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A delineation of female customers' judgement of the customer service and consequent service quality of prominent clothing department stores in Tshwane

by

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A Grabowski

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Study leader: Prof Alet C Erasmus (University of Pretoria)

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation that I submitted for the degree Masters Consumer Science (Clothing Retail Management) of the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Andrea Grabowski

May 2010

ABSTRACT

A delineation of female customers' judgement of the customer service and consequent service quality of prominent clothing department stores in Tshwane

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So many new retail stores have opened their doors in recent years that many market areas appear to be over stored and poorly differentiated. The UK retail fashion environment is for example accused of selling masses of similar products in similar environments (Otieno, Harrow & Lea-Greenwood, 2005). Retailers thus need to reconsider their marketing strategies and have to find other ways than products and price categories to distinguish them from the rest and to gain a competitive edge in the market. Empirical evidence of consumers' judgement of the service offering in retail stores in emerging economies is limited. Studies done in terms of South African consumers' service quality judgments in supermarkets (Marx & Erasmus, 2006) and in appliance sales departments (Gothan & Erasmus, 2008) revealed specific shortcomings and concluded that efforts to improve service quality need to be designed with the product category and context in mind. This study addresses this need within the clothing retail context in the Tshwane municipal district, RSA to provide evidence of judgements in an emerging economy.

The survey involved 243 female consumers who completed a structured questionnaire that investigated consumers': (1) judgement of Customer Service (CS) in terms of tangible evidence of the service offering; (2) perception of Service Quality (SQ) by means of two different SQ instruments; (3) judgement of store prestige using the PRECON scale (Deeter-Schmelz, Moore,

Goebel & Solomon, 1995). Explorative factor analysis was used to summarize and reduce the data in terms of relevant dimensions of the respective measuring instruments and to determine the significance as well as the relative importance of the various dimensions of CS and SQ in the context of this research.

Findings revealed that female consumers, irrespective of age, mostly shop for clothing once per month. Factor analysis indicated that consumers' expectations of clothing retail stores are cognitively structured in terms of three elements of CS namely (1) PHYSICAL FACILITIES and PRODUCT PRESENTATION; (2) PERSONNEL; (3) STORE IMAGE and PROCESSES. In general, consumers' expectations of the three elements of CS that were identified in the context of this study are high. An investigation of the findings of both SQ judgements reiterates the importance of PERSONNEL in terms of consumers' judgement of SQ in clothing retail stores. The dimension SUPPORTIVENESS clearly indicates lacking interaction with personnel towards a hassle free shopping experience. Two additional dimensions of service quality that came to the fore are IMPRESSIVENESS and CONVENIENCE. Findings of this study coincides with the original Terblanche and Boshoff investigation, apart from the suggestion that the one dimension is re-labelled to better reflect the content and implication for SQ judgements.

This research revealed that in general, prestige related factors do not seem to be crucial in terms of consumers' patronage of clothing department stores. Store atmosphere seemed to be the only factor that consumers agreed upon as being important: uncertainty about the other factors related to store prestige indicated that prestige would not necessarily attract customers. It may be that prestige seeking consumers shop at other stores than department stores that were included in this research.

Recommendations are made to augment the service offering in clothing department stores in the RSA to meet consumers' expectations and to enhance perceived service quality in a highly competitive market place.

OPSOMMING

‘n Ondersoek na vroulike verbruikers se beoordeling van die klantediens en diensgehalte van vooraanstaande kleding afdelingswinkels in Tshwane

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So baie nuwe kleinhandelaars het die afgelope aantal jare tot die mark toegetree dat dit mag voorkom dat die mark oorvoorsien en swak gedifferensieer is. In die VK is die kleding modededryf selfs al daarvan beskuldig dat hulle massas van dieselfde produkte in omgewings verkoop wat baie min van mekaar verskil (Otieno, Harrow & Lea-Greenwood, 2005). Handelaars behoort dus hulle strategieë dus aan te pas sodat hulle produkte en pryse duideliker van mekaar onderskei kan word sodat hulle terselfdertyd meer kompetender kan wees. Empiriese bewys van verbruikers se indrukke van die dienslewering in die kleinhandel in ontwikkelende lande is beperk. Studies wat gedoen is oor Suid Afrikaanse verbruikers se indrukke van die diensgehalte in supermarkte (Marx & Erasmus, 2006) en in afdelingswinkels waar huishoudelike toestelle verkoop word (Gothan & Erasmus, 2008) het duidelike tekortkominge blootgelê: aanbevelings is gemaak dat pogings om dienslewering te verbeter, binne produkverband en binne ‘n bepaalde konteks aangespreek behoort te word. Hierdie studie fokus dus op verbruikers se indrukke van die dienslewering in die kleding kleinhandelomgewing in Tshwane, RSA as voorbeeld van die situasie in ‘n opkomende ekonomie.

‘n Opname het 243 vroulike verbruikers betrek wat ‘n gestruktureerde vraelys voltooi het wat ondersoek ingestel het na hulle: (1) verwagtinge van die dienslewering in winkels, spesifiek met

betrekking tot die tasbare elemente van dienslewering; (2) persepsie van die diensgehalte (nie - tasbare aspekte) deur middel van twee verskillende erkende instrumente; (3) indrukke van winkels se sogenaamde prestige (PRECON skaal: Deeter-Schmelz, Moore, Goebel & Solomon, 1995). Verkennende faktoranalise is gebruik om data te ontleed en om dit te hergroepeer in terme van relevante dimensies vir die onderskeie meetinstrumente sodat die betekenisvolheid en die relatiewe belangrikheid van die onderskeie elemente van dienslewering en diensgehalte in die konteks van hierdie navorsing beskryf kon word.

Resultate toon dat vroulike verbruikers, ongeag hulle ouderdom, meestal een keer per maand kledingaankope doen. Faktoranalise het getoon dat verbruikers se verwagtinge kognitief in terme van drie elemente van dienslewering gestruktureer is naamlik: (1) FISIESE OMGEWING en PRODUKVOORSTELLING; (2) PERSONEEL; (3) WINKELBEELD en PROSESSE. In die algemeen koester verbruikers hoë verwagtinge van al drie hierdie elemente van dienslewering. Resultate toon dat PERSONEEL baie belangrik is in terme van verbruikers se beoordeling van die dienslewering van kledinghandelaars. In terme van diensgehalte blyk daar gebrekkige interaksie tussen verbruikers en personeel in terme van kommervrye aankoopervarings (ONDERSTEUNING dimensie) te wees. Twee addisionele dimensies van diensgehalte wat onderskei is, is INDRUKWEKKENDHEID en GERIEF. Hierdie studie se bevindinge bevestig bevindinge in 'n vorige studie van Terblanche en Boshoff, behalwe dat 'een van die dimensies herbenoem is om die inhoud van die skaal beter te beskryf.

Hierdie navorsing toon dat prestige verwante faktore in die algemeen nie so belangrik is in terme van verbruikers se ondersteuning van kledinghandelaars nie. Winkelatmosfeer blyk die enigste faktor te wees wat verbruikers wel in ag neem: onsekerheid oor die ander prestige verwante faktore dui daarop dat dit nie 'n deurslaggewende rol speel in winkelkeuse nie. Dit mag wees dat verbruikers wat wel prestige bewus is, nie by die winkels koop wat in hierdie studie ingesluit is nie.

Aanbevelings word gemaak om die dienslewering van kleding kleinhandelaars in die RSA te verbeter sodat dit aan verbruikers se verwagtinge sal voldoen en om verbruikers se persepsie van die diensgehalte te verhoog in 'n hoogs kompeterende markomgewing.

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NOTIFICATION

Because of the sensitive nature of this research, the identities of the clothing department stores that were targeted in this research project namely EDGARS, FOSCHINI, STUTTAFORDS, TRUWORTHS, QUEENSPARK and WOOLWORTHS are protected through the use of codes in stead of their real identities throughout chapters 5 to 8 of the dissertation so that no inferences could be made to specific retailers in the end. The intention of this study has been to explicate consumers' expectations of the customer service and their consequent judgement of the service quality of South African clothing retail stores in general and was never intended to discriminate against, or to favour any of the above channels. The results could however be beneficial to all outlets in terms of eventual service quality and customer loyalty in South African clothing retail stores.



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THE STUDY IN PERSPECTIVE

This chapter sets the context for the research, demarcates the research problem and indicates how the dissertation is structured

1.1 THE CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

So many new retail stores have opened their doors in recent years that many market areas seem to be over stored (Lewison, 1997:40). Some for example claim that the UK retail fashion environment is a poorly differentiated segment that consists of a mass of similar products that are sold in similar environments (Birwistle, Clark and Freathy, 1999 in Otieno, Harrow & Lea-Greenwood, 2005:296). This may very well also apply to the South African market where a few large retailers such as Edgars, Foschini, Queenspark, Stuttafords, Truworths and Woolworths are dominating (Datamonitor, 2005:4). According to their websites, these channels all provide similar products and services and they serve similar market segments, namely consumers in the living standards measurement (LSM) groups 6 to 10 (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003:87; www.edgars.co.za; www.foschini.co.za; www.stuttafords.co.za; www.truworths.co.za; www.woolworths.co.za). Amongst these competitors the most successful stores would therefore obviously be ones that offer customer service (CS) that is perceived to be different or exceptional to that of their competitors (Lewison, 1997:40).

From a retailer's point of view stores thus need to reconsider their marketing strategies and find other ways besides products and price categories to distinguish them from the rest to gain a competitive edge in the market. It would for instance be important to know which elements of the CS offering are considered important for someone to patronise a store and/or to become store loyal. Consumers' perception of service quality is an important consideration: service quality (SQ), mostly refers to the intangible aspects of the service offering such as reliability, tangibility, responsiveness, empathy and assurance (according to

established SERVQUAL instruments), whereby a consumer discriminates between different stores' service offerings (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). SERVQUAL is an established way of determining and measuring consumers' perception of service quality in retail. This measurement was initially developed by Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml in 1985 and based on the attention given in academic and research journals, service quality *per se* is still a very relevant research topic. This can be due to its direct relationship with profitability, costs, customer satisfaction and loyalty as well implications in terms of positive word of mouth communication (Carrillat, Jaramillo & Mulki, 2007:473; Hutchinson, Li & Bai, 2007:245; Newman, 2001:127; Buttle, 1996:8).

According to Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) SERVQUAL "provides a basic skeleton" through its expectations/ perceptions format that includes statements for each of the five service quality dimensions that are included in the instrument/scale. The original SERVQUAL scale has however received a considerable amount of criticism over time despite it being one of the most frequently used and accepted means of measuring service quality. Many authors are of the opinion that the SERVQUAL scale was developed specifically for "pure" service organisations and it does not boast a large success rate with organizations that have a combined product and service offering. A prominent concern mentioned by Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996:3) is that the scale has not been successfully adapted to a specific retail setting, such as apparel retail. A major objection is that the five dimensions that were developed by Parasuraman and co-workers are not necessarily applicable in all service contexts. Buttle (1996:15) hence recommend for the skeleton of the scale (dimensions) to be adapted or supplemented to fit the characteristics or specific research needs of a particular organization. This is reiterated in a study done by Marx and Erasmus (2006) that investigated customers' service quality judgements in supermarkets in Pretoria, in Tshwane, South Africa; Gagliano and Hathcote's investigation (1994) of customers' expectations and perceptions in retail apparel speciality stores; Gothan and Erasmus' (2008) investigation of customers' perception of service quality in appliance stores. Using exploratory factor analysis, all of these studies concluded a reduction of the five dimensions of the original scale.

Even though Parasuraman *et al.* (1988), suggested that the SERVQUAL scale is universally applicable, it must be taken into consideration that most studies reported, actually applied the scale in a First-World context. Carrillat *et al.* (2007:474) for example cautions that

research is needed to access the appropriateness of the SERVQUAL scale, when it is used outside the USA because differences in national culture or language may require a modification of items and may create distortions in how respondents perceive the construct/s. Previous studies have indicated that consumers in Third-World countries evaluate stores differently to their First-World counterparts and are apparently more tolerant of poor service delivery because these consumers tend to be more forgiving of poor service delivery. They therefore tend to make positive SQ judgements despite awareness of shortcomings in the service offering (Greenland, Coshall & Combe, 2006:583; Malhotra, Ulgado, Agerwal & Baalbaki, 1994:8). Erasmus and Gothan (2008) consequently suggested that, in emerging economies such as South Africa, it would probably be easier for these consumers to express shortcomings in terms of tangible aspects of a service offering that are easier to define and therefore more useful and valid to investigate consumers' evaluation of the tangible elements of CS that are based on the marketing mix of the company (Jobber, 2010:302). These elements interactively represent the specific marketing strategies of a company and in terms of clothing retailers, the elements of CS refer to the *product, store environment (place), services (processes), price and store image* (Lewison, 1997: 11-25, 498, 507).

One of the main aims of a retailer is to ascertain store loyalty. A lot of effort is consequently made to implement marketing strategies that would ensure that they have a competitive advantage above other, similar channels in the market place (Morgan, 1996 and Mcquitty, 2000 in Tsiotsou, 2006:209). Store loyalty assumes customer satisfaction, which is accomplished when a store's service offering in terms of the interactive contribution of the various elements of the service offering meets or exceeds a customer's expectations (Lee & Johnson, 1997:26). Consumer satisfaction *per se* does however not necessarily mean that the service offering is good: lower expectations, lower involvement and ignorance may for example negatively affect consumers' expectations framework (Malhotra *et al.*, 1994:8). Consumers cognitively develop an established knowledge and expectation framework that is based on experience, attitude, norms, motivation and exposure with regard to a specific product or context, which dictates their buyer behaviour. In other words, it is the process whereby consumers attain the required knowledge and skills that are required to successfully function as consumers (consumer socialization) (Chan, 2006:125). Based on a lower expectations framework due to limited experience, consumers may thus indicate that

they are satisfied although the service offering is not necessarily optimal. From a retailers' point of view an indication of consumers' satisfaction with the CS may thus not necessarily provide evidence of how to augment the service offering and how to retain customers' loyalty and in turn remain competitive. A study of the individual elements of CS (more tangible elements of the service offering) and how they collectively contribute towards CS would be more valuable to discriminate specific problem areas and to obtain information regarding consumers' expectations of the specific elements of the CS offering so that shortcomings could be identified.

No empirical evidence exists to explain why certain consumers prefer certain clothing retailers. Recent research has indicated that more than 50% of consumers in the greater Pretoria¹ area in the RSA own more than four different store cards (Erasmus & Lebani, 2008), which suggests that consumers either find all stores acceptable or wish to shop around because no single store offers them the complete package that they expect. It may also indicate that certain, very specific elements of the service offering of the certain stores are preferred and therefore consumers are not necessarily loyal to one clothing retailer. In order to know how a store's CS can be improved to increase store loyalty, it is therefore necessary to investigate consumers' judgement of the CS of prominent clothing retailers in terms of their service offering as a whole as well as their offering of individual elements of CS and their interactive contribution towards the stores' eventual customer service. This evidence would be useful to identify shortcomings in the service delivery that could be augmented to meet or exceed consumers' expectations and to increase their return intentions.

When opting for a specific retail store, consumers may apply one of several decision making rules to decide which store to patronise and which not. The service offering of a specific store is judged in much the same way (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007:452). When a consumer applies a compensatory rule, it may implicate that certain shortcomings of a store, for example exorbitant prices, is overseen because the store offers very attractive store card facilities that make products more accessible (price is therefore compensated for by processes) (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007:453). A non-compensatory rule, on the other hand, implies that the availability of a store card will – in a consumer's mind - not compensate for

¹ Pretoria is part of the greater municipal area that is called Tshwane

high prices and that she would then rather shop elsewhere (favourable processes therefore do not compensate for unacceptable prices because consumers apply a specific minimum acceptable cut off point for price). Similarly a consumer may not patronise a store if the salespeople are perceived to be rude or when fitting facilities are inadequate or unacceptable, even if all the other elements of the service offering are judged favourably (i.e. other elements of the marketing mix, although acceptable, can not compensate for the negative judgement of personnel and physical facilities) (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007:452). Evidence of the many store cards owned by consumers suggests that one of the non-compensatory rules may be applied when consumers embark on shopping trips to purchase clothing.

1.2 CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

Empirical evidence of consumers' judgement of the service offering in clothing retail stores in South Africa is limited. Studies done by other researchers in terms of RSA consumers' service quality judgements in supermarkets (Marx & Erasmus, 2006) and in appliance sales departments (Gothan & Erasmus, 2008) revealed unique and very specific shortcomings in the service offering for those contexts and the findings were brought to the attention of retailers. These studies concluded that efforts to improve service quality need to be designed with the product in mind and that the findings of service quality investigations in retail cannot be generalised across different product categories and contexts. Efforts to encourage purchase behaviour and store loyalty can be very costly and should therefore be based on relevant information to optimise efforts and money spent. Evidence of consumers' expectations of the service delivery in clothing retail stores and their perception of the service quality as it is at present, would be useful for those in managerial positions in retail. Findings could be useful to augment the service offering of clothing retail stores to enhance positive shopping experiences, even more so in the present tight economic climate. Existing textbooks and theories are mainly based upon evidence in First-World contexts that do not necessarily apply to the South African situation, which represents a transitional economy (Imrie, Cadogen & McNoughton, 2002:10). Terblanche and Boshoff's report (2003) on the service quality of clothing retail stores in South Africa was done from a marketing point of view, without inputs of specialists in the clothing field. As such, the conceptualisation of

service quality, i.e. the discriminators that were used to describe the clothing retail environment seem lacking. This study aims to address this shortcoming.

An increasing number of graduates in Consumer Science enter the clothing retail industry every year and fill managerial positions in prominent clothing retail channels within a relatively short period of time. An improved understanding of customers' perception of the service quality in clothing retail stores would be useful in terms of their training as well as their potential contribution when they pursue careers in this highly competitive environment.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Similarity is very common amongst clothing retailers throughout the world: retailers offer similar products in similar environments, often right next to one another in major shopping centres. Unless retailers differentiate themselves through their service offering so that customers can distinguish one from the other, retailers may find it difficult or even impossible to gain a competitive advantage in the market place and to foster store loyalty. Given this similarity, one inevitably wonders why some consumers prefer to shop at certain retailers and which elements of the service offering of a clothing retailer are highly important or even crucial during a consumer's decision to patronise and/or to be loyal to specific clothing retailers. Are consumers for example lured by an impressive product assortment or supportive personnel (as seems the case in supermarkets) and how do the various elements of customer service (CS) interactively contribute to consumers' eventual judgement of a clothing retail store's service offering? Evidence indicates that consumers' evaluation of a store's CS as a whole (i.e. calculating a mean score for a store's presentation of all the various elements of CS), does not necessarily identify shortcomings with respect to a store's presentation of specific elements of CS (Marx & Erasmus, 2006; Gothan & Erasmus, 2008). While a mean score gives an indication of customers' overall judgement (positive or negative) of the service offering, shortcomings will only be revealed if CS is examined in terms of consumers' expectations of the service offering as well as the significance of individual elements of CS and their interactive contribution towards the service that is offered. A delineation of the pertinence of specific elements of customer service and an

understanding of a possible hierarchy of the elements that are involved in CS will therefore be useful to identify specific shortcomings in the service offering of prominent clothing retail stores. This information would be useful to structure efforts to enhance consumers' perception of the service quality (SQ) in clothing retail stores, which is much more difficult to address directly because SQ, the construct, is mostly based on intangibles. In addition, an understanding of the importance of store image on consumers' patronage of clothing retail stores would also be useful towards clothing retailers' efforts to attract and retain customers. Nothing of the kind has been done in terms of clothing retail in the RSA to date.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions directed this research:

- 1. What are female consumers' expectations of the service offering/customer service (CS) of established clothing department stores in Tshwane, South Africa?*
- 2. How do female consumers perceive the service quality (SQ) of established clothing department stores in Tshwane, South Africa?*
- 3. How important is store image in terms of consumers' patronage of clothing retail stores in Pretoria, South Africa?*
- 4. What amendments are required in the service offering (CS) in clothing department stores to augment the service offering, i.e. to enhance service quality (SQ) to the benefit of all?*

1.5 AIM AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

1.5.1 Aim of the research

The research investigates female consumers'² expectations of the service offering (CS) and their perception of the service quality (SQ) of specific prominent clothing department stores in Tshwane, RSA as well as their regard for the prestige associated with clothing retail stores in order to identify possible incongruence (in terms of what is expected of the CS and perceived in terms of SQ) that could be used to formulate recommendations on how the service offering could be augmented to the benefit of all.

1.5.2 Research objectives

The following objectives directed the research design and methodology and specifically focussed on *female consumers* and *clothing department stores*:

1. In terms of the Customer Service (CS) of selected prominent clothing department³ stores:

1.1 to investigate and describe female consumers' expectations of the CS (in its entirety) in these stores;

1.2 to investigate and describe female consumers' expectations of CS in these stores in terms of the individual elements of CS;

1.3 to identify shortcomings in the service offering that need to be attended to, to augment the CS in terms of what consumers hope to find when they patronise clothing department stores.

2. In terms of the Service Quality (SQ) of the selected prominent clothing department stores:

² The study evolves around **female consumers'** expectations and perceptions of selected prominent clothing retail stores in Tshwane, RSA. In the rest of this document, "consumers" will thus imply "female consumers", unless specified otherwise.

³ This research specifically investigated prominent **clothing department stores**. These are however sometimes referred to as **prominent clothing retail stores** in this document



2.1 to investigate and describe female consumers' perception of the SQ (in its entirety) in these stores;

2.2 to investigate and describe female consumers' perception of the individual dimensions of SQ in these stores;

2.3 to identify and describe shortcomings in the SQ in these stores (in terms of SQ in its entirety as well as specific dimensions of SQ) that could be attended to, to augment the service offering.

3. To investigate and describe the significance of prestige related attributes as a possible influence on consumers' preference for, and patronage of clothing retail stores.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research is positivistic and empirical in kind. The survey involved the use of a structured questionnaire that relied on existing scales and quantifiable data, i.e. a quantitative approach (Babbie & Mouton, 1998:27, 75; McDaniel & Gates, 2004:30-32). Primary data was collected from a convenient, yet purposively selected sample (McDaniel & Gates, 2004:24). The cross-sectional study reflects the situation in an emerging economy at a specific period in time. Specific phenomena were investigated through a deductive approach that involved an investigation of extant literature that is mostly based on conditions in developed First-World countries, with the intention to interpret and describe findings in a specific context in an emerging economy (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:183).

The sample framework consisted of all the female consumers in Tshwane, RSA that patronise all or certain of the selected clothing department stores, i.e. prominent established clothing retail stores (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003:87). Convenience sampling was used to purposively recruit willing female customers that met the selection criteria in terms of gender, geographic location and buying behaviour. Five well-trained field workers assisted with data collection during October to November 2008 by means of a drop-down-collect-later procedure.

The structured questionnaire contained five sections that involved close-ended questions that mainly requested responses to Likert-type scales that were formulated in English as well as Afrikaans to enable respondents the option to respond in the language they were more comfortable with.

1.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive as well as inferential statistics were used to present the findings. Frequencies, means and percentage distributions were calculated. Where relevant in terms of the comprehension of the findings, results are offered in the form of tables and graphs. Exploratory factor analysis, an inter dependence technique, was used to investigate and possibly reduce the dimensions of established instruments to be more relevant in the context of the study (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 1997). Established measuring instruments were then used to determine the significance as well as the relative importance of the various elements/ dimensions of the Customer Service, Service Quality and PRECON prestige scales in the context of this study (Cooper & Schindler, 1998:560).

1.8 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The systems theory was chosen as theoretical framework because it allowed a study of CS and SQ as entire entities as well as the various elements/dimensions they comprise of in terms of the sequence, relationship and interdependency of the various elements/dimensions and how they contribute to the eventual service offering in a clothing department store. The general systems theory is based on structural functionalism, i.e. structure and order (Sirgy, 1984 in Johnson, Tsiros & Lancioni, 1995:8); enables the generalization of behavioural principles across various organizations and disciplines; postulates that a larger system comprises of various sub-systems (Johnson *et al.*, 1995:8).

1.9 PRESENTATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is presented in eight chapters that address the following:

Chapter 1 introduces the research by setting the context for the study. It demarcates the research problem and indicates how the dissertation is structured.

Chapter 2 introduces the apparel industry in South Africa, describes the highly competitive landscape in which clothing retailers operate and highlights specific challenges and limitations they are confronted with.

Chapter 3 provides theoretical background on customer service, service quality and store prestige and indicates how these constructs were conceptualised for the conceptual framework of the study.

Chapter 4 introduces the systems framework that was used as the theoretical perspective for the organisation of relevant literature, compilation of the conceptual framework, research design and the eventual discussion of the findings.

Chapter 5 explicates the research design and the methodology in accordance with the objectives that were formulated for the research.

Chapter 6 presents the results in terms of relevant tables and figures as well as an interpretation of the findings in accordance with the objectives of the study.

Chapter 7 presents a discussion of the findings in terms of implications for the customer service and service quality judgements for selected clothing department stores with specific reference to consumers' judgements and perceptions of the service offering at present.

Chapter 8 introduces the limitations of the research as well as suggestions for further research.



APPAREL RETAILING IN PERSPECTIVE

This chapter introduces the apparel industry in South Africa, describes the highly competitive landscape in which clothing retailers operate and highlights specific challenges and limitations they are confronted with

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Retailing has undergone various changes in recent years. Because consumers have become more informed and discerning, retailers find it more and more difficult to “satisfy” their customers. They in fact almost need to perform beyond consumers’ expectations to build customer loyalty to survive (McCarthy, 1997:5; Linton, 1993:2). Success no longer only relies on exceptional product quality: all elements of a retailer’s customer service (CS), i.e. a service offering which is designed in terms of the retailer’s marketing mix, now have to be attended to very cautiously (McCarthy, 1997:5).

2.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN RETAIL ENVIRONMENT IN PERSPECTIVE

2.2.1 Introduction

The clothing retail industry in South Africa has a long and colourful history. Clothing retail stores are more established in certain areas of South Africa, namely the Western Cape, the Free State, Kwazulu Natal and Gauteng (Vlok, 2006:227). In recent years the clothing and textile industry has contributed billions of rands into the local economy but the majority of clothing sales are still local. In 2004 less than 10% of clothing sales was based on exports. Clothing retailers are key players in the value chain, as is the case in developed countries (Vlok, 2006:228). Many clothing companies that partake in the RSA clothing retail scene form part of the informal sector but it is estimated that there are approximately 2,000 registered clothing, textile, foot wear and leather organisations operating in South Africa. Of

these, five retailers contribute approximately 70% of the total clothing retail sales of the country (Vlok, 2006:229).

Studies done over a five year period between 1999 and 2003 in South Africa revealed that the market for clothing, textiles and footwear excelled during the period. Sales in women's clothing for example increased by 40% during the time, thus establishing itself as a very lucrative market. This increase in sales has however not affected the local clothing manufacturing industry positively. Quite the opposite occurred as the level of employment in the clothing industry dropped and the output of these organisations subsequently declined (Vlok, 2006:231) mainly due to an increase in imports from China. Between 2002 and 2004 clothing imports from China increased by 335%, eventually contributing 85% of the total clothing imports to South Africa. China has subsequently become the number one clothing importer to South Africa and at present dominates the clothing imports to our country (Vlok, 2006:234). Clothing retailers favour imports from China because of products' low cost prices that allow them to add higher margins and to increase their profits.

Table 2.1 illustrates the increase in large clothing retailers' profits between 2002 and 2005 (Vlok, 2006:240).

TABLE 2.1: RETAILERS' PROFITS BEFORE TAX: 2002 to 2005

	2002	2003	%	2004	%	2005	%
	(R MILLION)		increase	(R MILLION)	increase	(R MILLION)	increase
			2002-3			2003-4	
Edcon	263	565	115%	1027	82%	1851	80%
Mr Price	193	256	33%	296	16%	411	39%
Foschini	283	513	81%	753	47%	1141	52%
Truworths	452	549	21%	761	39%	980	29%
Woolworths	599	778	30%	937	20%	1112	24%

Sources: Company Annual reports, 2002, 2003, 2004; Annual Results 2005 in Vlok, 2006:240

2.2.2 The retail industry signifies growth in society and the economic development within a country

It is hard to imagine modern society without retailers and retailing. In fact, “retailing is all around us” (Poloian, 2003:6). Retailing involves business activities that include a supply of physical products as well as services to consumers (Levy & Weitz, 2007:7). A retailer is any type of business that either sells products or services or both to their target consumers. Retail is the last step in the distribution channel and in so doing links manufacturers up with consumers (Cant, Strydom & Jooste, 2007:362; Levy & Weitz, 2007:7). Retailers in South Africa – as is the case elsewhere in the world - play an essential part in the growth of society and the satisfaction of their needs. The level of development of a country’s retail industry is indicative of the economic development within that country, which explains why empirical evidence that was gained in First-World economies are not necessarily relevant and applicable to Third-World contexts or situations in emerging economies. The retail situation in South Africa is positioned between that of a sophisticated First-World industry and that of less developed Third-World retailing industries, which presents various exciting opportunities but unfortunately also many threats that cannot be ignored (Cant *et al.*, 2007:362).

The South African clothing retail industry is extremely competitive because several retailers are competing for the business of the same group of consumers (Dickerson, 2003:116). Furthermore the retail industry and the environment within which they operate are changing rapidly (Cant, 2005:3). In sluggish economic times (as we have experienced in recent years); as a result of advances in technology and due to changing consumer needs, it is of the essence that retailers are more attentive of the value and the quality of their services in order to at least maintain their market share (Cant, 2005:3; Dickerson, 2003:116). Retailers agree that the last decade has been particularly tough and admit that many have lost their market share during the time (Dunn, 2000:9). The 2008 sales figures show that the total retail trade for the SA apparel retail industry ended up at R50.3 billion, indicating a year on year increase of between 7.4% and 8.6% since 2004 (www.statssa.co.za). At the end of November 2009, sales figures were however down by 6.1% compared to the same period

the previous year, which reiterates the importance of excellent customer service and service quality for survival in the market place.

2.2.3 The SA apparel retail industry

2.2.3.1 Market value of the SA apparel industry

The South African retail industry is a prospering one as its market share as well as sales has increased in recent years. Despite a trying economic climate the clothing retail industry grew by 7.4% in 2008 (Datamonitor, 2009). Table 2.1 illustrates the retail sales figures for 2004 to 2008.

TABLE 2.2: THE RSA APPAREL RETAIL INDUSTRY VALUE: 2004 – 2008 (\$ BILLION)

<u>Year</u>	<u>\$ billion</u>	<u>ZAR billion</u>	<u>% Growth</u>
2004	4.4	36.5	
2005	4.8	39.7	8.6
2006	5.2	43.2	8.8
2007	5.7	46.9	8.6
2008	6.1	50.3	7.4
2004 – 2008			8.3

Source: Datamonitor, 2009

2.2.3.2 Market value: mens-, ladies'-, childrens wear 2008

In 2008, sales in women's wear contributed to more than fifty percent of the overall clothing retail sales for the year in South Africa, which coincides with Frings' (2005:286) conclusions in an American context. Table 2.3 reflects the market contribution of different products with regards to clothing retail sales.

TABLE 2.3: SOUTH AFRICAN APPAREL MARKET SHARE IN 2008

Category	% Market share
Women's wear	50.7
Men's wear	28.3
Infants' wear	21.1

Source: Datamonitor, 2009

2.2.3.3 *The competitive clothing retail landscape*

The socio-political environment that provides the backdrop within which consumers operate, together with consumers' need for identity, social acceptance and individuality explain the need for clothing retailers in the lives of consumers (Datamonitor, 2009:10). At present, a few large organisations dominate the RSA clothing industry and their sales account for a significant portion of the total revenue sales of the country. Due to the size of these companies they benefit when purchasing products from suppliers. This gives them a price advantage over smaller counterparts, which discourages new entrants into the marketplace (Datamonitor, 2009:11).

2.2.3.4 *Leading role players in the clothing industry in South Africa*

To explain the prominence of the giants in the clothing retail industry in South Africa, two prominent role players are hence introduced:

The **Edcon group** is one of the prominent role players in South Africa that dominate the market. Edcon is a market leader and contributed 61% of the total retail sales in 2008. It comprises of stores operating as Boardmans, Edgars, Jet, Jet Mart, Legit, Prato, Red Square, Temptations, CNA, Discom, Blacksnow and Jet shoes (Datamonitor, 2009:13). One of the stores, Edgars, is prominent in almost every town and city in South Africa. It specifically operates department stores that cater for the middle to upper-income consumer groups. (Datamonitor, 2009:13).

The **Foschini group** offers products including clothing, foot wear, jewellery, sports wear, outdoor wear, cosmetics and home ware. The Foschini group comprises of stores operating as Markhams, Total sports, Due South, Exact!, Sportscene, American Swiss, Matrix, Sterns, @home, Foschini, Donna Claire, Fashion Express and Luella. The company sales for the Foschini group ended on R7, 668.7 million in 2008 (Datamonitor, 2009:16).

2.2.3.5 *Households' expenditure on clothing*

A survey investigating the earning and spending capacity of South Africans between 1995 and 2000 revealed that in general, consumers in the different expenditure quartile groups spent less in 2000 than they spent in 1999 (Lehohla, 2002: 55). In 1999, the average

proportion of income spent by households on clothing and foot wear in the RSA was 5%. In 2000, the figure fell to 4%. Clothing retailers are thus fighting for a smaller piece of the pie and therefore superior service quality and customer service is needed in order to survive.

