and disposing activities, and vice versa.

An emotional response reveals a consumer’s passions, feelings and their frame of mind. Furthermore, figure 4.1 also refers to mental responses that consist of a consumer’s thought processes, judgments, attitudes and values, and could include a consumer’s feelings towards a specific apparel retail store. A retailer’s store

environment could also influence the consumer's purchase decision as explained in chapter 3.

For example, if a consumer wants to buy a new winter's coat, both pleasure and indecision may come from part of his/her emotional responses due to the various decisions that have to be made. The consumer will have to decide on a specific product, a store, a brand, style and colour, as well as on a payment method. Will he/she buy the coat cash, on credit, on his/her account or in any other way? As part of the consumer responses in figure 4.1, the consumer could imagine wearing the coat, making a mental list of characteristics the coat should have in order to enhance the decision-making process.

The behavioural responses, as depicted in figure 4.1, include a consumer's obvious decisions and actions during a purchase decision. The consumer will start by comparing different stores and brands with one another, paying attention to different advertisements, trying on different coats and obtaining opinions from friends or family. If a consumer is not completely satisfied with the store environment, he/she might make a mental choice not to enter the store, therefore deciding not to purchase the coat from that specific store. All of these actions could have an influence on the way consumer's behaves.

A model of consumer behaviour is depicted in Figure 4.2 that provides an overview of the steps in the consumer behaviour process as stated by Cant *et al.*, (2010: 51). This model will serve as a basis of discussion for this chapter. The consumer behaviour model commences with identifying marketing and other stimuli that could have an influence on consumers' behaviour and then moves on to group and individual factors that influence the consumer's decision making process.

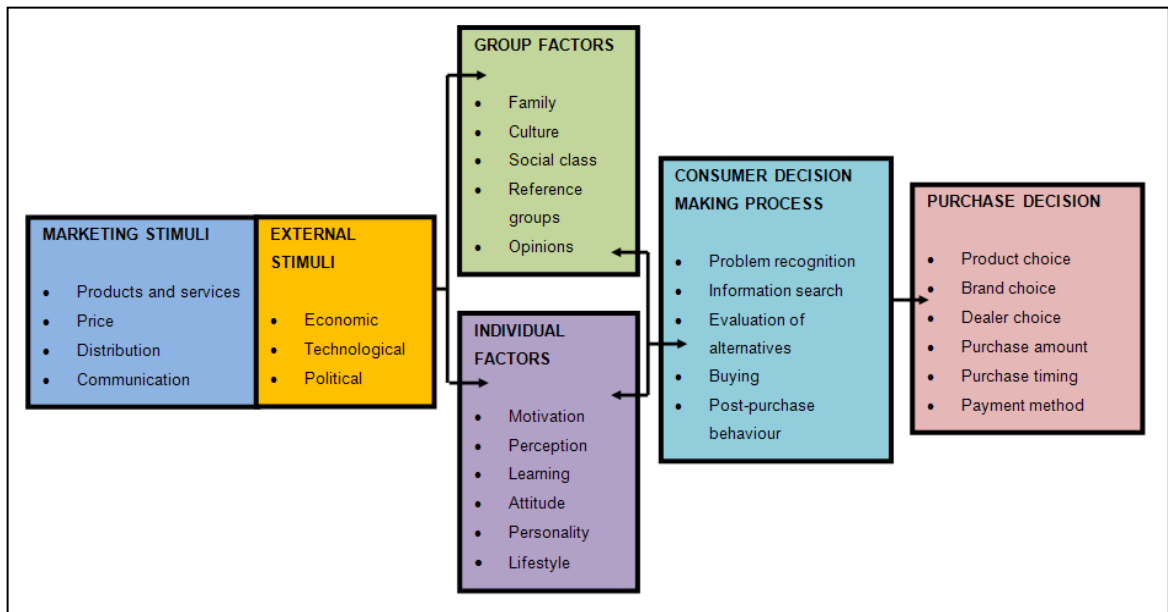


Figure 4.2: Model of consumer behaviour

Source: Adapted from Cant, M.C., van Heerden, C. H. & Ngambi, H. C. 2010. *Marketing Management*. Cape Town: Juta. p.51.

The various components of the consumer behaviour model as indicated above are discussed below, and even though marketing and other stimuli do not form part of the focus of this study, they will be discussed briefly in order to provide a holistic view of the consumer behaviour model.

4.3 MARKETING STIMULI

Consumers are confronted by various marketing stimuli from companies. These are the traditional marketing mix elements which consist out of the four “P’s” namely: product, price, place (distribution) and promotion (communication).

A product can be defined as a set of tangible and intangible attributes, which may include packaging, colour, price, quality, brand, as well as the seller’s services and reputation (Koekemoer, 2011: 6). A product may be a good, service, place, person or an idea (Koekemoer, 2011: 6). For example, clothing and clothing related items sold at an apparel retail store are products.

Price can be described as the amount of money a consumer is willing to pay a seller for a product at a certain point in time (Koekemoer, 2011:9). For example, a consumer might be willing to pay R900.00 for a winter's coat in the middle of the winter season.

Distribution is the process of ensuring that the marketer's product is made available to the targeted consumers in the right time, place, in the right condition and in the correct quantities (Koekemoer, 2011: 9). For example, clothing and clothing related items being available at retailers that are conveniently located and that have the correct sizes available.

Promotion is the combination of various activities and actions that are formed together in such a way to inform the consumers of a new product, idea or service. It can also be used to remind the market of a product, idea or service and persuade them to purchase the product (Koekemoer, 2011: 10). Advertising, sales promotion, personal selling and other communication techniques can be used to communicate with consumers.

Combined, these elements of the marketing mix influence the consumer when making a decision.

4.4 EXTERNAL STIMULI

External stimuli also impact the consumer behaviour process and include factors such as economic, technological and political influences.

The economy of a country affects every consumer or business (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 42) in the decisions they make. Economic stimuli involves the totality of economic factors, such as employment, income, exchange rate, inflation, interest rates, the business cycle, productivity, and wealth that influences the buying behaviour of consumers and organisations (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 42). If products are impacted due to an unfavourable exchange rate, this may lead to higher prices which in turn can and will affect consumer behaviour.

A second stimulus that affects the consumer behaviour process is technology. Technological stimuli include new technologies that create new products and new processes. For example, MP3 players, computer games, online shopping and high definition televisions are all new markets created by technological proceeds. Online shopping, bar coding and computer aided designs are all improvements to the way organisations do business due to enhanced technology. Technology can trim down costs; ensure better quality and direct innovation. These technological developments are able to support consumers as well as the organisations providing the products (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 42).

Political stimuli will also influence consumer behaviour. Political stimuli refer to government policies such as the degree of involvement in the economy. Political decisions can impact on many fundamental areas for organisations such as the edification of the workforce, the health of the country and the quality of the transportation of the economy such as the road and rail systems (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 40).

It should be clear that these stimuli are uncontrollable, but they must nonetheless be taken into consideration by marketers as it impacts consumer behaviour.

The following two components of the consumer behaviour model are group and individual factors that influence consumer behaviour (refer to figure 4.2). The group and individual factors are discussed in the subsequent section. The focus of this study is on the individual factors influencing consumer behaviour and this will be discussed in more detail.

Consumers make numerous decisions on a daily basis--from routine decisions to extremely important decisions. Consumers constantly make decisions regarding the purchase of products and services. Therefore, consumer decision making is a comprehensive process that moves from regular to highly planned problem solving (Kardes *et al.*, 2008: 63).

The outcome of a buying decision depends on various influencing variables, which can be separated into two groups: individual factors (internal or basic determinants) and group factors (external determinants) (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 50).

4.5 GROUP FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

All people belong to a group or at least aspire to belong to a group. It therefore stands to reason that these groups will influence consumer behaviour. Group factors can be defined as the concepts and ideas that influence consumers by being involved with other consumers on a daily basis (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 62-63). Consumers interact with each other day after day and therefore a substantial amount of learning takes place between them. Learning and interaction among consumers takes place in families, between friends, social classes, reference groups and different cultures.

Cant *et al.*, (2010: 62-63) identified five group factors that influence consumer behaviour. Figure 4.2 indicates that these group factors are: cultural influences, social class, reference groups, opinion leaders and family influences. Each of these factors are briefly discussed below.

4.5.1 Cultural influences

Culture can be seen as samples of behaviour and social relations that differentiate a society and divide it from others (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010: 366). Culture communicates values, ideals, and attitudes that help individuals communicate with each other and assess circumstances. Cultural influences are studied from civilizations and leads to universal patterns of activities (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010: 366). Cultural influences can be defined as a set of learned beliefs, values, attitudes and habits that are shared by a society and these are carried through generations (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 62).

The influence of culture on consumer buying behaviour changes from one country to another and even from one province to another. It is therefore very important

for apparel retailers to evaluate the culture of the different target audiences, provinces and even countries in order to design their store atmosphere in line with the desires of a specific cultural group.

4.5.2 Social class

Social class is another factor that has an influence and impact on consumer behaviour and can be seen as an open group of individuals who have comparable social ranks (Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012: 99). Social influences come from face to face interactions, for example friends gathering at a birthday party. Social influences could include any of the following: beliefs of friends and neighbours, judgement of peers and influences from the family (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 62). To some extent, a person's social class could determine the types, as well as the quality and quantity of products that a consumer buys or uses.

Due to social influences, a consumer's friends and peers could influence him/her to purchase their apparel and apparel related products at a specific store. This could be because the friends and/or peers exercise a strong social influence onto the consumer. The consumer will then only buy at the specific apparel retailer because they concede to social pressure.

4.5.3 Reference groups

Reference groups are a further factor influencing consumer behaviour. Reference groups can be seen as groups with whom an individual identifies, to the point where the groups order a pattern of behaviour (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010: 281). A reference group is also known as a group of people with which a person identifies with or aspires to belong to (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 63).

Reference groups have the potential to form a consumer's feelings or behaviour towards a specific product/brand or situation. Consumers could use reference groups to compare their own feelings and thoughts with those of others, and they could serve as a status function. Reference groups could also be used to

establish norms and values that regulate the behaviour of individuals. Consumers tend to use reference groups as a standard for self-assessment and as a foundation of personal morals and aspirations (Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012: 95).

4.5.4 Family influences

Another group factor influencing consumer behaviour is family influences. Family influences include the influences that household members have on the individual (Blythe, 2008: 235-237). Family influences could lead to combined decision making, where one family member could assist another family member in making a decision (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010: 317-324).

Due to the fact that consumer behaviour is strongly influenced by a specific family member, retailers define the roles and the influence of the husband, wife and children (Blythe, 2008: 235-237). For example, if the buying decision of a particular product is influenced by the wife, then the apparel retailers will target the women with their visual merchandising displays.

4.5.5 Opinion leaders

The role of opinion leaders are very important and can have a profound impact in consumer behaviour. Opinion leaders are the last group factor that can influence consumer behaviour. Opinion leaders can be defined as formal and/or informal leaders of reference groups, and their opinions usually influence opinion development in others (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010: 282). General opinion leaders are leaders within the society, such as doctors, lawyers, and politicians, and those who are seen as subject matter specialists.

For example, an image consultant, who assists people in choosing a wardrobe, is clearly an opinion leader for apparel related products. Consumers often seek advice from an image consultant because they believe that the image consultant

has knowledge far superior to their own that would assist them in choosing the correct clothing for their body type.

The individual factors influencing consumer behaviour are discussed in the following section. Refer to figure 4.2.

4.6 INDIVIDUAL FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Individual factors, also referred to as “internal determinants” or “basic determinants” of consumer behaviour (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 50), include consumers’ personalities, attitudes, learning abilities, perceptions and motives determine their spending decisions and behaviour.

In figure 4.2, six individual influencing variables that influence consumer behaviour are identified. These are: needs, motives, personality, learning ability, attitudes and perception. Each of these is briefly discussed below.

4.6.1 Motivation

Consumer behaviour is occasionally influenced by what motivates a consumer. Motives can be seen as internal stimulating energies that adjust a person's activities toward satisfying a need or achieving a goal; therefore motives are what cause consumers to act in a certain way (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 52). Motives direct a consumer towards the goal of satisfying a specific need, and are defined by Shiffman & Kanuk (2010: 181) as internal states that invigorate, trigger, inspire and express consumer behaviour towards their purchasing goals.

4.6.2 Personality

Personality has a strong influence on consumer behaviour because it can be used to distinguish one individual’s behaviour from another. Personality can be seen as a mixture of exclusive individual characteristics that reveal constant and lasting

patterns of behaviour. Personality can be defined as: "...those inner psychological characteristics that both determine and reflect how a person responds to his or her environment" (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 59).

Personality makes an individual do something in a specific way when in a buying situation (Cant, Brink & Brijball, 2006: 162). To a large extent, a person's personality determines how they relate to their environment, or in this case, to a specific apparel retailer's store atmosphere.

4.6.3 Learning

A key influencing factor for many consumers is learning. Learning refers to the immediate or expected changes in consumer behaviour as an outcome of experience (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 56). Various aspects of a consumer--their perceptions, attitudes, motives and needs--are indirectly or directly inclined by the capability of the consumer to learn (Cant *et al.*, 2006: 123).

Due to past experiences, learning reveals changes in the likelihood of consumer behaviour. Consumer learning is a result of obtained knowledge or skill (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010: 210).

4.6.4 Attitudes

Attitudes are another individual factor that influences consumer behaviour. Attitudes refer to learned tendencies from which a person responds to something in a positive or negative way (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010: 247). Attitudes affect the way in which a consumer judges and reacts towards other people, objects and environments (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010: 246-247).

Cant *et al.*, (2010: 85) defines attitudes as a learned tendency to behave in a consistently favourable or unfavourable way towards a market-related object, event or situation. Consequently, attitudes could involve the like or dislike of a product or service. Therefore, consumer's attitudes could influence the way they

perceive a specific apparel retailer's store environment that could lead to either positive or negative buying behaviour.

4.6.5 Perception

The last individual factor to be discussed is perception. Perception, which is the main focus area of this study, refers to a process by which people decide on a sensory stimulus and arrange and infer them into a significant and logical picture (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 55). Perception, to a great extent, concludes a consumer's behaviour, allowing them to justify one action or another based on the alleged outcomes (Callahan, 2012: 1). Perception is discussed in detail in section 4.7.

4.6.6 General comments

Factors influence consumer decision making (group factors as well as individual factors) about which products and services to buy or which retail outlets to support. It can be inferred from the above discussion that consumers do not function in seclusion, but that their decisions are influenced by various factors. However, regardless of the pressures from the external environment, the choice to buy or not the buy remains an individual one.

In order for apparel retail stores to survive and to be successful, it is important for retailers to understand how consumers behave in a buying situation (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003: 7) and what their perceptions regarding the visual merchandising displays are. Apparel retailers may then be able to decrease the consumers' avoidance behaviour towards their store and the merchandise it sells, influencing the consumer's decision making positively to make a purchase.

Perception is the vital individual factor in terms of this study. In light of this, a detailed discussion on perception follows in the next section.

4.7 PERCEPTION DEFINED

The world consumers live in is rich with ambience. When entering an apparel retail store, consumers act differently to the sensations and stimuli around them; they either pay attention to it or ignore it. Each and every message created by an apparel retailer is done with a specific purpose in mind. However consumers transpire to make their own decisions by adapting the message that is created by certain sensations or stimuli (such as visual merchandising displays) to fit in with their own unique experiences, desires and prejudices (Cant *et al.*, 2006: 114).

Cant *et al.*, (2010: 54) defines perception as “...the process by which people select, organise and interpret information to form a meaningful picture of the world, through the five senses namely sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste”. Another definition by Blythe (2008: 91) states that: “... perception is a process of converting sensory input into an understanding of how the world works”. For the purpose of this study, perception will be defined as the judgement that is formed by the consumer after perceiving the apparel retailers’ visual merchandising displays. The focus is therefore on consumer perceptions that form part of the individual factors influencing consumer behaviour.

Perception is consequently a process of examination in which the outside world is passed through a filter and only the most significant or appealing things make it through the filter and impact the consumers (Blythe, 2008: 92). In simple terms, perception is the way consumers comprehend things. Apparel retailers are able to communicate a specific message to consumers by means of their visual merchandising displays. However, due to consumer perception, the message could reach the consumer as something totally different than what the retailer intended. It is therefore crucial for apparel retailers to understand how the consumer perceives the messages created by their visual merchandising displays (Mittal, Holbrook, Raghbir & Woodside, 2008: 59).

Consumers are exposed to different sensations and marketing communication stimuli on a daily basis. These sensations and stimuli could include advertising,

store displays, colours, sounds, packaging and more. The perceptions that form from these sensations and stimuli often act as triggers for certain actions and influences consumer behaviour. Consumers make decisions and take actions based on what they perceive to be the truth. It is therefore important that apparel retailers understand the whole concept of perception in order for them to determine what influences consumers to make purchasing decisions (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 54).

A study completed by Thanga and Tanb (2003: 195-196) explained that store atmosphere is important in a retail environment. Store atmosphere refers to the environment that is brought forth by a harmonized use of visual merchandising displays and the ease of movement within the store (explained in detail in chapter 3). Store atmosphere works on the pleasure and arousal spheres of consumer perception. Apparel retail stores with favourable store atmospheres are likely to increase in consumers' preference (Thanga & Tanb, 2003: 195-196).

The shopping behaviour of consumers is directly triggered by the store's physical surroundings (Thanga & Tanb, 2003: 195-196), for example: store layout, music, colour, visual merchandising displays and lighting blended together perfectly can provide the consumer with a favourable shopping environment. As a result, a well-designed store atmosphere offers a positive shopping environment for the consumer which in turn enhances positive buying behaviour (Kerfoot *et al.*, 2003: 150).

Figure 4.3 shows that various elements (proxemics, kinesics and paralanguage) contribute to a store's atmosphere and that the store atmosphere could have an effect on the consumers' perceptions of a specific store (Blythe, 2008: 97). Consumers' perceptions of a store's atmosphere can ultimately lead to positive buying behaviour (Evans, Jamal & Foxall, 2009: 67).