2.2.4 Different types of retail stores

Per definition (Dickerson, 2003:421-440; Bell & Ternus, 2002:56) the different types of retail stores in South Africa include department stores, chain stores, discount stores, boutiques, speciality stores and so-called outlet stores. The South African apparel/clothing retail environment is largely dominated by a few major retail chains that are also classified as department stores (Dunne, 2000:5), i.e. fairly large stores that consist of various departments that specialise in specific product categories. These stores generally offer a large product assortment and provide for a diverse group of consumers. A chain store is classified as a retail organisation that controls and operates various branches of the same store across regions (Dickerson, 2003:421; Bell & Ternus, 2002:56). Clothing retailers that were selected for this study⁴ and which served as the platform for this investigation fall into the latter category.

TABLE 2.4: PROMINENT CLOTHING RETAIL CHAINS IN SOUTH AFRICA

GROUP	CHAIN
EDCON	Edgars
	Jet
	Legit
PEPCOR	Pep
	Ackermans
	Jay Jay's
INDEPENDENTS	Woolworths
	Truworths
	Queenspark
	Stuttafords
	Mr Price
FOSCHINI	Foschini
	Markhams
	Exact

Stores that were selected for this research are shaded. Source: Adapted from Dunn (2000:8) as well as the respective retailers' websites (www.edcon.co.za; www.woolworths.co.za; www.foschini.co.za; www.truworths.co.za; www.Queenspark.co.za; www.Stuttafords.co.za).

⁴ Stores selected for inclusion in the investigation of this research: Edgars; Foschini; Queenspark; Stuttafords; Truworths; Woolworths

The holding groups of the selected retailers control and operate branches of these stores in almost every city across South Africa as well as in many of our neighbouring countries. Various branches of these stores are located across Tshwane, Gauteng, in various malls/shopping centres. Chains in general tend to provide a variety of products across categories (women's, men's and children's wear, jewellery and cosmetics, foot wear, accessories and often even household linens and kitchen ware) (Dunne, 2000:9). All the retailers that were selected for this study provide products in all of these categories except Queenspark that sells ladies' and men's clothing, footwear and accessories only while Foschini sells ladies' clothing, footwear and accessories. Other stores in the same holding company as Foschini, namely Markhams and @home are involved with the other product categories (www.edcon.co.za; www.foschini.co.za; www.queenspark.co.za; www.stuttafords.co.za; www.truworhs.co.za; www.woolworhs.co.za).

2.2.5 Implications of changes in the economy and technology for the clothing retail industry

Economic activity in a country, i.e. the state of the country's economy largely provides the backdrop to retailers' success. The economic activity in a country affects levels of employment, income, levels of production, living standards and consumption. The formal economy - within which the clothing retailers that were selected for this research falls into - forms the largest part of South Africa's total economy (Newman & Cullen, 2002:40).

The South African clothing retail industry is extremely competitive because in this country several retailers have to compete for the business of the same group of consumers (Dickerson, 2003:116). Retailers agree that the market is extremely tough at the moment and many have indeed lost their market share in recent years (Dunn, 2000:9). The world-wide recession is partly to blame for this unfortunate situation: retailers are particularly susceptible to economic fluctuations and are directly influenced by any governmental and macro-economic changes (Newman & Cullen, 2002:88). For example, when interest rates and cost of living rise, consumers' spending habits are affected immediately as their disposable income that is spent on items such as apparel, decreases. During times of economic difficulties, consumers' priorities inevitably change and so do their spending habits

(Dickerson, 2003:117). Ideally retailers therefore have to acknowledge economic slumps and recessions in their medium- and long term planning and strategies to avoid serious losses during trying times and to survive economic fluctuations (Newman & Cullen, 2002:91).

Like any organization, retailers are also affected by changes in technology, i.e. changes in the processes and resources that are involved in the production of clothing products and in the presentation of related services. Improved technology could be to the benefit of retailers as well as consumers because it could result in cheaper and improved products; it could also reduce distribution costs, improve the distribution of goods and subsequently improve the availability of products to consumers (Newman & Cullen, 2002:40-42).

Advanced technology holds several advantages for consumers: it may empower consumers because improved technology allows for information to become more readily available so that consumers could become better informed and more knowledgeable (Newman & Cullen, 2002:115). Probably the most noteworthy development in technology that has changed the face of retail in recent decades is the internet and the subsequent birth of internet retailing. Internet has brought retail stores into our homes and offices. Contrary to the formal retail environment, internet exerts no limitation on shopping hours, which is precious for those who experience time pressure. The internet also provides clothing retailers with an additional distribution channel and as it continues to evolve and expand, so do retailers now have exciting opportunities to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Many consumers however still prefer traditional retail stores and therefore the status quo should not be neglected (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010:584, 588). Compared to First-World countries, internet shopping in South Africa is still in its infancy stage.

2.2.6 Competition in the clothing retail environment

2.2.6.1 Clothing retail: a cut throat industry

Clothing retailers operate in a macro-environment (external) as well as a micro-environment (internal). Social, cultural, technical, economic and political influences are associated with the macro-environment (Newman & Cullen, 2002:53). The micro-environment, on the other hand, comprises of suppliers, competitors and the market place in general. Although these aspects originate externally from a retailer, retailers could exert some control and influence

over these factors through effective management (Newman & Cullen, 2002:54). The environment in which retailers operate is very dynamic and changes continually, therefore every clothing retailer has to attend to its products and services on an ongoing basis. A once-off or sporadic research project would be fruitless because clothing retailers have to keep track of changes as an everyday activity. A clothing retailer also needs to have its “finger on the tap” regarding macro-environmental changes because that impacts on consumers’ fashion needs and wants (Dickerson, 2003:128). Products and service offerings therefore have to be adapted accordingly for stores to remain competitive. The retail industry is generally known as a cut-throat industry where competition is fierce and where it is a matter of “survival of the fittest”. This explains why at present in South Africa, a few major clothing retailers are dominating despite the presence of smaller retail stores, such as boutiques, factory outlets and speciality stores (Newman & Cullen, 2002:53, 54).

2.2.6.2 *Adapting the retail offering to serve modern consumers in modern times*

Consumers’ expectations have changed dramatically in recent times. A discerning consumer nowadays expects a wide merchandise selection as well as superior services and facilities. When entering a retail store, consumers not only perceive the tangible products and physical surroundings, they also experience the associated services, image of the store and merchandise along with various other intangible benefits such as the pleasure of well designed fitting rooms, friendliness of personnel etc.. Value can therefore be added to the merchandise offering of a store through the addition of additional services that eventually form an integral part of the total retail offering and which differentiates one retailer from the next. In order to survive in a competitive environment such as clothing/apparel retail, a retailer has to provide much more than what is regarded as “sufficient” through basic, simple selling techniques. Clothing retailers are therefore faced with a major challenge to keep abreast and have to perform excellently to surpass their competitors. Shopping has also become an extremely competitive leisure activity: what was once seen as a routine visit has now become an expedition (Newman & Cullen, 2002:54, 55).

Ultimately, “the fashion business exists for one reason only – the consumer” (Dickerson, 2003:114). Retailing is first and foremost a “people’s business”. In order to be successful, a retailer therefore has to understand and fulfil its customers’ needs (Poloian, 2003:6). The

success of a clothing retailer depends on *consumers* becoming its *customers* (Dickerson, 2003:119). A clothing retailer therefore has to identify and know its target market well, i.e. in terms of characteristics such as lifestyle, income level, occupation, fashion interests, hobbies etcetera (Dickerson, 2003:126). Clothing retail chains have moved away from the trend of “being everything to everybody”. Instead, they now rather focus their merchandise and marketing activities on a specific market segment.

Maycumber (1995:9 in Dickerson, 2003:121) summarises the power of the consumer:

Business as usual is not an option, because the consumer is now in control. For some years now, retailers have been calling the shots. That has ended now. The consumer is really the centre of the decision-making process for the textile, apparel and the retail industries. Consumers have changed. They are time-poor, aging, have less money, are very, very value and quality driven, seek personalized products and, what is very important, are faced with a lot of shopping alternatives.

The situation in South Africa is no different. The need for an investigation from consumers’ perspective is probably long overdue – not only for the discipline of Consumer Science in terms of the training of students who wish pursue careers in retail one day, but for retailers as well because their existence solely depends on consumers’ patronage and their return intentions.

2.2.7 The female fashion consumer

Social as well as cultural changes in South Africa during the last decade have caused dramatic changes to the market place. In a large mass-market such as in South Africa, the target market of a typical major department store is large and diverse and generally consumers of various socio-economic groups have to be accommodated when devising a store’s marketing mix. Socio economic trends also dictate how consumers perceive fashion, which in turn affects consumers’ spending habits. At present, consumers perceive fashion as a useful tool that could be used to reveal their uniqueness and inner beauty. Comfort and ease in care are highly regarded in order to adjust to modern day hectic lifestyles (Dickerson, 2003:117, 118). Selling women’s wear is a lucrative business because it represents more

than 50% of apparel sales in retail and this figure is expected to rise even higher as the number of working women increases (Datamonitor, 2008; Frings, 2000: 34, 287), which not only increases women's need for work clothes but also provides them with purchasing power to spend on apparel items (Poloian, 2003:82). In many instances working women feel that they "deserve" to treat themselves to nice clothes because in a post modern, materialistic era fashion is used to express inner beauty and one's uniqueness. Fashion products also need to suit consumers' lifestyles and the multiple roles that they fulfil (Dickerson, 2003:118). Even the image of a store now has to reflect the image that the consumer would like it to portray: consumers in fact patronise stores of which the image is in congruence with their own (Newman & Cullen, 2002:243-244).

The traditional role of the woman in the home and society has changed significantly in recent decades and women now contribute significantly to the formal economy (Newman & Cullen, 2002:45). This has resulted in a variety of socio-economic changes that have affected shopping trends (Dickerson, 2003:129): women now have less time, more disposable income that they have control over, work long hours away from home and their daily lives are increasingly complex because they have to juggle multiple responsibilities to cope. Female consumers generally experience time pressure and are thus continually in search of alternative ways to achieve their shopping objectives with the least effort in less time. Internet shopping is one possible solution to this problem. Alternatively, women could consolidate their shopping needs and satisfy them in one central, convenient place (Newman & Cullen, 2002:44). This probably explains the popularity of certain retail channels where consumers can shop for clothing, foods, gifts, household linen etc. under one roof.

Women's new position in the economy means that they have more money to spend on items such as clothing; that they are more willing to pay higher prices and that the demand for quality products has increased (Newman & Cullen, 2002:200). Sales figures indicate that households nowadays spend a large portion of the total household income on women's wear (Newman & Cullen, 2002:46). This has several consequences for retailers: female consumers have established themselves as a very lucrative consumer group and retailers should therefore design their retail offering intentionally to appeal to this sector; shopping hours have been extended to accommodate working women; because shopping has also

become a leisure activity, the products and service offering of retailers had to be adjusted accordingly (Newman & Cullen, 2002:47).

2.3 MARKETING IN MODERN RETAILING

2.3.1 The marketing concept

“The modern marketing concept can be described as the achievement of corporate goals through meeting and exceeding customer needs and expectations better than the competition” (Jobber, 2010:4).

The marketing concept consists of key components in order to achieve the desired outcome. The **first component** is that of “customer orientation”, which inter alia includes activities such as added sales service (fitting assistance, tailoring and altering services), clothing products of superior quality and design. All these activities need to be designed and implemented with customer satisfaction in mind (Jobber, 2010:4). The **second key component** is “integrated effort”, i.e. the intentional involvement of all staff, including sales staff in the stores, even the buyers and managers at head office. The **third component** is “goal achievement” where the entire retail organisation believes that the corporate goal can only be achieved through customer satisfaction (Jobber, 2010:3).

There are unfortunately four pertinent limitations associated with the marketing concept. **Firstly** the marketing concept is regarded as an ideology where marketing acts as a constraint on innovation, marketing and society (Jobber, 2010:10). **Secondly**, marketing research often restricts innovations: when an organisation mainly depends on customers to guide them in the development of new products, it severely limits an organisation as consumers are seldom aware of what they really want in terms of product and services (Jobber, 2010:12). **Thirdly** marketing and society pose certain restrictions, e.g. when retailers focus on individuals in stead of the social impact of their products and organisation. This means that they focus on satisfying their consumers because it concerns the profit s that is derived rather than taking consumers’ welfare into consideration (Jobber, 2010:10-11). **Fourthly** marketing is viewed as a source of dullness: when retailers primarily focus on responding to their customers’ needs, marketing campaigns reflect customers’ demands

rather than creating demands (Jobber, 2010:12). Consumers should rather be tempted by the products and services offered by clothing retailers. This type of marketing is known as “retro marketing”, which involves five principles, namely secrecy, amplification, entertainment, tricksterism and exclusivity (Jobber, 2010:12).

2.3.2 A marketing driven orientation and relationship marketing

Marketing oriented retailers or organisations focus on consumers’ needs when developing new strategies, services and product lines because they realise that it is crucial to do so to survive. Consumers are for example increasingly more aware of the environment and the impact that their consumption makes on the environment. They may thus be on the look out for environmentally friendly products such as garments made from Bamboo or organic cotton. Marketing oriented retailers are concerned about consumers’ demands and will adapt their products and services in order to satisfy them (Jobber, 2010:5).

Relationship marketing is defined as retailers’ responsibility to *“identify and establish, maintain and enhance, and when necessary, terminate relationships with customers and other stake-holders at a profit so that the objectives of all parties involved are met”* (Cant, Brink & Brijball, 2006:261). Although attracting new customers still remains a goal of any marketing strategy, relationship marketing postulates that the retention and development of existing customers is even more important in the long term. Establishing and nurturing clothing retailers’ relationships with their existing customers by offering account systems, excellent service and excellent products is fundamental in terms of any retailer’s long-term success. This approach is often included in the customer relationship management (CRM) part of clothing retailers’ marketing strategy. There is a strong view that CRM actually needs to be incorporated into the marketing mix of a clothing retailer and the elements of the marketing mix need to be adapted accordingly (Cant *et al.*, 2006:262).

2.3.3 Market driven retail stores

Clothing retail stores that are market driven are highly aware of their customers’ concerns and address them throughout their service and product offering believing that customer satisfaction is crucial for success in the market (Jobber, 2010:6).

When developing their marketing mix, a market driven store acknowledges customers' choice criteria and adapts accordingly (Jobber, 2010:8), e.g. through attention to the in store environment (store layout, décor and atmospherics) and the state of the fitting rooms (lighting, cleanliness, décor) to add value to their shopping experience. A market driven clothing retail store segments its marketing mix in terms of customer differences, for example by offering own-brand clothing items at reasonable prices as well as outside brands, even international brands at higher prices. In so doing, they thus offer products to different socio economic groups in their target market. They also welcome change and spend time, money and effort in market research in an effort to understand their market better and to monitor any changes (Jobber, 2010:8).

A marketing oriented retailer also evaluates competitors and tries to understand them to develop products and services that are better than that of the competition to gain a competitive advantage. They regard money spent on marketing and market research as an investment. Emphasis is put on innovation and they constantly strive to be better, e.g. by developing on-line shopping where a customer can view the clothing items that are available in store and even try them on a virtual model so that they need not even physically enter the store. A retailer that is market driven operates fast and efficient and is always on the look out for new hidden markets (Jobber, 2010:8). They would for example be the first to stock a new brand that seems popular.

2.3.4 Emphasizing customer value and satisfaction

In order to attract and retain new and existing customers, marketing oriented retailers aim to create positive customer value, which in-turn results in customer patronage and satisfaction. The retailer strives to deliver better value to their customers by implementing their marketing concept and in doing this, meeting and optimally exceeding their customers' expectations (Jobber, 2010:10).

Customer value is determined partly by the customer, i.e. by the sacrifice that they are willing to endure to gain the offering as well as the benefits acquired by owning the products. For example, a customer would perceive to have had a positive value experience when the shopping experience (the environment, the service encountered at the purchasing

points, fitting rooms and the floor layout) as well as the clothing item/s purchased outweighs their monetary, time and self-perception sacrifices. A positive value experience occurs when customers' expectations have either been met or exceeded (Jobber, 2010:14). Successful retailers position customer satisfaction as the key component of their business strategy (Jobber, 2010:14). In order to retain customers in a competitive environment, exceeding customer s' expectations is a pre-requisite for success. Customers need to exit the store with a parcel in their hands feeling delighted with the clothing item/s that they have purchased, feeling positive about the service that they encountered and having enjoyed the overall shopping experience.

Through the so-called Kano model, characteristics that result in dissatisfaction, satisfaction and delight are explored: "must-be", "more is better" and "delighters" are the three underlying elements of the model (Jobber, 2010:15):

- **"Must be"** elements are expected and necessary, such as having staff at the pay points, having clothing items for sale on rails etc.
- **"More is better"** elements involve product variety, product quality, fashionable apparel items for sale, having staff at the pay points that are efficient and friendly. These elements can take customers' level of satisfaction to being past neutral
- **"Delighters"** are elements that go beyond customers' expectations and cause the customers to be satisfied but delighted as well, e.g. a clothing retailer could offer fitting assistance and advice, gift-wrap parcels, offer free alteration services, present an environment that tickles all the senses and which makes customers feel welcome and at home.

2.3.5 Developing a marketing mix that would provide a competitive advantage

A clothing retailer needs to develop a marketing mix that is based on the needs of their customers (Jobber, 2010:17). It is therefore essential that retailers understand their customers and potential customers. The main elements of the marketing mix are price, place, product and promotion and this concept was later expanded (the elements will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter). The elements must be well blended and one element must compliment and suit the others in order to create a uniform image and to

communicate a uniform message: if the clothing items that are sold in a store are of high quality at high prices, the store environment should support this image (Jobber, 2010:22). Features of these elements depend heavily in the decisions that retailers' marketing departments make to ensure satisfaction and gain a competitive advantage (Jobber, 2010:17). A competitive advantage is obtained when products and services that are offered are different or better, at prices that are competitive. In other words, customer value needs to be created. In order to succeed, a retailer needs to clearly differentiate themselves from their competitors in terms of elements that are regarded important by their target competitors (Jobber, 2010:52). It is necessary for retailers to be faster, better and closer than competitors. Their clothing products also need to be of better quality, the service needs need to be superior and retailers need to respond to their customers' fashion needs and service needs pertinently.

The success of a marketing plan is not only measured by the profit obtained - even if it is the desired end result. Six aspects are involved in determining whether the marketing strategy of a retailer is successful and whether the core strategy of a retailer is implemented satisfactorily (Jobber, 2010:52, 53).

- Firstly a "clear definition of target customers and their needs" needs to be established and the core strategy should address this.
- Secondly a retailer should establish a competitive advantage: they need to understand and analyse their competition to know what they need to do to differentiate themselves.
- Thirdly a retailer should determine what "acceptable risks" are involved and be prepared to deal with them, e.g. if a clothing retailer competes with another store whilst their own marketing mix is lacking, the risk that they will incur may be too great.
- Fourthly retailers' "resources and managerial support" should be able to handle all marketing strategies.
- A marketing strategy should also be designed to achieve product market objectives.
- All these above need to be consistent and such that they blend into a consistent whole.

2.3.6 Marketing audits

A marketing audit can be described as “a systematic examination of a business’s marketing environment, objectives, strategies and activities, with a view to identifying key strategic issues, problem areas and opportunities”. It provides a marketer with a foundation on which a marketing strategy can be built with the aim of improving marketing performance. A marketing audit addresses the following: “where are we now?; how did we get here?; where are we heading?” (Jobber, 2010:42). Insight into these questions requires an analysis on the macro- and micro environment.

The **macro-environment** comprises of aspects that retailers have no control over, but by analysing and understanding the environment within which they find themselves these aspects can be used to their advantage. The macro-environment involves the political and legal environment within which retailers operate. This could affect and even hamper a retailer’s strategy as they have to adapt their organisation to be in tone with these laws. The economic environment forms part of the macro-environment. If the economy is in a recession, this could for example result in people spending less money on clothing, causing profits to drop and the inevitable result of retrenching employees. The physical and ecological environment is concerned with global warming, pollution, recycling and environmentally friendly products (Jobber, 2010:43). A clothing retailer can gain goodwill and increase their social responsibility by selling clothing items that are made of organic materials and of which the packaging is made of recycled materials. In South Africa, Woolworths has done well with this approach (www.woolworths.co.za) and have in so doing gained a competitive advantage in the market place. Cultural and social changes such as the changes in age distribution and household structures, lifestyle changes and the emerging of various sub cultures also affect the profile of retailers’ target market (Jobber, 2010:43). It is important for clothing retailers to keep track of these changes and to adapt their product and service offering accordingly. The final component of a marketing audit involves the technological environment (Jobber, 2010:43): as technology advances, so should retailers’ product and service offerings. The internet has for example now made it possible for clothing retailers to sell their products online with the help of a virtual model that can be designed to be of similar proportions to the consumer. This has created a new distribution channel and has added an extra, very attractive dimension to their service offering.

The **micro-environment** involves aspects within clothing retailers' immediate environment that they have varying forms of control over (Jobber, 2010:43). Retailers' direct environment is influenced by the *size of the market* as well as the *rate at which it is growing* and the *trends of the market* (Jobber, 2010:43). Two pertinent aspects form a vital role in the determination of the clothing retailers marketing mix. Firstly the main players in retailers' micro environment are their customers: a retailer should determine who they are, what they want and how they want it. Retailers should determine how they evaluate products, what benefits they look for, etc. Secondly retailers should acknowledge the other key player, namely their competitors: a retailer should identify competitors, determine what their strengths and weaknesses are, investigate their product and service offering, determine their market share and the levels of success that they are achieving (Jobber, 2010:43). Distributors and suppliers are also pertinent in the success of retailers: their attractiveness, strengths, weaknesses and power changes need to be analysed in terms of how they would affect the success of a retailer (Jobber, 2010:43)

2.3.7 Competitor analysis

A retailer has to analyse competitors to determine, to understand and to track competitors' growth and their marketing mix in comparison to their own. Competitors' strengths can minimise a retailer's market share while their weaknesses provide opportunities for exploitation. Retailers that pay special attention to their competitors' actions generally achieve greater success (Jobber, 2010:709). Information regarding a competitor may be gathered through trade magazines, the internet, marketing research, distributors, sales figures, competitors' employees and by analysing their product on a first hand basis. The aim of a competitor analysis is determine who the competitors are (indirect and direct), what their strengths and weaknesses are, what their strategies are, what their strategic objectives and thrusts are, and what their response patterns are. When identifying their competitors, retailers often fall into the trap of *competitive myopia* where only direct (large department stores) competitors are identified and evaluated (Jobber, 2010:709). This generally results in a limited view of the competitive environment.

Retailers should firstly evaluate competitors that sell similar products (speciality stores or boutiques) and those that meet consumers' needs in a similar way (factory stores, flea markets, home produced clothing and internet sites). The marketing mix and strategies of

other types of outlets can affect the bottom line of a large retailer. It is therefore essential that retailers monitor all forms of competition (Jobber, 2010:709). Retailers should also be on a constant look-out for new entrants to the market in order to maintain and grow their market share.

Having identified their competitors in the market place, retailers then need to complete a competitive audit to point out competitors' strengths and weaknesses (Jobber, 2010:710) that could then form an important part in developing a competitor strategy. This is useful to identify shortcomings and gaps in their competitors' service- and product offering and provides insight in how a retailer could take advantage of vulnerabilities and fill gaps. Customer data, financial data, market share, distribution channels used, brand names, service quality and consumers' perception of store offer information that can help to identify shortcomings and opportunities in clothing retail (Jobber, 2010:710).

The third step in conducting a competitor analysis is for clothing retailers to determine their strategic objectives (Jobber, 2010:709). Clothing retailers could possibly decide to either build (increase their market share and sales), hold (maintaining market share and level of sales) or harvest (importance placed on cash flow through reducing expenses and increasing the prices) objectives (Jobber, 2010:711). This is a helpful technique as the strategy that they are following will dictate their responses. The response patterns that a competing clothing retailer follows, is a key component in their strategic decision making (Jobber, 2010:712). Their past behaviour could indicate how they should respond in the future and it is possible to control competitors' reactions by hitting back at them, thus conditioning them to behave in a way that they want them to (Jobber, 2010:713).

The fourth step in doing a competitor analysis would be to investigate the competition's products, target markets and their differential advantage. Their differential advantage and customers' perceptions can be analysed through marketing research (Jobber, 2010:712) and strategies can be developed to service a whole market (men's wear, women's wear and children's wear) or just a segment thereof (e.g. women's wear).

A retailer can gain a competitive advantage by using several competitive strategies (Jobber, 2010:713), e.g. through differentiation (selling clothing items that are special and unique or

offering exceptional services, such as six months free interest on your account); cost leadership (lower priced clothing items); differentiation focus (where the clothing retailer differentiates itself through its products and services in a specific segment, e.g. in elder ladies' wear) and lastly cost focus (where a clothing retailer differentiates itself using price in a specific segment) (Jobber, 2010:713-715). In order to create a competitive advantage, various sources are needed (Jobber, 2010:17) that includes superior skills, superior resources, core competences and their value chain (Jobber, 2010:718).

2.3.8 Influencing consumers' buying behaviour

For marketers to influence consumers' buying behaviour, they first need to gather information on consumers' cognition, affect and their behaviour towards clothing retailers' products, service offering (i.e. attitudes) as well as their attitudes towards stores and brands through market research. Depending on the results of the research and acknowledging the strategies that have already been put in place by management, the clothing retailer's marketing mix stimuli can be then be adapted or developed and introduced into the environment (Peter & Olson, 2010:232). The specific elements of the marketing mix (clothing items/ products, the store layout, the sales service etc) are designed to influence consumers' behaviour and especially their affect and cognition in a positive manner (Peter & Olson, 2010:232).

Research can also be done to determine the reasons for changes in consumers' buying behaviour, specifically to provide answers as to why changes have taken place and to assist them to implement alternative strategies. Various strategies exist on how a clothing retailer can influence overt consumer behaviour. Peter and Olson propose four main strategies that marketers can use. Firstly they could implement an affective approach to adapt the marketing mix and to design it in such a way that it affects consumers' affective (emotions, moods, feelings and evaluations) responses (Peter & Olson, 2010:233). Secondly they could adapt the marketing mix in a way that influences a consumer's cognitions (knowledge, meanings and beliefs). Thirdly consumers' overt behaviour can be influenced directly (Peter & Olson, 2010:234): apparently consumers occasionally process information automatically and at times are not even aware that they are doing so, for instance if they are buying socks. Consumers could be persuaded during these purchases through incentives, promotions etc.

The final strategy involves a combination of the fore mentioned strategies to influence multiple consumer responses (Peter & Olson, 2010:234).

2.4 SUMMARY

The South African clothing retail industry is extremely competitive because several retailers are competing for the loyalty of the same group of consumers (Dickerson, 2003:116). Retailers agree that the last decade has been particularly tough and admit that many have lost their market share during the time (Dunn, 2000:9). The 2008 sales figures show that the apparel retail industry's sales totalled R50.3 billion, i.e. a constant growth of between 7.4% and 8.6% on a year on year basis since 2004. This figure however declined in 2009, which contributed to a lot of pressure in the industry in terms of competitiveness, job retentions etc. (www.statssa.co.za).

Clothing retailers have also been affected by changes in technology in recent years that have inter alia resulted in lower production and distribution costs as well as improved products (Newman & Cullen, 2002:40-42). One of the pertinent advances in technology, i.e. internet shopping is however still in its infancy stage in the RSA: the majority of consumers still prefer traditional retail stores, which explains further attention to the service offering and service quality in clothing retail stores at this stage. Because the retail industry is known to be a cut-throat industry where it is a matter of "survival of the fittest", retailers now have to provide much more than what is regarded as "sufficient" to surpass their competitors (Newman & Cullen, 2002:54, 55). Clothing retail has thus moved away from "being everything to everybody". Instead, they now rather focus their merchandise and marketing activities on a specific market segment.

Selling women's wear has become a lucrative business because it represents more than 50% of apparel sales in retail and this figure is expected to rise even higher in the future (Datamonitor, 2008; Frings, 2000:34, 287). The traditional role of the woman in the home and society has changed significantly in recent decades and women now contribute significantly to the formal economy (Newman & Cullen, 2002:45). This has resulted in a variety of socio economic changes that have affected shopping trends (Dickerson, 2003:129).

This probably explains retailers' implementation of a so-called modern marketing concept that consists of three specific key components, i.e. *customer orientation*, *integrated effort* and *goal achievement* to achieve success (Jobber, 2010:3). Four pertinent limitations are unfortunately associated with the marketing concept: it is regarded as an ideology where marketing acts as a constraint on innovation, marketing and society; marketing research often restricts innovations because consumers are seldom aware of what they really want in terms of product and services; marketing and society pose certain restrictions, e.g. when retailers ignore the social impact of their products and organisation; marketing is often viewed as a source of dullness that primarily focus on customers' needs rather than to create demands (Jobber, 2010:12).

Relationship marketing is defined as retailers' responsibility to *"identify and establish, maintain and enhance, and when necessary, terminate relationships with customers and other stake-holders at a profit so that the objectives of all parties involved are met"* (Cant, Brink & Brijball, 2006:261). This approach is often included in the customer relationship management as part of clothing retailers' marketing strategy.

When developing their marketing mix, a market driven store acknowledges customers' choice criteria and adapts accordingly (Jobber, 2010:8). A market driven clothing retail store segments its marketing mix in terms of customer differences and they also welcome change by spending time, money and effort in market research to understand their market better (Jobber, 2010:8). A marketing oriented retailer also evaluates competitors and tries to understand them to develop products and services that are better than that of the competition to gain a competitive advantage.

In order to attract and retain new and existing customers, marketing oriented retailers aim to create positive customer value, which in-turn results in customer patronage and satisfaction (Jobber, 2010:10). The retailer strives to deliver better value to their customers by implementing their marketing concept and in doing this, meeting and optimally exceeding their customers' expectations (Jobber, 2010:10).

Through the so-called Kano model, characteristics that result in dissatisfaction, satisfaction and delight can be explored: "must-be", "more is better" and "delighters" are the three

underlying elements of the model (Jobber, 2010:15). Ultimately a clothing retailer needs to develop a marketing mix that is based on the needs of their customers (Jobber, 2010:17). The elements must be well blended and one element must compliment and suit the others in order to create a uniform image and to communicate a uniform message: if the clothing items that are sold in a store are of high quality at high prices, the store environment should support this image (Jobber, 2010:22). The success of a marketing plan is not only measured by the profit obtained - even if it is the desired end result. Six aspects are involved in determining whether the marketing strategy of a retailer is successful and whether the core strategy of a retailer is implemented satisfactorily (Jobber, 2010:52, 53): a clear definition of target customers and their needs; to understand and analyse their competition to know what they need to do to differentiate themselves; to determine what acceptable risks are involved and be prepared to deal with them; retailers' resources and managerial support should be able to handle all marketing strategies; a marketing strategy should be designed to achieve product market objectives and all these need to be consistent in order to blend into a consistent whole.

A marketing audit provides a marketer with a foundation on which a marketing strategy can be built with the aim of improving marketing performance. It addresses the following: "where are we now?; how did we get here?; where are we heading?" (Jobber, 2010:42). Insight into these questions requires an analysis on the macro- and micro environment. The macro-environment involves the political and legal environment within which retailers operate as well as the economic environment, technical, physical- and ecological environment. In South Africa, Woolworths has done particularly well with their concern about global resources (www.woolworths.co.za) and have in so doing gained a competitive advantage in the market place. The micro-environment involves aspects within clothing retailers' immediate environment that they have varying forms of control over (Jobber, 2010:43), e.g. the *size of the market* as well as the *rate at which it is growing* and the *trends of the market*. Distributors and suppliers are also key to the success of retailers: their attractiveness, strengths, weaknesses and power changes need to be analysed in terms of how they would affect the success of a retailer (Jobber, 2010:43)

A retailer also has to analyse its competitors to determine, to understand and to track competitors' growth and their marketing mix in comparison to their own (Jobber, 2010:709). Retailers that pay special attention to their competitors' actions generally achieve greater



success (Jobber, 2010:709). When identifying their competitors, retailers often fall into the trap of *competitive myopia* where only direct (large department stores) competitors are identified and evaluated (Jobber, 2010:709). This generally results in a limited view of the competitive environment. Actually retailers should evaluate all competitors that sell similar products and be on a constant look-out for new entrants to the market in order to maintain and grow their market share.

For marketers to influence consumers' buying behaviour, they first need to gather information on consumers' cognition, affect and their behaviour towards clothing retailers' products, service offering (i.e. attitudes) as well as their attitudes towards stores and brands through market research. Research **could expose** reasons for changes in consumers' buying behaviour, specifically to provide answers as to why changes have taken place and to assist them to implement alternative strategies. Because the retail industry is known to be a cut-throat industry where it is a matter of "survival of the fittest", retailers have to provide much more than what is regarded as "sufficient" to surpass their competitors (Newman & Cullen, 2002:54, 55). Clothing retail has thus moved away from "being everything to everybody". Instead, they now rather focus their merchandise and marketing activities on a specific market segment.



CHAPTER 3

CUSTOMER SERVICE, SERVICE QUALITY AND STORE PRESTIGE IN CLOTHING RETAIL STORES

This chapter provides theoretical background on customer service, service quality and store prestige and indicates how these constructs were conceptualised for the conceptual framework of the study

3.1 CUSTOMER SERVICE IN CLOTHING RETAIL STORES

3.1.1 Customer service defined

Customer service (CS) represents all efforts that are made by an organization to meet customers' needs and expectations so that the shopping experience becomes pleasurable (Miao & Bassham, 2006:54). These elements jointly represent the entire shopping experience that could provide retailers with satisfied and ultimately, loyal customers. Customer service is a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Gilmour, Borg, Duffy, Johnston, Limbek & Shaw, 1994:18) that comprises of several *controllable elements* that affect the retail experience. This service offering involves all the activities that occur at the interface between customers and organizations, other than pro-active selling, in an effort to maintain customer satisfaction and operational efficiency (Rakowski 1981 in Kim & Kim, 2001:139) and involves much more than simply being friendly, pleasant and providing speedy service (Clemmet, 1998:53).

In this research the dimensions of customer service are discussed in terms of specific elements that are associated with the marketing mix of an organisation. This marketing mix consists of specific elements of a store's marketing strategy and depending on the store, four to seven different tangible elements of the service offering may be involved (Jobber, 2010:301).

3.3.2 Elements of customer service in clothing retail

The literature is well established regarding the elements of the marketing mix, i.e. those factors that were categorised by McCarthy in 1964 as being crucial in terms of any company/business' service offering, namely the *product*, *place*, *price* and *promotion* (so called P's). Booms and Bitner (1981) later expanded this concept to include additional constructs, namely *processes*, *people* and *physical evidence*. These elements are generally conceptualised in terms of relevant descriptors that are adapted to suit a specific organization. In literature the marketing mix is therefore interpreted differently for different contexts. In this study the marketing mix is associated with the customer service (CS) of clothing retail stores. The elements of the marketing mix were adapted to suit clothing retail channels specifically and are hence discussed as the elements of customer service.

3.3.2.1 Product

In this study *product* refers to the apparel items that the retailer offers (Dickerson, 2003:127). More specifically, in terms of clothing retail stores, this construct refers to the merchandise assortment, i.e. the variety of styles, silhouettes, colours, fabrics and sizes, inclusive of the quality of apparel in terms of *physical* features (construction, finishes, fabric and the fit) as well as the *performance* features (aesthetical attributes, durability and utility) (Brown & Rice, 2001:47, 48). With regard to clothing especially, the quality of a store's merchandise in terms of the "degree of excellence" is highly important in a consumer's decision to patronise a specific store (Stamper, Sharp & Donnel, 1991:312). Perceived quality is based on consumers' rating of how well the garments meet their performance expectations (Brown & Rice, 2001:153). Aesthetic attributes evolve from structural integrity, i.e. the overall attractiveness of the garments (Brown & Rice, 2001:47) and involve various aspects such as the fabric, colour, detail and feel of the garment that may instigate curiosity and motivate consumers to take a closer look (Scheller & Kuntz, 1998:60; Stamper *et al.*, 1991:44). Even though aesthetic attributes may initially attract consumers, garments could eventually be rejected because other determinants such as fit and quality of construction are also considered during the buying process. (Brown & Rice, 2001:153).

Decisions concerning the *product* of a clothing retail store therefore involve many intricate decisions that are not merely based on the merchandise assortment (variety) and/or the uniqueness of the merchandise compared to that of competitors. The act of shopping for clothing involves decisions regarding one's appearance, self concept and image. It also reflects a consumer's attitude towards a store in conjunction with her values, for example materialistic views (Otieno, Harrow & Lea-Greenwood, 2005:299; Kaiser, 1998:147). The clothing that a person wears serves as a cue on how consumers view and express themselves. Clothing is in fact referred to as a *second skin*, which contributes to a wearer's psychological and social welfare (Otieno *et al.*, 2005:299). An understanding of this intricacy is crucial in any investigation of the products that are part of a clothing retail store's marketing mix and explains the invaluable contribution that professionals in the discipline of Consumer Science with expertise in clothing theory could make with regard to customer service investigations in this context.

Products can be categorised as being either high or low involvement purchases. When the risk associated with the purchase of the product is perceived as high due to monetary value as well as status and self-image involvement, consumers generally search for suitable alternatives and may spend more time on their decision making (Newman & Cullen, 2002:136-137). Clothing can be regarded as high-involved purchases due to the high correlation of the self and the image that one portrays through the clothing that you wear.

The merchandise that a clothing retailer offers therefore needs to be targeted at the right consumer group and offered at the right time in the right place (Newman & Cullen, 2002:141). Fashion has a high rate of consumption and does not have a very long "shelf" life. If a retailer sells apparel of a certain style when the style is already *yesterday's news*, success will not be achieved.

Clothing retailers can differentiate themselves by including well-known brands into their merchandise mix. Brands that are popular and well perceived add value to an organisation (Newman & Cullen, 2002:198). A brand can be defined as any name, logo, trademark or sign that is produced by a certain organisation and that is unique and recognisable (Newman & Cullen, 2002:197). Woolworths for instance stocks *Country Road* and *Trenerly* (Australian brands); Edgars sells brands such as *Levi* and *Guess* (popular American brands), Stuttafords

has included American brands such as *GAP*, *French Connection* and *Banana Republic* to their ranges (www.edcon.co.za; www.stuttafords.co.za; www.woolworths.co.za). These brands enhance stores' product offering and attract consumers to the stores. Modern day consumers are more aware of brands and their associated qualities. Specific brands are for instance known to offer pertinent psychic benefits by inspiring, providing confidence and silently "assuring" consumers that they have made the right choice. Clothing retailers often also develop and stock their own brands to boost themselves as a brand (Newman & Cullen, 2002:198-200).

3.3.2.2 Price

Price refers to the actual monetary cost involved to gain possession of specific apparel item/s (Dickerson, 2000:127). A clothing store's pricing policies may attract customers or discourage them to patronise the store. Apart from indicating affordability and serving as an indication of the level of financial forfeit (Monroe & Venkatesan, 1969 in Sheinin & Wagner, 2003:202), consumers ultimately want to feel that the benefits that they are acquiring surpass the monetary sacrifice (Monroe, 1990; Zeithaml, 1988 in Sheinin & Wagner, 2003:202). Price is often also associated with the quality of garments in a store (Ratchford & Gupta, 1990 in Sheinin & Wagner, 2003:202; Dawer & Parker, 1994; Rao & Monroe, 1988): the higher the price, the higher the perceived quality. Depending on just how important price is to consumers, the pricing strategy of a retailer could be an important reason why a consumer either patronises that store or not (Marx, 2005:16). Consumers are often attracted by higher prices and this may affect stores' pricing policies. Pricing policies for major department stores are generally formulated with their target markets in mind acknowledging the Living Standards Measurement (LSM) group they fall in. LSM indicators are used by organizations and researchers to classify the general population by their economic, demographic and psychographic characteristics (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003:87). A retailer's pricing strategy can be used to position a store in consumers' minds. Prices of merchandise can however also reflect other services that are offered by a store, such store cards that offer interest free revolving credit to their customers. The increased number of retailers that nowadays offer credit services in terms of store cards or accounts has widened their customer base considerably (Dunn, 2000:9). Someone might simply not be able to purchase at a specific store if they have to make a once off payment. If the amount is split

into payments over a six-month period however, the merchandise of the store become more affordable - even more so if no interest is charged.

Retailers are under constant pressure to reduce their prices in order to remain competitive. Clothing retailers develop pricing strategies that are based on their positioning strategies, their target market and cost structure. It is essential that the pricing strategy of a retailer reflects the image as well as the products and services that they offer and forms part of the retail offering. When determining their pricing strategy, a retailer needs to keep in mind their target market, the merchandise they wish to sell, the promotional activities they wish to engage in and the geographic location they would like to position themselves in (Newman & Cullen, 2002:182, 183). In some retail store settings, the merchandise dictates the pricing strategy such as with branded apparel items. The eventual price of merchandise is however generally determined by retailers' target market. The price of the merchandise assortment can also be influenced by the image of the store, the retail mix and the cost incurred by the retailer. Pricing also affects the merchandising and layout of the store. A clothing retailer may for instance place its branded or specialised items in "hot spots" in the store that are very visible and that experience high volumes of traffic. Promotions such as end-of-season sales and special offers, is another important way to positively influence sales without discrediting the image of a clothing retailer (Newman & Cullen, 2002:184).

Clothing retailers can implement one or more of three different pricing strategies as an integral part of their corporate strategy, i.e. "above the market", "at the market" and "below the market" pricing. The clothing retailers that were selected for this study follow an "at the market" pricing strategy where prices are similar to that of their competitors. This inevitably increases the level of competition because price is then not used as a means to differentiate (Newman & Cullen, 2002:185, 186). Queenspark and Stuttafords do however target a slightly higher end mass market as well and thus partake in "above the market" as well as "at the market" pricing strategies.

Price serves as a tool for retailers to position and re-position themselves over and over again. The pricing strategy that a clothing retailer follows has psychological implications and it suggests the image and quality of the retailer and its merchandise. High prices are generally associated with high quality and exclusivity and vice a versa. Price can be used to

establish or reinforce a retailer's image and can increase the customer base of a retailer. Customer service is also linked to the price of merchandise in a store: customers tend to expect less if prices are lower and visa versa. Consumers would therefore have higher expectations of retailers such as the ones included in this research because they are not discount stores. It also explains why consumers continue to patronise discount stores even if their service offering is disappointing (Newman & Cullen, 2002:188).

3.3.2.3 Sales service processes

Consumers and their changing needs are mainly responsible for the evolution of retailers and they will continue to be the driving force behind future change. Retailers have become more customer focussed since the 1980's and have adapted their retail offering to include services as a major part of their service offering to provide a means of differentiation from competitors (Newman & Cullen, 2002:479). Clothing retail stores for example provide decent fitting rooms where customers can try on garments before purchasing them, to minimise regret (Newman & Cullen, 2002:274).

Due to increased competition in the market place, consumers need not tolerate poor service and lack of personal attention any more. The service encounter forms part of the benefits you receive when buying apparel at a store. It reiterates the store image, it forms part of the initial contact with the retailer, it can inspire confidence, it can help determine a retailer's effectiveness and forms a basis for comparison (Newman & Cullen, 2002:288). Clothing retailers need to be pro-active in providing services that will add value to the shopping experience (Newman & Cullen, 2002:273). Through excellent sales service that involves *functional quality* (the process of service delivery, i.e. *what* is offered) and *technical quality* (the actual service offered to customers in the store, i.e. *how* it is offered), retailers can gain a competitive advantage and surpass customers' expectations by going the extra mile (Lewison, 1997:29, 495; Gagliano & Hathcote, 1994:61). These services must be communicated to their target group in order for the services to become synonymous with the retailer and their retail offering (Newman & Cullen, 2002:273). In terms of clothing retailers, functional quality entails prompt attention and processing of transactions, individual attention as well as the attitude and knowledge of sales assistants that represent the retail store during their interaction with customers (Saxby, 2003 in Marx & Erasmus,

2006:56). Extant research indicates that service encounters result in post-encounter behaviour in the form of repeat purchase behaviour and store loyalty or complaint behaviour and dissatisfaction (Gagliano & Hathcote, 1994:61; Rust & Oliver, 1994:13). Technical quality on the other hand, involves a store's offering of credit returns, their exchange policy as well as dependability and affordable after-sales service (Gagliano & Hathcote, 1994:62) that affect the overall reputation of a store. Customers may for example patronise a store because owning a store card makes merchandise more "affordable" or because a store is known to be very supportive in terms of returns or exchange of merchandise, which could be important if customers prefer to try garments on at home in a more private atmosphere. A store that is willing to exchange goods that fail to meet quality expectations also reduces the risk that is involved when purchasing more expensive garments.

3.3.2.4 Sales personnel

Sales personnel are often the first contact that a consumer has with a retailer, which elevates the role of a salesperson as a crucial connection with the store (Abratt, Bendixen & Drop, 1999:91). Customer satisfaction is largely influenced by how sales personnel treat the customers (Newman & Cullen, 2002:479). Sales personnel provide an invaluable cue to a potential customers about a store's identity and image (Yurchisin & Damhorst, sa:3). Personnel contribute to a value-added experience for customers and serve as a means of differentiation from competitors. A salesperson provides information that will satisfy consumers' needs and in so doing significantly contributes to the overall success of a retailer as well as a long term relationship that can result in customer loyalty, which is crucial in terms of retailers' profitability (Pettijohn & Pettijohn, 1994:17).

Consumers' interaction with the sales personnel of a store can make the difference between closing a sale or not. Impressive personal assistance can neutralize other negative service aspects such as poor fitting rooms or long queues at pay points. There are a variety of ways in which a retailer can ensure that a consumer has a pleasant service encounter with sales personnel. Personnel should have good product knowledge, be polite, greet potential customers warmly, and pay close attention to details such as when to respect a customer's privacy. They should also have the ability to suggest product alternatives or solutions and to

offer words of encouragement to help consumers to make up their minds (Newman & Cullen, 2002:286, 287). Clothing department stores that serve the mass market generally rely on a self-service strategy and customers only come into contact with sales staff at the fitting rooms, if they seek help and/or at pay points.

In clothing retail stores the appearance of the sales personnel is important to inspire consumers and to create confidence during consumers' interaction with them (De Klerk, Velleman & Malherbe, 1998:15-24 in Terblance & Boshoff, 2003:146). Sales personnel also need to be equipped with adequate product knowledge, company knowledge and have to possess personal selling and sales skills to adequately meet consumers' needs (Pettijohn & Pettijohn, 1994:19).

3.3.2.5 Store environment /Place

Place firstly entails the *geographic location* of a store. When a clothing retailer identifies a geographical location for a new store, an important concern would be to ensure that it provides a profitable and competitive position for them and that potential customers can access the store effortlessly (Newman & Cullen, 2002:219).

Place also refers to the *actual store/physical environment* where a retailer displays and sells products and services. It involves the store layout, the methods of display as well as the general atmosphere that sets the stage for sales transactions (Dickerson, 2000:127). Due to an ever increasing level of competition, retailers have a tough time differentiating themselves from competitors in terms of merchandise and price. The store environment and the ambience/ atmosphere that is created can thus offer tangible means of differentiation and a unique way of satisfying and even impressing consumers (Kotler, 1973 in Baker, Grewal & Parasuraman, 1994:328). There seems to be a strong relationship between customers' satisfaction with a store and the acceptability of the physical store environment (Fiore, 2002:122; Smith & Burns, 1996:7). The store itself - in terms of its location and the atmosphere, i.e. the lighting, colour, smell, music and ambience that is created in the store - therefore deserves liberal attention (Richardson, Kain & Dick, 1996:20). During the shopping experience, consumers interact with the environment and therefore the store itself as well as the music, lighting, colours and visuals may influence decision making more than other

elements such as promotions (Baker *et al.*, 1994:328). The elements used to create the atmosphere can be used to improve customers' opinion of the store, influence them to focus on the positive aspects of the store and influence their buying behaviour. It could also create a pleasant shopping environment where customers wish to spend more time browsing (Newman, Cullen, 2002:264, 266). The location as well as the décor and lighting of the changing rooms also play a large role in consumers' satisfaction with a clothing retail store. The changing rooms need to be conveniently located and should be so convenient and comfortable that they would encourage customers to try on garments. The store environment in fact plays a vital role in consumers' judgement of products and service quality (Zeithaml, 1988 in Baker *et al.*, 1994:328; Gardner & Siomkos, 1985; Olson, 1977).

Interest in these visuals has given birth to so-called *visual merchandising* whereby merchandise is arranged and displayed optimally (Kerfoot, Davies & Ward, 2003:143). Visual merchandising can be described as the way in which stores' merchandise (apparel in this instance) is displayed to attract attention. It forms an integral part of a complete design and the merchandising concept that is supposed to provide important visual cues to passers by in an effort to lure them into the store (Lea-Greenwood, 1998:324, 325). The visual merchandising of a store should be evident throughout the entire store from the displays to the layout and should make use of a variety of props, fixtures, signs and decorations. Effective visual merchandising helps a retailer to divide a store into specific sections (e.g. men's wear, women's wear, children's wear) and to establish a mood that would attract and hopefully impress the target group of the store. Visual merchandising can be employed in the windows of the store, the aisles, on walls and as floor displays (Newman & Cullen, 2002:263). How a store's apparel or merchandise is displayed has a large impact on its sales, as well as on consumers' perceptions of the store. The success of a promotional campaign and how the retailer is perceived can almost instantly be measured by how many potential customers are entering a store during a specific period in time (Newman & Cullen, 2002:157).

Three types of window and in-store interior displays, i.e. merchandise display; architectural display and point-of-sale display engage a variety of artistic and highly technical design elements such as texture, lighting, colour, mannequins, graphics, fixtures and signage (Omar, 1999 in Kerfoot *et al.*, 2003:144). Displays in clothing retail stores are meant to promote

merchandise and to convey a message of social success and acceptance to existing and prospective customers (Peglar, 1998 *in* Hu & Jasper, 2006:28). In order to ensure that displays are effective, clothing retailers should ensure that displays are balanced; that displays are arranged around a central focal point to draw consumers' attention; that merchandise is arranged at the correct height to increase visibility and that retailers' most attractive merchandise is used (Newman & Cullen, 2002:139). A variety of fixtures such as gondola shelving, racks, counters, mannequins, mirrors, hangers, glass, bins, peg boards and other customised features can be used to display apparel items (Newman & Cullen, 2002:161). When designing displays, retailers should take dominance, sales appeal and simplicity into account to ensure that the displays are effective (Newman & Cullen, 2002:258, 259).

The *layout* of a clothing retail store needs to provide easy access to the merchandise and supporting facilities such as the fitting rooms (Newman & Cullen, 2002:244). The store layout refers to the way in which the retailer has arranged the merchandise across the available floor space. The layout of a store has two main functions: it controls the way in which consumers will move around the store and determines the overall appearance of the store (Newman & Cullen, 2002:250). Various store layouts – all of which have pro's and con's - can be used by clothing retail stores, namely the *grid*, *free flow*, *boutique*, *loop* and *spine* layout methods (Newman & Cullen, 2002:251). It is essential that a store's layout is carefully planned in terms of traffic circulation and convenience and that changing rooms and products are positioned in a pleasant manner (Aghazadeh, 2005:31; Baldwin, 1998:151) because consumers subconsciously take these cues into consideration during their shopping endeavours (Smith & Burns, 1996:7). When consumers have limited information about the quality of the merchandise or the service of the store, their purchase decisions are often based on other information cues. The store environment can provide a variety of such informational cues to make it easier for consumers to process information. The store environment can therefore provide valuable information-processing shortcuts during consumers' purchasing decisions (Baker *et al.*, 1994:328).

The store environment has been found to have a strong influence on a store's image as perceived by consumers and thus affects consumers' overall attitude towards a retailer (Baker *et al.*, 1994:328). It is said that the store environment could be so important that the

appearance of the store will determine whether or not the consumer will patronise the store – even more so than the store’s pricing strategy and merchandise quality (Darden, Ordem & Darden, 1983 in Baker *et al.*, 1994:328). Ultimately a clothing retail store’s internal layout, displays, exterior façade and the atmospherics all contribute to the image that the retailer wishes to portray (Newman & Cullen, 2002:241). The interior and the exterior of a store can therefore be used as powerful tools to attract consumers into the store, to make them feel at ease and to support their own self-image (Newman & Cullen, 2002:242). A clothing retail store’s design need to confirm consumers’ expectations and need to be in congruence with consumers’ aspirational needs.

3.3.2.6 Promotions

Promotions refer to all efforts that are made by a retailer to establish and reiterate its image and product offering in an attempt to increase the target market’s awareness and to establish a demand for its products and services (Dickerson, 2000:127). This involves the use of a variety of tactical marketing techniques to achieve a certain number of sales in a specific period (Du Plessis, Bothma, Jordaan & Van Heerden, 2005:226). Promotions aim to attract consumers and to turn them into customers through incentives and added value (Levy & Weitz, 2007:433; Du Plessis *et al.*, 2005:226). Together with advertising and publicity, promotions form part of a retailers’ communication mix as it communicates a store’s offering as well as its image. A successful promotion campaign is supposed to improve consumers’ perception of, as well as their attitudes towards the retailer so that they become more willing to patronise the store (Newman & Cullen, 2002:193, 194). Three specific advantages are associated with promotions, i.e. *communication* with the store’s target market; *offering incentives of value* to customers and *inviting* consumers to engage in a transaction and to become customers of the store (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2005:127).

Promotions affect the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase phases of the buying process (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2005:235). The success of a promotional campaign and how the retailer is perceived can be measured almost instantly by how many potential customers enter the store during a specific period (Newman & Cullen, 2002:132). A successful promotional campaign communicates with the appropriate target market clearly by using appropriate symbols, words and signs (Newman & Cullen, 2002:195).

Promotions can either be in-store based or out-of store. In-store promotions involve promotional displays, fashion shows, special events but the most popular and widely used form of promotion is a sale, most often at the end of a season. Out-of-store promotions include paid for advertising in various media such as magazines, newspapers, pamphlets or inserts and television (Levy & Weitz, 2007:433). Word-of-mouth also forms an integral part of a retailer's communication reality and by ensuring excellent customer service and positive shopping experiences, stores can gain a form of control over this otherwise un-controllable means of communication (Marx, 2005:16).

Various influences affect consumers' acceptance and interpretation of received messages. A retailer firstly does not operate in isolation, but exists in a social and cultural context. The way in which consumers interpret messages will depend on the social, economic and cultural position and the environment within which they exist. The perception that a consumer has of a specific clothing retailer at a given time will therefore affect her receptiveness as well her interpretation of messages. Similarly, the economic situation, the retail life cycle as well as the season also affect the messages that retailers convey and consumers' interpretation thereof (Newman & Cullen, 2002:195).

3.3.2.7 Store image

Store image may be one of the most influential factors in terms of consumers' preference of certain clothing retailers: clothing purchases involve symbolic consumption of a commodity that is linked to how we evaluate and view ourselves (Kaiser, 1998:145). This is even more so in terms of prestige seeking behaviour (Deeter-Schmelz, Moore & Goebel, 2000:43). Apparel retailing has thus become an image-creating activity whereby "mental pictures" are instigated in consumers' minds as a result of many stimuli. A store's image in fact represents and can be described as a store's "personality" that customers can associate with.

A store's image is intentionally created through its marketing mix, i.e. the specific presentation of elements of customer service that are transformed into "mental snapshots" that consumers rely upon when shopping (Lewison, 1997:11). Literature on store image indicates that merchandise as well as service quality are crucial in terms of consumers'

perception of the image of a specific store. Consumers may in fact deduce the image of a clothing retail store from their judgement of the quality of the merchandise and the customer service of a store (Zeithaml, 1988 in Baker *et al.*, 1994:328; Dodds, Monroe & Grewal, 1991).

Another aspect that contributes to, and largely influences consumers' perception of a store, is the brand image of the merchandise in the store. In modern retailing a well-known and popular brand image is a valuable asset that could be used by retailers to draw consumers to the store and to enhance sales. A correlation exists between the store image and a brand image: the brand that the store sells directly influences the perceived store image. Very often when a consumer possesses little or no information about the quality of merchandise, their eventual judgement would be based on the brand image of the merchandise (Porter & Claycomb, 1997:373).

The image of a retailer differentiates itself from its competitors and provides the backdrop to portray its service and merchandise offering. The image that a clothing retail store communicates should be such that the target market can identify with it: it should thus coincide with the target consumers' expectations and lifestyle. Store image is an important concept and part of the retail offering as it influences consumers' choice of store and loyalty towards the store (Newman & Cullen, 2002:243).

3.3.3 Consumers' expectations of the CS in clothing retail stores

3.3.3.1 Consumer expectations defined

Consumers' expectations evolve from their experiences and knowledge through their socialization as consumers (Levy & Weitz, 2007:524) and present the subjective desires or objective predictions of objects/services (Johnson & Mathews, 1996:290). In most studies done on service quality, consumers' expectations are vital (Coye, 2004:54). They can stem from the organization's image, marketing communication, word-of-mouth, previous encounters or/and customer needs. In conjunction to this, customer pre-attitudes as well as the conventional marketing mix can affect consumers' expectations of a service or a product (Leventhal, 2008:51). Consumers' expectations of CS are apparently relatively concrete and short-term. Due to rapid changes in the retail environment in recent years, increased living

standards and lifestyles, consumers nowadays seem to have higher expectations of the services provided by retail (Newman & Cullen, 2002:48).

Two conceptualizations of consumer expectations exist in service quality literature, namely an *expectancy-based assessment* that measures the gap between consumers' expectations and their perceptions of a service or product (Bloemer *et al.*, 1998:1084) and a *performance-based assessment* that involves two types of expectations, i.e. "shoulds" and "wills" (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin & Zeithaml, 1993). The authors propose that a consumer's *predictive "will" expectations* can be described as *what the consumer thinks will happen* (Leventhal, 2008:51) and it positively filters the reality and consequently increase consumers' perception of reality. *Normative "should" expectations*, on the other hand, negatively filters reality and refer to what a consumer *thinks should happen* in the next encounter with the organization and its products or services (Leventhal, 2008:51). Customers' perceptions of the reality thereby decrease and this explains why different consumers will have different expectations and perceptions of the same service (Johnson & Mathews, 1996:292).

Customers unfortunately do not always have a clear understanding of what they want in a service encounter. Expectations can therefore range from being fuzzy and even unrealistic (where consumers are aware that something should change but are not certain of what changes they would like to happen) to being precise. Fuzzy expectations often lead to switching behaviour where consumers not necessarily have any success in finding a retailer that fulfils their expectations. Expectations may be *implicit*: the customer sub-consciously expects certain characteristics of the service that only become evident when they are not met. Expectations may however also be *explicit* and clear desires regarding a shopping encounter that has been experienced. A combination of these types of expectations may be experienced simultaneously in various degrees (Ojasalo, 2001:202, 203). They have also been described using customer needs as a base for differentiation, namely *must be* needs, which are needs that consumers are not aware of until they no longer have it; *expected needs* which are needs that a consumer are aware of and are able to express, and lastly the so-called *exciting needs*, that are unforeseen but result in great pleasure (Leventhal, 2008:51). This is imperative for retailers to know because "expected needs" eventually develop into "must be needs" that retailers should geared for.

3.3.3.2 *The effect of consumers' expectations on their satisfaction and store choice*

Consumers' expectations of a clothing retailer refer to what they "hope" to find in the store. Expectations are not necessarily realistic because it depends on existing schema and schemata in consumers' minds that have been formed over time through:

- Exposure to retail stores, and clothing retailers specifically in the case of this research which then "sets the stage" for subsequent judgements and for comparisons.
- Experience over time
- Experience with different stores that enable a comparison of what is offered by different clothing retail stores.
- Formal and/or informal education that equips someone with knowledge of clothing products, fashion etc.
- Interaction with others, for example peers.

Consumers with limited experience and exposure would therefore probably be less discerning and would be more satisfied/ impressed with a clothing retailer's service offering. In an urban environment, specifically in a major city such as Pretoria and in Centurion that are part of Tshwane, consumers' exposure to several shopping malls and many stores provide ample opportunity to develop relevant schemata and to become sceptical. It is therefore expected that consumers in Tshwane would be more aware of differences in clothing retailers' service offering due to opportunity to browse and compare.

Affirmation of consumers' expectations is critical in efforts to augment service quality (Bebko, 2000:12; Johnson & Mathews, 1996:290; Rust & Oliver, 1994:108). Consumers' expectations of a product or service are always based upon their frame of reference, i.e. their knowledge and prior experience of the context of the service offering. Limited experience limits expectations. A consumer may thus judge a service favourably although the service is not necessarily exceptional or good. It is important that retailers in a competitive retail environment acknowledge their customers' expectations and that they make effort to identify, reveal and calibrate customers' expectations, revert fuzzy expectations into precise ones, and turn implicit expectations into explicit ones (Ojasalo, 2001:206). Customers' satisfaction is indeed experienced as an outcome of their

expectations. Satisfaction results when the reality (the actual store experience) confirms or exceeds consumers' expectations (positive disconfirmation).

The dis/confirmation model suggests satisfaction as the congruence between consumers' expectations and their perception of the reality (Emmerson & Grimm, 1999:404). This theory in its primary level describes whether or not products or services meet up to the set standards/expectations that consumers possess. Confirmation occurs when consumers' expectations are met and disconfirmation results when their expectations are not met (i.e. either meets or exceeds expectations). Some authors prefer to conclude that confirmation occurs when the service encounter exceeds what the consumer expected and disconfirmation occurs when the service encounter is less or worse than what they had expected (Leventhal, 2008:52).

3.3.4 Consumers' perception of the various elements of CS

Perception involves a perceptual process that describes the immediate responses of our sensory receptors (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, fingers) to stimuli such as light, sound, texture, smells. Perception is the process in which these stimuli are selected, organised and interpreted into coherent, meaningful images, messages (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2006:35). When exposed to, and subjected to stimuli in a clothing retail store, a consumer thus sees (products, displays); hears (announcements, music, noise); feels (in store temperature; fabric textures), etc.

In modern life we are bombarded from every direction by various sensory sensations. Consumers respond to this by absorbing some stimuli and blocking out some stimuli (Soloman, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2006:36). When consumers find themselves in a purchasing situation, they do not only respond to these stimuli but also interpret it. People experience phases in which in which they process, organise and store the stimuli. This is the process of perception (Soloman, 2006:49). The small amount of stimuli that is absorbed and processed is subjectively influenced by the consumers' needs, experience and biases. The process of perception has three stages namely *exposure (sensation)*, *attention* and *interpretation* (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:36).

The first stage, namely sensation, refers to consumers' reaction to the basic sensory stimuli such as sound, smell, colours. This is referred to the "raw" data that is then processed and interpreted. The way in which an individual interprets and assigns meaning to stimuli, depends on their own set of schemas. A schema is a set of beliefs and feelings that a consumer has cognitively organised in their frame of reference. Consumers generally group objects that are believed to have characteristics that are very similar in nature based on what schema the object falls into (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:37). The perceptual process can be further broken down into four phases, namely *primitive categorization*, where the rudimentary characteristics of a stimulus are identified; *cue check* - where the characteristics are evaluated in order for a schema to be selected; *confirmation check*, where a specific schema is chosen and lastly *confirmation completion*, where a consumer decides what the stimulus is and comes to the conclusion that the clothing item that they would like to purchase is the right choice (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:38). The perceptual process is a very important way in which to position a clothing product.

As mentioned above the senses play a vital role in the formation of perceptions. Your sense of sight is the first sense that marketers use optimally in order to attract and stimulate consumers. Various meanings are communicated through the use of visual elements in advertising campaigns, the store environment, the products packaging, products size, design and colour (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:40). The most effective way to communicate a message and to provoke an emotion is through the use of colour. Colour is an important consideration when marketers are designing the stores interiors, the logo, the packaging, their displays and advertising. For instance: a clothing store's interior that is decorated in neutral colours gives the impression of calmness and sophistication, whereas a brightly coloured store interior can portray the message of youth and energy. Colour can become part of a clothing retailer's brand and upon seeing that specific colour a consumer automatically thinks of the store as the two are associated with each other (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:42). For example, Edgars uses a red square as part of their logo; red is then automatically associated with Edgars. Passers by can be attracted by colours used in window displays causing them to have a look which in turn could result in them entering the store and even making a purchase.

Different smells can arouse different emotions, associations and memories (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:43). An odour in a store can either be off putting or soothing and inviting or add to the atmosphere of the store. Clothing retailers should take note of the aroma in their stores – specifically as they want consumers to spend long periods of time in the store.

Sound is used as a tool to affect consumers' feelings and behaviour (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:43). It is an important atmosphere determinant and marketers should pay special attention to the music played in stores because it should be suited to the type of store, the image that they portray as well as the type of clientele they wish to attract. If a clothing store appeals to an older target market but they are playing contemporary pop music loudly, potential customers may leave the store without making a purchase even if they intended to do so. In a large department store it is necessary to play “neutral” music that will appeal to all ages and that will not offend anyone. The music should be in the background with the consumer being aware of it but not actually listening to it.

Touch has been found to positively influence sales transactions (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:44). The feel of the fabric of a garment has symbolic meaning: the smoothness of silk exudes luxury and class, whereas the coarseness of denim relates a message of practicality and durability (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:44). The texture of fabrics that clothing products are made of have a direct correlation with the perceived quality of the product.

Attention is the second stage of the perceptual process and refers to how much attention consumers pay to the stimuli that they are being exposed to (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:48). As consumers are exposed a large variety of stimuli, marketers are always on the look out for different ways to make their stimuli stand out from the rest. (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:44). Another way of attracting attention is by differentiating your stimuli from that of your competitors. When something is unique and different it commands attention and consumers tend to remember these (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:49).

The last stage of the perceptual process involves the interpretation of the stimuli into meaningful information. The way in which a consumer interprets the stimuli depends on their own schema and therefore two people can be exposed to the same stimuli but form different interpretations (Solomon *et al.*, 2006:50). This explains why one consumer will love

the environment of a store whilst another individual will dislike it completely and not patronise the store.

In order to impress a consumer, a store therefore has to intentionally design and plan stimuli to impress consumers rather than to annoy or over stimulate them. A store should also design stimuli that consumers can identify with and that would be comprehensible, and that would distinguish itself from competitors. Any stimulus is always interpreted within a consumer's frame of reference, i.e. what a consumer has been exposed to in the past, and/or what a consumer is able to interpret at a given point in time: over exposure to stimuli causes a consumer to ignore stimuli in "self defence". It is difficult to anticipate what consumers would eventually recognise and take notice of.

Consumers' perception of the service quality in clothing retail stores therefore involve their senses, perceptual processes as well as their ability to comprehend and their willingness to take notice.