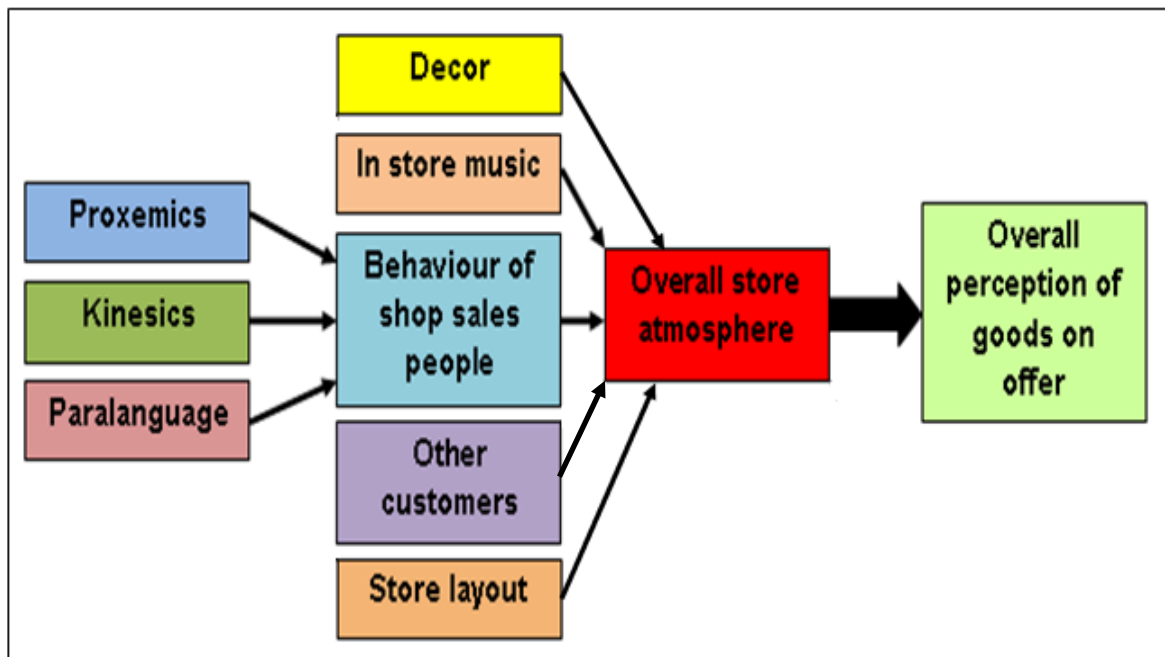


Figure 4.3: Perception and visual merchandising

Source: Adapted from Blythe, J. 2008. *Consumer behaviour*. London: Thomson. p. 97 and Evans, M., Jamal, A & Foyal, G. 2009. *Consumer behaviour*. 2nd ed. England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. p. 67.

The first group of elements that influences consumer perception (depicted in figure 4.3) are proxemics, kinesics and paralanguage. *Proxemics* refers to the use of physical space in conveying a perceptual stimulus. For example, a sales assistant in a retail store might stand too far away from the consumer which could be interpreted as the sales person disliking the consumer, or stands too close which could invade the consumer's personal space. *Paralanguage* refers to the way words are used. Speaking to loudly or too softly, too quickly or too slowly can influence how a message is conveyed to the consumer. *Kinesics* is the reading of body language such as facial expressions and gestures or more formally, non-verbal behaviour (Blythe, 2008: 97). Together, proxemics, kinesics and paralanguage contribute to a store's overall atmosphere which has an impact on the consumer's overall perception of the store.

The second group of elements presented in figure 4.3 include decor, in store music, behaviour of shop sales people, other consumers, and store layout, and these also have an impact on the atmosphere of a store. The most important element in terms of this research study is décor. Décor encompasses the use of

visual merchandising displays to furnish and decorate a store (as discussed in detail in chapter 3). In-store music forms part of store atmospherics and store layout falls within visual merchandising which is not the focus area of this study. As figure 4.3 indicates, store décor has an impact on the overall store atmosphere and ultimately affects the consumers' perceptions of the store and the goods the store offers.

Consequently, consumers' decisions to visit/revisit an apparel retail store can be influenced by the visual merchandising displays. If consumers' perceptions of the visual merchandising displays are positive they can decide to revisit the store; however if they have a negative perception they might not return to the store again. As a result, the retail environment that is created by utilising visual merchandising displays is able to guide consumers' conclusions about the merchandise, the service quality and the consumers' satisfaction of the store.

How perceptions are formed will now be considered by examining the perceptual process in the subsequent section.

4.7.1 The process of perception

There are many views on how perceptions are formed. For the purpose of this study, the process of Cant *et al.*, (2006: 116-120) will be used. The process of perception consists of four important steps namely exposure, attention, interpretation and memory. These steps are discussed below.

- **Exposure**

Exposure is the first step in the process of how perceptions are formed. Exposure takes place when a consumer comes into contact with stimuli--either through sight, hearing, taste, smell or touch. Retailers often use advertisements in unusual places to ensure that the competition for the consumer's attention is less. For example, apparel retailers often make use of visual merchandising displays and point of purchase displays to attract the attention of the consumer. Figure 4.4

illustrates how Country Road makes use of a home ware display right next to the till points to attract the consumer's attention. Once the consumer is in contact with a certain stimuli (exposed), the next step in the process of perception is attention.



Figure 4.4: Exposure - point of purchase display

Source: Picture supplied by Country Road

- **Attention**

Attention is the second step in the perceptual process. Attention is a close observation of something or carefully listening to something (Gilmour, 2010: 18). Consumers are exposed to more stimuli than they can process on a daily basis (Fletcher, 2011: 1); therefore the process of attention is activated when a consumer makes a deliberate attempt to focus their attention on a specific stimulus. In apparel retail stores, product displays, promotional materials and the merchandise sold in store are all combined to create a visual impact. These facets of the store are all placed in a specific position and attempt to grab the attention of the consumer.

Consumers find it difficult to share their attention between the overload of posters, displays and other visual materials competing for their interest. Sometimes, apparel retail stores are too visually untidy to have any valuable effect on the

consumer. Therefore, a consumer will only process a specific stimulus when he/she makes a deliberate attempt to focus his/her attention on a specific stimulus and makes an effort to notice it. After the consumer has focused his/her attention on a specific stimulus, the third step in the process of perception follows, which is the interpretation of the stimuli.

- **Interpretation**

Interpretation is the third step in the process of perception. Interpretation can be seen as the act or process of explaining (Gilmour, 2010: 153). In terms of apparel retail stores, the meaning that a consumer allocates to a sensory stimulus is called interpretation. Two consumers can be exposed to the same stimuli, however the way they interpret it can be completely different from one another. The way consumers interpret stimuli usually depends on their own beliefs, motives, attitudes and experiences (as explained in section 4.6). Retailers rely greatly on symbols in their communication messages to support the correct understanding of their message.

Where some apparel retailers use visual merchandising displays to promote their brand, consumers might interpret it as visual noise. By reducing the visual noise volume in an apparel retail store, the retailers are able to provide fresh space for the remaining displays (Fletcher, 2011: 1). The goal is to ultimately have more eyes on the displays and thereby induce the call to action.

Having discussed interpretation of the stimulus, the next and final step in the process of perception is recall/memory, where the consumer chooses to remember or recall the stimuli.

- **Recall/memory**

Recall/memory is the fourth and final step in the perceptual process. Recall is the ability to remember information or experiences (Gilmour, 2010: 232). It is impossible for consumers to remember all the stimuli they come across on a daily

basis. Retailers should make use of the correct visual merchandising displays to ensure full and correct recall of the message they want to communicate.

As explained in chapter one, Levi and Weitz (2009: 532) point out that the consumers' perceptions of a store's environment depends on the consumers' shopping goals. When consumers are shopping for something that they deem as an unfulfilling mission, they prefer to be in a soothing and calming environment; however, if consumers are shopping for pleasure they prefer being in an exciting environment. It can therefore be inferred that consumers' perceptions may have an impact on the way they behave towards a store and its merchandise.

Apparel retailers have to establish how their visual merchandising displays are perceived by the consumers. It is essential to identify what consumers are actually seeing, how they interpret it and which features are most important to them. By establishing how visual merchandising displays are perceived by the consumers, it could benefit apparel retailers to align the internal focus of their visual merchandising displays with the consumers' expectations.

Having discussed consumer perception in detail, the next step in the consumer behaviour model (refer to figure 4.2) to be discussed is the consumer decision-making process.

4.8 THE CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The consumer decision making process refers to the process the consumer goes through when making a decision. The five stages in the consumer decision-making process are: problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, action/response and post-purchase evaluation (Cant *et al.*, 2006: 195). These stages are discussed below and illustrated in figure 4.5.

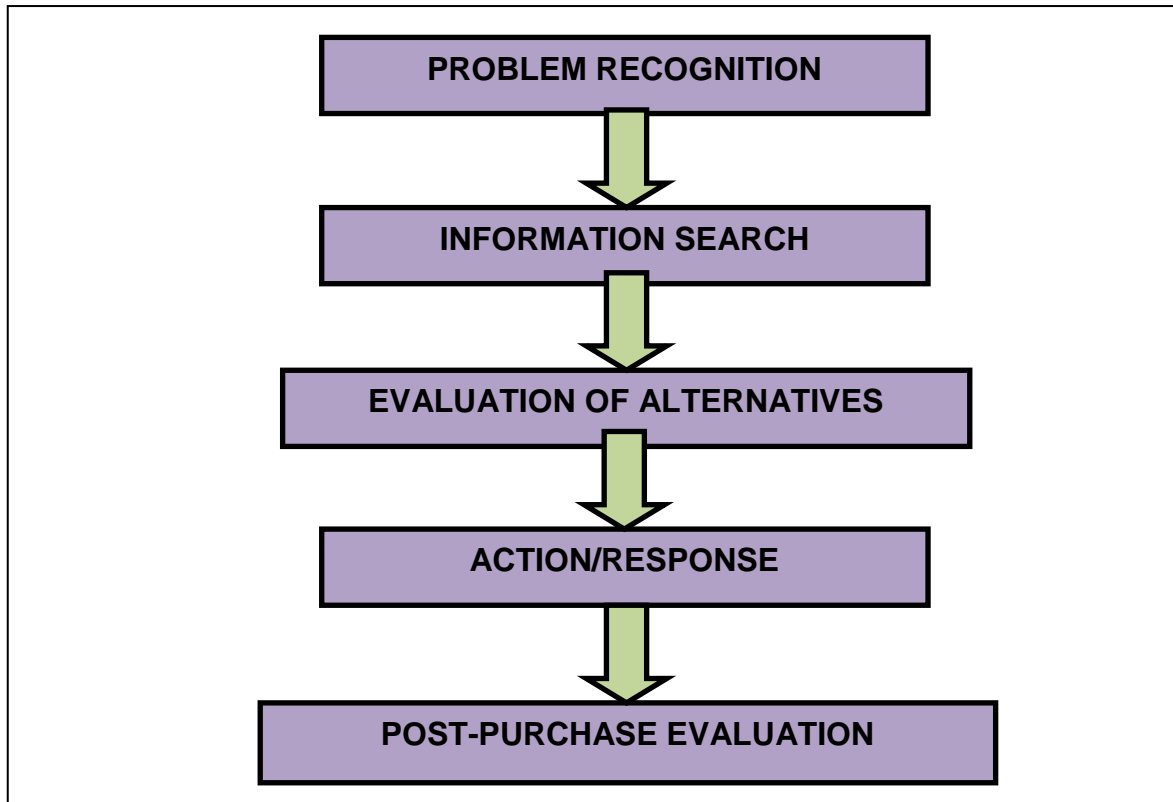


Figure 4.5: Stages in the consumer decision-making process

Source: Cant, M. C., Brink, A. & Brijball, S. 2006. *Consumer behaviour*. Cape Town: Juta. p. 195.

4.8.1 Stage 1: Need/problem recognition

As indicated in figure 4.5, it can be seen that the first stage in the consumer decision-making process is to recognise that there is a problem or a need that requires being satisfied. A problem or a need arises when an individual has a purchasing need and is unsure how to satisfy this need (Cant *et al.*, 2006: 195). According to Mittal *et al.*, (2008: 307), problem recognition is the consumer's realisation of a gap between his/her current state (where a consumer is dissatisfied with their present situation) and his/her desired state (desire to take action to achieve the desired situation).

Figure 4.6 depicts that when a consumer is dissatisfied with their current situation, a gap is formed between a consumer's current state and his/her desired state. This gap progresses into a need that requires being fulfilled. In order to close this gap, a consumer has to go through the rest of the stages in the consumer

decision-making process and ultimately purchase a product in order to satisfy their need.

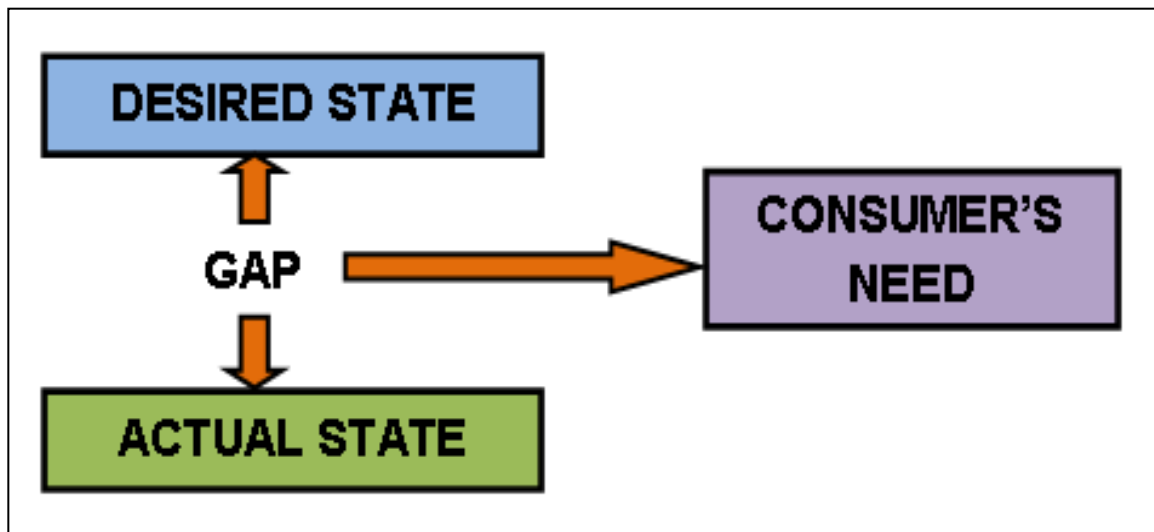


Figure 4.6: Problem recognition

Source: Mittal, B., Holbrook, M. B., Raghbir, S. B. & Woodside, A. G. 2008. *Consumer behaviour*. China: Open Mentis. p. 307.

Problem recognition will differ from situation to situation due to the fact that the influencing factors (individual and group factors) change. All the influencing variables could have an effect on the need/problem recognition stage. Table 4.1 at the end of section 4.8 illustrates a practical example of the need/problem recognition stage. After recognising a need or a problem, the next stage in the consumer decision-making process is to search for and process the information that was found.

4.8.2 Stage 2: Information search and processing

Looking for information and processing information is the second stage in the consumer decision-making process. In this stage, the consumer searches for as much information about the product as possible. Consumers look for information about potential solutions in the peripheral environment, or they utilize information they have stored in their memory (Cant *et al.*, 2006: 197). Information search and processing also includes organising this information in the mind of the consumer.

Consumers can search for information internally or externally (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2007: 262):

- Internal data is data from the consumer's previous experiences that is stored in his/her memory. It is also known as individual factors and can include attitudes, personalities, lifestyles and demographics. Internal data could include the consumer service from a store, prices of products or even parking problems.
- External data is what the consumer gathers from outside sources such as reference groups, family and friends. External data can also include advertisements, in-store promotions, brochures and pamphlets.

Consumers' shopping style could also influence the way consumers search for information (Mittal *et al.*, 2008: 319). This is demonstrated by the fact that consumers have different shopping styles--some are passionate shoppers who search extensively to buy the best product, where others are brand loyal, staying with brands that they know and trust. For example, consumers that only purchases clothing from Woolworths do so because they trust the brand.

Some consumers find shopping interesting. These are the shoppers that enjoy a pleasing and fulfilling retail environment (Mittal *et al.*, 2008: 319). Therefore, a consumer that is passionate about shopping and who finds it interesting will most likely enjoy an apparel retail store that is filled with visual merchandising displays. However, the opposite also applies. Table 4.1 at the end of section 4.8 illustrates a practical example on the information search and processing stage.

Having gathered information, the consumer needs to evaluate the available alternatives. This is the third stage of the consumer decision-making process.

4.8.3 Stage 3: Evaluation of alternatives

The evaluation of alternatives is the third stage in the consumer decision-making process. During this stage, the consumers evaluate or assess the various alternatives, using all the information they have, together with their experience, in

order to make a decision. Evaluation criteria can be defined as “...the limits which consumers decide are acceptable when searching for a solution to their problems” (Cant *et al.*, 2006: 201). Factors such as price, brand, warranty and the type of store could be used to evaluate a product against alternatives. Figure 4.7 shows the different alternatives that can be used to evaluate a product against alternatives. Table 4.1 at the end of section 4.8 illustrates a practical example on the evaluation of alternatives stage.

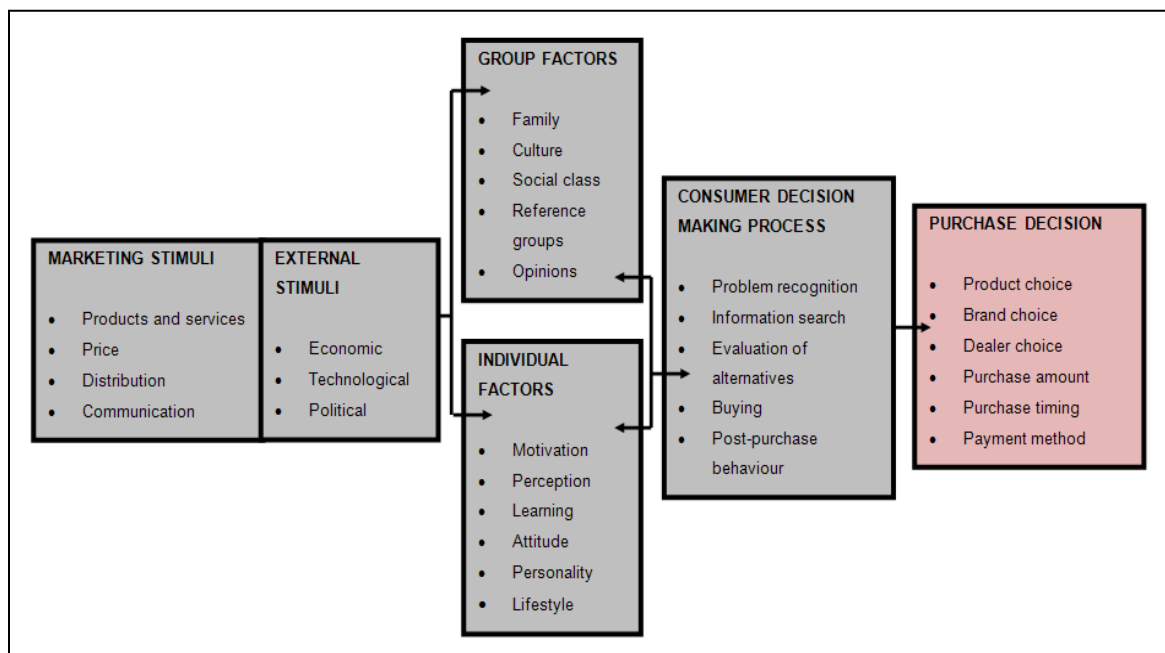


Figure 4.7: Alternatives for purchase decision

Source: Cant, M.C., van Heerden, C. H. & Ngambi, H. C. 2010. *Marketing Management*. Cape Town: Juta. p.51.

Once all the relative alternatives have been evaluated, the consumer has to make a decision. The response/action stage is the next step in the consumer decision-making process.

4.8.4 Stage 4: Response/action

The consumer’s responses/actions make up the fourth stage in the consumer decision-making process. This stage is where the consumer chooses the most pleasing option from the alternatives (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 64). The decision that is made is the outcome of the evaluation (Cant *et al.*, 2006: 202). Table 4.1 at the

end of section 4.8 illustrates a practical example regarding the response/action stage.

Having made a decision, choosing the best alternative or deciding not to make a purchase, the fifth and final stage of the consumer decision-making process takes place--to evaluate the decision.

4.8.5 Stage 5: Post-purchase evaluation

The fifth and final stage of the consumer decision making process is post purchase evaluation. In the final stage, the consumer will either be satisfied or dissatisfied with their decision. If the consumer decided to purchase a product, he/she will assess the performance of the product and will either be pleased or disappointed with the purchase. Table 4.1 below illustrates the steps of the decision making process by means of practical examples.

Table 4.1 Practical examples of stages in the decision-making process

Problem recognition	A consumer needs an outfit for a year end function because he/she does not have anything suitable to wear.
Information search	<p>Internal data</p> <p>Remembering what colleagues wore at the previous year’s function and discussing with colleagues what they will be wearing.</p> <p>External data</p> <p>Discussing the “problem” with family and friends and asking their opinion about the situation.</p> <p>Browsing through a couple of fashion magazines to familiarise his/herself with the latest fashion trends relating to the year-end function.</p> <p>Speaking to the salespeople in the stores, in search of the latest styles, brands and prices.</p> <p>External data - Stimuli</p> <p>Visiting a few apparel retailers where some of the retailers offered a</p>

	more pleasurable shopping experience than others. Some of the stores might be filled to capacity with merchandise and Christmas decorations that make it difficult to search for an outfit. Other retailers might be minimalistic with their displays which offers a more relaxed and open environment to shop in.
Evaluation of alternatives	Trying on various dresses, skirts and suits that fit the occasion. Criteria such as price, brands, fit, in-store environment and style are used to evaluate the alternatives. After comparing all the options the selection is narrowed down to two. The first option is hanging in the store that was overcrowded with merchandise and displays, while the second option is in a store that offered a pleasing shopping experience. Another factor to consider is how he/she will pay for the purchase; using cash, credit card or a cheque.
Buying	All the elements are compared and evaluated by the consumer. Once the evaluation is complete, the consumer decides to buy the second option, and pay using credit card.
Post-purchase evaluation	The consumer reflects about whether he/she is satisfied or unsatisfied with the purchase. And the consumer will rationalise whether the R1200 that was paid for the outfit was worthwhile.

The consumer decision making process is the last step in the consumer behaviour model that has been discussed with regard to this study. With the aim of concluding this chapter, the importance of consumers' perceptions within the construct of consumer behaviour with regard to visual merchandising displays is discussed in the subsequent section.

4.9 THE IMPORTANCE OF PERCEPTION WITH REGARD TO VISUAL MERCHANDISING DISPLAYS

Consumer behaviour originated in the 1950s when Maslow (1954) developed his motivation hierarchy of physical, emotional and social needs. During the 1960s consumer behaviour became a legitimate field of study, and in the 1970s

researchers in consumer behaviour commenced the development of the concept of consumer processes. Since then consumer behaviour has grown into a mature research regulation and is a significant field of study (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2007: 5-6).

Knowledge about consumer behaviour is critical for apparel retailers due to the fact that a strong understanding of consumer behaviour may assist retailers in selecting the correct visual merchandise displays to meet consumer needs. It might also suggest the important influences on consumer decision-making. Apparel retailers must therefore study consumer behaviour in order to create visual merchandising displays that they believe will be of value to consumers and ultimately influence their perceptions and behaviour. This may also enhance their evaluation of a store or a product.

One of the study objectives of this research is to identify the relative importance of the influencing variables (such as space, suitability, colour, height, etc.) of visual merchandising displays through the consumers' perceptions. Consumers are living in a competitive marketplace and therefore consumer perceptions are very important in gaining sustainable competitive advantage in the apparel retail industry. Apparel retailers should be willing to analyse the whole process of how consumers make decisions and how perceptions are formed regarding their visual merchandising displays, through the eyes of the consumers.

Due to the high competition in the apparel retail industry today, it has become extremely important for the apparel retailers to understand how consumers think, feel and act in order for their businesses to thrive and endure. An apparel retailer is able to achieve insight into their target markets through research. By researching consumer behaviour the findings can assist apparel retailers in improving their marketing strategies through understanding the following aspects (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2007: 6-7):

- The psychology of how consumers think, feel, reason and select between various options.

- How individuals are influenced by aspects of their environment, such as culture and family.
- How industrial buyers are influenced by objects in an organisation.
- How consumer decision making processes differ between products and services.
- The implications of the marketing concept and consumer orientation.
- How to retain consumers as loyal partners.

For more than 20 years, the experiential study of consumers' reactions to store atmosphere and visual merchandising concepts has been a research area that has fascinated many (Groeppe-Klein, 2005: 430). It has now become commonly accepted that a pleasing store atmosphere has a key impact on consumers' in-store behaviour and store evaluation, and ultimately their perception of the store (Groeppe-Klein, 2005: 430).

Creating the perfect store environment has become a progressively more important method of retail positioning. Stores have individual environments (most of the apparel retailers are branded--they are all designed to look the same, for example, Mr. Price) and retailers have to understand that the environment of a store is a significant part of the consumer's shopping experience. Furthermore, visual merchandising displays can influence these environments, both positively and negatively.

Attractive store designs are able to create positive feelings for both buyers and non-buyers. Since stimuli are regarded as the physiological basis for emotions, it can be inferred that a positive store atmosphere will increase consumer stimulation separately from any purchase. Conversely, it can also be inferred that highly interesting store designs also incite more purchases from consumers due to their perceptions being positive (Groeppe-Klein, 2005: 430).

As dictated by Puccinelli *et al.*, (2009: 24), visual merchandising can influence a consumer's emotional state which consecutively drives the consumer's approach or avoidance behaviour. As visual merchandising displays form part of visual

merchandising, this principle is also applicable for visual merchandising displays. Therefore, apparel retailers can create visual merchandising displays that they believe will be of value to consumers that will encourage approach behaviour and that would ultimately result in a consumer purchasing a product.

According to a study completed by Kerfoot *et al.*, (2003: 143) it was suggested that the liking of the visual merchandising used in store does not necessarily lead to approach behaviour. Kerfoot *et al.*'s (2003) study also illustrates that it does not necessarily lead to avoidance behaviour either. This is illustrated in table 4.2 below. A favourable response that leads to liking, in most cases provokes browsing and once attracted to browse the connection to purchase becomes noticeable, however liking the visual merchandising of a store might still lead to avoidance behaviour (Kerfoot *et al.*, 2003: 143).

Table 4.2 points out that the liking of the visual merchandising used in store influences a consumer's behaviour that leads to purchasing, but not at all times. Disliking the visual merchandising of a store resulted in 64% of the consumers leaving immediately, 35% of the consumers still browsed, and only 19% of the consumers made a purchase. In contrast, liking the visual merchandising of a store resulted in only 10% of the consumers leaving immediately, 88% stayed in the store and browsed and 80% of the consumers made a purchase. Therefore, disliking the visual merchandising used in store could still lead to purchasing, however to a much lesser extent.

Table 4.2 Visual merchandising - affective responses and anticipated action

AFFECTIVE RESPONSE	ACTION	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Like (40 responses)	Leave immediately	10
	Browse:	88
	Purchase	80
Dislike (36 responses)	Leave immediately	64
	Browse:	36
	Purchase	19

AFFECTIVE RESPONSE	ACTION	RESPONSE PERCENTAGE
Indifferent (15 responses)	Leave immediately	46
	Browse:	53
	Purchase	47
Note: Response percentages do not equal 100 as browse and purchase are not mutually exclusive categories and other potential actions have been omitted from the table		

Source: Kerfoot, S., Davies, B. & Ward, P. 2003. Visual merchandising and the creation of discernible retail brands. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 31(3):143-152.

Kerfoot *et al.*, (2003: 143-152) explains that in order to understand a consumer's approach or avoidance behaviour completely, one has to go beyond considering the development of a general state of liking or disliking and analyse what drives consumers' decision making. One of the focuses of this study is to determine whether the above mentioned results could be individualised for visual merchandising displays.

4.10 SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss consumer behaviour with the focus on perception. Consumer behaviour was discussed comprehensively by means of a consumer behaviour model. The factors influencing consumer behaviour were discussed first. The discussion commenced with explaining the group factors influencing consumer behaviour and it concluded with an explanation of the individual factors. Given that perception forms part of the individual influencing variables, perception was examined in detail subsequent to the individual influencing variables. The discourse about the process of perception explained four important steps, namely observation, selection, organisation and reaction. Next, the consumer decision-making process was discussed, by explaining various steps in the process. The chapter concluded with a brief discussion about the importance of perception with regard to visual merchandising displays.

CHAPTER 5: METHODODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is to discuss the purpose of this study that leads to the primary research question. The primary and the secondary objectives of the study are emphasized next. A detailed discussion regarding the research process that was followed during this research study is provided in this chapter. The research design, the sample, sampling techniques and the data collection methods used is discussed throughout the research process. Rigor and ethics in qualitative research is also examined, and the chapter concludes with considering the limitations of this research study.

5.2 THE MARKETING RESEARCH PROCESS

Marketing research refers to the process of “...planning, collection and analysis of data relevant to the marketing decision making and the communication of the results of this analysis to management” (McDaniel & Gates, 2001: 6). According to the American Marketing Association, marketing research is the function which links the consumer and the public to the marketer through information. Information is used to identify and define marketing opportunities and problems; generate, refine, and evaluate marketing actions; monitor marketing performance; and improve the understanding of marketing as a process (American Marketing Association, 2004: 1). Different studies use different methods and techniques in their research processes because they have different research aims.

Data gathered for a research study can either be primary or secondary data, and can either be quantitative or qualitative in nature. Secondary data already exists and can be used in solving a research problem, while primary data is collected for the first time, specifically to address the imminent research study (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 89). These concepts are discussed throughout the chapter.

The marketing research process provides an orderly and planned approach to the research study at hand, and verifies that all aspects of the research are consistent with one another (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 75). The research process is illustrated in figure 5.1.

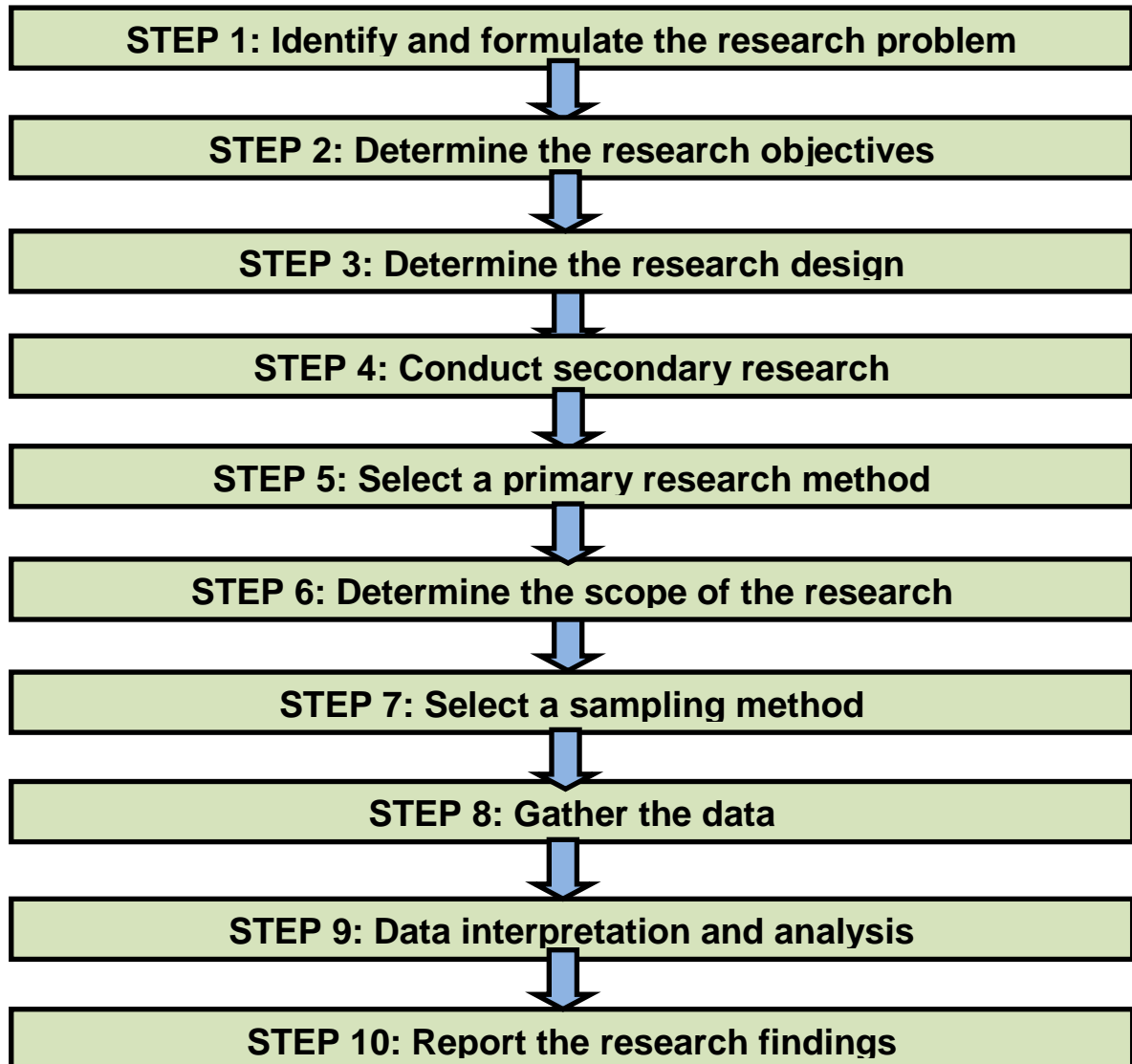


Figure 5.1: The marketing research process

Source: Adapted from Tustin, D. H., Ligthelm, A., Martins, J. H. & Van Wyk, H. De J. 2005. *Marketing research in practice*. South Africa: ABC Press. p. 76; Wellman, J. C. & Kruger, S. J. 2001. *Research methodology*. 2nd ed. South Africa: Oxford. p. 1 and Mc Daniel, C. & Gates, R. 2001. 3rd ed. *Marketing research essentials*. USA: South-Western. p. 22.

In the following sections, each step as indicated in figure 5.1 is discussed in detail and relates to the imminent study.

5.2.1 STEP 1: Identifying and formulating the research problem

The first step in the marketing research process is to identify and formulate a research problem. A marketing research problem refers to a situation or situations that present difficulties for marketing decision-makers (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 124). A marketing opportunity refers to any favourable or unexploited situation in one or more of the marketing environments that can be utilised proactively by decision makers to the advantage of the organisation (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 124).

The research study commences with identifying a specific marketing problem or opportunity. If a marketing research problem is well devised and the objectives of the problem are accurately defined, the probability of designing a research study that presents the required information resourcefully is increased to a great extent (McDaniel & Gates (2001: 26).

In this study, consumers' perceptions regarding visual merchandising displays are being analysed. In chapter 3 it was revealed that the conventional visual merchandising elements (store design, lighting, product placements, atmospherics, fixtures and permanent props), are of high importance to the retail industry (Levy & Weitz, 2009: 527). The existing literature fails to directly recognise the potential of visual merchandising displays to influence consumers' behavioural responses. It also fails to recognise what consumers' perceptions are about the visual merchandising displays presented in apparel retail stores. Therefore the purpose of this study is to explore consumers' perceptions towards visual merchandising displays in the South African apparel retail industry, with the purpose of providing the apparel retailers in Tshwane with the necessary knowledge regarding the visual merchandising displays used in store.

The purpose of this study, as stated above, guided the development of a primary research objective that served to provide direction to the research process (Cant *et al.*, 2010: 122-124). The development of research objectives is the second step in the marketing research process, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

5.2.2 STEP 2: Determine the research objectives

To resolve a research problem, research objectives are formulated. Research objectives can be seen as statements that the research project will attempt to achieve (Mc Daniel & Gates, 2001: 27). The research objectives should flow from the definition of the research problem, because if the objectives are reached, the decision-maker will have the information that he/she needs to solve the problem (Mc Daniel & Gates, 2001: 27). For the purpose of this study, both primary and secondary objectives were formed. The secondary objectives were developed from the primary objective.