3.3.5 The interactive contribution of the various elements of CS in terms of the service offering

As discussed above, CS is a multidimensional construct that involves various elements/dimensions of CS that each need to be designed individually although they eventually affect customers collectively as well. Consumers will probably identify elements of CS that they consider crucial and others that are secondary or not important at all. The systems theory (discussed in chapter 3) postulates that a negative assessment of one element of CS, for instance the product (in terms of inferior quality of garments) could be negated by a positive assessment of another element such as price so that the eventual evaluation of the retailer's customer service is positive even though not all elements meet consumers' expectations (Spears and Gregoire, 2005:5). It is therefore essential for any clothing retailer to refrain from looking at the elements of CS in isolation but to also investigate the complex interactive contribution of various elements of CS towards a shopping experience that will positively affect consumers' purchase intentions and buying behaviour (Gothan & Erasmus, 2008:640).



3.2 SERVICE QUALITY IN RETAIL

3.2.1 Service quality defined

Quality is a very ambiguous term and therefore many definitions exist. One definition approaches quality in three different ways, namely the *technical part* (i.e. the extent to which something measures up to specific technical standards); *philosophical* - (that has to do with the innate excellence of the service in terms of intangibles) as well as the *user-based approach* that will be concentrated on in this research. Consumers are generally unaware of the technical standards that stores and products should comply with and thus it is difficult for them to make a judgement based on that (Schneider & White, 2004:10).

Service quality (SQ) is described as a judgement of service excellence and superiority and refers to how the actual service offering meets up to customer expectations (Herstein & Gamliel, 2006:306) or their interpretation of how the service is supposed to be performed (Lewison, 1997:495). SQ is extrinsically perceived and is based on customers' experience through service encounters (Walker, Johnson & Leonard, 2006:23). Parasuraman et al., (1988 in Asubonteg, McCleary & Swan, 1996:63) explain that three core themes exist with regard to services, namely that consumers find it more difficult to judge service quality than it is to judge a physical good's quality; their perceptions of the service quality experienced are the outcomes of a comparison with their expectations and the actual service that was experienced and lastly that consumers don't only make evaluations on quality based on the outcomes of the service encounter but they also evaluate the process of the service delivery when deciding whether or not the service lives up to their expectations. Service quality is therefore defined as a "global judgement, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service". This concept has become increasingly popular amongst researchers and increasingly more crucial for marketers and organizations as a consumers' perception of the service quality directly affects the bottom line of the organization through customer retention, loyalty, satisfaction, repeat purchasing behaviour and word-of-mouth (Carrillat, Jaramillo & Mulki, 2007:472; Asubonteg *et al.*, 1996:63). This is even more important in recent times as the current retail environment has become more competitive and more aggressive in terms of efforts to attract and retain customers (Asubonteg *et al.*, 1996:62).

3.2.2 Dimensions of service quality

Organisations are compelled to place added emphasis on SQ in order to remain in business (Farner, Luthans & Sommer, 2001:350). Various studies that have tried to clarify this concept have been published to date. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry consequently developed the widely used SERVQUAL scale that distinguishes five dimensions of SQ (mostly intangibles) through which consumers' perception of a store's performance can be rated (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988:23; Bloemer, Ruyter & Wetzels, 1998:1084). Although this SERVQUAL scale has been criticized widely, especially in terms of theoretical and operational aspects (Ahmed & Shoeb, 2009:20) – similar to the fact that there is no consensus about a clear definition of what service quality is - there is no consensus about the best way of measuring it (Wisniewski, 2001:380). Despite criticism of the scale developed by Parasuraman and co-workers in 1988 it is still the most widely used scale in all various types of research studies. Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) developed this scale with the aim to discover the importance of the various dimensions of service quality when a consumer is making a judgement on the overall quality of the service offering. In addition to this, the relative weight that a consumer assigns to each dimension can also be determined (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2007:495). The initial scale consisted of ten dimensions but this was later condensed to five dimensions (Ahmed & Shoeb, 2009:18). This scale was later adapted by Dabholkar and co workers (1996) to be more suitable for mixed service encounters: the latter scale includes certain tangibles as part of the structure of the service.

The various models that have been developed thus far to investigate service quality do not necessarily contain the same dimensions (Martinez & Martinez, 2010). The dimensions that are discussed in the following section are included in the SERVQUAL instrument of Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) as well as Terblanche and Boshoff's schematic presentation of service quality as part of the so-called *total retail experience* (Terblanche and Boshoff 2001:36). The discussion of these selected dimensions is meant to illustrate how complex these intangibles are to grasp and to account for in any investigation.

3.2.2.1 Reliability

Reliability encompasses a retailer's ability to accurately and consistently deliver the service that it promises (Schneider & White, 2004:32; Bloemer *et al.*, 1998:1084). It for example involves the manner in which a clothing retailer handles complaints about defects in clothing, requests to order clothing merchandise from other stores, honours advertised prices as well as their ability to execute the service at the time that it promised to do so in an accurate and responsible manner (Bebko, 2000:23).

The reliability of a retailer is excellent when (Bebko, 2000:23):

- *a retailer promises to offer a certain service, they do so (for example adjusting clothes to fit)*
- *they do all they can to solve a customer's problem (for example if a style is sold out and needs to be ordered from another branch)*
- *the service is executed correctly the first time round*
- *the service is done at the time that is was promised to be done*

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- *they do all they can to solve a customer's problem (for example if a style is sold out and needs to be ordered from another branch)*
- *the service is executed correctly the first time round (for example the cashier rings up the sale correctly the first time)*
- *the service is done at the time that is was promised to be done (for example when an item had to be ordered from another branch and it was stated that it would be available at their branch in two weeks' time for the customer to collect, it would arrive in time)*

3.2.2.2 Empathy

Empathy has to do with how a retailer treats customers with different needs and wants (Schneider & White, 2004:32; Bloemer *et al.*, 1998:1084) for example when care is taken and individualised attention offered by salespeople on the floor or at the help desk in the clothing retail store (Bebko, 2000:11).

The empathy of a retailer is excellent when (Bebko, 2000:24):

- *retailers give customers individual attention (for example when the retailer invites them to a special pre sale event a day before the sale officially opens)*
- *employees give personal attention to customers (for example when help is needed in the fitting room)*
- *the retailer has customers' best interests at heart (for example when a customer returns an article, they gladly exchange it)*
- *operating hours are convenient (for example when a retailer extends the operating hours during the holiday season so that customers can do their shopping after work)*

3.2.2.3 Assurance

Assurance refers to the capacity of the clothing retailer to instil confidence and trust during service endeavours (Schneider & White, 2004:32; Bloemer *et al.* 1998:1084).

The assurance of a retailer is excellent when (Bebko, 2000:23):

- *the conduct of the employees instil confidence (for example when sales personnel make customers aware of fabric content and explain fabric care procedures)*
- *the environment and the service make the customer feel safe (for example a security guard is always present at the door and greets customers upon entering the store; the fitting rooms are clean and in good condition)*
- *the employees are unconditionally polite and helpful (for example when a customer has a query regarding a garment that was shown in a magazine but that is not available in the store).*

3.2.2.4 Responsiveness

Prompt service to customers is referred to as a store's responsiveness (Schneider & White, 2004:32; Bloemer *et al.*, 1998:1084) and refers to queuing at pay points, prompt sales service as well as satisfactory exchange and return services.

The responsiveness of a retailer is excellent when (Bebko, 2000:23):

- *all transactions and records are error free*
- *the customer is well aware of exactly when the service will take place (for example the pay points are clearly marked out)*
- *employees provide immediate service (for example when you have a query regarding the availability of a garment, they immediately try to assist)*
- *employees are available to help customers (for example there are an adequate amount of staff on the floor that are willing to assist with queries such as availability of sizes, colours etc).*
- *employees have enough time to assist customers (for example even if an employee is off duty but still on the floor, they will still assist a customer that has a query).*

3.2.2.5 Tangibility

Tangibility involves the physical aspect of the service (Schneider & White, 2004:32; Bloemer *et al.*, 1998:1084) such as the physical facilities in the store environment, equipment (e.g. coat hangers, rails) as well the appearance of the personnel and their communication equipment such as computers and telephones (Bebko, 2000:11).

The tangibility of the service of a retailer is excellent when the store's (Bebko, 2000:23):

- *equipment is modern looking (for example their computers at the pay points are modern)*
- *facilities are attractive and appealing (for example, fitting rooms are clean, spacious and attractive)*



- *employees look neat and tidy (for example, employees are dressed in attractive uniforms)*
- *associated materials are attractive and appealing (for example the plastic shopping bags are strong and attractive).*

3.2.2.6 Empathy

Empathy has to do with how a retailer treats customers with different needs and wants (Schneider & White, 2004:32; Bloemer *et al.*, 1998:1084) for example care taken and individualised attention offered by salespeople (Bebko, 2000:11).

The empathy of a retailer is excellent when (Bebko, 2000:24):

- *retailers give customers individual attention*
- *employees give personal attention to customers*
- *the retailer has customers' best interests at heart, for example accepting returns on garments that do not perform as expected*
- *operating hours are convenient*

3.2.3 The interactive contribution of the various elements of SQ in terms of the service offering

Consumers would typically enter a store: their total experience of the store as well as their perception of the individual elements of the marketing mix of a store (referred to as CS in this research) influences/determines their perception of the service quality of the clothing retail store. Consumers therefore judge tangibles in the clothing retail store, i.e. merchandise variety, visual merchandising, presence of sales personnel, length of queues etc and their subsequent experiences during the service encounter culminates in terms of a service quality judgement that may be positive or negative.

SQ is judged in terms of individual dimensions. The one dimension, namely *reliability* concerns the *outcome* of the service offering/delivery while the other four dimensions, i.e. *empathy*, *assurance*, *responsiveness* and *tangibility* form part of the *process* of the service

delivery. Despite juxtaposing evidence, some researchers consider reliability as the most important element of SQ (Bebko, 2000:11).

The general systems theory however postulates that the various dimensions of SQ are also judged interactively. If one dimension of SQ is perceived negatively, such a negative perception could be negated by another positively perceived dimension. Therefore, depending on what a consumer regards as important, the consumer's evaluation/perception of SQ could still be positive because a negative judgment of one dimension of SQ could be negated by the positive judgements of other dimensions of SQ that are regarded more important in terms of the total service experience. The opposite is however also true: if a crucial dimension of SQ is perceived negatively, the entire service offering could be interpreted as negative despite other dimensions being good or even excellent.

3.3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CS AND SQ EXPLAINED

In this study, service quality (SQ) is referred to in terms of predominantly intangible aspects of the service offering whereby consumers' perception of a retailer's service offering is described. Customer service (CS), on the other hand, in this particular study is distinguished in terms of tangible elements of the service offering that are based on the elements of the marketing mix of an organisation (Jobber, 2010:26). It is difficult to differentiate between CS and SQ because the constructs are inter-reliant. Consumers' perception of the various dimensions of the service quality of a store depends on how well (in terms of consumers' frame of reference) the elements of the store's CS offering is designed and executed. For example: the ringing up of purchases at the pay point and the ability of the sales personnel to do it correctly probably signify that the service is reliable (SQ) but it simultaneously reflects on the sales personnel, a distinct element of CS and so forth.

Due to the diversity of the South African market where prominent clothing retailers deal with consumer profiles that include characteristics of Third- and First-World consumers across a broad socio-economic spectrum, it is even more difficult to "measure" consumers' perception of SQ and CS. The target market of the stores that were targeted in this research fall in LSM groups 6 to 10, which represent the middle to upper income groups, i.e. consumers who supposedly have a certain minimum level of education and who have

varying amounts of exposure to all media types and facilities (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003:87). Their actual education status and their exposure through consumer socialisation that both influence their SQ judgements, may therefore vary considerably. Therefore a typical service quality instrument might probably not successfully identify shortcomings in the service delivery when used on its own. In addition, consumers in emerging markets (such as South Africa) are apparently more tolerant of poor service delivery than consumers in more developed markets such as in Europe and the USA and thus tend to make favourable judgements despite shortcomings in service delivery (Malhotra *et al.*, 1994:7). A recent study (Erasmus & Gothan, 2008) suggests that in these circumstances, a service quality investigation could be supported by another instrument that is based on more tangible evidence of customer service, i.e. attributes associated with the elements of the store's marketing mix.

3.4 STORE LOYALTY/ CUSTOMER LOYALTY

There is no consensus amongst authors on a definite definition of loyalty (Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001:531). Store loyalty refers to consumers' commitment, preference, repeat patronage behaviour and/or allegiance with certain stores. Novo (2004:2) in Marx (2005:11) defines customer loyalty as the inclination to choose one retailer over another when satisfying a certain purchasing want or need. When a consumer regularly frequents a store to purchase a certain type of merchandise it can be said that the customer is store loyal (Levy & Weitz, 2007:108). Jacoby and Chestnut (1978, in Bloemer, 1997:500) further explain this concept by stating that store loyalty is "the biased (non-random) behavioural response (i.e. revisit), expressed over time, by some decision making unit, with respect to one set of stores, which is a function of psychology (decision making and evaluative) processes resulting in brand commitment". Store loyalty refers to consumers' commitment, preference, repeat patronage behaviour and/or allegiance with certain stores. When consumers regularly frequent a clothing retailer store to purchase certain types of merchandise, they are said to be store loyal (Levy & Weitz, 2007:108). Loyalty is generally market-specific in terms of a service, vendor, customer and brand (Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001:531). Loyal customers are highly sought after by any organisation because they provide a competitive advantage, are less sensitive to price fluctuations, partake in positive-word-of

mouth communication and contribute to a store's profitability (Jones & Taylor, 2007:36; Rundle-Thiele & Mackay, 2001:529).

Consumers' patronage behaviour towards a clothing store relies on their feelings or attitude towards the store (affect) and the knowledge that they have gained through experience, socialisation and other sources (cognition). A consumer goes through several phases before actually becoming store loyal. Firstly someone becomes aware of the store (e.g. through word-of-mouth, media, advertisements or by passing the store). Secondly a consumer becomes a customer and actually purchases a clothing item in the store, which contributes to the image that is created. Consumers are thus then aware of the store and have formed a perception of the store in their minds. Positive perceptions may lead to preferences, repeat visits to the store and ultimately, repeat purchases. Visits to the clothing retail store may even become a habit that leads to repeat purchasing behaviour and store loyalty (Cant *et al.*, 2006:250).

Store loyalty is determined by a pre-determined set of criteria that a consumer uses to evaluate the store offering, These criteria involve the elements of the marketing mix as well as psychological factors for example waiting time at pay points and efficiency of staff (Cant *et al.*, 2006:250-251). The image the store portrays as well as the store environment largely affects consumers' affect, cognition and purchase behaviour. Store loyalty has a positive effect on a retailer, as it decreases ambiguity; decision making is also made easier for customers and the risk associated with store choice is reduced (Cant *et al.*, 2006:252). Loyal customers are therefore less likely to shop around or to engage in pre-purchase searches in other stores (Cant *et al.*, 2006:252).

Store loyalty has pertinent marketing implications (Cant *et al.*, 2006:252). Marketers need to design strategies to affect consumers' attitudes towards clothing retailers in order to develop loyal customers. One way is to impress consumers by consistently exceeding their expectations (Cant *et al.*, 2006:253).

3.5 THE EFFECT OF CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION ON CONSUMERS' EXPECTATIONS AND JUDGEMENT OF THE CS AND SQ OF CLOTHING RETAIL STORES

3.5.1 Consumer socialization defined

Consumer socialization is the process whereby individuals attain the skills, attitudes and knowledge that is required for them to operate in the market place (Rose, 1999:105). Various external factors such as cultural background, media, family, peers and marketing institutions affect individuals' development as consumers and their buying behaviour (Rose, 1999:105). Consumer socialization involves the same analytical and reflective stages that are consistent with a child's age development (John, 1999:186-187). During the time when children develop into young adults, they gain shopping knowledge and skills, acquire product and brand knowledge, become acquainted with the appeal and bias of advertising and gain first hand retail store knowledge (John, 1999:188-194). They also develop shopping scripts and begin to understand the order of events that are involved in a buying encounter (John, 1999:194).

The consumption and buying related skills that a child (girl) develops provide an instrumental backbone in how the individual will for example buy clothing later in their lives (product related consumer socialization). Over time during the process of consumer socialization, consumers develop structural and symbolic knowledge that form part of their transactional knowledge. This knowledge becomes more sophisticated with age and increased experience. *Structural knowledge* involves knowledge of product attributes (quality, assortment, variety, fabrics etc.) and taxonomic relationships of categories and core attributes. Even though this type of knowledge is very rudimentary, adults still use it to categorise products and services. *Transactional knowledge* develops over time to include *symbolic knowledge*: individuals thus begin to understand the symbolic meanings and the status involved with various products such as clothing and the status that can be obtained by wearing certain brands and shopping at certain stores because the concept of self (self-image, esteem, ideal-self) is largely influenced and portrayed by the clothing that they wear (John, 1999:193; Kaiser, 1998:147).

3.5.2 The influence of consumer socialization on consumers' buying behaviour

Consumers' consumer related skills and product knowledge inevitably positively relates to their exposure and experience while growing up. Unfortunately the demographics of the South African population at present and our past political history have created different levels of exposure and experience for consumers who are now included in the customer profile of prominent clothing retail stores in South Africa. This dissimilarity complicates any efforts to differentiate and augment the CS and that would enhance SQ to the level that meets and exceeds the market's expectations (Rose, 1999:105). The difference may be as significant when customers of prominent clothing retailers in South Africa are compared to their first world counterparts.

3.6 SUMMARY

Female consumers' judgement of the service offering of clothing department stores could be investigated in terms of tangible elements of the service offering (in this study referred to as CS). An investigation of female consumers' expectations of individual elements of CS would however not necessarily provide enough evidence to augment the service offering because these elements of CS are interdependent. Therefore their interactive contribution towards the service offering should also be acknowledged. Consumers' judgement of tangible elements of CS culminates as a judgement/perception of service quality (SQ), which mostly comprises of intangible dimensions. A consumers' judgement of a store's CS and SQ is inevitably influenced by exposure and previous experiences (consumer socialization): it is proposed that consumers with less extensive experience would be more forgiving and that they would probably make positive judgements of a service offering despite shortcomings. It would therefore be difficult to detect shortcomings in the service offering when less experienced consumers are involved. A combination of investigations, i.e. investigation of tangible evidence of the service offering as well as an investigation of service quality in terms of more intangible dimensions is therefore proposed to get a better understanding of consumers' judgement of specific retail settings. In the fashion environment, prestige related factors also affect consumers' store patronage. It therefore makes sense to combine such measurements to gain a more inclusive understanding of why certain clothing stores



are preferred and how a store's service offering could be augmented to attract and retain customers in a very competitive market place.



CHAPTER 4

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE; CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK; RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This chapter introduces the systems framework that served as the theoretical perspective that was used to organise relevant literature in terms of a conceptual framework and to guide the research design and discussion of the findings

4.1 MOTIVATION FOR USING A SYSTEMS APPROACH AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1.1 Introduction

The general systems theory is described as a “research paradigm that attempts to facilitate the generalization of behavioural principles across a wide range of organizations” (Sirgy, 1984 in Johnson, Tsiros & Lancioni, 1995:8). This theory postulates that an organization comprises of various sub-systems that work within a larger system (Johnson *et al.*, 1995:8). The systems theory is appropriate for the study of service quality because it allows a study of CS and SQ as entire, separate entities as well as the various elements/ dimensions they comprise of in terms of the sequence, relationship and interdependency of the various elements and how they contribute to the eventual service offering in a clothing retail store.

4.1.2 Core assumptions of the systems approach

A system is defined as any collection of interrelated parts or subsystems that are combined to obtain one or more objectives (Spears & Gregoire, 2003:2), e.g. the various elements of CS in a retail setting that can be discussed and evaluated individually or in terms of the CS as a “whole experience”. These elements are perceived and interpreted (transformed) by customers within their knowledge, experience and expectations frameworks in terms of an output, i.e. a judgement that the service offering is impressive/ satisfactory or the contrary. The systems theory proposes that all the elements of CS and SQ are not perceived as the

same, similar or on the same level: they are organized in a hierarchy. Customers do not necessarily regard all the elements of CS or SQ as equally important. Also, CS and SQ can be judged favourably despite shortcomings in certain of the elements/ dimensions of the service offering due to the principle of equifinality. A positive judgement can for example be achieved/ concluded via different routes: the negative effect of rude salespeople (personnel is one of the elements of CS) can for example be negated by an impressive product assortment (products is another element of CS). This example implies that customers regard the *product* more crucial than *personnel* in terms of their final judgement of the store's service offering. In this research one of the objectives is to specifically identify the hierarchy of the elements of CS and of SQ in order to explain the interactive effect of these elements on consumers' expectations and judgement (outcome) of CS and SQ respectively (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993:328). Systems can either be open or closed: CS and SQ can be regarded as open systems where boundaries between various elements/ dimensions of these phenomena are permeable. Price is for example often positively correlated with quality (that is associated with another element, i.e. product). The various elements of CS therefore mutually influence one another (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993:333).

4.2 CUSTOMER SERVICE

4.2.1 Elements of CS in clothing retail stores (Inputs)

The elements of the CS of a clothing retail store that serve as the inputs of the system (CS), are: product, price, store image, store environment and the services respectively. These elements can be differentiated consciously or sub consciously in the consumer's mind when a consumer (female) enters a clothing store (Thang & Tan, 2003:194; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007: 444). The systems theory postulates that these elements are not necessarily of equal importance during a consumer's judgement of a store (there is a hierarchy) and that some elements may even compensate for others that are lacking (Spears & Gregoire, 2003:2) for example if a store's prices are perceived to be high (a negative perception) the consumer might still support the store if the quality is simultaneously perceived to be high. In order to understand why a consumer judges a store positively, one must thus first understand how they rate/ prioritise the various elements of CS as well as which elements are regarded as crucial (non negotiable). The latter is done through a non-compensatory decision rule (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007:540).

4.2.2 Interpretation of the elements of CS within consumers' expectations (Transformation)

When entering a clothing store, consumers would typically process the external stimuli for example in store displays (elements of CS) and the product assortment they are exposed to, internally (within their frame of reference that form their expectations) and convert it into significant information on which a CS judgement is based (Thang & Tan, 2003:194). The transformation of stimuli involves cognitive activity, i.e. thought processes through which consumers retrieve and use information they are familiar with (knowledge and experience based schemata and scripts that relate to CS) (Kaiser, 1997:34). Cognitive thought processes determine consumer's expectations of how the CS and SQ "should" be (Johnson & Mathews, 1996:292). In this phase, one of the core assumptions namely *hierarchy* comes into being as not all elements of customer service are equally important to everyone. Every female consumer will develop a set of standards of what they find to be crucial in terms of clothing / apparel outlets/ department stores and what they find to be less important.

4.2.3 Consumers' perception of CS and SQ (Outputs)

A consumer's CS judgement (positive or negative), represents the output, i.e. the goal of the system (Spears & Gregoire, 2003:2). A consumer's favourable (or negative) judgement may be achieved in more than one way (*equifinality*) because negative judgements can be compensated for by other positive judgements (this would be reflected in a mean score across different measurements in a CS or SQ instrument). A consumer thus attaches weights to specific elements according to a hierarchy that is experience based and through the application of compensatory and non-compensatory decision rules - a final judgement (positive or negative) is made. The output of a system thus only indicates the judgement of the whole experience (CS *per se*), it does not identify individual negative judgements of service elements unless the elements are scrutinized individually. Any clothing retail store that focuses on individual elements of CS in an effort to augment their service offering and

to enhance their SQ may fail dearly due to a misunderstanding of the interactive effect of the individual elements of CS and SQ.⁵

4.3 CUSTOMER SERVICE IN CLOTHING RETAIL STORES DISCUSSED IN TERMS OF A SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

A clothing retail store's CS offering is distinguished in terms of specific elements namely Product, Price, Services/ Processes, Store environment as well as the Store image. In conjunction with socio-cultural influences (specifically lifestyle as determined by the socio-economic group), these elements of CS serve as the inputs of the system and determine how CS is perceived. The prominent clothing retailers in South Africa all target consumers in LSM groups of 6 to 10 and thereby suggest a certain level of affordability and dictate a minimum image level for the store through its merchandise, the personnel as well as the environment that is created for shoppers. The elements of CS are interpreted individually but also interactively within consumers' established mental frameworks that are determined through consumer socialization and inevitably prior experience as shoppers and through shopping related activities. During the interpretation (transformation) of the external stimuli (inputs), consumers apply decision rules to order the elements in terms of their importance and significance. The decision rules can either be compensatory (whereby certain negative judgements are compensated for by other positive judgements) or non compensatory (e.g. non acceptance of poor quality, despite excellent pricing strategies and impressive store atmosphere). A consumer concludes the interpretation in the form of a positive /negative judgement of the clothing retailer's CS as a whole (output). This will probably reflect a similar SQ judgement (because CS and SQ is intertwined) and a consequent decision to re patronise the store or not and to become store loyal or not. The latter decision is part of the feedback of the store experience and influences customers' consideration of elements of CS during future re purchase behaviour.

⁵ This research proposes that a clothing retail store intentionally designs the elements of CS (tangible elements of the marketing mix) for the store and that this influences consumers' perception of the SQ (mostly intangible dimensions) of the store

4.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

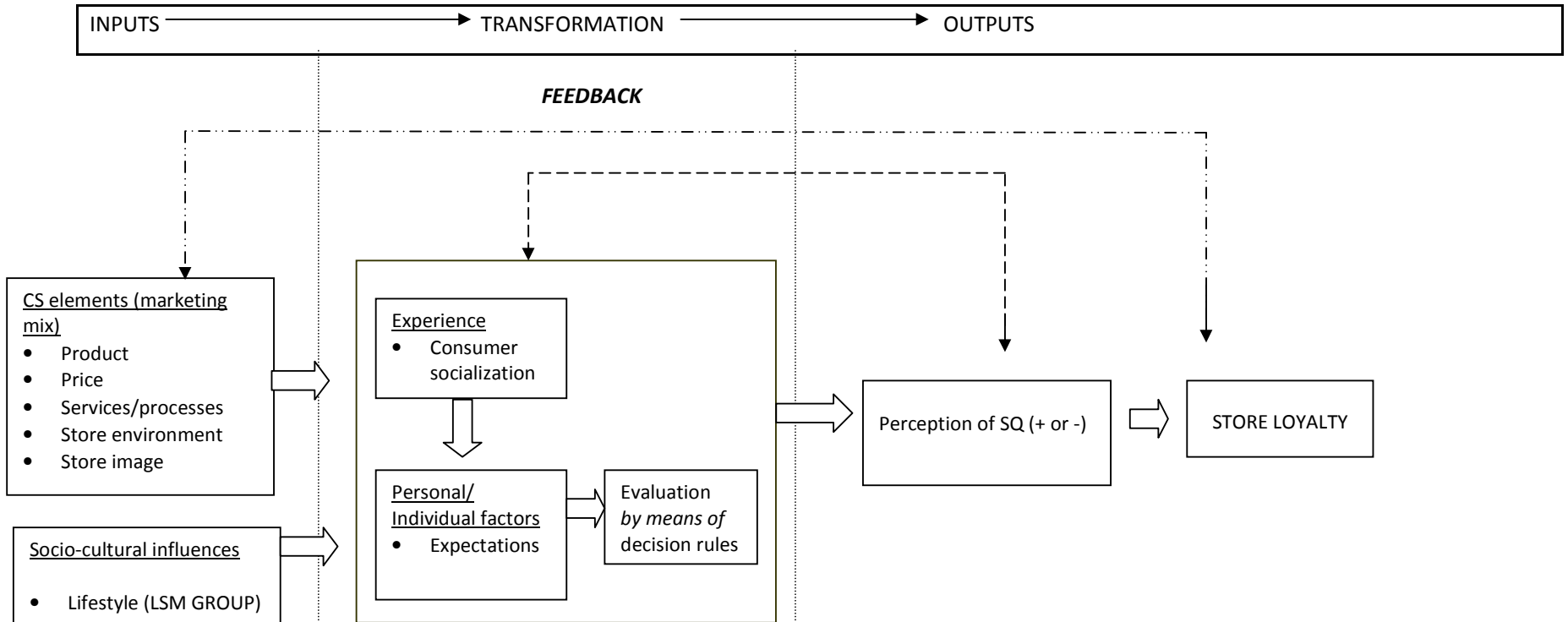


FIGURE 4.1: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE EXPLICATION OF CONSUMERS' JUDGEMENT OF CLOTHING RETAILER'S CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFERING WITHIN THE SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE



Specific objectives were formulated with regard to female consumers' expectations and judgements of selected established clothing department stores in Tshwane, RSA to address prominent issues of the research problem:

1. In terms of the Customer Service (CS) of selected prominent clothing department stores:

- 1.1 to investigate and describe female consumers' expectations of the CS (in its entirety) in these stores;*
- 1.2 to investigate and describe female consumers' expectations of CS in these stores in terms of the individual elements of CS;*
- 1.3 to identify shortcomings in the service offering that need to be attended to, to augment the CS in terms of what consumers hope to find when they patronise clothing department stores.*

2. In terms of the Service Quality (SQ) of the selected prominent clothing department stores:

- 2.1 to investigate and describe female consumers' perception of the SQ (in its entirety) in these stores;*
- 2.2 to investigate and describe female consumers' perception of the individual dimensions of SQ in these stores;*
- 3.3 to identify and describe shortcomings in the SQ in these stores (in terms of specific dimensions of SQ) that could be attended to, to augment the service offering.*

3. To investigate and describe the significance of prestige related attributes as a possible influence on female consumers' preference for, and patronage of clothing retail stores.



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explicates the research design and the research methodology in accordance with the objectives of the research

5.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was designed within specific parameters. Firstly, the research was limited in scope because a research based dissertation for the degree Masters in Consumer Science only contributes 150 of the 240 credits that are required for completion of the degree. Secondly, the research was not funded, which inevitably limited the scale of the research. Thirdly, the objectives of the research confined the study to an exploratory, descriptive endeavour because of lack of empirical evidence that would substantiate an extensive research project on a representative scale. The intention with the research was subsequently to optimise the opportunity and the findings of this research in terms of suggestions for viable follow-up research projects that could be done on a national scale with the consent and support of retailers so that the findings could be generalised.

Acknowledging the type of data that was required to accomplish the objectives of the research, a survey was designed to explore specific phenomena (CS, SQ and store prestige) in a specific context (an urban area in an emerging economy) (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:183). A structured questionnaire, which is typical of quantitative studies, was developed to collect primary data. After unsuccessful efforts to ascertain permission from authorities to collect data in stores in shopping centres, it was decided that willing respondents would be allowed to complete the questionnaires at home in their own time. The questionnaire was divided into specific sections to address pertinent objectives and related phenomena (McDaniel & Gates, 2004:30-32). These sections mostly included existing instruments that involved familiar scales to investigate in an explorative way, consumers' expectations of the customer service (CS); their judgements/perception of the service quality (SQ) and their regard for prestige of specific clothing retail department stores. The constructs CS, SQ and store prestige were investigated holistically as

well as in terms of their respective dimensions interactively contribute towards consumers' judgements of the clothing retail stores' service offerings, consumers' store patronage and ultimately, store loyalty. A study of the interactive effect of the elements of CS and the dimensions of SQ and store prestige therefore implied causality and therefore spurious association of the various elements was done (McDaniel & Gates, 2004:28).

The study can further be described as cross-sectional. It also reflects the situation in an emerging economy in a specific urban region at a specific period in time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:183).

5.2 UNIT OF ANALYSIS, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

5.2.1 Unit of analysis

The **unit of analysis was based on the following considerations** that eventually served as pre conditions for individuals' participation:

- A focus on *female consumers* seemed appropriate because sales of women's wear generally significantly contribute to retailers' overall sales of clothing. In the USA sales of women's wear contribute to approximately 50% of clothing sales (Frings, 2005:286) while Datamonitor reported a 50.7% market share for women's wear in 2008.
- Previous research has shown that consumers that are financially better off are more critical of service quality and are less tolerant of poor service (Samson & Little, 1993:390). It was therefore decided to involve urban consumers, across Tshwane in Gauteng, which is a more affluent geographic area in the RSA, to collect information from consumers who have reasonable access to different clothing department stores for this exploratory investigation.
- Because department stores generally focus between 70 and 80 percent of their merchandise on the needs and requirements of the middle to upper –middle price ranges (Frings, 2005:287), it seemed appropriate to focus on an urban area that is more affluent than many other parts in the country. Involvement of respondents from suburbs across the city, however allowed for diversity in the sample, i.e. respondents from different socio economic levels.



- Confinement of the study appropriate because the population of Tshwane is very diverse and it provided the ideal opportunity to recruit potential respondents for the study.
- Female consumers in the large urban area of Tshwane generally have extensive exposure to, and ample opportunity to patronise several clothing retail stores and shopping malls, which seemed appropriate in terms of respondents' potential contribution towards the study.

5.2.2 Sample framework

The study was limited in scope: it specifically investigated *females*⁶ expectations of CS, their shopping behaviour, perception of the service offering (SQ) and regard for store prestige of selected clothing department stores. The sample framework consisted of all the female consumers of 21 years and older in Tshwane that shop at all or certain of six selected clothing retailers (i.e. Edgars, Foschini, Queenspark, Stuttafords, Truworths and Woolworths). Primary data was hence collected from female consumers in Tshwane, RSA because female consumers in this specific geographic region in Gauteng are probably better off in terms of the options that they have to choose from when doing shopping than in most parts elsewhere in the country. These consumers potentially have access to several shopping malls and centres that are often located within close proximity of one another that allow for comparative shopping in terms of stores and choice of merchandise. It was assumed that any shortcomings/ problems identified through this exploratory study would merit further investigation because conditions in other geographic areas in the country would probably be similar or worse.

The population of Tshwane, within a 30 Km radius of the centre of Pretoria, consists of:

- a total population (across all age groups) of 1 522 493, that includes 751 589 males (49.4%) and 770 904 females (46.6%);
- a total female population of 25 years and older: 435 929
- a female population of 25 to \leq 30 years: 160 190
- a female population of 30 years and older: 275 738

(www.statssa.co.za)

⁶ All references to respondents in this research hence refer to *female* consumers specifically.