The primary research problem pending from the preliminary literature review is therefore as follows: How can insight into the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer perceptions inform knowledge in apparel retail? The primary research objective derived from the research problem is as follows:

- To determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumers' perceptions.

The secondary objectives derived from the research problem are the following:

- To determine to what extent consumers' notice the visual merchandising displays presented in stores.
- To determine the important aspects of visual merchandising displays to consumers.
- To determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer behaviour.

This research study takes on a consumer response centred approach to visual merchandising display stimuli, in an attempt to consider this area of retail concern in a holistic manner. In doing this, it explores an area that has received limited attention in the literature. This research study would benefit apparel retailers in Tshwane because it would offer a more detailed exploration in terms of consumer

perceptions towards visual merchandising displays and the effect these displays have on consumers' perceptions. The apparel retailers in Tshwane can therefore apply the findings of this research study to their retail environments, depending on the outcome.

Once the research objectives have been identified, the next step in the marketing research process is to create the research design.

5.2.3 STEP 3: Research design

The research design is the third step in the marketing research process and it refers to the plan that should be followed to answer the research objectives. In essence, the researcher develops a structure or outline to answer a specific research problem (Mc Daniel & Gates, 2001: 26).

When a clear methodology is not present the reader of the study is left to contemplate the research approach by positioning pieces of the methodology together based on data gathering or analysis techniques (Caelli, Lynne & Mill, 2003: 6). This challenge was countered with an in-depth explanation of the methodology used for this study--the design, the sampling methods, and the data gathering techniques as well as the data analysis.

The three types of research designs (exploratory, descriptive and causal) have diverse and balancing roles to play in many research studies. The difference between exploratory research, descriptive research and causal research (see figure 5.2) is discussed below, followed by a motivation of why exploratory research was used for this particular research study.

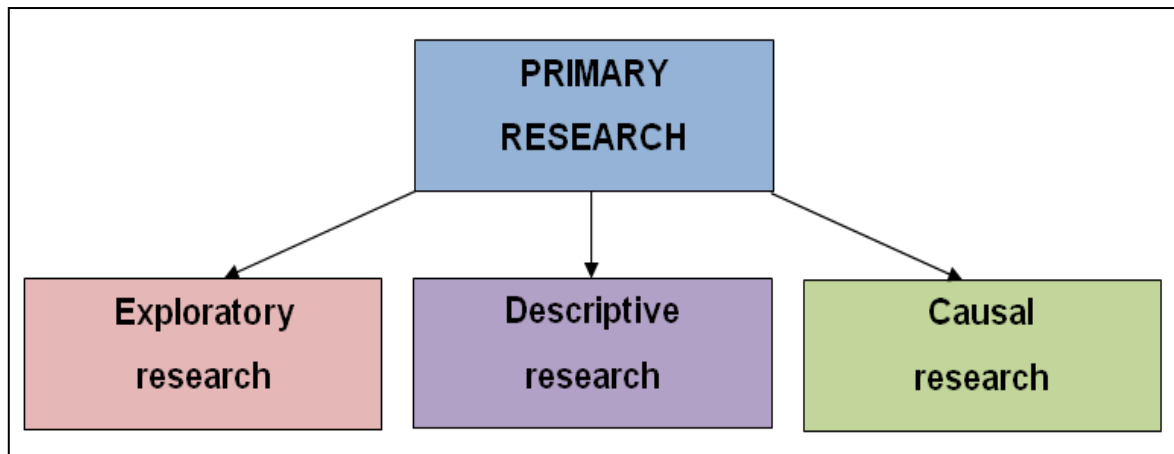


Figure 5.2: Research approaches

Source: Adapted from Tustin, D. H., Ligthelm, A., Martins, J. H. & Van Wyk, H. De J. 2005. *Marketing research in practice*. South Africa: ABC Press. p. 83.

Exploratory research is mostly useful in studies where the researcher lacks a clear idea of the problems he/she will encounter during the study. Exploratory research assists the researchers in developing clear concepts (Cooper & Schindler, 2008: 145). Exploratory research is used to observe insights into a common nature of a research problem. Normally, there is little former information on the research topic available (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 84).

Descriptive research is usually used to answer questions such as who, what, when, where and how, and is used to describe objects, people, groups, organisations or environments (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 51). The research methods used in descriptive research are structured and quantitative in nature. Typical approaches to a descriptive research design include in-house personal interviews, surveys, telephone interviewing, e-mail surveys and web-based surveys (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 86).

Causal research refers to studies where the researcher examines whether one variable causes or changes the value of another variable. In most of the cases, experiments are used to measure causality (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 87). Causal research allows causal assumptions to be made and seeks to identify cause-and-effect relationships (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 53).

Table 5.1 below compares the three different primary research approaches in terms of the following characteristics: the amount of uncertainty in the research, the key research statement used, the research approach used, and the nature of the results. It also gives an example of when to use which research type.

Table 5.1 Characteristics of different types of marketing research

	EXPLORATORY RESEARCH	DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH	CAUSAL RESEARCH
Amount of uncertainty	Highly ambiguous	Partially defined	Clearly defined
Key research statement	Research question	Research question	Research hypothesis
When conducted?	Early stage of decision making	Later stages of decision making	Later stages of decision making
Usual research approach	Unstructured	Structured	Highly structured
Examples	<p>“Our sales are declining for no apparent reason”</p> <p>“What kinds of new products are fast-food consumers interested in?”</p>	<p>“What kind of people patronize our stores compared to our primary competitor?”</p> <p>“What product features are most important to our consumer?”</p>	<p>“Will consumers buy more products in blue packaging?”</p> <p>“Which of two advertising campaigns will be more effective?”</p>
Nature of results	Discovery oriented, productive, but still speculative. Often in need of further research.	Can be confirmatory although more research is sometimes still required. Results can be managerially actionable.	Confirmatory oriented. Fairly conclusive with managerially actionable results often obtained.

Source: Zikmund, G. & Babin, B. J. 2010. *Exploring marketing research*. 10th ed. China: South-Western. p. 56.

This particular research study took an exploratory approach into the South African apparel retail industry. Exploratory research was performed because it is able to illuminate unclear situations (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 54). This research method is not proposed to present definite evidence from which to establish a particular route to follow. It is more important to receive suggestions and insight than

scientific objectivity (Wiid & Diggines, 2009: 199). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the extent to which visual merchandising displays effect consumers' perceptions was studied by means of exploratory research. Once the type of research design to use was decided, the researcher has to conduct secondary research.

5.2.4 STEP 4: Conduct secondary research

Conducting secondary research is the fourth step in the marketing research process. Secondary data can be seen as historical data previously collected for some other research opportunity or problem (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 163). If the analysis of secondary data and the analysis of existing literature yields no solution to the marketing problem, the marketing research process, as illustrated in Figure 5.1, proceeds to the selection of a primary research method.

For the purposes of this study, secondary data were analysed to develop an understanding of the South African retail industry, visual merchandising displays, as well as consumer behaviour. Furthermore, secondary data were analysed to investigate consumer perceptions toward visual merchandising displays used in apparel retail stores. For the purposes of this study, secondary data and existing literature further defined the marketing problem rather than providing a solution.

Due to the fact that using only secondary data was insufficient to answer the imminent research problem, it was also necessary to gather primary data. The next step in the marketing research process is selecting a primary research method.

5.2.5 STEP 5: Select primary research method

Selecting a primary research method is the fifth stage in the marketing research process. Primary research is data that is gathered for the first time, and is collected specifically to address a particular research objective (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 89).

There is no single and best research design because all research problems that are faced by researchers have an array of research design choices. Each research design has its own advantages and disadvantages. Data gathered for a research study can either be quantitative or qualitative in nature. The difference between qualitative and quantitative research is discussed below, followed by a motivation explaining why *qualitative research* was used for this research study.

- **Quantitative marketing research**

Quantitative marketing research is used in studies that use mathematical analysis and is mostly used in descriptive and causal research (McDaniel & Gates, 2001: 109). Quantitative marketing research addresses research objectives through practical assessments that engage in statistical evaluation and analysis approaches (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 133-144). Qualitative research involves less interpretation and is more suitable to be independent (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 134-135).

- **Qualitative marketing research**

Qualitative marketing research is research data that is not subject to quantification or quantitative analysis and is mostly used in exploratory research (Mc Daniel & Gates, 2001: 109). Qualitative research can be used to study consumer attitudes, feelings and motivations. Therefore it is an interpretative technique that describes, decodes, and translates information (Cooper & Schindler, 2008: 214).

Qualitative research is more dependent on the researcher because the researcher must deduce meaning from the unstructured data such as text from an interview or a focus group (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 141). It does not rely on self-response questionnaires as in quantitative research. What makes qualitative research such a strong method lies in its ability to provide multifaceted textual explanations of how individuals experience a given research subject. It supplies information about the “human” side of a topic.

In table 5.2 a comparison is made between qualitative research and quantitative research by means of the following criteria: types of questions asked, the chosen sample size, the amount of information received per respondent, the administration, the type of analysis, the hardware used to collect the data, the ability to replicate the research, the training necessary in order to collect the data and the type of research that is usually used.

Table 5.2 Qualitative versus quantitative research

COMPARISON DIMENSION	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH	QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH
Types of questions	Probing	Limited probing
Sample size	Small	Large
Information per respondent	Abundant	Fluctuates
Administration	Requires interviewer with special skills	Fewer special skills required
Type of analysis	Subjective, interpretive	Statistical, summarization
Hardware	Tape recorders, projection devices, video, pictures, discussion guides	Questionnaires, computers, printouts
Ability to replicate	Low	High
Researched training	Psychology, sociology, social psychology, consumer behaviour, marketing, marketing research	Statistical, decision models, decision support systems, computer programming, marketing, marketing research
Type of research	Exploratory	Descriptive or causal

Source: Mc Daniel, C. & Gates, R. 2001. 3rd ed. *Marketing research essentials*. USA: South-Western. p.109.

Qualitative research was concluded to be more appropriate for this particular research study because an in depth understanding of the consumers' perceptions about visual merchandising displays and the influence it has on consumer behaviour was required. Therefore an interpretative technique that describes,

decodes and translates was necessary to obtain the required information (Cooper & Schindler, 2008: 214).

Due to the fact that the researcher needed detailed explanations in terms of consumer perceptions, qualitative research was used because it is research that discovers the true significance and new insights about the available data (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 131).

The major disadvantage of qualitative research is the fact that a small group of interviewed participants cannot be representative of the whole population (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 131-133). However given the explorative, qualitative nature of the study, the goal was not to be representative, but to be able to transfer the findings and information (Krefting, 1991: 14).

After the primary research method has been chosen, the next step in the marketing research process is to determine the scope of the research.

5.2.6 STEP 6: Determine the scope of the research

Determining the scope of the research study is the sixth stage of the marketing research process. Depending on the problem or opportunity under investigation, research is conducted using either a census or a sample of the research population. The research population is defined as the total group of people or establishments whose opinions, behaviour, preferences or attitudes will yield information for the answering of the specific research question (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 97).

When conducting a census, data are obtained from every member of the research population (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 337). A sample, on the other hand, refers to a representative subset of the population of interest (Wiid & Diggins 2009: 193). Because census research is costly, researchers will most often draw a sample from the population in which they are interested (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 412).

Researchers have two options when selecting respondents to form part of the sample, namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling. In the former, all the subsets of the population have a known non-zero chance of being selected to be part of the sample, whereas in the latter, certain subsets of the population have little or no chance of being selected for the sample (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 344). Probability sampling as well as non-probability sampling is discussed in detail below, together with a discussion on why non-probability sampling was used for this research study.

Probability sampling

As stated above, probability sampling supplies every element in the population with a known, non-zero probability of being selected for the sample (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 344). The sampling methods that can be utilised in probability sampling include the following: simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, proportional sampling, cluster sampling and multistage area sampling. These are all discussed briefly below (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 426-430).

- Simple random sampling is a sampling process that guarantees each element in the population has an identical chance of being included in the sample.
- Systematic sampling is a sampling procedure where a starting point is selected by a random process and then every “*n*th” number on the list is selected. The formula to calculate the intervals (“*n*th”) is illustrated below:

$$\frac{\text{Population}}{\text{Sample}} = \text{Interval (}n\text{th time)}$$

- Stratified sampling is a sampling process in which simple random sub-samples that are more or less the same on some feature are drawn from each section of the population.

- Proportional sampling is a stratified sample where the number of sampling units drawn from each section of the population is in proportion to the population size of that section.
- Cluster sampling is an economically proficient sampling technique where the primary sampling unit is not the individual element in the population but a large cluster of elements. The clusters are selected at random.
- Multistage area sampling is a sampling technique that involves a combination of two or more probability techniques.

Table 5.3 compares the probability sampling techniques with one another based on the cost, the degree of use and the respective advantages and disadvantages of each technique.

Table 5.3 Comparison of probability sampling techniques

DESCRIPTION	COST AND DEGREE OF USE	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Simple random: The researcher assigns each member of the sampling frame a number, then selects sample units by random method	High cost, moderately used in practice	Only minimal advanced knowledge of population needed, easy to analyse data and compute error.	Requires sampling frame to work from, does not use knowledge of population that researcher may have; larger errors for same sampling size than in stratified sampling; respondents may be widely dispersed, hence cost may be higher.
Systematic: The researcher uses natural ordering or the order of the sampling frame, selects an arbitrary starting point, then selects items at preselected interval.	Moderate cost, moderately used	Simple to draw sample, easy to check.	If sampling interval is related to periodic ordering of the population, this may introduce increased variability.
Stratified: The researcher divides the population into groups and randomly selects subsamples from each group. Variations include proportional, and disproportional, allocation of subsample sizes.	High cost, moderately used	Ensures representation of all groups in sample, characteristics of each stratum can be estimated and comparisons made, reduces variability for same sample size.	Requires accurate information on proportion in each stratum; if stratified lists are not already available, they can be costly to prepare
Cluster: The researcher selects sampling units at random, then does a complete observation of all units or draws a probability sample in the group.	Low cost, frequently used	If cluster geographically defined, yields lowest field cost, requires listing of all clusters, but of individuals only within clusters; can estimate characteristics of clusters as well as of population.	Larger error for comparable size than with other probability samples; researcher must be able to assign population members to unique cluster or else duplication or omission of individuals will result.
Multistage: Progressively smaller areas are selected in each stage by some combination of the girt four techniques.	High cost, frequently used, especially in nationwide surveys	Depends on techniques combined.	Depends on techniques combined.

Source: Zikmund, G. & Babin, B. J. 2010. *Exploring marketing research*. 10th ed. China: South Western. p. 433.

Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling relies on the discretion of the researcher (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 344). Non-probability sampling is a sampling method where the samples are grouped in a process that does not provide all the individuals in the population an equal chance of being selected (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 344). Subjects in a non-probability sample are usually selected on the basis of their accessibility or by the purposive personal judgment of the researcher.

The major disadvantages of non-probability sampling are the possible sources of bias. The advantages of non-probability sampling include that:

- It is cost effective
- It is useful when the population is widely scattered
- It is often used in exploratory studies

The sampling methods that can be utilised in non-probability sampling include the following: convenience sampling, judgemental sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling. These are all discussed briefly below (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 97):

- Convenience sampling is a method where the members of the sample are chosen based on them being readily available.
- Judgemental sampling is a method where the members are chosen on the basis of the researcher's judgement on what constitutes a representative sample of the population.
- Purposive sampling is a sampling method where the members are chosen with a specific purpose in mind. They are therefore intentionally chosen to be non-representative.
- Quota sampling is a sampling method where the members are chosen on the basis of satisfying some form of pre-specified criteria that applies to the population.
- Snowball sampling is a sampling method where the members are originally chosen judgementally and are then asked to identify others with the desired characteristics to be part of the sample.

Table 5.4 compares the non-probability sampling techniques with one another based on the cost, the degree of use and their advantages and disadvantages.

Table 5.4 Comparison of non-probability sampling techniques

DESCRIPTION	COST AND DEGREE OF CONTROL	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Convenience: The researcher uses the most convenient sample or economical sample units.	Very low cost, extensively used.	No need for list of population	Unrepresentative samples likely; random sampling error estimates cannot be made; projecting data beyond sample is relatively risky.
Judgement: An expert or experienced researcher selects the sample to fulfil a purpose, such as ensuring that all members have a certain characteristic.	Moderate cost, average use.	Useful for certain types of forecasting; sample guaranteed to meet a specific objective.	Bias due to expert's beliefs, may make sample unrepresentative; projecting data beyond sample is risky.
Quota: The researcher classifies the population by pertinent properties, determines the desired proportion to sample from each class, and fixes quotas for each interviewer.	Moderate cost, very extensively used	Introduces some stratification of population; requires no list of population	Introduces bias in researcher's classification of subjects; non-random selection within classes means error from population cannot be estimated; projecting data beyond sample is risky.
Snowball: Initial respondents are selected by probability samples, additional respondents are obtained by referral from initial respondents.	Low cost, used in special situations.	Useful in locating members of rare populations.	High bias because sample units are not independent; projecting data beyond sample is risky.
Purposive: The researcher selects respondents with a purpose in mind	Very low cost, extensively used.	No need for list of population	Unrepresentative samples likely; random sampling error estimates cannot be made; projecting data beyond sample is relatively risky.

Source: Adapted from Zikmund, G. & Babin, B. J. 2010. *Exploring marketing research*. 10th ed. China: South Western. p. 432.

For this particular research study, non-probability: purposive sampling was applied. The respondents were chosen on the basis of their accessibility and by the purposive personal judgment of the researcher. Therefore non-probability sampling was utilized because not every element in the population had a known probability of being selected for the sample (due to purposive sampling). The fact that the sample population for this given study was widely spread and because non-probability sampling is cost effective, it contributed to the decision to make use of non-probability sampling.

The leading disadvantages of non-probability sampling are the possible sources of bias. However, this does not mean that non-probability sampling methods cannot provide good results; the problem is that the researcher is unable to provide any suggestion of the reliability of the results that are attained from the research (Wiid & Diggins, 2009: 199). However, given the exploratory nature of the study it was not the goal for the findings to be representative to the whole population, but rather to be able to transfer the findings to another study. Consequently the sample was nevertheless deemed adequate.

Following the steps of the marketing research process in figure 5.1, the next step in the process is to select a sampling method.