5.2.3 Identification of the selected



The selection of stores was based on the definition of “department stores” in literature. Six stores, namely Edgars, Foschini, Queenspark, Stuttafords, Truworths and Woolworths (*in alphabetic order*) were identified as established department stores, i.e. large retail stores that offer a wide variety of merchandise that is divided into distinct departments or separate clearly distinguished selling areas within a store. Department stores generally focus between 70 and 80 percent of their merchandise in the middle to upper –middle price ranges (Frings, 2005:287). The selected stores are often conveniently located near, or adjacent to one another in shopping malls and centres, which provides ample opportunity for consumers to browse and to compare merchandise and services.

5.2.4 Data collection

Initially a mall intercept method was envisaged to recruit participants. Unfortunately only one shopping mall gave permission to do recruiting and to collect data at the mall. Due to this pertinent practical constraint the mall intercept method unfortunately had to be altered to a convenient snowball sampling technique. The malls that were approached initially were: Brooklyn mall; Centurion mall, Sunnypark shopping centre, Kollonade shopping centre and Woodlands mall because at the time, there was a branch of each of the selected retailers in every one of these malls that are situated across different geographic areas. Evidence that convenient snowball sampling has been used with great success in similar studies (Marx, 2005 and Gothan, 2008) convinced the researcher to adapt the data collection technique provided that effort would be made to recruit as many respondents possible within existing time and financial constraints. After discussions with the statistician, it was concluded that this method of data collection would be adequately suited.

Potential respondents were thus recruited through a convenient sampling method in a purposive manner considering gender, geographic area and personal experience with clothing purchases (McDaniel & Gates, 2004:24). Three hundred and fifty questionnaires were handed out to potential respondents that met the pre-requisites (i.e. females; at least 21 years of age; residing in Tshwane; having personal experience with shopping). Five trained field workers (two friends and three fellow students) aided in the distribution and collection of questionnaires during October and November 2008. At first, potential respondents were identified conveniently in different suburbs where the assistants lived and then, through convenient snow

ball sampling additional potential. Recruitment was mainly done over weekends, hoping that completed questionnaires could be collected after a day or two. A drop-down-collect-later procedure was used after an initial screening of potential respondents in accordance with the pre-requisites for participation and an explanation of respondents' responsibilities. Potential respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the information and protection of their identity through anonymous participation. They were also informed that it would require at least 20 minutes to complete the rather lengthy questionnaire.

Data was collected across Tshwane in various suburbs within a 30km radius from the centre of the city to ensure inclusion of consumers from different socio economic groups and with the intention to recruit respondents who have access to stores in different shopping malls and centres. The underlying motivation for the recruitment of respondents was that consumers in LSM groups 6 to 10 would fit the various retailers' target market. Because the selected retailers aim to attract a diverse consumer population, effort was also made to recruit females across a broad age spectrum. Completed questionnaires were collected after a period of three days. In exceptional cases inexperienced (in terms of the completion of questionnaires) respondents completed the questionnaires in the presence the assistant but without any interference. Eventually, after at least two reminders and encouragement to complete the questionnaires that were handed out to potential participants, 243 completed questionnaires (69.4%) were retrieved. Willing respondents' contact details were written on a separate card and were entered in a lucky draw that took place in December. This lucky draw served as an incentive for participation.

Despite critique that may be voiced against a convenient sampling method, several researchers agree that it is not necessarily a limitation. Calder, Phillips and Tybout (1981 in Prakash, 1992:815) state that if the purpose of the study is to (1) develop new theory (which is the case in this research that is justified on the grounds that limited empirical evidence exists concerning South African consumers' expectations of clothing retail stores and their judgement of the retailers' service offering); and (2) to test hypotheses, convenience sampling is preferable to a representative sample where the goal is to generalise.

Every instrument that was used in this research was tested to determine the internal consistency.

5.3 MEASURING INSTRUMENT

5.3.1 The structured questionnaire

The survey involved the use of a structured questionnaire, which enabled the collection of quantifiable data (Neuman, 1997:233). It consisted of six parts and was designed to include suitable measuring instruments in accordance with the objectives that were formulated for the study. The use of a questionnaire for data collection allows anonymous participation, which enhances truthful responses (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:185). All the questions in the various sections of the questionnaire were close-ended, which allowed for ease of completion of the questions and it also ensured uniform responses that would be easier to process (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:233). The questionnaire was bilingual (English and Afrikaans) to allow respondents to complete the questionnaires in the language they felt more comfortable with and to avoid any misunderstanding that could result in unreliable data.

The first draft of the questionnaire was done in English as it was based on existing instruments and scales. The researcher then translated the content to Afrikaans. This was checked by the researcher's supervisor and the content was subsequently translated back to English by the researcher to ensure correct interpretations and translations. The final version was then checked against the content of the questionnaires of previous researchers (Gothan, 2008; Marx, 2006) to ensure that the wording coincided. The measuring instruments implemented the dimensions of the scales that were used by the originators of the scales, i.e. simple Likert-type scales, based on their successful application in previous studies (Deeter-Schmelz, Moore & Goebel, 2000:43). Reliability coefficients were nevertheless calculated to confirm the reliability of these scales in the context of this research (McDaniel & Gates, 2004:31-32).

SECTION A: Demographic information, i.e. age (categorically); area of residence. Gender was excluded because it served as a precondition for participation⁷.

SECTION B: *Shopping behaviour* (frequency); *store patronage* (with specific referral to the six selected retailers); *general impression* of the selected clothing retailers; *willingness to recommend* the selected retailers to others.

SECTION C: Consumers' *expectations of customer service* investigated by means of a 31-item scale that was adapted from the study done by Marx (2005) with regards to supermarkets. This instrument investigated consumers' expectations of the customer service (CS) in the selected clothing retail stores by means of attributes that pertained to the marketing mix of a clothing retail store (a quantification of female consumers' expectation of the tangible elements of clothing retailers' service offering).

SECTION D: Consumers' *perception of the service quality* of clothing retail stores was investigated by means of an instrument based on the multi-attribute scale that was originally designed by Dabholkar *et al.* (1996). This instrument was preferred because it was designed by its authors to be used for contexts with mixed products and services. A *direct single measurement* was done instead of two measurements that require an expectation-minus-perception quantification using subsequent measurements based on the same items. This research thus only presented one measurement, i.e. a scale that investigated consumers' perception of the service quality of clothing retail stores. These findings were later interpreted in conjunction with consumers' expectations of the tangible elements of CS (Section C) to identify shortcomings in stores' service offering. This procedure was preferred because respondents were subjected to a judgment and interpretation of non tangible evidence of the service offering once only: it was thus assumed that this procedure would be easier for respondents to deal with. This has been done successfully in two prior studies (Gothan, 2008; Marx, 2005). A repetition of the procedure provided opportunity to compare consumers' expectations and judgments of service quality in three dissimilar retail contexts in the same geographic area upon completion of this research project.

⁷ Every reference to "consumer" in this research project, specifically refers to "female consumers"

The manner in which the service  is research project was applied can be justified by clear suggestions of Martinez and Martinez (2010:38, 39), i.e.:

- (1) that creative use of service quality instruments should be encouraged because the issue of appropriate and most relevant measuring instruments for service quality investigations in retail is not yet resolved.
- (2) that creative model building in the service quality domain is at present constrained by the body of existing literature: in some instances such as the Grönroos model (1982, 1984 in Martinez & Martinez, 2010) clear indications of how the model should be operationalised does not exist, which opens the door for new interpretations. Although some models are formative and others reflective, all formative models have some reflective elements, which pave the way for new conceptualisations.
- (3) that service quality instruments need to be country/culture specific because service quality is an intangible construct that is difficult to interpret. Consumers' judgement/interpretation would inevitably therefore be based on their frame of reference, i.e. how the service in a specific context is rendered.

SECTION E: A second service quality judgement based on the adapted multi-attribute scale of Terblanche and Boshoff (2003) that was designed for clothing retail stores in a South African context was nevertheless also included. The researcher intentionally chose not to include this scale as the only option in the questionnaire despite the fact that it was designed in a South African context with clothing retail in mind. The researcher argued that the inclusion of the instrument in Section C would contribute to an existing body of knowledge because it allowed for an investigation in a third retail context using the same instrument. In addition, the researcher argued that Terblanche and Boshoff are not clothing specialists and that certain quality attributes were omitted in their service quality instrument. The inclusion of this instrument therefore provided opportunity to compare the findings of the two instruments (judgement of the service quality dimensions) on face value.

SECTION F: A PRECON instrument was included to investigate consumers' preference for store prestige. This 30-item scale was originally developed by Deeter-Schmelz *et al.* because of indications that store-prestige and a prestigious image (in terms of the atmosphere) are highly regarded in terms of consumers' perception of the service quality and fashionability of

merchandise of a retailer (Deete



hat may be significant in a clothing

context.

5.3.2 Justification for the use of a multidimensional formative service quality instrument in the context of this research project

The use of a particular service quality (SQ) model/ largely depends on the philosophical view of the researcher/s and the context in which the research is done (Martinez & Martinez, 2010). Researchers agree that as yet, no specific model and measurement could necessarily be singled out as best one for a specific context (Ahmed & Shoeb, 2009:20). In this particular research project, a multidimensional formative approach was chosen. Service quality was therefore investigated within a systems perspective which coincides with the interpretation of formative multidimensional SQ models, i.e. SQ was considered as a multidimensional entity. It was assumed that the dimensions of SQ interactively affect consumers' SQ judgement. The eventual SQ score would thus be dependant upon the proposed dimensions. The SQ score would therefore be a weighted combination of the dimensions, which means that poor performance in one dimension could be negated by excellence in other dimensions. An identification of the relevant dimensions and their contribution toward SQ would therefore provide valuable guidelines in terms of how a service offering could be improved. This approach has been used in the RSA context before to investigate the service quality in appliance sales departments of major retail channels (Erasmus & Gothan, 2008). In this research endeavour, exploratory factor analysis was used to verify the internal consistency of the scale in the specific research context. This resulted in a reduction of the dimensions of the initial instrument and a consequent redefinition of the dimensions to reflect the content of the dimensions, which is in agreement with the recommendations of Martinez and Martinez (2010), namely that models should be verified in the context of the research and that dimensions could be more flexible than proposed by their original authors.

Although the original Dabholkar model and SQ instrument was designed in a multidimensional reflective manner, the researcher decided that the dimensions of SQ should not be regarded as a proxy of SQ but rather as formative towards the construct. The content (attributes) of this instrument was regarded suitable for this research context and it was decided that exploratory factor analysis would be used to redefine the dimensions. Service quality is then determined as



an algebraic construction that i perception of quality in terms of several dimensions. In this way, the importance of the various dimensions of SQ could be investigated in terms of a consumer's judgement of the overall quality of the service offering (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2007:495). It allowed for a calculation of the relative weight that a consumer assigns to each dimension of SQ (Chowdhary & Prakash, 2007:495).

5.4 DATA ANALYSIS

All questionnaires where coded by the researcher immediately after data collection in accordance with pre-determined data definitions. Once all questionnaires had been collected and coded, they where sent to a statistician for data capturing together with a set of data definitions. The researcher then checked the data for errors, where after the researcher and the statistician proceeded with the various statistical procedures.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the "body of data" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:257). Descriptive statistics are employed in order to measure the points of central tendency (mode, median and mean), variability by means of variance, range, quartile and standard deviation and lastly the measures of shape, in other words the skewness and kurtosis of the data (Cooper & be presented and organised in a more understandable manner. Schindler, 1998:427-430). In this study tendencies and basic frequencies are presented as descriptive statistics through visual illustrations of specific sections of the data, i.e. an inclusion of graphs, frequencies, means and percentage distributions (, 1996:163) this allows the data to

Exploratory factor analysis, an interdependence technique was used to investigate and possibly reduce the dimensions of established instruments to be more relevant in the context of the study (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 1997). Data was analysed to determine the significance as well as the relative importance of the various elements/ dimensions of the Customer Service, Service Quality and PRECON prestige scales in the context of this study (Cooper & Schindler, 1998:560). Factor analysis seeks for patterns within the various dimensions or elements of an instrument to determine whether or not all dimensions are deemed as important or if some of the dimensions can be grouped in order to form a new comprehensive (combined) set of variables that correlate with each other (Cooper & Schindler, 1998:577). The grouped variables or factors "account for the variance in the data as a whole"



(Marx, 2005:34). The group with nation becomes the first factor and this process is repeated until all the variances are included. The correlation coefficients that exist between the factor and the variable are dubbed loadings and for this study any factor loadings that were greater than 0.25 were deemed as important and included. Factor analysis does not identify dependent variables and it can therefore be considered an interdependence method that regards all the relevant variables and the relationships that exist between them (Marx, 2005:34). Factor analysis was used in this study to summarize the data, i.e. to reduce the original variables into a smaller number of concepts. Factor analysis is perfect tool to explore the relevant phenomena, i.e. it can be used to explore the possibility of various hidden structures within the variables. A major consideration in this research was that established SQ instruments do not necessarily reflect the content and dimensions of consumers in emerging economies, therefore exploratory factor analysis was used to redefine the dimensions of the scales that were included in this research. In every instance the internal consistency of the scales was investigated. Findings are revealed in Chapter 6.

5.5 OPERATIONALISATION

Table 5.1 provides a summary of the objectives indicates the relevant sections in the questionnaire and specifies the statistical procedures that were used to analyse the data in accordance with the objectives.

TABLE 5.1: DETAIL OF STATISTICS DURING DATA ANALYSIS



Objective	Questionnaire: relevant data	Statistical procedures
<p>To investigate and describe consumers' expectations of the CS in clothing department stores, specifically in terms of their expectations of individual elements of CS</p> <p>To make recommendations to retailers to enhance the service offering in this competitive market based on empirical evidence of consumers' expectations of clothing retail stores as well as their store patronage.</p>	<p>Section A & B: Demographic data; Evidence of shopping behaviour</p> <p>Section C: <i>31 statements rated on a 5 point scale : "Definitely" to "Not at all"</i> (mostly tangibles that described elements of CS)</p>	<p>Descriptive statistics: simple frequencies and ranking, followed by exploratory factor analysis to identify the relevant elements of CS in this context.</p> <p>An investigation of the internal consistency of the instrument (Cronbach Alpha)</p> <p>A calculation of the means to allow a discussion of consumers' expectations of the individual elements of CS.</p>
<p>To investigate and describe consumers' perception of the SQ of the clothing department stores in terms of relevant dimensions of Service Quality in the context of this research, i.e. clothing retailers in an emerging economy.</p> <p>To discuss shortcomings that could be addressed to enhance the service offering based on evidence of consumers' perception of SQ in clothing retail stores.</p>	<p>Section D: SQ instrument (Dabholkar) <i>28 statements rated on a 5 point scale rated on a 5 point scale: "Excellent" to "Poor"</i></p> <p>Section E: Terblanche & Boshoff instrument: <i>24 statements reacted to in terms of a 5 point scale that ranged from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly Disagree"</i></p>	<p>Exploratory factor analysis was done to identify the relevant dimensions of these scales in the context of this study.</p> <p>Internal consistency was investigated.</p> <p>Means were calculated as an indication of consumers' perception of the various dimensions of SQ.</p>
<p>To investigate and describe the significance of prestige related attributes of clothing retail stores that may affect consumers' preference for, and patronage of clothing retail stores</p>	<p>Section F: PRECON scale</p> <p>30 items rated on a 5 point scale: <i>"Strongly agree" to "Strongly Disagree"</i></p>	<p>Exploratory factor analysis was done to identify the relevant dimensions of these scales in the context of this study.</p> <p>Internal consistency of the scales was investigated.</p> <p>Means were calculated as an indication of consumers' regard for the importance of prestige related factors for clothing retail stores.</p>

5.6 QUALITY OF THE DATA

The quality of the data determines whether the research is successful and publishable or not as well as whether or not significant statistical results can be achieved and hence meaningful conclusions obtained (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:27). Every study aims at research and data that is valid and reliable, with results that reflect the judgements of the respondents and not that of the researcher. The quality is measured in terms of the validity as well as the reliability of the data (McDaniel & Gates, 2004:125).

5.6.1 Validity issues

5.6.1.1 *Validity per se*

Validity is defined as the level to which the measure that is used correctly reflects the various concepts that it was supposed to measure (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:28; De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2005:160; McDaniel & Gates, 2004:125). Various validity dimensions are relevant. Care and consideration is crucial through all the stages of the research, including the data collection process in order to obtain meaningful results that reflects the truth as best as possible (Mouton, 1996:111).

5.6.1.2 *Conceptualisation: Theoretical validity*

Various sources of literature were consulted as a basis for this study in the form of a literature review. Theoretical validity was ensured through a meticulous scrutiny of relevant literature to gain an understanding of the relevant concepts for the study and in terms of their application in the questionnaire. The questionnaire included instruments that have been used before. They were translated from English to Afrikaans: to and fro to ensure that the content was clear and correct and to prevent misunderstandings or misinterpretations (Marx, 2005:35; McDaniel & Gates, 2004:203). Careful attention was thus given to the language and wording used in the questionnaire. The inclusion of existing scales that were used in similar, successful studies enhances the validity of the study. A statistician was consulted to ensure that the correct scales were used.

5.6.1.3 *Operationalisation: Construct validity*

Construct validity is “the degree to which a measurement instrument represents and logically connects via the underlying theory, the observed phenomenon to the construct” (McDaniel & Gates, 2004:205), i.e. the ability of the questionnaire and the various scales to measure what is intended to be measured (Mouton, 1996:128). Through a thorough literature review, the apt terminology and concepts were identified and conceptualised. Existing instruments and scales were slightly adapted by using relevant terminology to reflect the context of the study (clothing retail).

5.6.1.4 *Sampling: Representativeness*

The chosen sample must accurately represent the population for the study. This study unfortunately had to depend on a convenient sampling method. In order to include a wide spectrum of consumers who shop at different shopping malls across the city, recruitment was done in different geographic areas/suburbs of Tshwane . Intentional effort was made to include different age groups. A relatively large sample (N=243) group was recruited to reduce error and hoping that the data would reflect the judgements of the larger population as best as possible. This study is explorative and descriptive in kind and there was never any intention to generalise the findings towards the entire country. Only willing participants were included and therefore it can be assumed that their responses would have been honest and trustworthy.

5.6.2 *Reliability issues*

Reliability is defined as the extent to which the measures are without random error and hence present consistent data (McDaniel & Gates, 2004:200). The fewer errors there are in the measurement in a particular study, the more reliable the results will be: if the study is thus later repeated in the exact same setting and circumstances, the results should coincide. Reliability forms an integral part of the validity in the data collection process.

The following steps were taken to  process of data collection:

- All participants were willing and voluntarily completed the questionnaire.
- The questionnaire was scrutinised and pre tested to eliminate any misleading questions and complicated language so that it was quick and easy to complete.
- Respondents were fully informed about the purpose of the research in person and this was confirmed in a cover letter.
- Anonymity and confidentiality was ensured in order to inspire confidence and truthful responses.
- The questionnaire only contained questions regarding the relevant research objectives.
- Permission from the ethics board was obtained before any data collection commenced.
- Participants were allowed to drop out at any time if they wished to do so. No pressure was therefore exerted when, after two reminders, consumers did not have their completed questionnaires ready for collection.
- A statistician was consulted to structure and content of the questionnaire and to ensure that the data would be ample to cover the scope of the objectives and the statistical methods that were to be used .



CHAPTER 6

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results in terms of comprehensible tables and figures as well as an interpretation of the findings in accordance with the objectives of the study.

6.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The only prerequisites for females to become involved in this study, was that they had to be older than 21 years, had to reside in the greater Tshwane area and they had to willingly partake. The age limitation was set to ensure that respondents would have had adequate shopping experience to enable a useful contribution to the research.

6.1.1 Geographical area

Consumers were recruited in various suburbs within a 30km radius from the centre of Tshwane which involved consumers in Pretoria as well as Centurion. Respondents (N=243) who were recruited in 51 different suburbs, thus actually resided in the Tshwane metropolitan area (Table 6.1).

TABLE 6.1: GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS WHERE RESPONDENTS RESIDED (N=243)

Geographical area	n	%
Eastern suburbs: Brooklyn, Constantia Park, Eersterust, Elardus Park, Faerie Glen, Garstfontein, La Montagne, Lydiana, Lynnwood, Mamelodi, Menlo Park, Menlyn, Meyerspark, Mooikloof, Monument Park, Moreleta Park, Nelmapius, Newlands, Rietvallei ridge, Silverton, Waterkloof, Willows	105	43.2
Western suburbs: Laudium, Pretoria west, Westview	26	10.7
Northern suburbs and Moot: Acacia, Brummeria, Gezina, Pretoria gardens, Rietfontein ridge, Mayville, Montana, Queenswood, Rietondale, Villieria, Wonderboom, Waverley	38	15.6
Southern suburbs: Centurion, Doringkloof, Eldoraigue, Pierre van Ryneveld, Valhalla	30	12.3
Central: Arcadia, Baileys Muckleneuk, Brooklyn, Groenkloof, Hatfield, Hillcrest, Sunnyside, Pretoria central	44	18.2



An effort was made to involve c eographic areas to ensure that the findings reflected upon stores that are located in different suburbs and several shopping centres (i.e. Brooklyn mall; Pretoria city centre; Kollonade shopping centre; Centurion mall; Menlyn; Woodlands shopping centre) rather than stores in a specific shopping mall/ centre.

6.1.2 Age

Respondents' ages are summarised in accordance with the categories that were stipulated in the questionnaire (Table 6.2).

TABLE 6.2: THE AGE REPRESENTATION OF RESPONDENTS (N=243)

AGE CATEGORIES	AGE OF RESPONDENTS	
	n	%
Years		
21-30	120	49.4
31-40	48	19.8
41-50	36	14.8
51-60	24	9.9
61 and older	15	6.1

The sample was divided into two age groups for further investigation: female consumers from 21 up to 30 years of age (49.4%) and those >30 years (50.6%). It was assumed that the younger group of females would provide the view of younger consumers who are relatively concerned about fashion and who spend a significant part of their budgets and time on fashion (Carpenter, Moore & Fairhurst, 2005:51; Chan, 2006:418) while the older females would provide the view of consumers who have had ample opportunity to shop around and to compare different clothing retail stores during their lives. It was thought that younger female consumers might be more opinionated and that they might browse and shop around more actively than the older females who may already have established their store preferences over time. Figure 6.1 reflects the representation of specific age groups more visually.

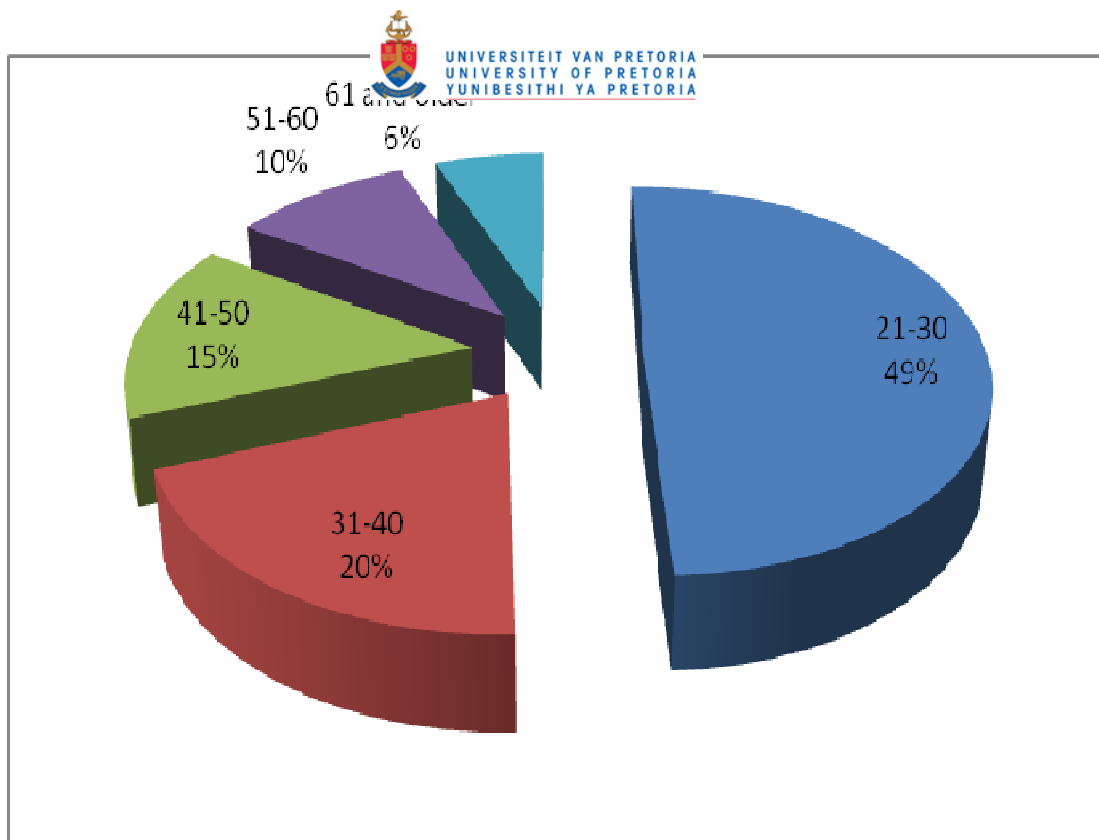


FIGURE 6.1: AGE REPRESENTATION OF RESPONDENTS

6.2 RESPONDENTS' PATRONAGE OF THE SELECTED CLOTHING DEPARTMENT STORES

6.2.1 Store patronage of the sample

This question aimed at discovering how frequently female respondents shopped at the selected clothing retailers and to describe their store patronage across the different stores. The results are presented in Table 6.3 and Figure 6.2 respectively. In order to protect the identity of the various clothing department stores, codes were assigned to them and they will hence be referred to as A, B, C, D, E and F respectively.

TABLE 6.3: RESPONDENTS' LOSS THE DIFFERENT RETAILERS (N=243; <30 years: n=120; >30 years: n=123)



Stores		Frequency of store visits											
		Once/ week		Three times/ month		Twice / month		Once / month		Never		Missing	
Store	Sample	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
A	All (N=243)	16	6.6	31	12.8	43	17.7	110	45.3	34	14.0	9	3.7
	<30 years	8	6.7	17	14.2	27	22.5	51	42.5	17	14.2	3	
	>30years	8	6.5	14	11.4	15	12.2	58	47.2	16	13.0	9	7.3
B	All (N=243)	5	2.1	17	7.0	20	8.2	72	29.6	105	43.2	24	9.9
	<30 years	1	0.9	10	8.8	10	8.8	36	31.6	57	50.0	6	
	>30years	4	3.3	7	5.7	10	8.1	34	27.6	47	38.2	18	14.6
C	All (N=243)	2	0.8	11	4.5	5	2.1	34	14.0	163	67.1	28	11.5
	<30 years	0	0.0	1	0.9	1	0.9	12	10.6	99	87.6	7	
	>30years	2	1.6	10	8.1	4	3.3	20	16.3	62	50.4	21	17.1
D	All (N=243)	4	1.6	5	2.1	7	2.9	35	14.4	161	66.3	31	12.8
	<30 years	1	0.9	2	1.8	4	3.5	21	18.4	86	75.4	6	
	>30years	3	2.4	3	2.4	3	2.4	14	11.4	72	58.5	25	20.3
E	All (N=243)	11	4.5	22	9.1	27	11.1	91	37.4	71	29.2	21	8.6
	<30 years	4	3.5	14	12.2	18	15.7	47	40.9	32	27.8	5	
	>30years	7	5.7	8	6.5	9	7.3	41	33.3	39	31.7	16	13.0
F	All (N=243)	59	24.3	33	13.6	41	16.9	80	32.9	22	9.1	8	3.3
	<30 years	25	21.4	15	12.8	21	18.0	41	35.0	15	12.8	3	
	>30years	32	32.9	18	14.6	20	16.3	38	30.9	7	5.7	5	4.1

Shaded areas reflect on discussions in the subsequent paragraph

The largest percentage of respondents that shop for clothing **once per week**, shop at F (24.3%). This is the only one of the selected retailers that, apart from apparel, also sells food and also has restaurants in the stores that may serve as an attraction and that may lead to consumers' browsing in the clothing departments of the stores even though they may not have planned to do so when they entered the stores .

In terms of *frequency of shopping*, it seems as if females in general **mostly shop once per month** for clothing. The stores most frequently patronised once per month for clothing purchases were (in descending order): A (45.3%); E (37.4%); F (32.9%) and B (29.6%). More



than two thirds of the respondents never shop at D or C, which are the more expensive stores included in the study that stock specific brands and sophisticated branded clothing that may be too expensive for many, especially for younger consumers. It is noteworthy that so many respondents apparently never shop at B (43.2%) – a store that targets the younger market and that is supposed to be a worthy competitor for the other stores. Reasons for a lower interest in this store are not obvious and could be investigated in a following study in terms of their service offering and a specific inter related presentation of the elements of CS. Findings are presented visually in Figure 6.2.

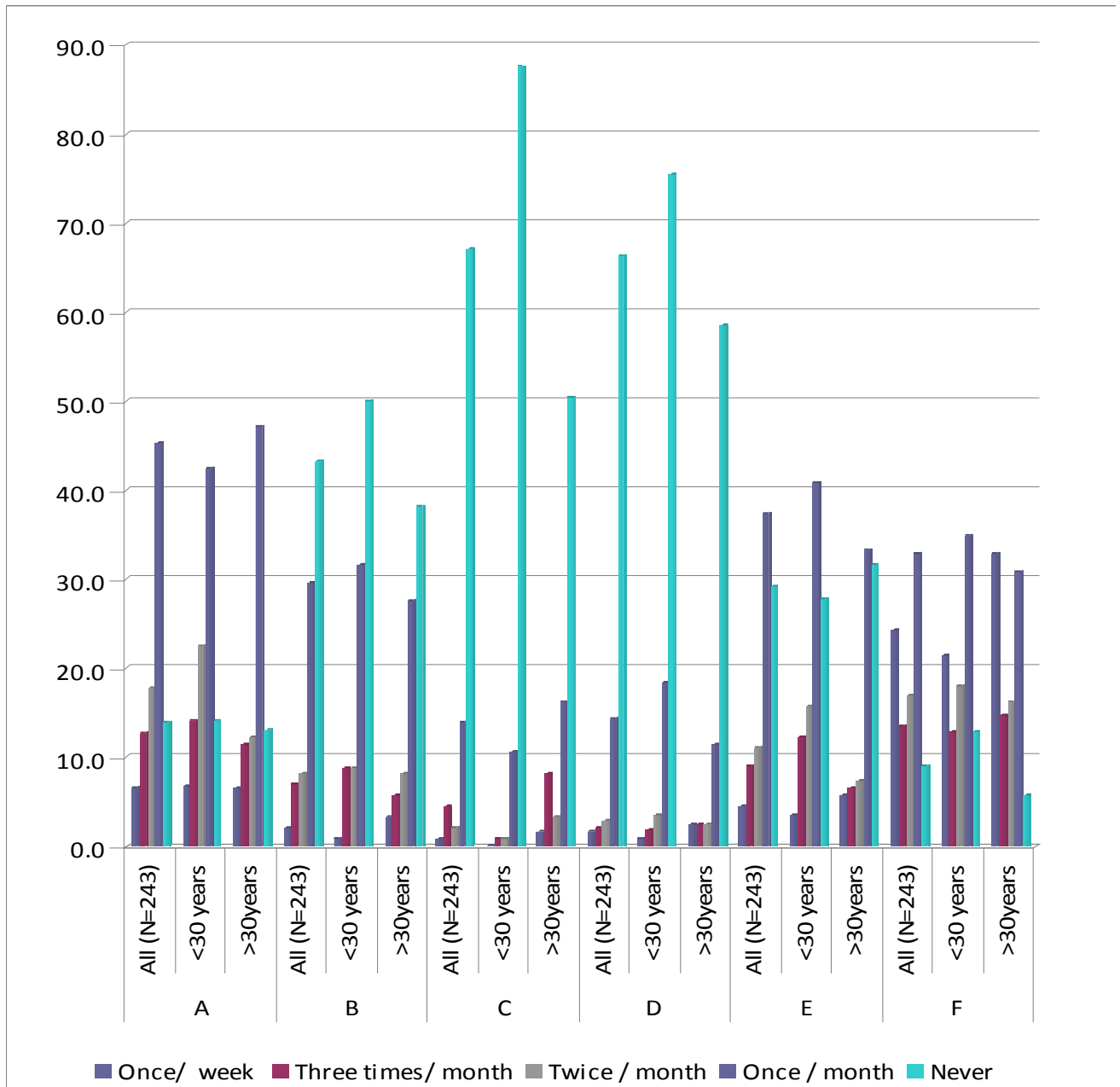


FIGURE: 6.2 RESPONDENTS' STORE PATRONAGE ACROSS THE DIFFERENT RETAILERS (N=243; ≤30YEARS: n=120; >30 YEARS: n=123)

6.2.2 Store patronage of respondents ≤ 30 years

From the figures in Table 6.3, it is evident that the younger consumers generally patronise the clothing retailers once per month. This may be due to financial constraints as this age group is probably not necessarily earning large salaries yet. The stores most frequently patronised once per month for clothing purchases were A and E: >40%; B and F, >30%. More than 75% of the respondents indicated that they **never** shop at D or C, which are the more expensive stores. Interestingly almost fifty percent of the younger respondents apparently never shop at B, which is focused on the younger market and that is supposed to be a worthy competitor for the other stores. This confirms a previous remark that lower interest in this store could be investigated in terms of the channel's service offering. Young clothing shoppers apparently seldom patronise C and D, the two more expensive stores that carry more expensive branded clothing. Findings are presented more visually in Figure 6.3.

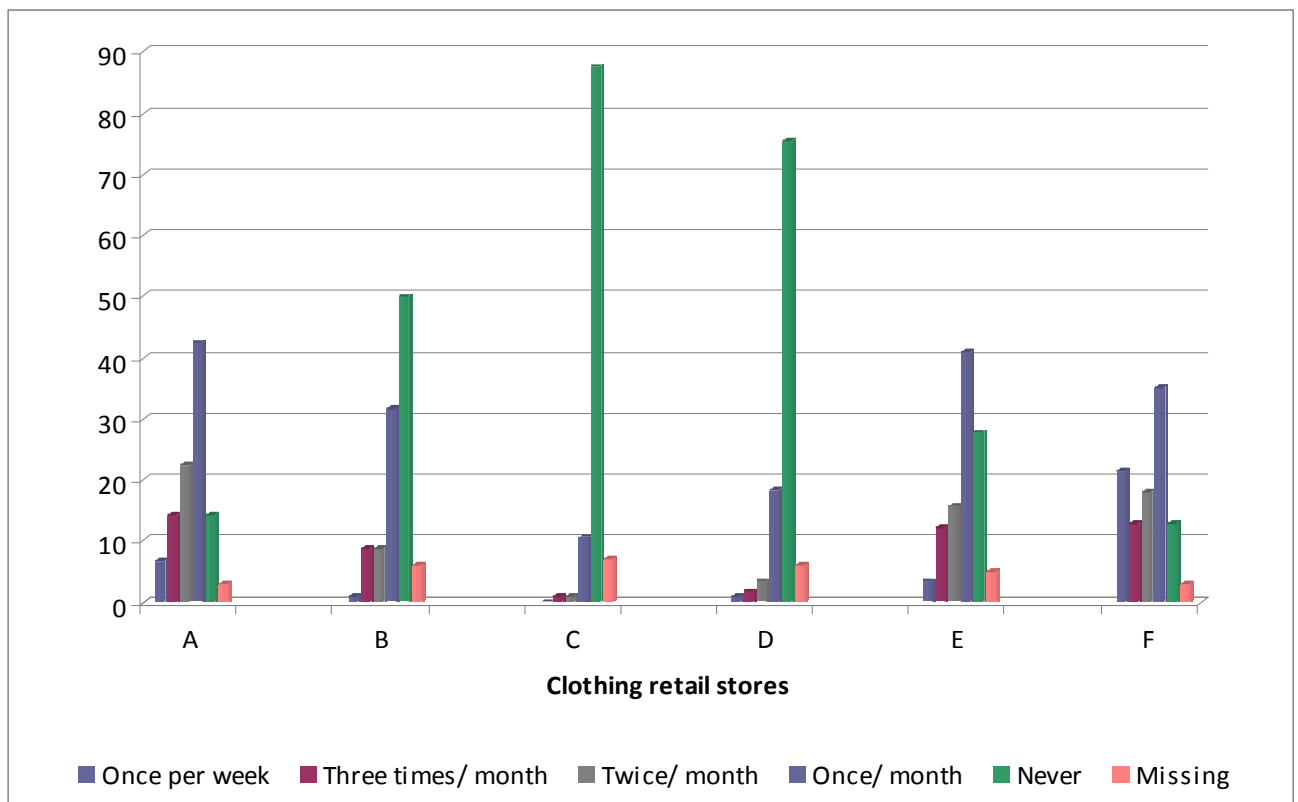


FIGURE 6.3: FREQUENCY OF PATRONAGE OF THE SELECTED CLOTHING RETAILERS BY RESPONDENTS ≤ 30 YEARS

6.2.3 Store patronage of respondents >30 years

Figures in Table 6.3 indicate that respondents >30 years generally patronise clothing retailers once per month. The stores most frequently patronised once per month for clothing purchases were A: >40%; E and F: >30%. Similar to the younger respondents, >50% indicated that they **never** shop at C and D. Non patronage of D could be investigated further as it was expected that this store would be popular with this group. The economic climate may have influenced consumers' store patronage negatively because both these stores are more expensive than the rest. The findings are presented visually in Figure 6.4.

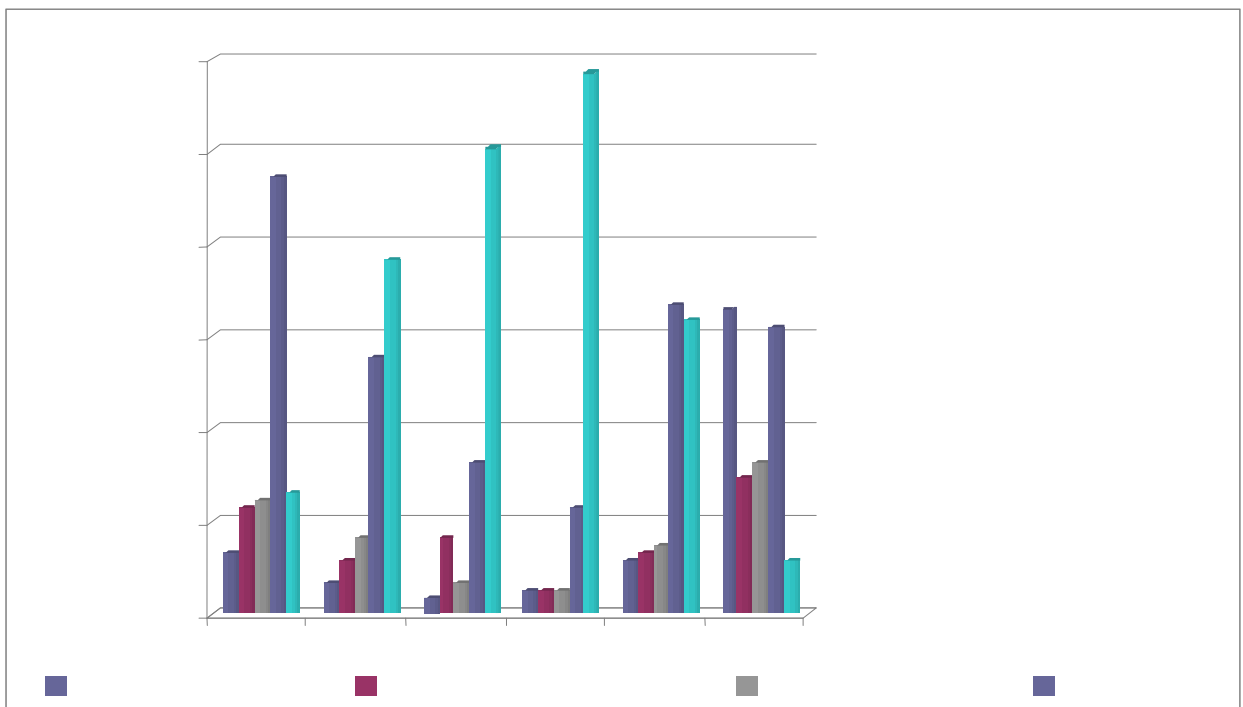


FIGURE 6.4: FREQUENCY OF PATRONAGE OF THE VARIOUS CLOTHING RETAILERS BY RESPONDENTS >30 YEARS

6.2.4 Conclusive remarks

It seems as if consumers, irrespective of age, mostly shop for clothing once per month, although more than 20% of the respondents indicated that they browse in F's clothing departments once per week. This could be attributed to the attraction of the foods department and restaurants in many of these stores. Store C apparently appeals to slightly older consumers, while D generally carries more expensive brands, which may be too expensive for young consumers in terms of regular shopping and store loyalty. The clothing department stores C and D seem to attract a smaller niche market.

6.3 METHOD OF PAYMENT MOST FREQUENTLY USED FOR CLOTHING PURCHASES

6.3.1 Payment methods mostly used for clothing purchases

This question aimed to investigate the methods of payment that are most frequently used for clothing purchases. The results are presented in Table 6.4 and a more visual presentation is provided in Figure 6.6.

TABLE 6.4: METHOD OF PAYMENT MOSTLY USED FOR CLOTHING PURCHASES (N=243)

METHOD OF PAYMENT	Sample (N=243)		≤30years (n=120)		>30years (n=123)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Cash	90	37.0	58	48.3	18	14.6
Store credit card	58	23.9	23	19.2	21	17.1
Credit card	49	20.2	18	15.0	22	17.9
Debit card/cash card	38	15.6	19	15.8	9	7.3
Cheque	3	1.2	1	0.8	0	0
Missing	5	2.1	1	0.8	2	1.6

Payment methods mostly used are (in descending order): cash, store cards (that generally restrict consumers to specific stores) and bank credit cards. A summation of cash, cheques, debit/cash cards imply that clothing purchases are mostly paid for in cash.

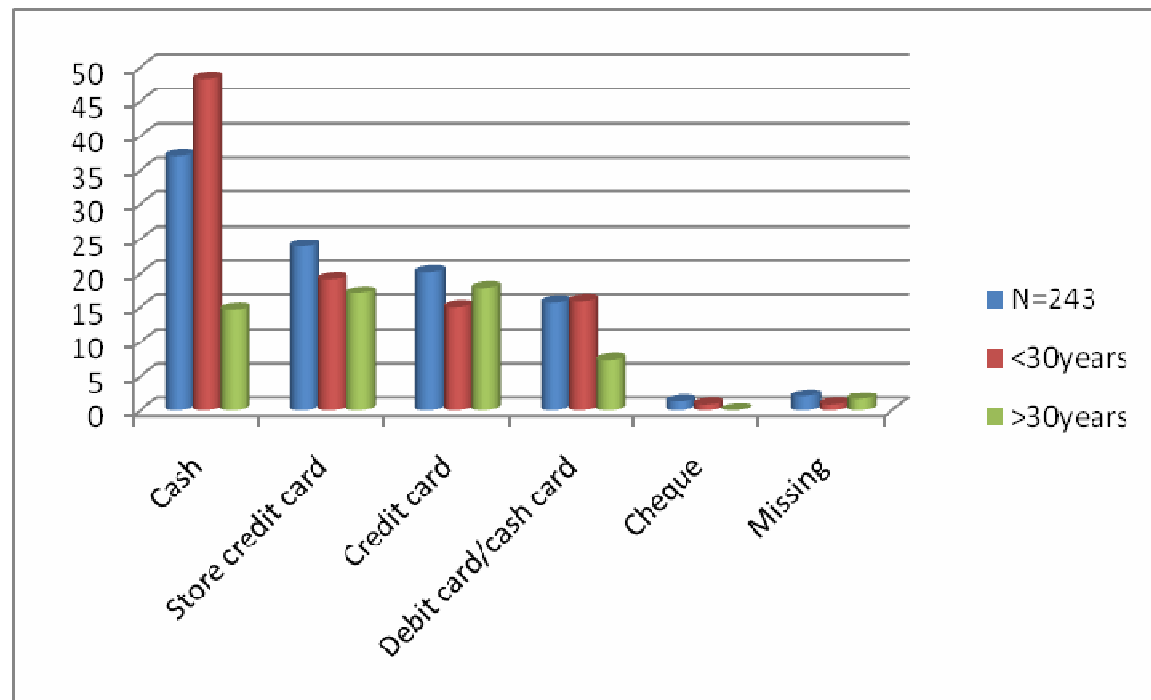


FIGURE 6.5: METHODS OF PAYMENT USED FOR CLOTHING PURCHASES (N=243)

The majority of respondents indicated that they mostly use cash to pay for clothing purchases (cash over the counter; cash- or debit cards and cheques). The credit facilities most frequently used, are store credit cards (that may restrict store patronage to specific stores) and bank credit cards.

6.3.2 Payment method used by respondents ≤ 30 years

Findings reveal that the most frequently used methods of payment for clothing used by younger consumers are cash or debit cards (48.3% and 15.8% respectively). Many consumers in this age category probably do not have established credit facilities yet. The most frequently used credit type, is store cards (19.2%).

6.3.3 Payment method used by respondents >30 years

Findings indicate that consumers >30 years no longer use cash as the primary payment method: barely 15% indicated that they use cash, while 35% indicated that they either use credit cards or store cards as payment method. Use of cash for clothing purchases therefore seems to decline as consumers grow older, probably because credit cards and store cards are convenient to use and due to the security involved when a person does not have to carry large amounts of cash in her purse.

6.4 RESPONDENTS' GENERAL IMPRESSION OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE OF THE VARIOUS CLOTHING DEPARTMENT STORES

Respondents were asked to give an indication of their overall impression of the service offering of the various clothing retail stores. Before reverting to established multiple item scales, a single measurement was used and the scale allowed for *Excellent/Good/Average/Poor/Unacceptable* judgements. For those who had limited experience with specific channels, the scale also allowed them to indicate *no opinion*. Respondents only judged the stores that they actually patronised, which explains the high *no opinion* figures. During interpretation of the findings, categories were combined as reflected in Table 6.5.

TABLE 6.5 RESPONDENTS' JUDGEMENT OF THE VARIOUS CLOTHING DEPARTMENT STORES (N=243)



Store	Good to Excellent		Average		Poor to Unacceptable		No opinion		Missing	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
A	93	38.3	103	42.4	26	10.7	12	4.9	9	3.7
B	58	23.9	73	30.0	21	8.6	60	24.7	31	12.8
C	55	22.6	19	7.8	5	2.1	128	52.7	36	14.8
D	47	19.3	29	11.9	6	2.5	118	48.6	43	17.7
E	92	37.9	71	29.2	11	4.5	41	16.9	28	11.5
F	168	69.1	52	21.4	6	2.5	10	4.1	7	2.9

Shaded areas indicate the best rating for the respective

Bolded figures indicate responses of approximately 50% or more of the respondents

A large majority (69.1 %) of the respondents indicated that they considered the CS of one of the clothing department stores, i.e. F, as “Good to Excellent”. Respondents’ judgement of the CS of two of the stores, i.e. A and B, seemed to be almost equally divided between an “Average” or “Good to Excellent” judgment. Approximately 50 % of the respondents expressed “No opinion” in terms of two of the stores (C: 52.7%; D: 48.6%), which probably indicates that these stores are not patronised by them and that they thus rather refrained from expressing an opinion. The highest ratings for these stores (“Good to Excellent”), however suggests that those who do patronise these stores, regard them “Good to Excellent”. The small percentages that indicated that stores are “Poor to Unacceptable” suggest that respondents were not particularly negative about the service offering of clothing department stores in general. A visual presentation of the findings is offered in Figure 6.6.

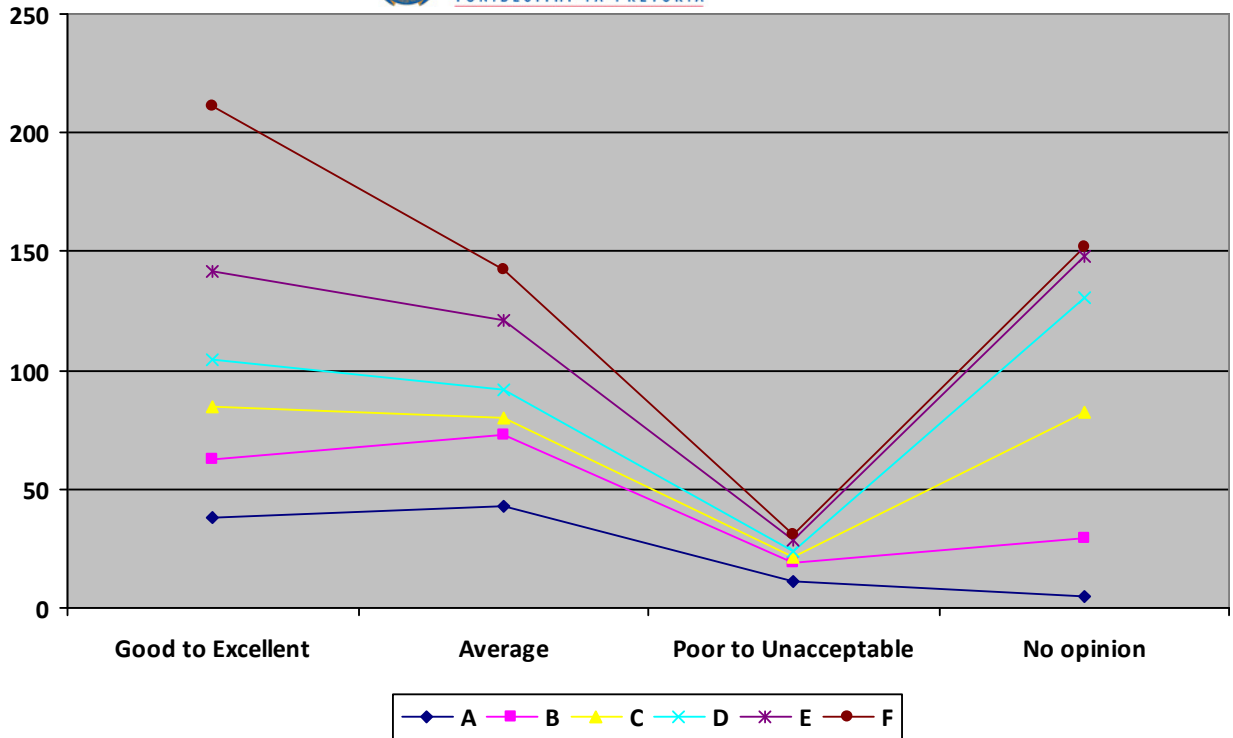


FIGURE 6.6: RESPONDENTS' GENERAL IMPRESSION OF THE SERVICE OFFERING OF THE SELECTED CLOTHING DEPARTMENT STORES

6.5 CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE OF CLOTHING DEPARTMENT STORES

6.5.1 The importance of specific attributes of customer service

Section C involved a 31 item/attribute scale. Responses were indicated on a 5 point Likert type scale (*Definitely/Preferably/Maybe/Not at all*). This question was meant to investigate respondents' expectations of mostly tangible elements of a clothing retailer's service offering that relate to specific elements of retailers' marketing mix, i.e. product, place, price, promotion, store image, sales service processes and sales personnel related attributes. The instrument used in this study has been used in Pretoria, Tshwane area in RSA before, although in two dissimilar contexts, involving supermarkets and appliance retail settings respectively. The content (wording) was adapted for the purpose of this study to involve concepts that are associated with clothing/ apparel. Respondents indicated their expectations, i.e. what they *hoped to find* in a clothing retail store in terms of specific attributes. It was assumed that this

instrument would indicate the p  store patronage and possibly store loyalty.

In terms of expectations/requirements that respondents *definitely* considered important in order to frequently patronise a clothing department store:

- **More than 70% indicated that the following attributes are *definitely* important:**

A clean store (PLACE); Efficient staff at pay points (PERSONNEL); Short queues at cashiers and a short waiting time (PROCESSES); Clean coat hangers and rails (PLACE); Variety of sizes to ensure certainty of good fitting garments (PRODUCT); Value for money (PRICE); Products of excellent quality (PRODUCTS).

Table 6.6 reflects respondents' requirements concerning specific individual attributes of CS in terms of percentages.


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TABLE 6.6: CUSTOMERS' REQUIREMENTS OF CLOTHING STORES AS A PRE REQUISITE FOR REGULAR PATRONAGE INDICATED IN % (N=243)

Question: What requirements/expectations do you have of a clothing retail store as pre condition for you to become a regular customer?	Definitely	Preferably	Maybe	Occasionally	Not at all	Missing (n)
A clean store	88.1	11.1	0.8			
Efficient staff at pay points	80.3	18.9	0.8			
Short queues, short waiting time at cashiers	75.7	19.3	2.9	1.7	0.4	
Clean coat hangers/ rails/ shelves	75.3	17.6	6.3	0.8		1.6
Variety of sizes	75.3	21.8	2.9			
Value for money	74.9	20.2	3.7	0.8	0.4	
Products of excellent quality	73.7	21.0	4.9	0.4		
The store must be located in a safe area	66.5	24.0	8.7	0.4	0.4	0.4
Well trained, knowledgeable staff	64.2	28.0	6.6	1.2		
A good return and exchange policy	62.2	27.0	7.9	2.1	0.8	0.8
Friendly shop assistants	61.6	30.5	6.2	1.7		
A large product variety /assortment	60.5	28.0	9.5	1.7	0.4	
Clearly visible differentiation of departments	60.4	24.7	12.4	1.7	0.8	
A pleasant store atmosphere	59.9	34.7	5.0	0.4		0.4
Well designed fitting rooms	59.3	25.4	11.6	2.9	0.8	0.8
A comfortable in-store temperature	57.2	30.5	10.3	1.2	0.8	
Good security in the store	56.6	27.3	13.2	2.5	0.4	0.4
Efficient staff assistance in all departments	56.0	32.0	7.5	3.7	0.8	0.8
Attractive visual display of clothing	54.4	30.7	12.0	2.1	0.8	0.8
A well organized store layout	53.9	32.9	11.5	1.3	0.4	
A positive store image	53.5	33.7	11.5	0.8	0.5	
Store must be conveniently located	52.9	34.3	9.9	2.1	0.8	0.4
Managers that are approachable	51.5	35.6	10.4	2.5		0.8
An aesthetically appealing store environment	49.0	39.9	9.1	1.2	0.8	
Fashionability of clothing items	48.2	32.1	14.8	4.5	0.4	
Easy access to parking area from the road	47.5	27.5	17.5	4.6	2.9	1.2
Managers that show interest in clients	47.3	33.3	15.2	4.2		
Neatly dressed staff in identifiable uniforms	46.1	34.2	14.4	4.1	1.2	
Availability of credit facilities	36.8	22.3	17.8	9.9	13.2	0.4
Regular promotions	35.0	30.0	23.9	9.9	1.2	
The store must appear modern	34.6	31.3	29.2	2.1	2.8	

Figures in the definitely column are arranged in descending order

Although important to consider, merely attending to consumers' expectations concerning single attributes of CS will not provide trustworthy evidence in terms of the enhancement of CS because individual attributes that are associated with a specific element of CS are generally intertwined with related attributes. Consequently factor analysis was done to identify the relevant elements of CS in the context of this study.

6.5.2 An exploration of relevant elements of CS through exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted, in particular a Maximum Likelihood Exploratory Factor Analysis, specifying a Direct Quartimin Oblique Rotation (Jennrich & Sampson, 1966) of the original factor matrix. This was followed by an assessment of the internal consistency of each factor/element. From the Scree plot of the Eigenvalues, a two factor solution seemed feasible. However, in this format, two attributes/items/factors loaded on both elements and two had to be discarded because their values were too low. Based on the Scree plot, the alternative revealed a three factor solution (Eigen value ≥ 1.5). The convention of using factor loadings of ≥ 0.25 was used. This option involved all of the items. The findings are presented in Table 6.7: figures are presented in descending order for each of the three factors.

TABLE 6.7: FACTOR LOADING OF ELEMENTS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE



Question: What requirements/expectations do you have of a clothing retail store as pre condition for you to become a regular customer?	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3
A well organized store layout	0.731	0.057	0.014
Short queues at cashiers and a short waiting time	0.689	-0.119	-0.136
Store must be conveniently located	0.679	-0.007	-0.010
Well designed fitting rooms	0.581	-0.059	0.116
Variety of sizes and certainty of good fitting garments	0.577	-0.109	0.062
Clear/visible differentiation of departments	0.570	0.139	0.067
Value for money	0.534	-0.033	-0.043
Easy access to parking area from the road	0.531	0.132	-0.055
A good return and exchange policy	0.513	0.030	0.054
The store must be located in a safe area	0.506	-0.007	0.176
Well trained, knowledgeable staff	0.502	0.304	0.048
Attractive visual display of clothing	0.500	-0.023	0.030
A comfortable in-store temperature	0.495	0.088	0.075
Efficient staff at pay points	0.453	0.309	-0.102
Good security in the store	0.453	0.230	0.132
Clean coat hangers/ rails/ shelves	0.416	0.003	0.109
Efficient staff assistance within the various departments	0.414	0.315	0.092
The store must appear modern	0.335	-0.118	0.526
A large product variety /assortment	0.317	0.028	0.145
A positive store image	0.264	0.157	0.433
Managers that are approachable	0.003	0.919	-0.059
Managers that show interest in clients	0.016	0.864	-0.012
Friendly shop assistants	-0.077	0.612	0.342
Staff that are neatly dressed in an identifiable uniform	0.231	0.308	0.191
An aesthetically appealing store environment	-0.069	-0.023	0.608
Fashionability of clothing items	0.017	-0.031	0.495
A pleasant store atmosphere	0.104	0.162	0.364
A clean store	0.020	0.152	0.304
Availability of credit facilities	0.178	0.115	0.279
Regular promotions	0.247	0.080	0.278
Products of excellent quality	0.215	0.002	0.266
% Variance explained (VP)	29.0	6.2	2.8
Cronbach Alpha	0.88	0.78	0.66
Mean	4.46	4.33	4.31
Standard Deviation	0.47	0.65	0.49

Shaded areas distinguish attributes that loaded onto a specific factor

Three factors/elements emerged: twenty items loaded onto factor 1; four loaded onto factor 2; seven loaded onto factor 3.

After investigation and interpretation (factors) of the three factors, they were named:



- Physical facilities and product presentation (Factor 1);
- Personnel (Factor 2);
- Store image and processes (Factor 3).

If the original construct, i.e. Customer Service, is defined in terms of the elements that interactively contribute to the phenomenon (Lewison, 1996), seven potential elements are considered, namely: product; place; price; promotion; store image; personnel and processes. In the context of this research, findings however suggest that during consumers' judgement of the customer service of clothing retail stores, their expectations are framed within only three broader categories rather than the six that were initially investigated as based on literature, namely:

- Physical facilities and product presentation (that merges three original elements/factors PRODUCT; PRICE and PLACE);
- Personnel (thus a retention of the original element)
- Store image and processes (a merge of two of the original elements, name PLACE and PROCESSES).

Internal consistency is affirmed through Cronbach's Alpha: 0.88; 0.78 and 0.66 for the respective factors/elements.

6.5.3 Conclusive remarks on customers' expectations of CS

In terms of clothing retail stores, three elements of CS were identified through factor analysis, namely (1) PHYSICAL FACILITIES and PRODUCT PRESENTATION; (2) PERSONNEL; (3) STORE IMAGE and PROCESSES. Consumers apparently have expectations of a clothing retailer's **product offering** coherently in terms of **product**, **price** and **product display** rather than to evaluate these elements individually. The implication is that negative judgements of attributes that relate to any one aspect of the element, for example product display, would negatively impact on the entire element of CS. A store's design of this particular element of CS should therefore consider a more intricate offering rather than focussing on single aspects only, such as price (and neglecting store display). The means (4.46/5.0) indicate that consumers have high expectations of this element of CS.

The element PERSONNEL is unequivocally retained as a crucial element of CS. Even in clothing department stores where personnel are not necessarily always directly involved in a consumer's purchases apart from assisting at pay points and the fitting rooms, consumers have high expectations (4.33/5.0) that contribute to their overall judgement of the entire service offering.

Thirdly, consumers tend not to discriminate between attributes that describe the physical pleasantness of the surroundings and pleasantness experienced through the offering of quality garments and opportunity to use various payment methods. A clothing retailer's IMAGE and PROCESS related activities are apparently perceived on the same level, i.e. minimal disappointment. Expectations are nevertheless high (mean: 4.31/5.0).

In general consumers' expectations of the three elements of CS that were identified in the context of this study, are high (>4.3/5 for all three elements), which suggest that consumers expect excellence. Non patronage of certain stores would therefore probably relate to problems with one or more of the elements of CS and this should be attended to, to attract more consumers and to ascertain store loyalty.

The findings of this study are in congruence with previous studies that used the same instrument in a similar context (Pretoria, RSA) although in different product contexts. In the study that was done in appliance sales departments in major retail stores (Gothan & Erasmus, 2008), **three** elements of CS were identified through factor analysis, namely (1) PERSONNEL; (2) PROCESSES and VALUE FOR MONEY; (3) PRODUCT PRESENTATION (Cronbach's Alpha 0.87; 0.84; 0.86 respectively). Similarly in a supermarket context, three elements of CS were identified, namely (1) PERSONNEL (2) PROCESSES; (3) VALUE FOR MONEY (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.71; 0.61; 0.75 respectively). Without exception PERSONNEL seem to be judged *per se* and seem to be an important discriminator of CS.

6.5.4 Consumers' expectations of the CS of clothing department stores in terms of the respective elements of CS

Upon investigation of the means for the three factors, i.e. the newly identified elements of CS, it became clear that consumers' expectations are relatively high – especially considering the instruction for their response, namely *expectations of the elements of CS as a pre condition for regular store patronage*. The mean for first factor, namely PHYSICAL FACILITIES and PRODUCT PRESENTATION is the highest although the means for all three factors are >4.3/5.0. Consumers thus expect excellence and the implication of the high means is that a store that fails to meet expectations will have difficulty to retain customers due to the competitive environment in which clothing retail stores operate.

6.6 PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY IN CLOTHING RETAIL STORES

6.6.1 Motivation for the implementation of two different SQ measurements

Respondent's perceptions of the service quality of the selected clothing retailers, based on their personal observations/experiences of the retailers they patronise, were investigated through two different instruments that were presented in separate sections of the questionnaire.

- Section D involved a 28 item/attribute scale that investigated consumers' perception of SQ using an adapted version of the scale of Dabholkar and co workers (1996). In this format, it has been used in other product contexts in the RSA setting before, but the wording was adapted slightly to reflect upon the clothing retail environment rather than a generic product category. By including this instrument, the researcher created opportunity to compare the findings with those of the previous studies in a later publication.
- In Section E of the questionnaire, a 24 item scale was included in which items/attributes were classified by Terblanche and Boshoff (2003) in terms of controllable elements of the service offering. Responses were indicated on a 5 point Likert type scale (*Excellent/ Good/ Fair/ Poor/ Uncertain*). Because this instrument was specifically developed in a clothing retail context in the RSA, the researcher was obliged to include it as well. It was decided that the findings could then be discussed along with findings achieved by means of the instrument used in Section D.

Both instruments were analysed and interpreted in the same manner: Exploratory factor analysis was conducted, in particular a Maximum Likelihood Exploratory Factor Analysis method, specifying a Direct Quartimin Oblique Rotation (Jennrich & Sampson, 1966) of the original factor matrix. This was followed by an assessment of the internal consistency of each factor/element.

6.6.2 Validation of the measuring instrument

Upon investigation of the Scree plot of the Eigen values, several solutions were considered during the scale purification process. A two factor solution was plausible, however, in this content, two attributes loaded on both elements and two attributes had to be discarded because their values were not regarded as being high enough (<0.25). The next option using the convention of factor loadings ≥ 0.25 was accepted: three elements (Eigen values >1.8) were revealed. This option involved all of the items; findings are presented in Table 6.8. Figures are presented in descending order for each of the three proposed factors.

TABLE 6.8: FACTOR LOADING ELEMENTS OF SERVICE QUALITY



Question:	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3
What is your impression of the clothing retailer where you frequently do your clothing?			
Sales people in this department are always willing to respond to customers' requests.	0.922	-0.065	-0.002
Sales people attend to customers promptly when requested	0.857	-0.040	-0.036
Customers receive personal attention in this store.	0.824	0.063	-0.018
This store shows a sincere interest in solving customers' problems	0.757	0.015	0.090
Sales people's behaviour in the stores instils confidence in customers.	0.694	0.154	-0.094
Sales people are knowledgeable enough to deal with customers' questions.	0.610	0.187	0.031
Telephonic enquiries to this store are handled courteously.	0.521	0.094	0.096
Customers trust dealings with this store. ⁸	0.350	0.395	0.040
This retailer has merchandise available when customers want it. ⁹	0.293	0.458	0.067
Materials associated with this store's service (e.g. shopping bags, statements etc) create a good impression.	-0.082	0.694	0.079
The retailer keeps its promises.	-0.010	0.688	0.031
The store lay-out makes it easy for customers to find what they are looking for.	0.105	0.683	-0.146
The general impression of the various departments is visually pleasing.	-0.044	0.681	-0.039
The store gives a modern impression.	-0.104	0.662	0.022
The store lay-out makes it easy for customers to move around.	0.121	0.661	-0.168
The general surroundings in the store are clean, attractive and convenient.	0.040	0.621	0.028
Sales people are neatly dressed	0.156	0.460	-0.082
Customers of this store have access to convenient parking.	0.092	0.438	0.195
The merchandise in this store is of a high quality.	0.206	0.436	0.029
The retailer deals with a transaction correctly the first time.	0.166	0.416	0.170
This store willingly accepts returns and exchange of goods	0.047	0.389	0.297
This store provides error-free sales transactions.	0.201	0.356	0.110
This store accepts most major credit cards.	-0.047	-0.087	0.875
This store offers enough credit options.	0.094	-0.075	0.756
This store's operating hours are convenient.	-0.009	0.173	0.456
% Variance explained	38.2	6.4	5.3
Cronbach Alpha	0.94	0.88	0.72
Mean	3.60	4.14	4.40
Standard Deviation	0.82	0.54	0.77

⁸ This attribute could also have loaded on Factor 2 but its position in Factor 1 was accepted because the activity involves personnel and seemed to fit in as indicated

⁹ The same comment as above



The internal consistency of the confirmed by Cronbach's Alpha of 0.94; 0.88; 0.72 for the three dimensions of SQ that were identified. The original version of Dabholkar's SQ scale consists of five dimensions (empathy, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibility). Upon investigation of the Scree plot in this research, a three factor solution seemed more relevant and it is therefore suggested that consumers perceive SQ in clothing retail stores in terms of fewer categories than is suggested in the original scale, namely in terms of:


- SUPPORTIVENESS that integrates denominators of assurance, reliability, empathy, reliability, responsiveness
- IMPRESSIVENESS that integrates denominators of reliability, tangibility
- CONVENIENCE that integrates denominators of reliability, empathy.