5.2.7 STEP 7: Selecting a sampling method

Selecting a sampling method is the seventh step of the marketing research process (see figure 5.1). Even though sampling is part of the scope of the research, it can still be seen as a separate step in the marketing research process.

A sample can be seen as a subset (or some part) of a population (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 96). A population is any complete group of entities that share some a common set of characteristics (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 412). In order to select a sample, a researcher has to complete the following five stages: define the population, specify the sample frame, select the sampling method, determine the

sample size and draw the sample (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 415). These stages are illustrated in figure 5.3.

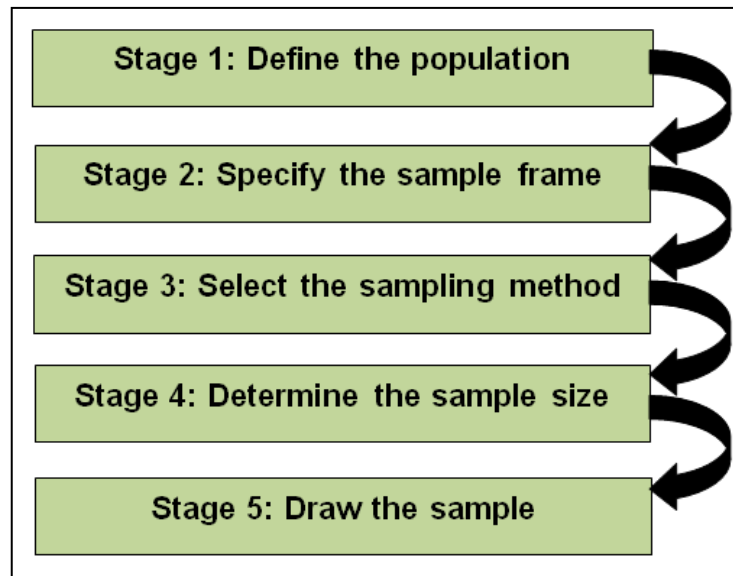


Figure 5.3: Selecting a sample method

Source: Adapted from Zikmund, G. & Babin, B. J. 2010. *Exploring marketing research*. 10th ed. China: South Western. p. 415.

a) Stage 1: Define the population

The population is the group from which the researcher will draw his/her sample. The population should include all the people whose opinions, behaviour, preferences and attitudes will be of value to answer the research question.

When using qualitative research, it is not necessary to collect data from everyone in the area of interest in order to retrieve convincing findings. In qualitative research, only a sample of a population is selected for any given study (Cooper & Schindler, 2008: 215). For this research study, the population was defined as any person who buys clothing or clothing related items at retail stores in Tshwane. Having defined the target population, the researcher now specifies the sample frame.

b) Stage 2: Specify the sample frame

A sample frame is necessary if a probability sample is drawn. As explained previously, with probability sampling, every element in the population has a known, non-zero probability of being selected for the sample (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 344). In non-probability sampling, the sample relies on the discretion of the researcher (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 344).

Because this research study used non-probability sampling, it was not necessary to draw a sample frame. Refer back to step 6 of the marketing research process for a detailed explanation. After the sample frame has been specified, the next stage is to select a sampling method.

c) Stage 3: Select the sampling method

In the third stage of selecting a sample, the researcher specifies whether he/she will use probability or non-probability sampling, as well as how the sample units will be selected (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 97). As discussed in section 5.2.6 (step 6 of the marketing research process), non-probability sampling was best suited for this research study.

The sampling method chosen for this particular research study was non-probability: purposive sampling. In purposive sampling, the researcher samples with a *purpose* in mind. This is usually the case where the study requires one or more specific predefined groups. Purposive sampling can be very useful for situations where one has to reach a targeted sample quickly and where sampling for proportionality or representativeness is not the main concern.

With a purposive sample, the researcher is likely to retrieve the opinions of the target population. However, a disadvantage is the fact that the researcher might overweight subgroups in the population that are more willingly available (Cooper & Schindler, 2008: 455).

However, due to the fact that the research study had a qualitative paradigm (it was not the goal to be representative) and was exploratory in nature (not proposed to present definite evidence and where further research is required); the sampling method was nonetheless considered sufficient.

The inclusion criteria for the purposive sampling for this research study were as follows:

- People who buy clothing at apparel retail outlets
- People that are residing in Tshwane
- People who read, speak and understand English
- People that have a cell phone and access to e-mail
- People that are willing and have the time to participate in the study

After the sampling method has been chosen, the researcher has to determine the sample size.

d) Stage 4: Determine the sample size

In the fourth stage of selecting a sample, the researcher specifies the number of sample elements to be included in the final sample.

Eight members for each focus group were chosen in order to prevent sample sizes from being too small or too big. If the focus group was too small, one or two members could intimidate the other members, and if the groups were too big, it could have influenced the participation of the members of the group (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 144-145). The pre-determined size of the groups ensured that every participant was able to voice his/her opinions.

Initially, it was planned to have two focus groups, each with eight members. However, if the data and themes were not saturated (to the state of the data collected being adequately full and incapable to take on more data), a third and a fourth focus group would have been held. However, after the second focus group it was observed that the participant's responses from the first and second focus

group had common characteristics and the responses related to one another. The naïve sketches were analysed and it was found that the participants' replies had common themes and categories (explained in section 5.2.8). Therefore the data was saturated (unnecessary to take on more data).

The final stage in the process of selecting a sample is to decide on the operational procedure for the selection of the sample elements.

e) Stage 5: Draw the sample

The final and fifth stage of selecting a sample entails the specification of the operational procedure for the selection of the sample elements.

For the purpose of this study, each participant was emailed to invite them to the focus group session. The email included the session time and the list of questions the group was to discuss. Once 16 participants (eight participants per focus group) agreed on the date and time, the sample was finalised. Each participant was emailed one week in advance to remind them to attend the meeting.

Even though diversity and representativeness of the population is not a requirement of purposive sampling (because purposive sampling falls part of non-probability sampling), diversity was created in terms of age (ages ranged from the age of 23 to the age of 76) and gender to encourage conversation in the focus groups (step 6 of the marketing research process). This allowed for a more representative sample of the population and diverse views regarding the subject at hand.

Having gathered all the information necessary to form a sample, the next step in the research process is to gather the data.

5.2.8 STEP 8: Gather the data

The process of collecting data is usually referred to as field work (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 99). When using qualitative research, there are four common techniques used to collect data, namely: focus groups, depth interviews, conversations and free association and sentence completion methods (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 141-149). These techniques are all discussed below, together with a discussion that explains why focus groups were utilized for this particular research study.

- **Focus groups**

A focus group can be explained as a free-flowing interview that consists of small groups of participants, usually between six and ten people. The participants that are part of the focus group gather at a certain time at a pre-determined location and discuss the relevant topic. A focus group is generally led by a trained moderator who follows a flexible layout. One of the moderator's many tasks is to promote conversation between the participants. Refer to p. 165 where focus groups are explained in detail.

- **Depth interviews**

A depth interview is defined as a one-on-one interview between a researcher and a respondent. In a depth interview, the researcher asks questions and follows up the answers with probes in order to retrieve more information from the respondent. As with focus groups, there is also a moderator in a depth interview and he/she must be highly skilled to encourage the respondents to talk unreservedly.

- **Conversations**

Conversations are informal forms of qualitative data collection. The researcher engages with a respondent in a discussion about the relevant subject matter. The approach followed in conversations is entirely unstructured; therefore the

researcher should not have many expectations. Often, a conversation takes place impulsively, with little need for formal settings such as in the case of focus groups.

- **Free association and sentence completion**

Free-association technique is another form of qualitative data collection. Free association and sentence completion record a respondent's first cognitive reactions. Simply put, it records a respondent's "top-of-mind" reactions. Respondents usually have to say the first thing that comes to mind when they come into contact with a specific stimuli. Free association and sentence completion consists out of observation, collages and Thematic Apperception Test.

Table 5.5 compares the different qualitative techniques discussed above with one another by means of its main advantages and disadvantages.

Table 5.5 Comparison of qualitative research techniques

COLLECTION TECHNIQUE	DESCRIPTION	MAIN ADVANTAGES	MAIN DISADVANTAGES
FOCUS GROUP	Small group discussions led by a trained moderator	Can be done quickly Gain multiple perspectives Flexibility	Results do not generalize to larger population Difficult to use for sensitive topics Expensive
DEPTH INTERVIEWS	One-on-one, probing interview between a trained researcher and a respondent	Gain considerable insight from each individual Good for understanding unusual behaviours	Results not meant to generalize Very expensive per interview
CONVERSATION	Unstructured dialogue recorded by a researcher	Gain unique insights from enthusiasts Can cover sensitive topics Less expensive	Easy to get off course Interpretations are very research-dependent
WORD ASSOCIATION/ SENTENCE COMPLETION	Records the first thoughts that come to a consumer in response to some stimulus	Economical Can be done quickly	Lack the flexibility that is likely to produce truly creative or novel explanations
OBSERVATION	Recorded notes describing observed events	Can be in-obtrusive Can yield actual behaviour patterns	Can be very expensive with participant-observer series
COLLAGES	Respondent assembles pictures that represent their thoughts/feelings	Flexible enough to allow novel insights	Highly dependent on the researcher's interpretation of the collage
THEMATIC APPERCEPTION/ CARTOON TESTS	Researcher provides an ambiguous picture and respondent tells about the story	Projective, allows to get at sensitive issues Flexible	Highly dependent on the researcher's interpretation

Source: Zikmund, G. & Babin, B. J. 2010. *Exploring marketing research*. 10th ed. China: South Western. p. 142.

Data collection for this research study was conducted by means of crystallisation. Crystallisation is a post-modernist development of research and it is used to find various instances from numerous sources to create a unity of information (Huberman & Miles, 1994: 179-210).

Crystals are like prisms that reproduce and deflect within themselves, in that way creating diverse colours, patterns and displays, shedding off in different directions and therefore allowing the same story to be told from different perspectives. Crystallisation is, for that reason, a research kaleidoscope. When used in qualitative research, crystallisation begins from the premise that there is no correct way of telling an experience. Therefore each story, like light striking a crystal, reflects different perspectives of an experience.

For the purpose of this study, focus groups together with naive sketches were selected as a means of data collection. As a result, through the use of crystallised focus groups and naïve sketches, an in-depth understanding of consumers' perceptions about visual merchandising displays were received. A detailed explanation on focus groups and naive sketches follows.

- **Focus groups**

This research study made use of self-reporting as a data source by means of focus groups. A focus group is an unstructured, free flowing interview with a small group of people, usually between six and ten participants (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 144-145). This use of data collection aligns well with an exploratory approach as focus groups enable the researcher to illuminate unclear situations. This specific research topic needed to be discussed in detail and different types of views and perceptions needed to be explored. This would not have been possible with the use of a structured questionnaire. A group of participants were asked about their perceptions, opinions, and views towards visual merchandising displays, and whether these displays had an influence on their buying behaviour.

The focus groups were based on the use of visual stimulus material. Photographs were taken of an apparel retail store in Tshwane and they were presented to the participants in the focus groups (Annexure B). The participants were asked questions derived from the research objectives. The following questions were used to structure the focus group (the same questions were also used in the naïve sketches):

1. What do you think about visual merchandising displays? (Primary objective--to determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer perceptions)
2. When you walk into a clothing store, what do you notice about the visual merchandising displays? (Secondary objective 1--to determine to what extent the consumers notice the visual merchandising displays presented in stores)
3. What aspects about visual merchandising displays are important to you? (Secondary objective 2--to determine what aspects of visual merchandising displays are important to consumers)
4. Do the visual merchandising displays of a store have an effect on your buying decision? (Secondary objective 3)

Focus groups have been chosen for the following reasons (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 141-144):

- It allowed the participants to discuss their true feelings, anxieties and frustrations towards the visual merchandising displays in store in their own words.
- It was a relatively rapid way of collecting the comprehensive data that was required for this research study.
- It allowed the participants to use each other's ideas and present other perspectives and feelings, therefore one consumer could stimulate thoughts among others and create additional insights.
- It provided the researcher with multiple outlooks on the imminent topic. A comment by one participant started a sequence of responses from the other participants.

- It permitted flexibility to allow for a more detailed description about the topics that needed exploration. Several topics could be talked about and many insights were achieved, especially with regard to the differences in consumer behaviour in different situations.

The disadvantages of using focus groups are summarized in Table 5.6. It includes the counteractive measures that were taken to oppose the disadvantages for the purpose of this study.

Table 5.6 Disadvantages of focus groups

DISADVANTAGE	CORRECTIVE MEASURE
Focus groups are likely to become influenced by one or two overriding participants in the session, therefore making the output very biased	A competent moderator was appointed that observed all the participants to ensure that they were all comfortable providing their opinions.
Focus groups are not as effective as IDI's in dealing with sensitive topics.	This research topic was not of personal nature, and the session was completely voluntary.
Focus groups are usually held in a very synthetic environment which might influence the responses from the participants.	The researcher ensured that all the participants were comfortable with the location of the session.
Focus groups have to have objective, sensitive and efficient moderators.	An independent moderator who was not influenced by the topic or participants was appointed to facilitate the session. She had good people skills, training and experience.
It may not be easy to retrieve a representative sample of the population.	Given the exploratory nature of the study, the sample was nevertheless deemed adequate.
Focus groups are not fully confidential or anonymous.	There was not any material of a confidential nature. The participants signed a permission form that allowed the participants to see/hear each other and call them by name.

Source: Zikmund, G. & Babin, B. J. 2010. *Exploring marketing research*. 10th ed. China: South Western. p. 142.

As mentioned above, purposive sampling was used for this research study. Initially, two focus groups were planned, each with eight members. However, if the themes were not saturated, a third and a fourth focus group would have been held. However, after the second focus group and 18 naïve sketches, the data was saturated.

Eight members for each focus group were chosen in order to prevent it from being too small or too large. If the focus group was too small, one or two members could intimidate the other members, and if they were too large, it could have influenced the participation of the members of the group (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 144-145). The size ensured that every participant was able to voice his/her opinions. Each session was recorded by using a video camera in order to record the participants' responses.

- **Naïve sketches**

Naïve sketches were utilized as a second method to illuminate consumers' perceptions towards visual merchandising displays in apparel retail stores (Annexure C). A naïve sketch is an approach that provides mute evidence of an experience (Hodder, 1994: 703-716). A naïve sketch endures physically and can be separated across space and time from the author. Its significance does not lie in its production, but in its meaning. This provides deeper insights into the internal meanings (Hodder, 1994: 703-716). Simply put, a naïve sketch is an open-ended questionnaire that asks participants the same structured questions as in the focus groups.

Each participant was provided with a naïve sketch to complete before the focus group commenced. It comprised of the same four questions that were asked in the focus groups. In this way, the researcher was able to retrieve double the amount of the responses (instead of doing only focus groups) and compare the responses from the naïve sketches with that of the focus groups to gain deeper insight into the research problem.

Preparing for the focus group session

First and foremost, the major objective of the meeting was identified by the researcher. The purpose of these focus groups was to examine consumers' behaviour with the focus on consumer perceptions towards visual merchandising displays in the apparel retail industry of Tshwane, South Africa. Each member

was emailed an invitation to the session and a follow-up invitation was sent to them via e-mail. This included the session time and the list of questions the group were going to discuss. Each participant was emailed a week in advance to remind them to attend the meeting.

In order to structure the focus groups, four key questions were developed. Each focus group was scheduled for two hours to ensure that there was enough time to work through all the participants' opinions. A conference room with adequate air flow and space, where it was quiet, and where there was enough lighting in order for the participants to clearly see the photos and materials of the stores presented to them was arranged beforehand. The chairs were placed in a circle in order for all the participants to see and hear each other clearly. Name tags were made for each participant and refreshments were ordered.

A few ground rules were used in order to sustain the participation and the focus of the participants. For example: to keep focus and energy and to get closure on each of the questions (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 141-150). Another ground rule was that for recording purposes, it was asked that the participants did not interrupt each other. Each question was worded carefully before the question was addressed to the group. After each question was answered, the researcher reflected back a review of what was heard. If it was noted that one or two people were dominating the meeting, other members were called on to share their perspectives.

Immediately after each session, the researcher verified that the tape recorder recorded the whole session. If any relevant observations in terms of the study were made during the session, the researcher noted them (please see Annexure D for the Agenda that was followed in terms of the focus group discussions).

After all the data has been collected, the next step in the research process is to analyse the data and to interpret the results.

5.2.9 STEP 9: Data analysis and interpretation of results

Once all the data had been captured and cleaned, the data analysis process commenced. The intention of data analysis is to understand the data and to draw conclusions from the data collected (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 102).

This research study was contextual in nature, therefore thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Thematic analysis is an exercise in qualitative research that involves searching through data to identify any repeated patterns (Tesch, 1990: 113). The exploratory power of this accepted technique can be improved when the analyst lacks prior familiarity of the research topic. Therefore, they cannot be influenced by prejudice. However, the analyst should have a basic idea about the research topic before the analysis of the data can commence.

Table 5.7 below describes the process that was followed in order to analyse the data gathered from the naïve sketches and focus group interviews. See Annexure E for an example of how the coding was done. Annexure E contains the coding for the naïve sketches, together with a copy of the summary of results that were obtained from the naïve sketches.

Table 5.7 The thematic analysis process

ACTION	DESCRIPTION
Formulate a sense of the storyline by reading through the transcriptions and naïve sketches.	Formulate the necessary background information. The researcher wrote down ideas as they came to mind.
The researcher selected one interesting and short document and asked herself what the interview was all about.	Focusing on the underlying meaning of the text the researcher wrote down the thoughts in the margin. Repetition of this process was followed throughout all generated data. As there was transition from one topic to another, the researcher distinguished content from topic. Identified topics were then written in the margin of the document.

ACTION	DESCRIPTION
The researcher paid attention to the underlying meaning rather than the content. As topics emerged, they were written down in the margin, clustering similar topics together.	A connection was made between similar topics by using highlighters. Topics with the same colour were clustered together. All topics were arranged into columns on one sheet of paper, one column per each data document. The best fitting name that captured the substance was chosen for the clustered topics. These topics were then further arranged into major topic, unique topics and leftovers.
Abbreviated topics were written as codes. The clustered major topics as well as the unique topics were abbreviated as codes.	These codes were written next to the appropriate segment of the text. This process indicated how well the topic descriptions corresponded with what was found in the data. It also led to the discovery of new topics that were not previously identified.
At this stage the researcher was ready for refinement of the organized data.	The most descriptive wording for the topics was found and the topics were turned into categories and sub-categories.
A final decision was then made on the abbreviated category name.	Each code was alphabetized. Subsequently a coding session was completed.
The data material belonging to each category was assembled in one place and a preliminary analysis was performed.	Confusions and contradictions, as well as the missing information with regard to the research topic were then identified. This led to some of the data being discarded, as it was not relevant.

Source: Adapted from Cresswell, J.W. 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage publication. p. 154-155; Merriam, S. B. 2002. *Introduction to qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. p. 3-17 and Tesch, R. 1990. *Qualitative research analysis tapes and software tools*. New York: Wordsworth. p. 113.

The data were analysed and the results were interpreted, therefore the researcher then has to report the results.

5.2.10 STEP 10: Reporting the results

The final step in the marketing research process is the preparation of the research results and conveying the research findings and recommendations to the client or decision-maker.

The findings and recommendations of this study will be presented in chapter 6 and chapter 7 of this research study.

5.3 RIGOR AND ETHICS

Four strategies to ensure trustworthiness according to Guba's Model of trustworthiness were applied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 139-164). These include: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

5.3.1 Strategies to ensure rigor

5.3.1.1 Credibility (*Truth value*)

The credibility criteria involve establishing that the results of qualitative research are believable from the participants' points of view. As previously mentioned, the purpose of qualitative research is to explain or understand the phenomena of interest from the eyes of the participant.

Credibility for this research study was accomplished by means of triangulation, prolonged engagement and member checking. Triangulation was achieved by gathering data through (a) focus groups, (b) naïve sketches and (c) by using a co-coder. After each question in the focus group was discussed, a summary of what was said was delivered and a collective answer was reached by all the participants. A co-coder was used in order to ensure that the data collected was coded correctly and that the correct themes were selected. Naïve sketches were used in combination with focus groups to ensure that the data obtained in the naïve sketches correlated with the data obtained from the focus groups. This was done to ensure that the data collected for this study was in fact saturated.

5.3.1.2 Transferability (*applicability*)

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative perspective, the transfer of the research findings is the responsibility of the person doing the generalizing. The researcher enhanced the transferability of the findings by describing the research and the assumptions thoroughly.

5.3.1.3 Dependability (consistency)

Dependability highlights the need for the researcher to account for the increasingly altering environment within which research takes place. The researcher used the exact same methods and procedures in each focus group and all the data from the focus groups and the naive sketches were coded and analysed in the same way.

5.3.1.4 Conformability (neutrality)

Conformability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or substantiated by others. Conformability was achieved by means of triangulation (gathering data through (a) focus groups, (b) naïve sketches and (c) by using a co-coder).

The appropriate ethical strategies relevant to this research study's context and design were applied throughout the duration of this research study. These include: respect for persons, beneficence and justice. These are internationally agreed upon ethical principles as stipulated by the Belmont Report (Amdur, 2003: 23-31).

5.3.2 Ethical strategies

5.3.2.1 Respect for persons

The first ethical principle relevant for this research study is respect for persons. Respect for persons focused mainly on ensuring participants' rights to independence and self-rule in the research process (Amdur, 2003: 25). The participants were personally invited to partake in the research by the researcher. Voluntary participation was stipulated in the letters of consent (Annexure A). Participants were informed that they could leave from the research process at any time without fear of ill-treatment. Voluntary participation was further emphasized during the initial contact with the participants at beginning of the focus groups. The letters of consent included the following information, namely:

- title of the research study
- purpose and objectives of the research study
- proposed research methods and procedures
- the way in which the results will be utilised
- participants right to terminate their participation without being penalised
- measures that would be applied to ensure confidentiality and anonymity

5.3.2.2 *Beneficence*

A second ethical principle closely linked with qualitative research is beneficence--doing something good for others and avoiding any harm to them. According to Amdur (2003: 29): “Do to others as you would have them do to you”. Participants were told how the results will be published. Quotations or other data from the participants, even though anonymous, could reveal their identity; however the participants had the option to agree/disagree to the following in the consent form:

- I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published (I remain anonymous) or if a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
- I agree that the other participants can see or hear me and call me by my name as stated on my label.

5.3.2.3 *Justice*

Justice refers to the distribution of risk to the society, implying that the selection of participants should not be biased in terms of classes or types of individuals (Amdur, 2003: 30). Participants were purposively selected as discussed in section 5.2.7.

Even though some sources used in this research study are comparatively old, they are still relevant because they are classified as classical sources and are from the original authors of the text and/or techniques.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The opinions of many outside the chosen participants were not represented. Future research could therefore aim to identify a more representative sample of South Africans from all walks of life. Similarly, the sample was primarily taken from those living in Tshwane, and thus it was not geographically representative. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it was not the goal to be representative; however the goal was for other researchers to be able to transfer the findings.

5.5 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the marketing research process to be followed was discussed together with the appropriate methods and procedures used from this particular research study. In order to produce high-quality research data, Guba's Model of trustworthiness was applied. The next chapter will contain the analysis and the interpretation of the data, together with an evaluation of the study's objectives as stipulated in chapter 1.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the results of the explorative study commenced in chapter 5. The findings that were obtained are discussed in a clear and meaningful way in order to answer the objectives of this research study as outlined in chapter 1. Quotes from the focus groups are used in order to validate the findings of the research.

6.2 RESEARCH TERMS

Throughout this chapter, various research terms are used that are discussed in detail in chapter 5. To facilitate the reader, the important research terms will now be revised in short.

- **Focus group:** A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are asked about their perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept or idea (Zikmund & Babin, 2010: 141-149). Questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to talk with other group members. This research study comprised out of two focus groups, where each focus group had eight participants. Please refer back to chapter 5 for the full discussion.
- **Naive sketch:** A naïve sketch can be seen as an approach that provides mute evidence of an experience (Hodder, 1994: 703- 716). Simply put, a naïve sketch is an open-ended questionnaire that asks participants questions relating to the study at hand. For the purpose of this study, the same structured questions that were used for the focus groups were used in the naive sketch:

1. What do you think about visual merchandising displays? (Primary objective--to determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer perceptions)
 2. When you walk into a clothing store, what do you notice about the visual merchandising displays? (Secondary objective 1--to determine to what extent the consumers' notice the visual merchandising displays presented in stores)
 3. What aspects about visual merchandising displays are important to you? (Secondary objective 2--to determine what aspects of visual merchandising displays are important to consumers)
 4. Do the visual merchandising displays of a store have an effect on your buying decision? (Secondary objective 3)
- Thematic analysis: Thematic analysis is an exercise in qualitative research which involves searching through qualitative data to identify any repeated patterns (Tesch, 1990: 113). These patterns are then sorted into themes and categories. It is a process that organises and describes data in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82).
 - Theme: A theme is a cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings and usually emerges through the inductive analytic process which characterises the qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 82).
 - Category: A category is a class or group of things, ideas, people, emotions, beliefs and more, which has some quality or qualities in common (Gilmour, 2010: 40).

In order to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the process of explaining the results that follows, a brief description of the thematic analysis process is provided below (Cresswell, 1994: 154-155; Merriam, 2002: 3-17 & Tesch, 1990: 113):

1. The researcher formulated a sense of the storyline by reading through the transcriptions and naïve sketches. In the first step the researcher wrote down ideas as they came to mind.
2. By focusing on the underlying meaning of the text, the researcher wrote down the thoughts in the margin. Repetition of this process was followed throughout all generated data. As there was transition from one topic to another, the researcher distinguished content from topic. Identified topics were then written in the margin of the document.
3. As topics emerged, these were written down in the margin, clustering similar topics together. A connection was made between similar topics by using highlighters. Topics that were highlighted with the same colour were clustered together. All topics were arranged into columns on one sheet of paper, one column per each data document. The best fitting name that captured the substance was chosen for the clustered topics. These topics were then further arranged as major topic, unique topics and leftovers.
4. The clustered major topics as well as the unique topics were abbreviated as codes. These codes were written next to the appropriate segment of the text. This process indicated how well the topic descriptions corresponded with what was found in the data. It also led to the discovery of new topics that were not previously identified.
5. The most descriptive wording for the topics was found and the topics were turned into themes and categories. Coding refers to the process whereby data will be divided into finer parts, conceptualized in a new way.

In the next section, the research question is revised.

6.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this study was to explore consumers' behaviour with the focus on consumers' perceptions towards visual merchandising displays in the South African apparel retail industry, with the purpose of providing the apparel retailers in

Tshwane with the necessary knowledge regarding the visual merchandising displays used in store.

The primary research question pending from for the preliminary literature was therefore as follows: How can insight into the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer perceptions inform knowledge in apparel retail?

The primary and secondary research objectives are reviewed in the following section.

6.4 THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

6.4.1 Primary objective

- To determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumers' perceptions.

6.4.2 Secondary objectives

- To determine to what extent consumers' notice the visual merchandising displays presented in stores.
- To determine the important aspects of visual merchandising displays to consumers.
- To determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer behaviour.

This research study acquired a consumer response centred approach to visual merchandising display stimuli in an attempt to consider this area of retail concern in a holistic manner.

The use of pre-testing is discussed subsequently.

6.5 PRE-TESTING

In order to determine the effectiveness of a questionnaire, it was necessary to pre-test it. Pretesting is useful in aiding the researcher to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the questions concerning question format, wording and order. Pre-testing usually begins after a first draft of the questions has been developed. It can be done several times during the development process as the researcher refines and revises each draft. Pre-testing ends when the researcher is satisfied that the target audience understands the questions correctly (Tustin *et al.*, 2005: 413).

For this research study, pre-testing was done by using the naïve sketches. Five participants were asked to complete the naïve sketch where after the researcher analysed the answers. During the pre-testing of the naïve sketches it was apparent that the participants misinterpreted the concept of “visual merchandising display”. Many participants were of the opinion that mannequins and actual clothing on the mannequins was the visual merchandising displays. This might have created an impression that visual merchandising displays are not noticeable or important to a store as participants rarely noticed or referred to them. It was therefore decided to explain the concept of visual merchandising displays to the participants more effectively by means of photos and verbal discussions.

6.6 THE DYNAMICS OF THE FOCUS GROUP AND NAÏVE SKETCHES

It was clear from the naïve sketches that many of the participants did not fully understand what visual merchandising displays were and therefore misunderstood the context of the questions. Many participants thought that mannequins and actual clothing on the mannequins was the visual merchandising displays. This might have created an impression that visual merchandising displays are not noticeable or important to a store as participants rarely noticed or referred to them. They gave more importance to the mannequins and how they portrayed the store’s brand, merchandise and the quality of that merchandise.

There were some disagreements between participants about the main concepts. The focus groups were only continued when all the participants agreed that they had a clear understanding of the concepts. Interaction between the participants was free flowing in both the focus groups.

In the next section, the central theme of the results is discussed, where after the outcome (findings) of the primary and secondary objectives are examined in terms of four main themes and their underlying categories as outlined by Tesch's model (thematic analysis)--and as explained in chapter 5--with quotes from the focus groups to validate the findings.

6.7 FINDINGS

6.7.1 The central theme

Participants' perceptions of the impact of visual merchandising displays on their buying behaviour varied as evidenced by their attention or lack of interest to visual merchandising displays when they first walked into a store. A prominent visual stimulant and important aspect of visual merchandising that was identified by participants was colour.

Other important aspects of visual merchandising that were identified were positioning of displays and the use of space, lighting, and the neatness of displays. Emotional responses to the visual merchandising displays ranged from feeling overwhelmed, as well as experiencing extreme irritation or feelings of calmness and relaxation.

Perceptions of visual merchandising displays that were identified were subliminal in creating an interest and desire to further peruse the merchandise and aesthetically to beautify the store as well as to add to the character of the store. Participants expressed that the impact that visual merchandising displays had on their buying decision depended on personal preferences.

A discussion on the four main themes and their underlying categories follows.

6.7.2 Themes and categories

Theme 1: Participants perceived visual merchandising displays as a tool that creates a “purchasing” context that adds to the retail experience.

Theme 1 connects with the primary objective of this research study: To determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumers’ perceptions. The participants expressed that the visual merchandising displays *enhanced their buying experience in subliminal ways through the beautifying of the store and by creating a relaxed environment to shop in*. The participants also stated that the *displays contributed to the image of a store through the quality of the product sold in store and the character of the store*.

The participants also stated that visual merchandising displays are viewed as a *promotional tool*, for example: to convey branding, the product, product information and product quality. The participants said that in order for the displays to attract attention, the displays should be *well designed*. If not, the displays only create irritation and it could be overbearing.

Four categories emerged from the first theme and are explained below. Quotes were taken from the focus groups to illustrate the participants’ views on the various categories of this theme/objective.

1.1 Visual merchandising displays enhance the consumers’ buying experience in subliminal ways:

1.1.1 It beautifies the store (including a colourful environment and decorative in nature)

The focus groups explained that although they participants did not always consciously notice the visual merchandising displays, the displays definitely aided

in contributing to a pleasant experience as the store was more beautiful with decorated displays.

- “And you go there for the nice experience...”
- “...the stuff high on the shelves or the pictures or box displays or whatever, I don’t really notice that although I think it does create an overall atmosphere in the store...”
- “...visual merchandising display actually plays an important role in attracting consumers...”
- “Creating interest and desire”

1.1.2 It creates a relaxed environment

The participants felt that a store with pleasing displays that were calming and well-designed enhanced the peaceful, relaxed atmosphere of a store. Even if the store did not offer the required product, participants still viewed the store as a haven of tranquillity that they could enjoy.

- “...I spend a lot of time in a store where I feel like WOW, this is the way I want to be, so I want to buy this, I want to spend time in the store because it creates that feeling...”

1.2 Visual merchandising displays contribute to the image of the store through:

1.2.1 The quality of the product sold

The quality of the product is inferred by the quality of the display as well as the quality of the materials used in the display.

- “And clothes are, I mean those posters, you can see from the material that they use for the posters, the kind of quality of the product, yes it communicates that...”

- “...and you go there and then you look at the jeans and say, gee, I want them, they are good quality...”

1.2.2 The character of the shop

The character of the shop is enhanced by visual merchandising displays.

- “...it creates a sense of belonging in the shop, like for instance Country Road, you feel that, ah gee, I belong here, you know, it’s warm, it’s inviting, it’s relaxing...”

1.3 Visual merchandising displays are viewed as a promotional tool (for example: branding, product, information and quality).

Many participants were of the opinion that the visual merchandising displays were part of the store’s product promotion strategy. Posters, mannequins, and clothes that are displayed in light boxes seem to affect the consumer, as the focus group explained that the participants thought that the reason these products were being promoted by these various displays was for the consumer to be enticed to buy them.

- “...they portray a lifestyle that you want or that you aspire to having and so that you go and you look at their clothes and you have seen the posters like Participant X said, so you know, I mean, just the way they market their brand, it just appeals to me anyway and clothes are, I mean those posters, you can see from the material that they use for the posters, the kind of quality of the product, yes it communicates that...”

1.4 Visual merchandising displays should be well designed to attract positive attention (if not, it creates “irritation” and could be “overbearing”).

The focus groups explained that in order to have a positive experience in a store, the visual merchandising displays should be well designed but should limit the amount of décor that is used in the display. Furthermore, the focus groups explained that when merchandise is moved or scattered regularly because the visual displays change, it causes irritation and negative feelings towards the store's ability to satisfy the consumers' needs. Spatial orientation and perfectly designed visual merchandising displays are definitely themes that affect the consumers' perception of the store.

- "...sometimes I do get irritated because I remember where something is and I come back and everything looks very different..."
- "It's just pure commercialising that they are trying to, I don't know what they are trying to manipulate us in a sense..."
- "...if you walk into a store and it is just like, glitter balls and you know, it doesn't mean anything, it's basically just splashed all over the place, it irritates me and I just feel, you know, I am getting out of this place now..."

Theme 2: Participants' perceptions of visual merchandising displays varied from person to person with emphasis on the subliminal nature of visual merchandising displays.

Theme 2 ties in with the following secondary objective: To determine to what extent the consumers' notice the visual merchandising displays presented in stores. Participants explained that visual merchandising displays are *mostly noticed in a subliminal way*, and that it *is influenced by personal preferences, contextual aspects such as themes, type of store and brand or branding, gender to some degree, and sensory and cognitive aspects*.

It appears that although the visual merchandising displays affect the consumers in terms of their total perception of the retail store, they are not completely reliant on the displays to make their purchasing decisions. In fact, if they are specifically shopping for a certain item, they may not even notice the displays unless the product they are searching for is, in fact, part of the display. These are all

mentioned in the following paragraphs together with quotes to verify the findings. Below are a few quotes taken from the focus groups to illustrate the participant's views on this objective.

- "...if I was a shopper per se, I don't think I would notice it, it would still be one of those things that I would notice if it was not there..."
- "...you will notice it subconsciously..."
- "I don't really think about these things, I don't think we walk into a shop and think actively about these things... this doesn't cross our minds... 90% of people don't even think about it..."
- "...if I am looking for something specific and that specific thing is in the display, then I will notice it, but not always..."

Four categories emerged from the second theme. These four categories are explained below. Quotes were taken from the focus groups to illustrate the participant's views on the various categories of this theme/objective.

2.1 Personal preferences

The theory as explained in chapter 3 points out that the consumers' perceptions of a store's environment depends on the consumers' shopping goals. When consumers are shopping for something that they deem as an unfulfilling mission, they prefer to be in a soothing and calming environment, however, if consumers are shopping for pleasure they prefer being in an exciting environment (Levi and Weitz, 2009:532).