The first dimension, i.e. *supportiveness*, confirms the importance of the interaction with personnel as was also suggested in the CS investigation (refer to 6.5). The second dimension coincides with place related as well as product related expectations when interpreted in terms of tangible elements of the service offering; it may however also involve to the actions of personnel. Convenience culminates as experiences related to place, i.e. location, store design, product assortment, as well as minimal frustration through well designed processes (payment facilities etc).

6.6.3 Respondents' perception of the SQ of clothing department stores based on the Dabholkar et al. (1996) SQ instrument

Consumers' perception of the SQ of clothing retailers can be described in terms of the means that were calculated for the three dimensions of the SQ instrument that are relevant in the context of the study.

It was decided that the means (maximum 5.0) would be interpreted as follows: Good to Excellent: >4; Fair to Good: >3-4; Disappointing: >2-3; Poor: ≤ 2 . Consumers' judgement of the first factor namely *Supportiveness* (3.6) indicates a judgement of the particular dimension as being *fair to good*. Although consumers' apparent perception of the supportiveness of clothing retail stores seems positive, stores in general could improve in terms of their treatment of customers in the stores especially because consumers have several stores to choose from. The

second factor, *Impressiveness*, i:  being *good* to *excellent* in general, which means that these dimensions were judged favourably. Findings therefore suggest that clothing department stores succeed to impress customers but do not necessarily support their customers optimally. The third factor (mean: 4.4/5.0) seem to reflect stores' effort to make shopping experiences very convenient and this was also perceived favourably.

Consumers' overall judgment of SQ did not expose particular shortcomings as the means of the various dimensions were relatively high, especially considering consumers' high expectations of tangibles as reported in the former section. The one dimension of SQ that reflects upon the *technical quality* of the offering, i.e. *how the service is provided*, namely *Supportiveness* however seem to be an area that could be attended to, to improve consumers' judgment of SQ.

6.6.4 SQ investigation by means of the adapted version of the Terblanche and Boshoff (2003) scale

6.6.4.1 Validation of the measuring instrument

Section E involved a 24 item/attribute scale that investigated consumers' impressions of the intangible service quality attributes. Responses were indicated on a 5 point Likert type scale (*Strongly agree/Agree/Uncertain/Disagree/Strongly disagree*). Exploratory factor analysis was performed as explained in 6.5.2. From the Scree plot of the Eigen values the most interpretable solution seemed to be a three factor solution with Eigen values >1.5. The findings are presented in Table 6.9: figures are presented in descending order for each of the three factors.

TABLE 6.9: FACTOR LOADING ELEMENTS OF SERVICE QUALITY



Question: To what extent do you agree with the following statements in terms of your preference of a clothing retailer?	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3
When I had a problem, the retailer showed sincere interest in solving it	0.857	-0.095	-0.014
Employees provided me with prompt service	0.836	-0.010	0.001
I have confidence in the retailer employees	0.823	-0.019	0.011
The retailer gave me individual attention	0.822	-0.008	-0.065
Employees had the knowledge to answer my questions	0.821	-0.011	-0.054
Employees were never too busy to respond to my requests/	0.818	0.028	-0.084
Employees understood my specific needs	0.809	0.070	-0.035
Employees gave me personal attention	0.803	-0.014	0.004
Employees were consistently courteous	0.794	-0.070	0.067
Employees were always be willing to help me	0.703	0.076	0.011
The retailer had my best interests at heart	0.626	0.039	0.133
The retailer provided its services at the time it promised to do so	0.528	0.064	0.156
The retailer provides error-free sales transaction record (till slips, credit card slips, accounts)	0.361	0.211	0.058
The retailers products do not have defects	0.303	0.030	0.285
The retailer offers a wide variety of products	-0.122	0.994	-0.057
The products of the retailer cater for a wide range of preference	0.023	0.762	0.030
The retailer has all the products that I want to buy	0.108	0.716	-0.072
The retailer offers me a satisfactory choice of products	0.008	0.701	0.127
The retailer makes all products available in a variety of sizes	0.001	0.680	0.061
The retailer offers products of good quality	-0.066	0.000	0.972
The products available are of good quality	0.020	-0.012	0.907
The retailer is known for good quality products	-0.026	0.001	0.894
Materials associated with the retailers service (shopping bags, till slips or catalogues) look good	0.125	0.136	0.441
The retailers physical facilities look good	0.156	0.276	0.307
% Variance explained	41.8	11.8	5.9
Cronbach Alpha ¹⁰	0.95	0.89	0.89
Mean	3.59	4.09	4.29
Standard deviation	0.69	0.68	0.55

¹⁰ These Cronbach Alphas validate the current study and diminish any concerns that there may have been due to the method of sampling and the sample

Three factors emerged: fourteen items loaded onto factor 1; five loaded onto factor 2; five loaded onto factor 3. After an examination of the contents of these factors, it became clear that:




- The first factor/dimension coincided with that of the original scale, the only difference being the inclusion of two additional items in stead of the original twelve. It was nevertheless decided to retain the original label for the scale, namely *Personal interaction*;
- The second factor/dimension involved five of the original items, and it was decided to label it in accordance with the original scale, *Product variety and assortment*;
- The third factor/dimension involved five items that confirmed the content of the original scale. Upon an examination of the content, it was however decided to re-label this dimension to *Cues of quality* rather than *Physical cues* as suggested in the original scale because the latter could be confusing because it may suggest aspects related to the store design, layout and space planning: in terms of the investigation of tangible evidence of clothing stores' service offering, *physical evidence* is associated with PLACE related attributes.

This study therefore confirms the dimensions of the scale that was developed by Terblanche and Boshoff (2003) although this research proposes a re-labelling of one of the dimensions of SQ to prevent confusion. Internal consistency of the instrument is confirmed through Cronbachs Alpha of 0.95; 0.89 and 0.89 for the respective dimensions.

These findings confirm the validity of the study and negate any concerns that there may have been due to the sampling method that was used and the size of the sample.

6.6.4.2 Respondents' perception of the SQ of clothing department stores based on the Terblanche and Boshoff instrument

For the purpose of interpretation of the findings, it was decided that means ≥ 4 would be interpreted as *Agree to Strongly Agree*; < 4 to 3 interpreted as *Uncertain*; < 3 interpreted as *Disagree to Strongly Disagree*.

For the first factor, *personal in*  UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA thus indicates that consumers are *uncertain* about the quality of *personal interaction* in clothing retail stores. This indicates a pertinent shortcoming that should be attended to.

A mean of >4 for *product variety and assortment* indicates that consumers *agree* that this dimension of service quality is excellent. Although it does not reflect a *strongly agree* judgement, consumers seem to be pleased in general.

Similarly they *agreed* that the third dimension, *cues of quality* is attended to well.

None of the three dimensions obtained a mean that indicates that consumers strongly agree that the dimensions of service quality are at best, however in general only *personal interaction* did not evoke a positive judgement. Standard deviations indicate small variances in consumers' judgements.

6.6.5 Conclusive remarks on consumers' judgement of the SQ of clothing retail stores

An investigation of the findings of both SQ judgements reiterates the importance of *personnel* in terms of consumers' judgement of SQ in clothing retail stores. This was revealed through an investigation of tangible aspects of clothing stores' service offering (refer to 6.5.2) and was also revealed through the investigation by means of the Dabholkar instrument (6.6.2) where the dimension *supportiveness* suggests that the involvement of personnel may be lacking and may hinder a hassle free shopping experience. It can therefore be deduced that a consumer has a high regard for the role of personnel in terms of the quality of the service that is offered in a clothing retail store and that indeed this dimension of service quality could be improved.

Apart from the dimension *supportiveness*, the SQ investigation through the Dabholkar scale identified two additional dimensions namely; *impressiveness* and *convenience*. In another study in the same geographic context, although in an appliance sales department in retail stores (Gothan & Erasmus, 2008), two dimensions were identified, i.e. *supportiveness* and *impressiveness*. The present study therefore confirms the previous investigation although *convenience* surfaced as an additional dimension in this study. This is understandable in a clothing retail store setting because the latter dimension involves attributes that deal with

payment methods and credit facilities that are purchased more frequently than household appliances (the product context of the previous study). In clothing retail stores in the RSA, store cards as a convenient pre-approved revolving credit system is promoted vigorously (which differs from the situation in appliance sales) and it seems as if consumers are inclined to associate this commodity with the quality of a store's service offering.

In terms of judgements by means of the Terblanche and Boshoff (2003) instrument, the findings of this study coincides with that of the original scale, apart from the suggestion that the one dimension is re-labelled to better reflect the content and implication for SQ judgements.

Both instruments used in this research, showed strong internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha: >0.72 for the dimensions that emerged in the investigation that implemented the Dabholkar instrument and Cronbach's Alpha: >0.89 for the dimensions that emerged in the investigation that implemented the Terblanche and Boshoff instrument). It can therefore be accepted that the instruments provided insightful and reliable findings in the context of this research study.

Irrespective of the instrument used to investigate service quality, it seems as if clothing shoppers' perception of the dimensions of service quality and relevant attributes that have bearing to the *impressiveness* aspect of the service and the *product* related dimensions is positive. The *supportiveness* aspect and the *personnel* related aspects of the service offering however seem less ideal. Effort should therefore be made to enhance personal interaction in stores as well as any aspects that may enhance consumers' perception of the *supportiveness* of the stores.

6.7 PRESTIGE ASSOCIATED WITH CLOTHING STORES

6.7.1 Validation of the PRECON instrument

Section F in the questionnaire involved a 30 item/attribute instrument that was meant to investigate consumers' regard for *store image* and the importance of *prestige* in store patronage. An existing instrument, the PRECON scale was used. Responses to the items on the questionnaire were indicated on a 5 point Likert type scale (*Strongly agree/ Agree/ Uncertain/ Disagree/ Strongly disagree*). In the same way as with previous instruments, exploratory factor analysis was first performed to finalise the relevant factors in the context of this research,


namely the Maximum Likelihood  with direct quartimin rotation. From the Scree plot of the Eigenvalues a three factor solution was considered but eventually a five factor solution that coincided with the original scale seemed more appropriate. The convention of using factor loadings of ≥ 0.25 was used and this option involved all of the items, which seemed commendable. The findings are presented in Table 6.10: figures are presented in descending order for each of the five factors/dimensions.

TABLE 6.10: FACTORS RELATEI



Question:	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
To what extent do you agree with the following statements in terms of your preference of a clothing retailer?					
I like to wear brand name clothing	.843	.140	-.003	-.099	-.012
I will pay a higher price for clothing that is made by a popular designer or manufacturer	.774	.188	-.049	-.142	-.008
I look my best when I wear brand name clothing	.774	.027	.131	-.072	.046
I consider the brand name when purchasing clothes for others	.637	.069	.048	.032	-.083
Wearing high-quality designer clothing makes me feel special	.622	-.068	.161	.053	.107
When purchasing clothes for myself, I prefer clothes with bold, recognisable logos	.616	-.060	.337	.009	-.026
Clothing made by a well known designer or manufacturer is worth more money	.557	.054	.152	-.009	-.024
Giving high-quality clothing gifts makes me feel special	.496	-.076	.130	.217	.055
When I buy clothes for others or as a gift, I buy clothes of superior quality	.448	-.041	-.150	.238	.121
I prefer to shop at stores that carry high-quality clothing	.351	-.006	-.115	.117	.116
I like to be seen wearing high-quality clothes	.330	-.014	.180	-.044	.301
I usually buy high quality clothing.	.303	.000	-.058	.071	.249
I enjoy clothes like some people do such things as books, records and movies	.035	.846	.017	-.005	-.011
Clothing is so attractive to me that I am tempted to spend more money than I should	-.042	.767	.106	-.071	.109
I like to shop for clothes.	.028	.764	-.093	.086	-.043
If I were to suddenly receive more money than I have now, I would spend it on clothes.	.050	.701	.054	.026	.075
Planning and selecting my wardrobe is one of my favourite activities.	.082	.608	.079	.043	.036
I like to shop in the same clothing stores as the people I admire	-.008	.066	.868	.034	.101
Sometimes I would like to know where important people buy their clothes	.104	-.003	.809	.084	.011
I like to shop for clothing at stores where wealthy people shop	.164	.070	.660	.007	.080
It is important to shop in the same clothing stores as my friends	.146	.044	.642	-.074	.099
I often ask friends where they buy their clothes	-.058	.221	.396	.072	.015
It is important to me that the clothing store where I shop, has great service	.004	.019	-.065	.861	-.076
It is important to me that a clothing store has a warm, inviting atmosphere	-.002	.155	-.034	.740	-.132
Personal service is important to me when buying clothes	.034	-.014	.109	.608	.032
I shop in clothing stores where the personnel are well dressed	-.064	-.034	.056	.448	.321
When buying clothes, I require the individual attention of at least one salesperson	.087	-.068	.183	.391	.161
I shop in stores that have artistic-looking displays	.046	.127	.076	.259	.323
I prefer to shop in classy stores.	.042	.148	.083	-.125	.865
I like to shop in clothing stores that present a high-class image	.032	.076	.131	-.014	.831
Cronbach Alpha	0.90	0.88	0.87	0.78	0.93
Mean	3.28	3.27	3.38	3.85	2.81
Standard deviation	0.82	1.05	0.98	0.68	1.24

Twelve items loaded onto factor 1; while five loaded onto factor 2; five loaded onto factor 3; six loaded onto factor 4 and two loaded onto factor 5 respectively. After examining the contents of

the five factors, they were labelled  and quality; Factor 2: *Patron status*; Factor 3: *Fashion involvement*; Factor 4: *Store atmosphere* and Factor 5: *Store image*.

The first factor, namely *brand quality* contains attributes pertaining to price, quality and brand, which concurs largely with the study done by Deeter-Schmelz *et al.* (2000): their study however distinguished brand and quality as two separate factors. In the context of this study consumers seem to interpret these two concepts coherently. The brand therefore probably signifies the quality of the clothing and *visa versa*: a brand may thus even equate high quality or the contrary. Previous research suggests that consumers generally evaluate the prestige of a store based on a heuristic that mainly evolves around the quality and the price of the products. As suggested in this study, consumers seem to confound price, quality and brand.

The second factor, namely *patron status*, coincides with, and integrates the same items that were grouped in the original study, indicating that prestige conscious consumers consider it important to know where their friends as well as “important others” shop. Consumers’ perception of the prestige of a clothing retailer is therefore apparently influenced by store patronage of significant others.

The third factor, involved items related to pleasure or enjoyment experienced from the shopping act as well as the fashion involvement/ interest of consumers, thus labelled *fashion involvement*. This too concurs with the factor in the study by Deeter-Schmelz *et al.* (2000).

Similarly the fourth factor that emerged - identical to the one in the Deeter-Schmelz *et al.* (2000) study - was that of the *store atmosphere*. It thus indicates that the prestige associated with a store is associated with the atmosphere, service and tangible environment. In the CS investigation, *physical environment* emerged as one of the three elements of CS that affects consumers’ judgement of the service offering of a clothing retail store.

The fifth factor, unlike in the Deeter-Schmelz *et al.* (2000) study, was that of *store image*. Although only consisting of two attributes, both depicted the social significance of a shopping experience and the status that the store exudes: factor loadings were >0.8 and therefore the factor was retained as such.

6.7.2 Consumers' prestige preferences



ing retailers

Twelve items loaded onto factor 1; while five loaded onto factor 2; five loaded onto factor 3; six loaded onto factor 4 and two loaded onto factor 5 respectively. After examining the contents of the five factors, they were labelled as follows: Factor 1: *Brand quality*; Factor 2: *Patron status*; Factor 3: *Fashion involvement*; Factor 4: *Store atmosphere* and Factor 5: *Store image*.

For the purpose of the interpretation of the findings, the means that were calculated for the five dimensions of the PRECON scale were interpreted in accordance with the options of the scale. Findings indicated that, *store atmosphere* (mean 3.8) is more important in terms of store patronage than any of the other factors: respondents more or less *agreed* that it is considered during store patronage.

In the context of this study (namely clothing retailers in an emerging economy), clothing shoppers are *uncertain* and possibly *slightly agree* that *brand quality*; *patron status* and/or *fashion involvement* are important in terms of store patronage.

Store image seem to be of lesser importance because respondents mostly *disagreed* or were *uncertain* of whether this aspect influences patronage of clothing retail stores.

Clothing shoppers' uncertainty of prestige related store attributes in their patronage of clothing retailers was confirmed through the low store patronage figures for two stores that were included in the study (C and D), i.e. the more expensive clothing department stores that are associated with a more prestigious image than the other stores. In the context of this study, none of the factors that relate to prestige could be confirmed as pertinent in terms of consumers' choice of clothing retail stores. In other words, consumers who frequently shop at specific clothing retail stores do not seem to do so based on prestige factors. Retailers would therefore be better off focusing on other elements of the service offering if they wish to enhance their service offering in an effort to attract and retain customers.

6.7.3 Conclusive remarks regarding consumers' regard for the prestige of clothing retailers

This research revealed that in general, prestige related factors do not seem to be crucial in terms of consumers' patronage of clothing department stores. Store atmosphere seemed to be the only factor that consumers' agreed upon as being important: uncertainty about the other

factors related to store prestige  t necessarily attracts customers. It may be that prestige seeking consumers shop at other stores than department stores that were included in this research.



DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS


This chapter presents a discussion of consumers' expectations of the customer service as well as their perception of the service quality in clothing retail stores in terms of implications for efforts to optimise the service offering to the benefit of all

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study was done with the intention to investigate female consumers' expectations with regards to the service offering (customer service) of six selected clothing department stores in Tshwane, South Africa and to determine whether store prestige is considered important in terms of store patronage . A systems theory approach was used to explore the interactive contribution of the various elements of customer service (CS) towards the service outcome to indicate which individual elements of CS are considered crucial in terms of what consumers expect to find when they enter a clothing retail store. This information could be useful for the relationship marketing initiatives of market driven retailers that wish address consumers' needs and expectations to encourage store patronage and to gain a competitive edge in the market place.

The research followed a quantitative approach. A structured questionnaire (a survey) was used to collect primary data in an urban area where consumers have access to, and are exposed to several shopping malls and shopping centres where selected clothing department stores are located. The researcher assumed that the findings of this research would offer "a best case scenario" because the service offering of the selected stores in smaller towns would probably similar or worse. Statistical procedures of data processing included basic descriptive statistics as well as inferential statistics (factorial analysis of variance).

Literature indicates that decisions concerning the "product" of a clothing retail store involve many intricate decisions that are not merely based on the merchandise assortment (variety) and/or the uniqueness of the merchandise compared to those of competitors. The act of

shopping for clothing involves d  appearance, self concept and image and it also reflects a consumer's attitude towards a store in conjunction with her values, for example materialistic views (Otieno, Harrow & Lea-Greenwood, 2005:299; Kaiser, 1998:147). The clothing that a person wears serves as a cue on how consumers view and express themselves. Clothing is even referred to as a "second skin", which contributes to the wearer's psychological and social welfare (Otieno *et al.*, 2005:299). An understanding of this intricacy is crucial in any investigation of the products of a clothing retail store's marketing mix and explains the invaluable contribution that professionals in consumer science with expertise in clothing theory could make with regard to customer service investigations in this context. The findings of this research that aimed to investigate the intricacy of consumers' expectations of the service offering, their regard for store prestige and their perceptions of six selected prominent clothing retail stores are consequently discussed in terms of the specific objectives that were formulated for the research.

7.2 CONSUMERS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE CS OF CLOTHING RETAIL STORES (OBJECTIVE 1)

7.2.1 Consumers' expectations individual elements of CS

Findings revealed that more than 70% of the respondents expected the store environment (PLACE) to be attended to in a meticulous way, for example *a clean store and clean coat hangers*. Consumers apparently also have high expectations of PRODUCT related attributes: stores are expected to stock *products of excellent quality; to offer a variety of sizes to choose from* as well as *good fitting garments*. In addition, PROCESS related attributes were mentioned, specifically *efficient staff at pay points; short queues* as well as PRICE related attributes namely *value for money*. In order to interpret the findings in terms of elements of customer service rather than individual attributes of customer service, exploratory factor analysis was done in which identified three pertinent elements of customer service that are apparently considered in terms of store patronage, namely: (1) PHYSICAL FACILITIES and PRODUCT PRESENTATION; (2) PERSONNEL; (3) STORE IMAGE and PROCESSES.

Consumers' expectations of clothing retail stores seem to be fairly high with regard to all three factors that emerged during factor analysis. This contradicts literature that suggests that consumers in third world or developing countries tend to be forgiving of poor service and thus have low expectations. The findings of this study revealed the contrary, which could be ascribed



to the fact that the study was done in affluent cities in the country that offer many stores and shopping centres to choose from, often within close proximity from one another. The respondents included in this research may therefore have been exposed to more outlets than the average shopper in an emerging economy. Also, the retailers in Tshwane may be slightly more sophisticated than stores elsewhere in the country, although the stores that were selected also aim to attract consumers in the lower end of the LSM groups (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 2003:87).

The importance of the aesthetic appeal for clothing shoppers is re-iterated by the fact that PHYSICAL FACILITIES and PRODUCT PRESENTATION emerged as a pertinent factor through factor analysis. The mean score that was calculated (4.46/5) signify high expectations for this element of CS. When looking at the literature, this can be explained by the fact that clothing is strongly linked to self-concept and image and that clothing is therefore considered to be a high-involvement purchase (Otieno *et al.*, 2005:299; Kaiser, 1998:147). A consumer probably associates the aesthetic appeal of the store with the image that the store portrays, which in turn is linked to an individual's self-concept. This could in part be contributed to the fact that a consumer in a third world country places additional emphasis on tangible aspects such as the aesthetic value of both store and product as this is easier for them to judge (Malhotra *et al.*, 1994:8).

The second factor that emerged during factor analysis is PERSONNEL. The respondents' expectations were once again fairly high (4.33/5), which means that female consumers have high expectations of the personnel in clothing retail stores, to the extent that it could be a crucial determinant in terms of store patronage. Even though, in these major clothing channels, sales personnel are not necessarily in close interaction with customers other than at pay points, at fitting rooms or occasionally on the floor, consumers have high expectations of their appearance and conduct. The findings coincide with a study done by De Klerk, Velleman and Malherbe (1998:15-24) in which the importance of the appearance of the salesperson is confirmed in terms of consumers' store patronage. In a study done by Klassen, Clayson and Jasper (1996), a strong correlation between the appearance of the personnel and the perceived image of the store was also confirmed. Salespeople (although human) therefore have to support and strengthen the service offering in a clothing retail store in very much the same way

that the props and the visual dis  UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA fore mentioned elements of CS that were discussed in the previous paragraph.

Consumers apparently also have high expectations of the third element of CS, namely PROCESSES of the store (4.31/5), which confirms the importance of any activity that may turn a clothing shopping experience into a non fuss hassle free experience, for example the availability of credit facilities and the opportunity to return and exchange merchandise. This may explain the use of store cards by older consumers. The findings showed that although younger consumers mostly pay for clothing purchases in cash, use of store credit increases for older consumers. Use of store cards is associated with convenience and preferential treatment. Most of the younger consumers who pay in cash will therefore probably adopt a store credit card or a bank credit card sooner rather than later (Erasmus & Lebani, 2008). Store cards and associated advantages may therefore be perceived to be a major attraction to shop at certain stores and to become loyal customers. Store cards and related advantages form part of so-called relationship marketing that is accepted as crucial in modern marketing.

PRICE was not identified as a pertinent element of CS during factor analysis. This contradicts the view of Dunn (2000:9) that “price as the basis of competition is becoming increasingly important”. Consumers’ attention to price may therefore be embedded in their store patronage, e.g. to shop at stores A, E and F rather than C and D, because the latter two are the more expensive stores. Price is therefore inadvertently eliminated from their frame of reference as a single important factor and it is used in conjunction with other factors such as quality of the products. The majority of the respondents indicated that they shop for clothing once per month, which indicates that by their purchasing behaviour and the decision of which retailer to patronise, they accept the pricing strategy of the retailer. Frequent shopping at a specific retailer (store loyalty) suggests that customers find specific stores’ merchandise affordable (Monroe & Venkatesan, 1969 in Sheinin & Wagner, 2003:202). Customers thus probably feel that the benefits that they acquire surpass the monetary sacrifice (Monroe, 1990; Zeithaml, 1988 in Sheinin & Wagner, 2003:202) and they therefore apparently don’t place too much emphasis on price *per se* as an over ruling single element. As the literature suggests, store image (however a consumer may derive it) is an influential factor in terms of why consumers prefer certain clothing retailers: it is linked to how we evaluate and view ourselves

(Kaiser, 1998:145) and it seems  the important factor but that price is used in conjunction with other attributes to create a favourable impression or not.

Similarly consumers did not elevate QUALITY as a distinctive element of CS. It may be that price is associated with quality as suggested in literature (Dawer & Parker, 1994; Rao & Monroe, 1988; Ratchford & Gupta, 1990 in Sheinin & Wagner, 2003:202) and that a regular customer does not perceive any risk in this regard. Consumers' store patronage is therefore apparently neither influenced by price, nor by quality, as pertinent, individual elements of CS.

The systems theory postulates that the various elements of CS should be judged in interaction (as a whole) in terms of their overall contribution towards female consumers' choice of retail stores. This suggests that consumers apply the lexicographic rule, i.e. that they rank the elements of CS in order of importance (some elements were deemed to be more important than others), and in doing they patronise clothing retail stores that match or exceed their expectations (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000:456). Within the systems theory it is postulated that the elements of CS are in a hierarchical order that might influence consumers during a shopping endeavour. Exploratory factor analysis identified PHYSICAL FACILITIES and PRODUCT PRESENTATION as the first element of CS; PERSONNEL as the second element, and PROCESSES as the third. The processes associated with the selected clothing retail stores are similar and competitive, which may explain it being identified thirdly: consumers probably "know" that retailers are competing for their loyalty and thus assume that none of these stores would disappoint them in terms of process related aspects of the service offering.

This research therefore revealed that consumers have high expectations of the tangible elements of the service offering in clothing retail stores. The fact that they have at least six prominent channels to choose from, may contribute to critical awareness. The findings of the study is in congruence with that of Westbrook (1981:68-85), that reports that the stores' sales personnel, products, the store environment as well as value-priced relationships are the most influential elements of retail patronage and consumer satisfaction.

Upon the examination of consumers' judgement of the CS of the selected retail stores by means of a direct measure, it became clear that a discrepancy exists between what female consumers expect and what they experience in reality. Of all the stores included in the study,

only F received a *Good to Excellent* rating. The other stores were rated lower. One can thus deduce that in general, clothing retailers could improve their service offerings to meet consumers' expectations.

When only the judgements of regular customers of the respective stores are taken into consideration, stores' judgments are more positive, which means that consumers who do not shop at certain stores refrain from doing so because certain elements of CS do not meet their expectations.. The apparent gap between consumers' expectations (which are high) and their judgement of the CS of the respective stores in general, could be investigated in a following study. It seems that consumers' expectations with regard to the three factors that emerged in this study are not met in general.

South African consumers – who are categorised as consumers in an emerging economy - are therefore not necessarily tolerant of poor CS as is suggested by Greenland *et al.*, (2006:583) and Malhotra *et al.*, (1994:8) in terms of what seems true of consumers in emerging economies and Third World contexts in general.

7.2.2 Recommendations to enhance the service offering in a competitive market based on evidence of consumers' expectations of CS and their store patronage

Consumers' expectations of CS seem high in terms of all three elements of CS that were distinguished in this research through factor analysis. This poses a major challenge for retailers in the market place. Before strategies to improve the CS offering are designed, it is therefore essential that a retailer becomes acquainted with what their target market expects (LSM group and associated characteristics) specifically in terms of elements of CS that are regarded crucial during consumers' judgement of a store.

Sophistication through exclusive branding may for example be a means for a retailer to differentiate itself from others (Lewison, 1997:40) but it is not necessarily the most profitable solution in an emerging country such as South Africa. The findings of this study in fact indicate that although consumers have high expectations with regards to the physical environment and product presentation, the two stores that are probably strongly focussed on this aspect, are not patronised by the majority of consumers. Stores therefore have to be extremely careful how

the elements of the service offering in conjunction with one another: even if one element of CS seems “perfect”, as seems the case with the stores mentioned, other elements of CS may jeopardise consumers’ return intentions.



Based on the findings of this research, it is proposed that, in order to draw and retain customers, a clothing retail store has to:

- attend to PHYSICAL FACILITIES and PRODUCT PRESENTATION meticulously;
- appoint PERSONNEL that support the store’s service offering through their appearance, conduct, presence, skill, attitude;
- focus on PROCESSES that will provide a competitive advantage in the market place.

Offering what the other clothing retailers already offer is a “must have”; offering what they do not yet have is “highly recommended” and offering the “unexpected” seems exciting and essential to beat the rest. The basic denominators that were used in the CS instrument that was used in the research can provide a useful guide towards retailers’ efforts to enhance their service offerings, for example:

- Is the layout of the store conducive for shopping? Even if all the theoretic principles have been taken into consideration, practical implications and lack of excitement may cause consumers to become “passers-by”.
- How does the image portrayed through the dress of sales personnel and their age and gender coincide with what is offered in the store?
- Do store card holders feel special or are they treated to additional benefits that are noted by those who use alternative methods of payment?

Every one of the 31 statements included in the measuring instrument of this study, provides opportunity for “self evaluation”.




7.3 CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION OF THE SQ IN CLOTHING RETAIL STORES (OBJECTIVE 2)

7.3.1 Consumers' perception of clothing retailers in terms of relevant dimensions of service quality

An investigation of respondents' perception of the 28 items listed in the service quality instrument of Dabholkar *et al.* (1996) revealed that only five items (*this store offers enough credit options; this store accepts most major credit cards; this store's operating hours are convenient; this store willingly accepts returns and exchange of goods; the store gives a modern impression*) were judged *good to excellent* by more than 50% of the respondents. The dimensions of SQ that were judged as being *excellent* are mainly policy (*empathy*) or problem solving (*assurance*) related with the exception of *the store gives a modern impression*, which is a physical aspect (*tangible*) element as per the definitions and factors defined by Dabholkar *et al.* (1996). The importance of the availability of various payment methods that include credit options is reiterated, which explains the increase in the use of store credit facilities by older consumers and it being the second most used method of payment by the sample overall.

The outcome of the first investigation of consumers' perception of the service quality of clothing retail stores by means of the Dabholkar *et al.* (1996) instrument identified three distinct dimensions of the service offering that are considered when judging a store's service quality. Consumers' judgement of the first factor namely SUPPORTIVENESS (3.6/5) indicates a judgement of the particular dimension as being *fair to good*. Although consumers' apparent perception of the supportiveness of clothing retail stores seem positive, stores in general could improve in this regard considering that consumers have several stores to choose from. The second factor, IMPRESSIVENESS, seem to be perceived as being *good to excellent* in general: respondents thus judged this aspect of clothing stores favourably. Clothing retailers thus apparently succeed to impress customers but not necessarily support their customers as expected. This could explain why two of the stores that seem to be more sophisticated than the rest in terms of store design and display as well as branding, are not patronised to the same extent. Stores' effort to ensure CONVENIENCE was judged to be *good to excellent*. Based on store patronage this dimension of a clothing retailer's service offering therefore seems to draw more customers than impressive stores. Consumers' overall judgment of SQ did not expose particular shortcomings through the Dabholkar instrument: the mean scores for the various

dimensions of SQ were relatively  rs' high expectations of tangibles as reported in the former section. The one dimension of SQ that reflects upon the *technical quality* of the offering, i.e. how the service is provided, namely *supportiveness* seem to be the area that could be attended to, to improve consumers' judgement of SQ.

The service quality investigation by means of the Terblanche and Boshoff instrument suggested that consumers perceive PERSONAL INTERACTION in clothing retail stores as being *average to good*, which juxtaposes what consumers expect. In other words, the functional quality of the service as defined by Saxby (2003, in Marx and Erasmus, 2006:56), which is deemed to be important in terms of consumers' perception of service quality, is apparently not optimal from consumers' perspective. A mean of 3.59/5 indicates that consumers are uncertain about the quality of *personal interaction* in clothing retail stores and this signifies a pertinent shortcoming that should be attended to.

A high mean (>4/5) for PRODUCT VARIETY and ASSORTMENT, on the other hand, indicates that consumers agree that this dimension of service quality is attended to almost as expected. Although it does not reflect a *strongly agree* judgement, consumers seem to perceive it in a positive way in general. Similarly they agreed that the third dimension, CUES OF QUALITY is attended to well. None of the three dimensions obtained a mean that indicate that consumers *strongly agree* that the dimensions of service quality are at best, however in general only *personal interaction* did not evoke a clear positive judgement. Standard deviations indicate small variances in consumers' judgements and reliability co-efficients were high, which suggests that these findings could be taken to heart.

7.3.2 Shortcomings that could be addressed to enhance the service offering based on the evidence of consumers' perceptions of SQ in clothing retail stores

Consumers' perception of the dimensions of SQ was generally not out right negative. The study suggested that attention be given to attributes relating to SUPPORTIVENESS (Dabholkar investigation) and PERSONAL INTERACTION (Terblanche and Boshoff investigation). Retailers should attend to their personnel and their interaction with customers as it seems unmistakably important to consumers as this dimension of service quality was identified through two different instruments in the service quality investigation while the element PERSONNEL was

clearly distinguished as a prominent element of the service offering in the CS investigation.