Furthermore, the focus groups propounded the view that the after-purchase satisfaction is what often draws consumers back to a particular retail store, regardless of the visual merchandising displays. If the store fulfilled their shopping goals previously, they are also more likely to return. Similarly, no amount of great quality visual merchandising displays will draw consumers in if they have already decided that a particular store will not aid in fulfilling their shopping goals. The participant's responses supported this theory, and their responses were as follows:

- “That’s where people differ, I hate shopping, if I could go to a factory store and buy everything I need for the rest of the year in the one stop shop with nothing on the walls, no displays, nothing, jeans, shirts, I would go bang, bang, bang, thank you very much, I am out of there.”
- “That will absolutely not draw my attention, I wouldn’t even see the briefcase, I wouldn’t mind whether the briefcase is there or not there, makes no difference to me, if they don’t sell briefcases...”
- “...I always notice it, I kind of look for it when I go shopping...”
- “..there is like specific types of stores that I will always go in there because consistently they have visual merchandising and displays and stuff that I like and I identify with and then there are stores that I never go into because I never like it but then if, once in a while they have something that looks really WOW, then I will go in but, I mean, that is like 1% of the time, that I will go into that store because I have got set places that I like and where I go and then other places, I just block out because I don’t like the store, I don’t like anything about it then I don’t want to go in there...”
- “...once I buy in a specific section and I am happy with the product, I don’t care about the display, I go, I revisit the store just to see if they have new stock.”

2.2 Contextual aspects such as themes, type of store and brand or branding

A consumer will often notice a particular theme that is being conveyed through a visual merchandising display, and will appreciate the store’s attentiveness to social and environmental phenomena such as sporting events or seasonal changes. The focus groups also explained that they noticed ill-fitting themes in apparel retail stores, in terms of whether the items displayed are actually available in store, or whether it sends the correct message with the complement of the display.

- “...I also notice things that actually does not fit in with the store, you know like a bicycle, a mountain bike in the middle of Woolworths with a, you

know, that doesn't make sense so I then I will notice it quickly and especially if it doesn't fit in with the surroundings..."

- "When I walk into a store I also notice the theme, for example if its summer, spring, Christmas like you said or now with the Rugby World Cup, it's like Rugby everywhere, so a certain theme definitely comes through in the displays..."

2.3 Gender

The focus groups agreed that there are sharp differences between male and female apparel consumers, in that women are more attentive to the complete retail experience that includes visual merchandising displays. Comparatively, men search for markers in a store about where to find what they are looking for. For example, if a man is shopping for a suit, he searches objectively for visual clues that will point him in the direction of the suit section, not paying too much attention to the style or manner in which the suits are displayed.

- "...there is a clear distinction between the male shopper and the female shopper..."
- "...men, in the sense are a bit more, they don't really notice it, they are kind of like, oh, suit, okay I am buying that, whereas females, we like look around like, oh, you know that looks nice together, that poster portrays the image I want to kind of go for, whereas a guy would be like, I need shoes, okay, those ones are great, so I think it differs a lot..."
- "...it depends on the type of store."

2.4 Sensory and cognitive aspects (colour emerged as an important cognitive and sensory stimulus)

The focus groups commented that colourful visual merchandising displays positively attracted consumer attention. It was also noted that the focus groups

were very aware of colour displays that were realistic for the consumer, and not merely part of a fashionable display.

- “...if there is colour around the store, it attracts your eye.”
- “I like simple stuff, I like a bit of colour but I think they must keep it original realistic, not too weird stuff...”

Theme 3: Participants highlighted the importance of physical and sensory attributes of visual merchandising displays that facilitated subconscious perceptions to surface into conscious awareness and knowledge (cognitive process).

Theme 3 connects with the following secondary objective: To determine what aspects of visual merchandising displays are important to consumers. Participants communicated that *sensory and physical attributes* are important to them. Attributes such as *brightness, the size and height of displays, the suitability of the displays and the fact that the displays should be realistic and logical* were highlighted. They also mentioned that the *displays should complement the space* of the store. Another aspect that the participants highlighted was that visual merchandising displays should *give information about the merchandise* on display.

It was evident that visual merchandising displays should *provide context and cater for individual needs, by staying true to the brand image and by changing the displays regularly*. In other words, keep the displays up to date with the current trends and seasons.

Three categories emerged from the third theme. These three categories are explained below. Quotations were taken from the focus groups to illustrate the participant’s views on the various categories of this theme/objective.

3.1 Important sensory and physical attributes of visual merchandising displays include:

3.1.1 Brightness, size and height of the displays

The focus groups were more attentive to displays that were at eye-level, and that physically displayed the products that could be bought from the store by making use of mannequins or half-mannequins. Images, posters and pictures did not create the same interest and intention to purchase as the sensory experience then became one dimensional.

- “...maybe try to keep it to the eye level of your average height.”
- “Prefer physical display to images and pictures.”

3.1.2 Size and suitability of the displays

While the focus groups continuously agreed that the visual merchandising displays were useful, they were very intent on providing information about what aspects hindered the successful perception of a display. The majority of the focus groups explained that the display needed to remain secondary to the actual products that could be bought from the retail store. Furthermore, the participants were acutely aware of having enough space to move freely between apparel in store, therefore busy and extensive displays are not well received.

- “I don’t like being overpowered by the display--it should be for guidance and demonstration, not dominant”.
- “I had been or occasionally been given a fright by the props in the shops, especially when it’s very busy and you walk, not on the pathway, and you turn and suddenly there is this prop standing looking and you, oh sorry, oh sorry, it’s a prop, you feel so stupid speaking to the silly prop next to you not expecting it there...”
- “...the visual merchandising display should not detract from things like space, you should still have your space to walk around, it should not be in the way of me seeing the product...”
- “Organised and structured displays”

3.1.3 The displays should be logical and realistic

The visual merchandising displays are better received if they are logical and realistic for the consumer. A fanciful, elaborately fictional display, while beautiful for some consumers, would not attract others if it was out of context with the product offering.

- “...what I will notice, is if it’s out of context...”

3.1.4 The use of displays should complement the space of the store

The main concern that came from the participants of the focus groups was that visual merchandising displays should never be cluttered, but should always remain neat and well designed.

- “Don’t clutter”

3.2 The use of visual merchandising displays should provide information about the product and emphasise the merchandise on display:

The participants of the research study explained that visual merchandising displays should always strive to educate the consumer on the products and merchandise on offer. Whether it’s how to wear a scarf, or which leggings to pair with ankle boots, the display should empower and enlighten the consumer so that they are positively impacted to make a purchase decision.

- “Highlight the product on display”
- “Props and the fixtures must be complementary”
- “...make sure your products match your displays... the less confused the more simplistic the better so really decide on what you want to say and really match it to what you have to offer.”

3.3 Visual merchandising displays should provide context and cater for individual needs, by means of the following:

Providing information on the products in the store is an important outcome that should be realised by visual merchandising displays, in the opinion of the focus groups. However, the participants also feel that the displays should also seek to cater for individual needs. This should be done by focusing on the context of the display, as well as by ensuring that individual consumers will enjoy a display because of its texture, its dimensions, its colour and its décor.

- “Providing information about the product”
- “...if there is a context to the display, then definitely I will notice it and if there is no context obviously I would not consciously but it’s about subconsciously that I will notice it...”
- “...we look at the signage, the material that they use.”

3.3.1 Change it regularly; keep it up to date

All the participants of the focus groups agreed that visual merchandising displays need to be altered regularly in order to keep the atmosphere of the store fresh and vibrant and competitive. This will denote that new stock has arrived, or that new merchandise or products are on offer, creating more opportunities for the consumer to make a purchase decision.

- “...I do notice if they would change it continuously, you come to a specific Mall and you are there often, and you had this window being dressed say in pinks for a Lady’s Store, and suddenly it is in a total different colour, I notice it...”
- “Keep to the Brand, keep to the lifestyle, be neat, every second month, re-order it or replace it...”
- “...if they didn’t change the displays, they didn’t changed the products, so there is nothing new for me to see because it’s the old stock basically so you have seen the stock already so why are you going in again?”

3.3.2 Stay true to brand image

Consumers enjoy stores that have a strong but welcoming brand identity. It attracts loyalty and makes people feel comfortable with the quality and product offering that can be expected.

- “...the type of lifestyle, the type of person they are trying to attract or, then you know you obviously want to stay because you identify with the look and the feel that they are trying to create...”
- “...it’s buying the image; you are not buying the actual product.”
- “...stick true to your Brand image...”

Theme 4: Participants expressed varied views in terms of the effect of visual merchandising displays on their buying decisions based on personal preferences.

Theme 4 connects with the following secondary objective: To determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer behaviour. The participants explained that their *buying behaviour is influenced to a limited extent*. They continued to say that the visual merchandising displays *guides them in the direction of the products* they are seeking and that it *guides their product choice*. The participants agreed that their *buying behaviour is influenced on a subliminal level* based on the *quality* of the visual merchandising displays and their *personal preferences*, including *gender*.

Two categories emerged from the fourth theme. These two categories are explained below. Quotations were taken from the focus groups to illustrate the participant’s views on the various categories of this theme/objective.

4.1 Buying behaviour is influenced to a limited extent.

The focus groups found that visual merchandising displays aid in the final stages of decision making regarding the purchasing of a specific product. However, there are other factors like price that also affect the final decision.

- “...it does help with regard to final decision making...”
- “If I am happy with the visual merchandising display that can lead to me buying the specific product.”
- “...it won't be the display that makes my decision, it would be the price and the quality and the style, so it's, I only feel that the display will get my attention but will not necessarily have an action for it so, it will maybe create awareness and Brand recognition and stuff like that but not necessarily buying behaviour.”
- “I think it influences me to want it but I don't necessarily buy it.”

4.1.1 Guides in the direction of the products

When visual merchandising displays are well designed and logical, the participants tended to be attracted to the section of products that were emphasised in the display. This illustrates that visual merchandising displays influence buying behaviour.

- “...it draws me towards the section, to that specific section.”

4.1.2 Guides product choice

The participants explained that visual merchandising displays guide the consumers' choices regarding products. Should a consumer be searching for a pair of boots, and a specific pair is highlighted in a display, the consumer may be more inclined to select that pair of boots than another pair that were not part of the display, if the display resonated with the consumer's perceptions of a well-designed, logical display.

- “...it’s a selling method, the way to sell a product...”

4.2 Buying behaviour is influenced on a subliminal level based on:

4.2.1 The quality of the visual merchandising displays

The participants in the research study agreed that a visual merchandising display that is perceived to be of a superior quality has the ability to capture the positive buying behaviour of the consumer. However, if the display does not register as one of a superior quality for the consumer, it may create a negative perception of buying the product.

- “Good visual merchandising displays will create the right atmosphere and context for me to buy while bad visual merchandising displays will work against my purchasing the product in question”.

4.2.2 The personal preferences of the consumer, including gender

While the visual merchandising displays are useful in promoting certain products if the displays are well designed and logical, participants feel that there are so many personal preferences to take into account for the displays to have a lasting effect on every consumer. There are colours, textures, styles, décor, sizes, budgetary constraints, and a host of other personal preferences that will affect the buying behaviour of the consumer more than the visual merchandising display.

- “I don’t know if I say it necessarily influences my buying decision because my buying decision is based on the quality of the material, the design, the colour, the make of the product.”
- “I am going to say subconsciously, I don’t think I could consciously say that it does influence my, you know the normal Visual Merchandising, yes, but those additional displays, the pictures and stuff, if it is influencing me, its subconscious, it’s not a conscious.”

- “...it draws you to it but it’s not going to determine your ultimate buying behaviour, it’s like Participant X was saying, with the garnish or the visual merchandising that is placed there, it sets a scene for the product and it creates the excitement to actually go and see it but when you get there and say for instance, it depends on personal preference, if it fits you, if it is colourful, that will decide ultimately your buying decision whereas it’s just sort of an attention grabber and do you, don’t you want it, it’s not really the ultimate...”
- “Basically the impact that it has on us is to draw us to what that specific section, maybe if the display wasn’t there, maybe we wouldn’t even notice that specific section...”
- “...it will grab my attention but not necessarily influence my buying behaviour...”
- “...you will stay longer there in that might lead to further purchases...”
- “...if there is no sync between the context and the atmosphere being created by the Visual Merchandising Display then it’s going to work against me buying...”
- “If I am happy with the Visual Merchandising Display that can lead to me buying the specific product.”
- “...there are different perceptions but that Visual Merchandising Display actually has an important role to play in buying behaviour...”
- “...there is a distinction between men shoppers and women shoppers, because mostly here the men said, don’t really notice it however the women agreed that if it’s in a context of what they want to buy, they will notice it, Brian however said that he would notice it for instance if it is in his context.”

6.8 SUMMARY

The participants expressed that the visual merchandising displays enhanced their buying experience in subliminal ways through the beautifying of the store and by creating a relaxed environment to shop in. They also stated that the displays contributed to the image of a store through the quality of the product sold in store and the character of the store. Participants explained that visual merchandising

displays are mostly noticed in a subliminal way, and that it is influenced by personal preferences, contextual aspects such as themes, type of store and brand or branding, gender to some degree, and sensory and cognitive aspects.

Participants communicated that sensory and physical attributes are important to them. Attributes such as brightness, the size and height of displays, the suitability of the displays and the fact that the displays should be realistic and logical were emphasized. They also mentioned that the displays should complement the space of the store. Another aspect that the participants stressed was that visual merchandising displays should give information about the merchandise on display.

The participants explained that their buying behaviour is influenced to a limited extent. They continued to say that the visual merchandising displays guide them in the direction of the products they are seeking and that it guides their product choice. The participants agreed that their buying behaviour is influenced on a subliminal level based on the quality of the visual merchandising displays and their personal preferences, including gender.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter conclusions from the study are made and recommendations arising from the conclusions are presented. The study's contribution to the apparel retail industry is also discussed, together with the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

7.2 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

In summation, the conclusions of this study emanating from the objectives in chapter 1 are discussed. The objectives are identified and conclusions for each objective are made.

- For the first objective as outlined in chapter 1 and discussed in chapter 6 (to determine what effect visual merchandising displays has on consumer perceptions), the participant's perceptions of visual merchandising displays were subliminal (intense enough to influence the mental processes or behaviour of the consumer) in creating an interest and desire to further peruse the merchandise and aesthetically to beautify the store.

The perceptions of the participants indicated that the visual merchandising displays contributed to the image of the store and also added to the character of the store. Spatial orientation and perfectly designed visual merchandising displays are definitely themes that affect the consumers' perception of an apparel retail store.

Furthermore, consumers perceived visual merchandising displays as a tool to establish a 'purchasing' environment and as a vehicle to portray the brand of the store.

- The second objective as stated in chapter 1 and further discussed in chapter 6 (to determine to what extent consumers' notice the visual merchandising displays presented in stores), concluded that what is noticed by the consumers in terms of the visual merchandising displays are mostly below the threshold of consciousness, and it is influenced by personal preferences, contextual aspects such as themes, type of store and brand or branding, gender to some extent, quality of the visual merchandising display and sensory and cognitive aspects.

The research study suggests that women are more attentive to the complete retail experience which includes visual merchandising displays. In comparison, men search for signs in a store about where to find what they are looking for.

The focus groups also explained that they notice ill-fitting themes in apparel retail stores, in terms of whether the items displayed are actually available in store, or whether it sends the correct message with the complement of the display.

- The third objective as mentioned in chapter 1 and examined in chapter 6 (to determine what aspects of visual merchandising displays are important to consumers), identified that a prominent visual stimulant and important aspect of visual merchandising displays was colour, which creates visual attraction and stimulation.

Other important aspects of visual merchandising that were identified were the positioning of displays and the use of space, lighting as well as the neatness of displays. Another important aspect that was noted was that visual merchandising displays should provide information about the products sold in store.

It was also apparent that the visual merchandising displays should cater for individual needs. In addition, participants explained that by placing too many

diverse kinds of products in the same visual merchandising display area, a confusing display could be the result.

- For the fourth objective as stated in chapter 1 and reviewed in chapter 6 (to determine the effect of visual merchandising displays on consumer behaviour), the participants' perceptions of the impact of visual merchandising displays on their buying behaviour varied as evidenced by their attention or lack of interest to visual merchandising displays when they first walk into a store. Consumers' behaviour is influenced by a limited extent as visual merchandising displays guides consumers in the direction of the products as well as in product choice. Consumers' behaviour will also be influenced by their personal preferences and the quality of the displays.

It was noted in the focus groups that the consumers' attention is drawn to certain aspects (such as colour and breathing space in the store) of visual merchandising displays that creates a space where their shopping experience can be positive. The participants tended to be attracted to visual merchandising displays that are well designed and logical. This illustrates that visual merchandising displays influence buying behaviour.

- The theory, as explained in chapter 3 argues that the consumers' perceptions of a store's environment depends on the consumers' shopping goals. The focus groups seemed to submit to the view that the after-purchase satisfaction is what often draws consumers back to a particular retail store, regardless of the visual merchandising displays. Apparel retailers should realise that if a store fulfilled a consumer's shopping goals before, consumers are also more likely to return. Similarly, no amount of great quality visual merchandising displays will draw consumers in if they have already decided that a particular store will not aid in fulfilling their shopping goals.
- Furthermore, emotional responses to the visual merchandising displays ranged from feeling overwhelmed, to experiencing extreme irritation or feelings of calmness and relaxation. Participants expressed that the effect that visual

merchandising displays had on their buying decisions varied and depended mostly on their personal preferences. The participants also indicated that the visual merchandising displays influenced their buyer behaviour on a subliminal level, meaning that they could not produce a conscious awareness of the displays, but that these displays do evoke some form of response below the threshold of conscious perception.

7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings drawn in Chapter 6 and the conclusions derived from the findings above, various recommendations can be offered to apparel retailers located in Tshwane. These recommendations are:

- The participants mentioned that less is more; simplicity and clarity are better than ambiguity. Therefore apparel retailers should avoid surface clutter and should not overcrowd the space that is utilised for a display. Larger items have more impact than smaller items, however if small items are used they will require special treatment or they disappear in the overall display, or the display becomes cluttered.
- Objects (props) have more impact when they are displayed together. As a result, if objects are massed together they will create the impression of a collection and will not be viewed as cluttered if they were spread out individually.
- Scale is also very important. If apparel retailers want to showcase a small item, they should keep it in a smaller context. Apparel retailers could set it on a small shelf, a box or a decorative tray to create a focal point.
- The focus groups explained that in order to have a positive experience in an apparel retail store, the visual merchandising displays should be well designed but should limit the amount of décor and or props that are used in the display.

- Visual merchandising displays should focus on one product or a small family of products to avoid confusion. Products that are in high demand should be given priority in visual merchandising displays. Popular products will draw consumer attention and help to sell other items in and near the display. However, for the display to be effective, the high-revenue products should be the display's main focal point.
- Participants agreed that they all notice a particular theme that is conveyed through a visual merchandising display. For this reason apparel retailers should be attentive to social and environmental phenomena such as sporting events or seasonal changes and create visual merchandising displays according to these event or season changes.
- The visual merchandising displays used in apparel retail stores should communicate the correct messages to consumers, for example the personality of the brand, the season, the current trends, etc.
- Apparel retailers should keep the distinct differences between male and female consumers in mind when designing their visual merchandising displays, especially in men's retailer stores or in retail stores that have menswear departments.
- Colour displays that are realistic for the consumer and not simply part of a trendy display draws more attention than just using colour for the sake of colour.
- Physical attributes such as brightness; the size and height of displays, the suitability of the displays and the fact that the displays should be realistic and logical are important. The displays should complement the space of the store and the visual merchandising displays should provide information about the merchandise on display.

A far-fetched, richly imaginary display, while beautiful for some consumers, would not attract others if it was out of context with the product offering. Visual merchandising displays should always strive to educate the consumer about the products and merchandise on offer.

- Visual merchandising displays should provide context and cater for individual needs, by staying true to the brand image and by changing the displays regularly--once every 3 months, or together with changing of the seasons. The visual merchandising displays need to be altered regularly in order to keep the atmosphere of the store fresh, vibrant and competitive. This denotes that new stock has arrived, or that new merchandise or products are on offer, creating more opportunities for the consumer to make a purchase decision.
- It is suggested that apparel retailers should keep the visual merchandising displays secondary to the actual products that are sold in store. Busy and extensive displays are not well received by the consumers; therefore enough space to move around freely in the store is vital. The visual merchandising displays are better received if they are logical and realistic to the consumer.
- The visual merchandising displays can be used to communicate a store's brand identity. A strong brand identity creates loyalty and ensures that people feel comfortable with the quality and product offering that can be expected.
- The participants explained that visual merchandising displays guide the consumers' choices regarding products. Should a consumer be searching for a pair of boots, and a specific pair is highlighted in a display, the consumer may be more inclined to select that pair of boots than another pair that were not part of the display. Therefore apparel retailers should make use of their latest products in their displays.
- Apparel retailers should keep their visual merchandising displays neat and tidy at all times, and ensure that the displays does not impact on the breathing

space of the store. Therefore there should be a systematic structure and purpose for the display.

- Apparel retailers should use aspects such as brightness, size and height in their displays as consumers prefer physical displays to images and pictures. The displays should be kept realistic and logical and the props and fixtures used should complement the space of the store.
- Apparel retailers should use visual merchandising displays to enhance a shopper's experience by beautifying the store, to create a relaxed environment and to create interest and desire to enter the store. Visual merchandising could also be used as a tool to display the store's brand and to communicate information of the products as well as the quality of the products.
- Well designed visual merchandising displays will create the correct atmosphere and context for consumers to buy while bad visual merchandising displays will work against the decision to purchase the product in question. Consequently an attractive display will have an impact on a consumer's buying decision.
- Visual merchandising displays should be used to guide consumers in the direction of the products and to guide product choice.

The study's contribution to the South African retail industry is discussed in the following section.

7.4 THE STUDY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN RETAIL INDUSTRY

In order for apparel retail stores to survive and to be successful, it is important for them to understand how consumers behave in a buying situation (du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003: 7) and to deduce what their perceptions are regarding the visual merchandising displays.

The results of the study could benefit apparel retailers in Tshwane because a detailed exploration in terms of consumer perceptions towards visual merchandising displays and a discussion regarding the effect these displays have on consumer behaviour was completed. The apparel retailers in Tshwane can therefore apply these findings to their retail environments and create visual merchandising displays that will be of value to consumers, and that will encourage approach behaviour and ultimately lead to a consumer purchasing a product.

By applying the findings of the research, apparel retailers can now decrease the consumer's avoidance behaviour towards their store and the merchandise the store sells, thereby positively influencing the consumer's decision making to ultimately make a purchase.

The limitations of this research study are discussed next.

7.5 LIMITATIONS

The opinions of many individuals outside the chosen participants were not represented. Future research could therefore aim to identify a more diverse and representative sample of South Africans.

Similarly, the sample was primarily taken from those living in Tshwane, and thus it was not geographically representative. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it was not the goal to be representative; the goal was for other researchers to be able to transfer the findings. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the sample was nevertheless deemed adequate.

7.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings and the conclusions discussed above, various suggestions for future researchers can be offered. These suggestions are:

- From this research study it was clear that the respondents expressed behavioural responses to visual merchandising displays. An area that would benefit from more detailed exploration is the influence of visual merchandising displays on brand recognition and differentiation.
- Whilst it is clear that the respondents expressed both affective and behavioural responses towards visual merchandising displays, an interesting study would be to ascertain whether visual merchandising displays have the ability to act as an identifying factor, i.e.: whether consumers are able to identify a store by only looking at the visual merchandising displays.
- Although some consumers have a stronger preference to visit/shop at certain apparel retail stores, more research is required to determine whether this preference renders into repeat visits and possibly higher patronage of the stores. One has to keep in mind that improving a store's image to increase the number of consumers shopping in that store adds to the costs of operation and should be carefully evaluated against the profit objectives of the store. As a result, being or becoming the most favoured store does not automatically increase the profitability for the store.
- The exterior of a retail store is also an important variable when considering the store environment and atmosphere. The outside appearance of a store is the first thing a consumer sees and it must therefore also be acceptable. Research on the exterior of the building, its shape, characteristics, colours, architectural style and signage could provide a retail store with a competitive advantage over its rivals if the store can successfully attract consumers according to their perceptions.
- A stimulating study could test consumers' perceptions of two stores from the same chain that is located in different regional areas. The outcome could lead to thought-provoking insights regarding the effect of exterior variables on shopping behaviour.

- Store layout options could be observed to study the effects on the amount of time consumers spend in the store.
- Another inspiring study would be how the retail environment can be used as a segmentation tool. Previous research has shown that consumers of different ages respond in a different way to music in retail stores, where other segmentation variables also need to be studied to analyse whether it has a similar effect. For example, is there a gender difference in the perception of and response to certain atmospheric cues, such as colours, scents or music? We all know from walking through almost any shopping centre that retailers design their environments for their specific target markets; however the research could be elaborated to find ways to manipulate or develop the atmosphere to better appeal to the different target markets.

7.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter, conclusions from the study were made and recommendations arising from the conclusions were presented. The main conclusion derived from the study was that the participants' perceptions of visual merchandising displays were intense enough to influence the mental processes or behaviour of the consumer in creating an interest and desire to further peruse the merchandise and aesthetically to beautify the store. Crucial recommendations that were derived included that physical attributes and realistic and logical displays are important. Furthermore, visual merchandising displays should complement the space of the store and the visual merchandising displays should provide information about the merchandise on display.

It was suggested that apparel retailers should keep the visual merchandising displays secondary to the actual products that are sold in store. Busy and extensive displays are not well received by the consumers; therefore enough space to move around freely in the store is vital.

REFERENCES

About.com. *Types of retail locations*. 2011. [Online] Available from: http://retail.about.com/od/location/a/retail_location.htm [Accessed: 2011-04-15].

American Marketing Association, 2004. [Online] Available from: <http://www.marketingpower.com/AboutAMA/Pages/DefinitionofMarketing.aspx> [Accessed: 2012-02-22].

Amdur, R. J. 2003. *The institutional review board member handbook*. Massachusetts: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

Bell, J. & Ternus, K. 2006. *Silent selling*. 3rd ed. New York: Fairchild Publications.

Bhalla, S. & Anuraag, S. 2010. *Visual merchandising*. New Delhi: McGraw Hill.

Blythe, J. 2008. *Consumer behaviour*. London: Thomson.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3: 77-101.

Caelli, K., Lynne, R. & Mill, J. 2003. 'Clear as Mud': Toward greater clarity in generic qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative methods*, 2(2): 1-13.

Callahan, R. 2012. *Internal & External Factors of Consumer Behaviour*. [Online] Available from: http://www.ehow.com/list_6300760_internal-external-factors-consumer-behaviour.html#ixzz1mM75jbZahttp://www.ehow.com/list_6300760_internal-external-factors-consumer-behaviour.html#ixzz1mFo9PNEb. [Accessed: 2012-02-14].

Cant, M. 2010. *Introduction to retailing*. 2nd ed. Cape Town: Juta.

- Cant, M. C., Brink, A. & Brijball, S. 2006. *Consumer behaviour*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Cant, M. C., van Heerden, C. H. & Ngambi, H. C. 2010. *Marketing management: A South African Perspective*. Cape Town: Juta.
- Colborne, R. 1996. *Visual merchandising: The business of merchandising presentation*. United States of America: Thomson Learning Inc.
- Cooper, D.R. & Schindler, P.S. 2008. *Business research method*. 10th ed. Singapore: McGraw Hill.
- Cox, R. & Brittain, P. 2004. *Retailing: An introduction*. 5th ed. United Kingdom: Pearson Education.
- Cresswell, J. W. 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage publication.
- Diamond, E. 2006. *Fashion Retailing: A Multi-Channel Approach*. 2nd ed. New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- du Plessis, P. J. & Rousseau, G. G. 2003. *Buyer behaviour: A multi-cultural approach*. 3rd ed. South Africa: Oxford University Press.
- du Plessis, P. J. & Rousseau, G. G. 2007. *Buyer behaviour: Understanding consumer psychology and marketing*. 4th ed. South Africa: Oxford University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. 2005. *Qualitative research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.
- Easey, M. 2009. *Fashion marketing*. United Kingdom: Wiley Blackwell.

Edcon. 2010. *Annual report*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.edcon.co.za/Documents/AnnualResults/annual%20report2010.pdf> [Accessed: 2011-07-11].

Evans, M., Jamal, A. & Foxal, G. 2009. *Consumer behaviour*. 2nd ed. England: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Fletcher, M. T. 2011. *How Too Much Visual Merchandising Can Harm a Retail Store*. [Online] Available from: Ezine articles: <http://ezinearticles.com/?How-Too-Much-Visual-Merchandising-Can-Harm-a-Retail-Store&id=4409094> [Accessed: 2011-01-17].

Gillmour, L. 2010. *English Thesaurus*. Great Britain: Hyper Collins.

Gopalakrishnan, D., Sakthivel, S & Santhoshkumar, K. 2009. Fashion retailing: The link between manufacturing and consuming. *Textile Review*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.fibre2fashion.com/industry-article/22/2146/fashion-retailing-the-link-between-manufacturing-and-consuming1.asp> [Accessed: 2011-01-17].

Groeppel-Klein, A. 2005. Arousal and consumer in-store behaviour. *Brain research bulletin*, 67: 428-437.

Harry, S. 2004. *A short history of suburban retail*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.walkablestreets.com/box.htm> [Accessed: 2011-03-25].

Hodder, I. 1994. The interpretation of documents and material culture. In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (703-716). California: Sage Publications.

Huberman, A. M. & Miles, M.B. 1994. Data management and analysis methods. In Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (179-210). California: Sage Publications.

Ingrid Elisabeth Summers. 2010. [Online] Available from: <http://ingridelizabethsummers.blogspot.com/2010/09/menlyn-window-display-update.html> [Accessed: 2011-06-06].

Jang, S. S. & Namkung, Y. 2009. Perceived quality, emotions and behavioural intentions: Application of an extended mehrabian-russell model to restaurants. *Journal of Business Research*, 62: 451.

Kardes, F. R., Cline, T. W. & Cronley, M. L. 2011. *Consumer behaviour: Science and practice*. China: South-Western.

Kerfoot, S., Davies, B. & Ward, P. 2003. Visual merchandising and the creation of discernible retail brands. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 31(3):143-152.

Koekemoer, L. 2011. *Introduction to marketing communications*. Cape Town: Juta.

Krefting, L. 1991. Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 45(3): 1-19.

Kunz, G. I. 2010. *Merchandising: Theory, principles and practice*. 3rd ed. United States of America: Fairchild.

LaPerriere, J. & Christiansen, T. 2008. *Merchandising made simple*. United States of America: Library unlimited.

Levi, E. & Weitz, S. 2009. *Retailing management*. 7th ed. New York: McGraw Hill.

Lusch, R. F., Dunne, P. M. & Carver, J. R. 2011. *Introduction to retailing*. 7th ed. China: South Western.

Maier, R. 2010. *Visual merchandising with mannequins*. [Online] Available from: http://www.articlealley.com/article_490182_64.html [Accessed: 2011-01-18].

Marie, S. 2011. *A history of visual merchandising in retail stores*. [Online] Available from: <http://hubpages.com/hub/A-History-of-Visual-Merchandising-in-Retail-Stores> [Accessed: 2011-01-28].

Mathew, R. 2008. *Apparel Merchandising*. New Delhi: Book Enclave.

Mc Daniel, C. & Gates, R. 2001. 3rd ed. *Marketing research essentials*. United States of America: South Western.

Merriam, S. B. 2002. *Introduction to qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mittal, B., Holbrook, M. B., Raghbir, S. B. & Woodside, A. G. 2008. *Consumer behaviour*. China: Open Mentis.

Morgan, T. 2008. *Visual merchandising: Window and in-store displays for retail*. China: Laurence King.

Mr. Price Home. 2011. [Online] Available from: <http://www.mrpricehome.co.za/flash/2011WinterCatalogue/index.html> [Accessed: 2011-06-06].

Parumasur, S. B. & Roberts-Lombard, M. 2012. *Consumer behaviour*. 2nd ed. Cape Town: Juta.

Pegler, M. 2010. *Visual merchandising and display*. 5th ed. China: Fairchild publications.

Pradhan, S. 2008. *Retailing management*. 11th ed. India: McGraw Hill.

Pick 'n Pay. 2012. *Clothing*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.picknpay.co.za/picknpay/content/en/clothing> [Accessed: 2012/02/28].

Puccinelli, N. M., Goodstein, R. C., Grewal, D., Price, R., Raghurir, P. & Stewart, D. 2009. Consumer experience management in retailing: Understanding the buying process. *Journal of retailing*, 85(1): 15-30.

Racked. In the window. 2011. [Online] Available from: http://ny.racked.com/archives/categories/in_the_window.php?page=4. [Accessed: 2011-06-06].

Richardson, L. 2009. *History of fashion retailing*. [Online] Available from: http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/2388230/history_of_fashion_retailin_g.html?cat=46 [Accessed: 20100-02-02].

Sharma, A. & Stafford, T.F. 2000. The Effect of Retail Atmospherics on Consumers' Perceptions of Salespeople and Consumer Persuasion: An Empirical Investigation. *Journal of Business Research*, 49: 183–191.

Shiffman, L. G. & Kanuk, L. L. 2010. 10th ed. *Consumer behaviour*. New Jersey: Pearson.

Sign works. 2007. [Online] Available from: <http://www.signworks.ae/services-displays-store-window-displays.htm> [Accessed: 2011-06-06].

Statistics South Africa. 2005. Retail trade sales. *Statistical release P6242.1*. December. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Statistics South Africa. 2006. Retail trade sales. *Statistical release P6242.1*. February. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Statistics South Africa. 2009. Retail trade industry – 2009. *Statistical release P6201*. December. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Statistics South Africa. 2010a. *Concepts and Definitions for Statistics South Africa*. [Online] Available from:

http://www.statssa.gov.za/inside_statssa/standardisation/Concepts_and_Definitions_%20StatsSAV3.pdf [Accessed: 2011-07-06].

Statistics South Africa. 2010b. *Mbalo Brief – Educational article on retail trade*. [Online] Available from: Statistics South Africa: http://www.statssa.gov.za/newsletters/Mbalo_brief_December_2010.pdf [Accessed: 2011-02-25].

Statistics South Africa. 2011. Retail trade sales. *Statistical release P6242.1*. December. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.

Stent, V. 2001. *Retail history*. [Online] Available from: Ezine Articles: <http://ezinearticles.com/?Retail-History&id=25660> [Accessed: 2011-02-02].

Strydom, J. W. 2008. *The South African retail environment*. University of South Africa.

Strydom, J. W., Cant, M. C. & Jooste, C. J. 2004. *Marketing Management*. Cape Town: Juta.

Thanga, D. C. L. & Tanb, B. L. B. 2003. Linking consumer perception to preference of retail stores: an empirical assessment of the multi-attributes of store image. *Journal of retailing and consumer services*, 10: 193-200.

The window display blog. 2010. [Online] Available from: <http://thewindowdisplayblog.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/zara-airport.jpg> [Accessed: 2011-06-06].

Tesch, R. 1990. *Qualitative research analysis tapes and software tools*. New York: Wordsworth.

Trendland. 2011. [Online] Available from: <http://trendland.net/2010/03/25/alice-in-wonderland-window-display/> [Accessed: 2011-06-06].

Truworhts. *Unaudited group interim results*. 2010. [Online] Available from: <http://www.truworhts.co.za/assets/investor/2011/Final%20Web%20version.pdf> [Accessed: 2011-07-11].

Tullman, M., Clark, & R. Rose, K. 2004. Revitalizing visual merchandising. *Chain store age*, 80(7): 66-68.

Turley, L. W. & Ronald, E. M. 2000. Atmospheric effects on shopping behavior: A review of the experimental evidence. *Journal of business research*, 49: 193-211.

Tustin, D. H., Ligthelm, A., Martins, J. H. & Van Wyk, H De J. 2005. *Marketing research in practice*. South Africa: ABC Press.

Wellman, J. C. & Kruger, S. J. 2001. *Research methodology*. 2nd ed. South Africa: Oxford.

Wiid, J. A. & Diggines, C. 2009. *Marketing research*. South Africa: Print communication.

Ystats. 2010. *Global retail trends*. [Online] Available from: http://www.ystats.com/uploads/report_abstracts/773.pdf [Accessed: 2011-04-04].

Zikmund, G. & Babin, B. J. 2010. *Exploring marketing research*. 10th ed. China: South Western.

* Permission to use photos from Country Road stores – see Annexure F.

ANNEXURE A: SAMPLE OF CONSENT FORM

ANNEXURE B: FOCUS GROUP PHOTOGRAPHS

ANNEXURE C: SAMPLE OF NAÏVE SKETCH

ANNEXURE D: FOCUS GROUP AGENDA

ANNEXURE E: NAÏVE SKETCH CODING REPORT

ANNEXURE F: COUNTRY ROAD CONSENT