Retailers should be cautioned against becoming too confident because consumers' high expectations and their less than impressive SQ perceptions indicate that the service offering in clothing department stores can and should improve to ensure customer loyalty. One of the elements of CS that clearly indicate room for improvement is PERSONNEL and this was confirmed in the service quality investigations.

7.4 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PRESTIGE IN TERMS OF CONSUMERS' PATRONAGE OF SPECIFIC CLOTHING RETAIL STORES (OBJECTIVE 3)

In terms of consumers' patronage of clothing retail stores, prestige related attributes cannot be ignored as clothing shoppers also have regard for the social experience and the pleasantness of shopping at a particular store (Mazursky & Jacoby, 1985 in Terblanche & Boshoff, 2003). The image of the store should therefore be considered as important although not necessarily crucial for store patronage (Lewison, 1997:11; Dodds, Monroe & Grewal, 1991; Zeithaml, 1988 in Baker *et al.*, 1994:328). Consumers' frequent patronage of store F in this study could thus also be attributed to the fact that significant others patronise the store and that it may seem appropriate to do so as well (as explained in Hirschman, 1981 in Terblanche & Boshoff, 2003).

In the PRECON investigation exploratory factor analysis confirmed the five factors of the original scale in the context of this study, namely BRAND QUALITY; PATRON STATUS; FASHION INVOLVEMENT; STORE ATMOSPHERE; STORE IMAGE (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.90; 0.88; 0.87; 0.78; 0.93 respectively). The means (3.28; 3.27; 3.38; 3.85; 2.81), which indicated respondents' regard for these five factors in terms of store patronage, however revealed that prestige and image of the clothing stores are apparently not highly regarded in the context of this study.

In terms of the dimensions BRAND QUALITY; PATRON STATUS; FASHION INVOLVEMENT and STORE IMAGE, means indicated that respondents were actually indifferent about the significance of these prestige related factors in terms of store patronage. They however agreed that one of the factors, namely STORE ATMOSPHERE influences store patronage. These findings coincide with the CS investigation where PHYSICAL FACILITIES and PRODUCT

 PRESENTATION was identified as  terms of consumers' expectations of a service offering; also during the SQ investigation when IMPRESSIVENESS (that pertinently reflects on the store environment) was identified as crucial in terms of consumers' perception of service quality. During the CS investigation it became clear that physical facilities are judged in conjunction with product presentation. The one factor of the prestige instrument that is positively associated with store patronage can be associated with tangible aspects of the service offering that have been identified through the CS investigation.

During the CS investigation the IMAGE of a retailer emerged as a significant element that directs consumers' expectations of a clothing store's service offering. Although consumers' expectations of the image of the stores seemed relatively high in the CS investigation, they were actually indifferent in terms of the significance of store image in terms of eventual store choice according to the PRECON investigation. This uncertainty may indicate that respondents struggled to admit the importance of these attributes, many of which are intangible concepts. This may be typical of a developing country: although it seems as if consumers' structural and transactional knowledge about shopping activities are fairly advanced, their symbolic knowledge however is not necessarily equally advanced. It may be that consumers in an emerging economy, do not have the same exposure that consumers in more developed economies have in terms of types of stores and that they therefore do not yet fully grasp the symbolic meaning and the status involved with clothing and/or the status that can be obtained by means of certain brands and certain stores as suggested by the literature (John, 1999:193; Kaiser, 1998:147). The reason for this could be that there is not really a significant difference in the projected status of the stores that were included in this study and which consumers are exposed to in general. They therefore failed to distinguish differences in the status of the stores that were included in this research project.

7.5 CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPLAINED WITHIN THE SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

Based on the findings of the study, the conceptual framework has been adapted to reflect the phenomena that were identified in the context of this research (Figure 7.1).

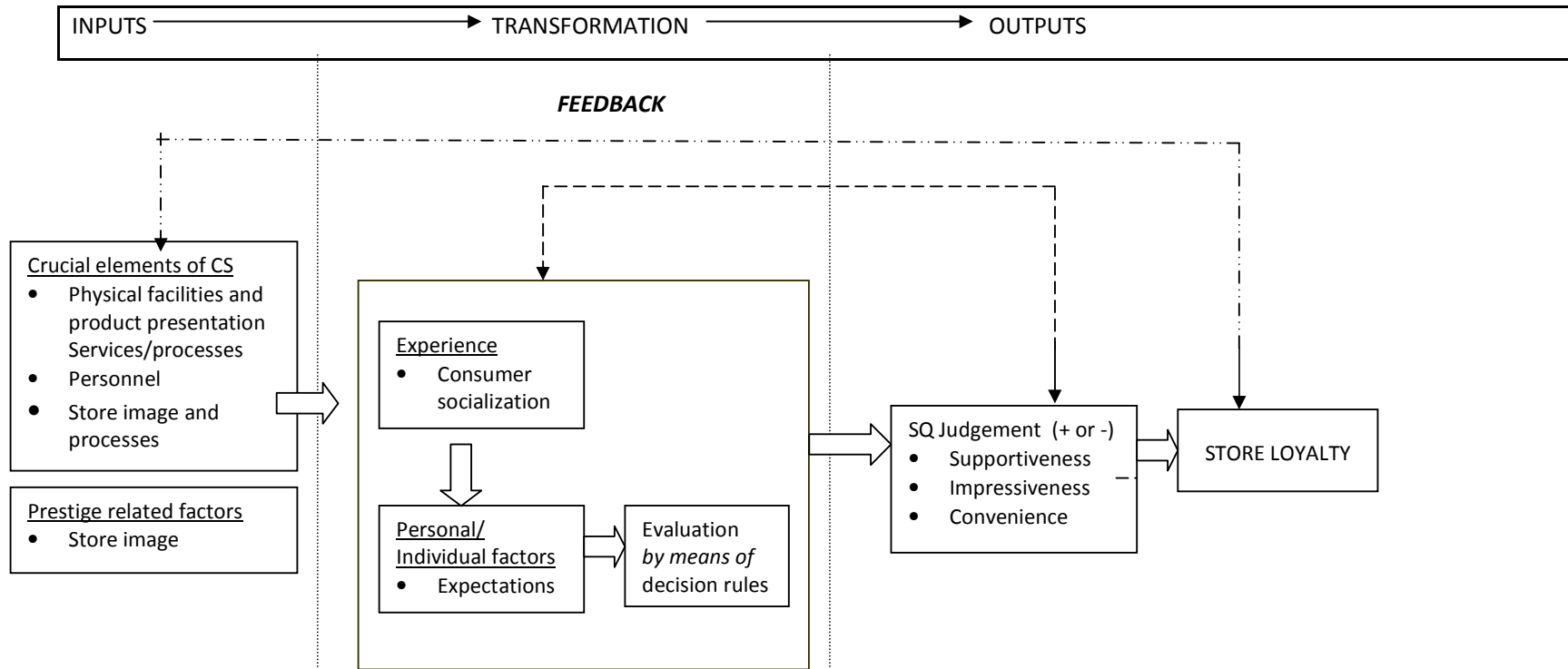


FIGURE 7.1: REVISED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



Within a systems framework, the actors that affect female consumers' judgement of clothing department stores. In the context of this study, *three distinct elements* were identified that apparently direct consumers' expectations of the tangible evidence of a clothing retailer's service offering namely: *Physical facilities and product presentation; Personnel; Store image and processes*. It therefore seems as if females tend to judge certain elements of the marketing mix coherently: *physical facilities and product presentation* are perceived as an entity, rather than separately. Interestingly consumers have pertinent expectations of *personnel* even though they are not as involved with customers as they are in other types of stores (for example household appliance departments) and females' expectations are apparently also coherent in terms of the *store image and processes* offered by the store. Contrary to what was expected, price and product quality were not identified as individual elements of CS that affect consumers' expectations in particular: these two aspects of CS are apparently disguised by other factors that come to mind more distinctively. Another phenomenon that apparently influences consumers' expectations and patronage of clothing retailers, is *store image*.

The **transformation** of the inputs into outputs (a judgment of service quality and probably store loyalty is described by Thang and Tan (2003:194) in Marx (2005) as "an intervening internal process" during which consumers convert stimuli into meaningful information and apply it in order to comprehend the environment before making any judgement". A consumer would therefore typically enter one of the clothing retailers and based on their socialization as consumers (prior experience and knowledge and their consequent expectations with regards to a clothing retail store), the consumer would make a positive or negative judgement of service quality and patronise the store or not and become store loyal or not. This study revealed that consumers' expectations of the service offering of clothing retailers are high (contrary to what is reported in literature about emergent and developing countries).

The proposed outcome (SQ judgement)/ **output** is either a positive or negative judgement of retail stores' service offering. This study concluded that consumers' perception of clothing retail stores is based on three pertinent dimensions of SQ namely *supportiveness; impressiveness* and *convenience*. This research revealed that customers' high expectations of the elements of CS are not met if their perception of SQ is taken as an indication of the realisation of stores' efforts in the design of their marketing mix. Based on frequency of patronage of the different stores and the service quality judgements, it seems as if stores may need to re-strategise to impress

customers and to enhance store  *personnel related* attributes of customer service and the *process related* factors that suggest *supportiveness*, were judged less favourably.

Patronage of three clothing retail stores seems particularly problematic if *frequency of store patronage* is compared to the other three stores that were included in the study. Reasons why these stores are less popular and are not frequented can be investigated in terms of specific factors that seemed important in this study (feedback). It can therefore be said that in terms of clothing department stores, female consumers' expectations are apparently not met and that negative disconfirmation resulted in very average service quality judgements. It can therefore be deduced that store loyalty is not attained. Store loyalty is also not necessarily due to excellent CS and SQ, it may be based on aspects that are associated with relationship marketing such as the issuing of store cards (that allow certain advantages and privileges) that later on literally captivate customers to the extent that they can no longer afford to shop at competitors. Advantages associated with store cards could cause customers to be more tolerant of negative aspects of the service offering of a retailer and could negate negative judgements of SQ.

Clothing retailers are cautioned not to become negligent with regards to their service offering because based on female consumers' perception of the SQ of the selected clothing retail stores, there seem to be pertinent limitations that should be addressed to enhance store loyalty and to survive in a highly competitive market place.



LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This chapter attends to the limitations of this study and provides suggestions for further research

8.1 THE RESEARCH IN RETROSPECT

At the end of any research project it is important that the researcher reflects on the study in order to objectively determine whether or not all objectives were met and that the study represents accurate and reliable results.

Firstly, the research was limited in scope, which posed pertinent limitations in terms of the sample and sampling. Extreme care was thus taken to ensure that the data and subsequently the information that was used in this research were accurate, valid and reliable so that the findings could make a meaningful contribution to the consumer science fraternity. The steps taken to ensure validity and reliability were discussed in chapter 5. Existing measuring instruments and scales were included in the questionnaire to enhance the reliability of the study. Reliability was eventually confirmed through high Cronbach's Alpha measurements in all of the investigations. The agreement of the findings of this research and the findings of Terblanche and Boshoff in terms of the SQ investigation is particularly noteworthy and diminishes all concerns there may have been about the sample that was conveniently recruited. A cover letter that clearly explained the purpose of the study accompanied questionnaires to put respondents at ease and to inspire confidence in the researcher. The cover letter gave assurance that all the information would be treated as private and confidential, that it would be used for the sole purpose of this study and that it was driven by the University of Pretoria for academic purposes. This aimed to recruit willing respondents and honest responses.

In order for any study to be successful it is essential that all objectives as stated in the beginning of the study are met. The researcher can conclude that all the objectives were met and that

meaningful conclusions could be  ered. No unexpected problems were encountered during the data collection phase or during the interpretation of the data.

8.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Certain aspects of the study were less than the ideal, namely:

- **Sample and sampling**

Due to time constraints (this study was part of the pre requisites for a Masters degree that had to be completed within a specific time frame) and financial constraints (the study was self funded), the research design was explorative and descriptive in kind. Realising that a purposive, representative study would have been the ideal to enable generalisation of the findings to the larger population, the researcher tried to involve as many respondents possible given the limitations: 350 questionnaires were thus handed out to respondents that were recruited by means of a convenient, yet purposive snow ball sampling method.

Management of shopping malls and shopping centres were unfortunately reluctant to permit data collection in the shopping malls, shopping centres or stores and the researcher therefore used trained assistants to recruit willing respondents across the geographic area through convenient snowball sampling. This was time consuming and difficult to administer.

Respondents were recruited in close proximity of large, well established shopping malls and shopping centres within a 30km radius of the centre of Pretoria, which involved female consumers in Pretoria and Centurion that are part of the Tshwane municipal area. This was done to ensure that respondents would have had fair access to the relevant retailers and that they would also have had access to different shopping centres and malls so that their responses would be based on ample exposure to the selected retailers. Although the area that was covered in this research offers a fairly good representation of consumers in terms of different socio economic groups, it would have been better to cover a still broader area or a national survey to include less affluent areas as well. It must however be noted that this research was limited in scope and meant to be exploratory and therefore the sample population seemed appropriate.

Data collection



- Completion of the questionnaires was time consuming: it took between 20 and 30 minutes for respondents to complete the questionnaires due to the inclusion of two SQ instruments in addition to the CS instrument and the PRECON scale. Potential respondents were however warned beforehand that participation would be time consuming. Some individuals were therefore hesitant to complete the lengthy questionnaire or declined the opportunity. It also took some time to retrieve some of the questionnaires. The researcher realised that the length of the questionnaire would be tiring and that it may jeopardise truthfulness of responses. Respondents were therefore encouraged to take their time and to complete questionnaires at home. They were allowed between three and seven days for completion of the questionnaires. Eventually, the internal consistency of the various scales was acceptable and findings concurred with similar studies, which reduced any concerns about the validity of the findings.

8.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The researcher identified various opportunities for further research during the course of the research process.

The following suggestions that involve issues relating to the sample and sampling, are suggested:

- **Gender:** The sample group consisted only of *female* consumers. It is proposed that the study is repeated with males because all except one of the major clothing retailers that were included in this study also have departments for men's fashion. An investigation of men's expectations and judgements of the SQ and CS of the various retailers and a comparison with the findings of this research project may produce enlightening results.
- **Geographic area:** This study could be repeated over a larger geographic area to investigate whether there are significant differences in terms of consumers' (male and female) judgement and expectations of CS and SQ in different geographical areas.
- **Type of clothing retail stores:** This study involved six prominent clothing department stores. The investigation could be repeated for boutiques and discount stores to identify significant differences and agreements as is suggested by Jobber (2010:709), i.e. to do a *competitor analysis* that involve all the apparel/clothing retailers because retailers should

The following suggestions that involve issues relating to the findings, are suggested:

- In terms of the prominence of PERSONNEL (as indicated in the CS as well as the SQ investigations), ways in which store personnel could be optimised to enhance SQ judgements, should be investigated.
- It might be interesting to find out how STORE DESIGN and VISUAL DISPLAY of merchandise is judged in discount stores and to investigate ways in which the image of stores could be boosted through the interior design and the display of merchandise as store patronage indicates the South African consumers still prefer an actual shopping experience to virtual shopping.
- Although this study indicated that PRESTIGE is not necessarily considered important in terms of females' patronage of clothing retail stores, it was concluded that prestige shoppers probably shop at stores such as boutiques rather than department stores. The importance of prestige for females who shop at more sophisticated stores, their expectations of CS and perception of SQ should also be investigated.
- The study could be repeated with a larger sample to allow for an investigation of consumers' expectations and perception in terms of pertinent age categories as this study reveals that older consumers patronise different stores on a regular basis and also use different payment methods.
- Inclusion of panel discussions (a qualitative approach) to discuss consumers' patronage and non patronage of certain clothing retail outlets would also be insightful.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS FOR CLOTHING RETAILERS

The research findings indicated that the largest percentage of respondents, irrespective of age, shop for clothing once per month although the store that also sell foods and offers a restaurant/ coffee facility in store, attract a fairly large percentage of shoppers to the clothing sections at more regular intervals, even once per week.



Although certain clothing channels are more successful with older consumers, particularly one of the clothing channels seem to be less successful to attract consumers even though the product offering on face value does not seem to differ significantly from some of the others that are patronised more frequently. In terms of the single measurement investigation, this store's service offering was rated average by the majority who patronise the store. This should be investigated in terms of specific aspects of the service offering as well as prestige related factors.

The majority of younger consumers use cash to pay for their purchases while the use of store cards and credit cards is more prevalent for consumers older than 30 years. Consumers may therefore be attracted to a specific store if she obtains a store card with an interest free revolving credit facility. The study shows that respondents are not particularly store loyal and that they apparently patronise more than one store to meet their clothing needs. It was also shown that store loyal consumers are probably bound by their store cards more than anything else. This provides opportunities for competing retailers to provide a superior service in order to attract customers from competitors. The competition is fierce, with no one retailer offering a vastly superior service offering and consumers being very fickle. Amidst tough competition in the recent economic climate, retailers probably need to up their game in terms of their CS and SQ, in order to gain a competitive advantage.

The findings confirmed the importance of PERSONNEL in terms of consumers' judgement of the service offering of clothing retailers – even though personnel are not necessarily as involved with customers in the store as it would be in terms of appliance sales. This should be noted in terms of clothing retailers' design of their marketing mix. As a non tangible dimension of the service offering, *SUPPORTIVENESS* emerged as a prominent dimension of SQ judgements. Consumers seem to judge clothing retailers' physical facilities and product presentation coherently; therefore the environment in which ladies' fashion is offered should be attended to in terms of a 'total experience'. In terms of prestige related factors, store image seems to be a noteworthy factor but prestige *per se* does not seem to be crucial in terms of store patronage. Although this juxtaposition may seem confusing it probably implies that females' expectation of the image of clothing retail stores in terms of their willingness to patronise a store (this was the formulation in the measuring instrument) is high, but that that prestige *per se* (a social dimension that refers to the influence of friends on store patronage) is not crucial for females who shop at clothing department stores.

8.5 CONCLUDING NOTES

With the present global economic predicament and the recession that has brought many businesses to their knees, retail sales are still looking grim and will probably take some time to recover. For the first time in seventeen years South Africa's economy has plunged into a recession (www.businessday.co.za/Articles/Content.aspx?id=78332). Statisticians therefore reported a decrease in retail sales on a year-on-year basis for June 2009 compared to the previous financial period (www.businessday.co.za/Articles/Content.aspx?id=78330), and only predicts sales to pick up again after 2010. It is therefore more important than ever that retailers are aware of the requirements (expectations) of their customers in order to retain them and to lure potential customers to their stores. This study showed that female customers have high expectations of clothing department stores, which means that stores will have to augment their service offering to levels that exceed the offering in stores at present. Although South Africa is categorised as an emerging economy, it does not necessarily mean that "anything goes". Exposure to more sophisticated businesses through travel and the media elevates consumers' expectations and stores will have to up their service offerings to stay competitive. The elements of customer service need to be offered at the highest level of excellence that is both profitable for the retailer as well as the customer in order for them to get their piece of the ever-decreasing size of the pie.



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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

100
1908 - 2008



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

Department of Consumer Science

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July 2008

Dear respondent

RESEARCH PROJECT: An investigation of customers' expectations regarding the customer service of prominent clothing retail stores in Tshwane

The intention with this research is to gain some insight into customers' expectations and perception regarding the customer service of prominent clothing retail stores in the city of Tshwane's metropolitan area. It will take at least 10 minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire that forms part of a dissertation for a Master's degree in Consumer Science. All information will be dealt with anonymously. Respondents may however provide their details voluntarily on a separate form so that it could be entered into a lucky draw to win a microwave oven at the closure of data collection. The winner will be notified telephonically.

Please read the questions carefully and give your honest opinion through out.

Thank you for your participation!

Andrea Grabowski

Student: M Consumer Science Clothing Retail Management

Study Leader: Prof Alet C Erasmus



Please confirm your details with an <u>X</u> in the relevant block. Bevestig asseblief u inligting met <u>X</u> in die toepaslike blokkie.		For office use only					V1.1	
		Respondent no:					V1.2	
		Store & shopping centre code:					V1.3	
1. In which suburb do you reside in Tshwane? In watter woongebied in Tshwane woon u?							V2	
2. Age in years / Ouderdom in jare		21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+		

SECTION B

3. How frequently have you shopped at each of the following clothing retailers during the PAST 3 MONTHS?
 (Indicate with an X any of the relevant options)

Hoe dikwels het u gedurende die afgelope 3 MAANDE by elk van die volgende klere winkels gekoop?
 (Merk met X waar van toepassing)

Handelaar Retailer	On average once per week/ Gemiddeld een keer per week	Maximum 3 times per month/ Maksimum DRIE keer per maand	Maximum twice per month / Maksimum TWEE keer per maand	Maximum once per month/ Maksimum EEN keer per maand	Never/ Nooit	FOR OFFICIAL USE
Edgars						V3.1
Foschini						V3.2
Stuttafords						V3.3
Woolworths						V3.4
Truworths						V3.5
Queenspark						V3.6

4a. How would you describe the Customer Service of the following stores to your best friend? (Circle each of the relevant options)
Hoe sal u die kliënte diens van die onderstaande winkels aan u beste vriendin beskryf?/(Omkring die opsies wat van toepassing is)

Handelaar Retailer	Excellent/ uitstekend	Good/ Goed	Average /Gemiddeld	Poor/Swak	Unacceptable/ Onaanvaarbaar	No opinion, I never shop there/ Geen opinie, ek koop nooit daar nie	FOR OFFICIAL USE
Edgars	5	4	3	2	1	0	V4.1
Foschini	5	4	3	2	1	0	V4.2
Stuttafords	5	4	3	2	1	0	V4.3
Woolworths	5	4	3	2	1	0	V4.4
Truworths	5	4	3	2	1	0	V4.5
Queenspark	5	4	3	2	1	0	V4.6

4b. What method of payment do you mostly use when shopping at your favourite clothing store? Indicate the retailer with an X in the relevant block.
Watter betaalm metode gebruik u die meeste wanneer u by u gunsteling klere handelaar koop? Merk u keuse met 'n X in die toepaslike blokkie.

METHOD OF PAYMENT/ BETAALMETODE		Official use
Cash/ Kontant		V4b.1
Cheque/ Tjek		
Bank credit card/ Bank kredietkaart		
Store credit card Winkel krediet kaart		
Cash card/ Kontantkaart		
Cash/ Kontant		



5. What requirements do you have of a clothing store to become a regular customer? Watter vereistes is vir u 'n voorwaarde om gereeld by 'n klerehandelaar inkopies te gaan doen?	Definitely/ Definitief	Preferably/ Verkieslik	Maybe/ Miskien	Occasionally/ Soms	Not at all/ Glad nie	FOR OFFICIAL USE	
A clean store /'n Skoon winkel	5	4	3	2	1	V5.1	
A large product variety /assortment/'n Groot produk verskeidenheid	5	4	3	2	1	V5.2	
A pleasant store atmosphere / 'n Aangename winkel atmosfeer	5	4	3	2	1	V5.3	
An aesthetically appealing store environment / 'n Winkel wat mooi is binne	5	4	3	2	1	V5.4	
Practical logic display of clothing / Praktiese logiese uitstalling van klere	5	4	3	2	1	V5.5	
Availability of credit facilities/ Beskikbaarheid van krediet fasiliteite	5	4	3	2	1	V5.6	
Clean coathangers/ rails/ shelves/ Skoon hangers, relings, rakke	5	4	3	2	1	V5.7	
Clear/visible differentiation of departments/ Duidelik sigbare onderskeiding van afdelings	5	4	3	2	1	V5.8	
A comfortable in-store temperature/ 'n Gemaklike winkel temperatuur	5	4	3	2	1	V5.9	
Easy access to parking area from the road / Maklike toegang tot parkeerarea vanaf die straat	5	4	3	2	1	V5.10	
Efficient staff at pay points / Bekwame personeel by betaalpunte	5	4	3	2	1	V5.11	
Efficient staff assistance within the various departments / Bekwame bystand van winkelpersoneel in die verskillende afdelings	5	4	3	2	1	V5.12	
Fashionability of clothing items/ Modieuse kleding items	5	4	3	2	1	V5.13	
Friendly shop assistants / Vriendelike winkel assistente	5	4	3	2	1	V5.14	
Managers that are approachable/ Bestuurders wat toeganklik is	5	4	3	2	1	V5.15	
Managers that show interest in clients / Bestuurders wat belangstelling in kliënte toon	5	4	3	2	1	V5.16	
Staff that are neatly dressed in an identifiable uniform/ Personeel wat netjies geklee is in 'n herkenbare uniform	5	4	3	2	1	V5.17	
Products of excellent quality/ Produkte van uitstekende gehalte	5	4	3	2	1	V5.18	
Regular promotions / Gereelde promosies	5	4	3	2	1	V5.19	
Good security in the store /Goeie sekuriteit in die winkel	5	4	3	2	1	V5.20	
Short queues at cashiers and a short waiting time / Kort rye by betaalpunte met minimum wagtyd	5	4	3	2	1	V5.21	
Store must be conveniently located/ Winkel moet gerieflik geleë wees	5	4	3	2	1	V5.22	
Variety of sizes and certainty of good fitting garments / Verskeidenheid groottes en die sekerheid van goedpassende klere	5	4	3	2	1	V5.23	
A positive store image/ 'n Positiewe winkelbeeld	5	4	3	2	1	V5.24	
A good return and exchange policy/ 'n Goeie omruil/ terugbring beleid	5	4	3	2	1	V5.25	
The store must appear modern /Die winkel moet modern vertoon	5	4	3	2	1	V5.26	
The store must be located in a safe area / Die winkel moet in 'n veilige omgewing geleë wees	5	4	3	2	1	V5.27	
Good value for money/ Goeie waarde vir geld	5	4	3	2	1	V5.28	
Well designed fitting rooms/ Goed ontwerpte aanpaskamers	5	4	3	2	1	V5.29	
A well organized store layout / 'n Goed georganiseerde winkeluitleg	5	4	3	2	1	V5.30	
Well trained, knowledgeable staff /Goed opgeleide, kundige personeel)	5	4	3	2	1	V5.31	

<p>5 b. Which of the retailers listed, do you patronise most frequently to shop for clothing? Indicate the retailer with an X in the relevant block.</p> <p>By watter van die handelaars wat gelys is, doen u die meeste kleding inkopies? Merk u keuse met 'n X in die toepaslike blokkie.</p>	STORE/ WINKEL	X	OFFICIAL USE
	Edgars		V5b.1
	Foschini		
	Stuttafords		
	Woolworths		
	Truworths		
Queenspark			



<p>6. How would you describe the <u>quality of service</u> (identified in 5b), that you patronise most frequently? Please circle the option that best describes your personal interpretation.</p> <p>Hoe sal u die <u>kwaliteit van dienslewering</u> van die winkel beskryf wat u in 6a. gemerk het en waar u mees gereeld klere aankope doen? Omkring asseblief by elke stelling, die opsie wat u indruk die beste beskryf.</p>	Excellent/ Uitstekend	Good / Goed	Fair/ Redelik	Poor / Swak	Uncertain / Onseker	FOR OFFICIAL USE	
1. The store gives a modern impression. / Die winkel vertoon modern.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.1	
2. The general impression of the various departments is visually pleasing. / Die algemene indruk wat deur die verskillende afdelings geskep word, is aantreklik/ mooi.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.2	
3. Sales people are neatly dressed. / Verkoopspersoneel is netjies geklee.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.3	
4. Supplementaries associated with this store's service (e.g. shopping bags, statements etc.) create a good impression. / Bykomstighede wat met dienslewering verband hou, (bv. inkopiesakke, fakture ens) skep 'n goeie indruk.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.4	
5. The general surroundings in the store are clean, attractive, convenient. / Die algemene omgewing in die winkel is skoon, aantreklik en gerieflik.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.5	
6. The store lay-out makes it easy for customers to find what they are looking for. / Die winkeluitleg is sodanig dat dit maklik is om te vind waarna jy soek.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.6	
7. The store lay-out makes it easy for customers to move around. / Die winkeluitleg is sodanig dat klante maklik kan rondbeweeg.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.7	
8. The retailer keeps its promises. / Die handelaar kom sy beloftes na.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.8	
9. The retailer deals with a transaction correctly the first time. / Hierdie handelaar doen transaksies uit die staanspoor korrek.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.9	
10. This retailer has merchandise available when customers want it. / Die handelaar het voorraad beskikbaar wanneer klante dit verlang.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.10	
11. This store provides error-free sales transactions. / Verkoopstransaksies van hierdie winkel is foutvry.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.11	
12. Sales people are knowledgeable enough to deal with customers' questions. / Verkoopspersoneel is kundig genoeg om klante se vrae te beantwoord.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.12	
13. Sales people's behaviour in the stores instills confidence in customers. / Die optrede van verkoopspersoneel in die winkels skep vertroue by die klante.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.13	
14. Customers trust dealings with this store. / Klante vertrou sake met hierdie handelaar.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.14	
15. Sales people attend to customers promptly when requested. / Verkoopspersoneel gee dadelik aandag aan klante wat dit verlang.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.15	
16. Sales people in this store inform customers clearly about store policies and operations. / Verkoopspersoneel lig klante deeglik in oor beleid en werkwyses.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.16	
17. Sales people in this store are always willing to respond to customers' requests. / Verkoopspersoneel van hierdie winkel handelaar is altyd bereid om op klante se versoeke te reageer.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.17	
18. Customers receive personal attention in this store. / Klante kry persoonlike aandag by hierdie handelaar.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.18	
19. Sales people in this store always behave courteously towards customers. / Verkoopspersoneel van hierdie handelaar tree altyd hoflik op teenoor klante.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.19	
20. Telephonic enquiries to this store are handled courteously. / Telefoniese navrae word hoflik deur die handelaar hanteer.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.20	
21. This store willingly accepts returns and exchange of goods / Hierdie winkel is bereid om artikels terug te neem of om te ruil.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.21	
22. This store shows a sincere interest in solving customers' problems. / Hierdie winkel stel opreg daarin belang om klante se probleme op te los.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.22	
23. This store's salespeople are able to handle customers' complaints themselves. / Verkoopspersoneel van hierdie winkel kan klante se klagtes self hanteer.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.23	
24. The merchandise in this store are of a high quality. / Die produkte in hierdie winkel is van hoogstaande gehalte.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.24	
25. Customers of this store have access to convenient parking. / Klante van hierdie handelaar het toegang tot gerieflike parkering.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.25	
26. This store's operating hours are convenient. / Die besigheidsure van die winkel is gerieflik.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.26	
27. This store accepts most major credit cards. / Hierdie winkel aanvaar die vernaamste kredietkaarte.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.27	
28. This store offers enough credit options. / Hierdie winkel bied voldoende kredietfasiliteite.	5	4	3	2	1	V6.28	



7 What is your impression of the clothing retailer where you shop most frequently? Wat is u indrukke van die klere handelaar waar u meestal inkopies doen?	Strongly agree / Stem beslis saam	Agree / Stem saam	Uncertain / Onseker	Disagree / Stem nie saam nie	Strongly disagree / Stem beslis nie saam nie	OFFICIAL USE	
Employees are always be willing to help me/ Werknemers is altyd gewillig om my te help	5	4	3	2	1	V7.1	
Employees give me personal attention/ Werknemers gee persoonlike aandag	5	4	3	2	1	V7.2	
Employees provide prompt service/ Werknemers bied stiptelike diens	5	4	3	2	1	V7.3	
Employees are consistently courteous/ Werknemers is deurgaans hoflik	5	4	3	2	1	V7.4	
The retailer provides individual attention/ Die handelaar bied individuele aandag	5	4	3	2	1	V7.5	
Employees are never too busy to respond to my requests/ Werknemers is nooit te besig om na my belange om te sien nie	5	4	3	2	1	V7.6	
When I have a problem, the retailer is sincerely interested in solving it/ As ek 'n probleem het, stel die handelaar opreg belang om dit op te los	5	4	3	2	1	V7.7	
I have confidence in the retailer's employees/ Ek vertrou die handelaar se werknemers	5	4	3	2	1	V7.8	
Employees understand my specific needs/ Werknemers verstaan my spesifieke behoeftes	5	4	3	2	1	V7.9	
Employees have the knowledge to answer my questions/ Werknemers het die kennis om my vrae te beantwoord	5	4	3	2	1	V7.10	
The retailer has my best interests at heart/ Die handelaar dra my belange op die hart	5	4	3	2	1	V7.11	
The retailer provides its services at the time it promises to do so/ Die handelaar lewer dienste op die bestemde tyd, soos belowe	5	4	3	2	1	V7.12	
The products available are of good quality/ Beskikbare produkte is van 'n goeie kwaliteit	5	4	3	2	1	V7.13	
The retailer offers products of good quality/ Die handelaar skaf goeie kwaliteit produkte aan	5	4	3	2	1	V7.14	
The retailer is known for good quality products / Die klere handelaar is bekend vir goeie kwaliteit produkte	5	4	3	2	1	V7.15	
Materials associated with the retailer's service (shopping bags, till slips, catalogues) look good/ Ware (inkoopstaske, kasregister strokies, katalogusse) van die handelaar vertoon goed	5	4	3	2	1	V7.16	
The retailer's kleding products do not have defects / Die handelaar se kleding produkte het geen defekte nie	5	4	3	2	1	V7.17	
The retailer's physical facilities look good / Die handelaar se fisiese fasiliteite lyk goed	5	4	3	2	1	V7.18	
The retailer provides error-free sales transaction record (till slips, credit card slips, accounts) / Verkoopstransaksie rekords van die handelaar (kasregister strokies, kredietkaartbewyse, rekeninge) is foutvry	5	4	3	2	1	V7.19	
The retailer offers me a satisfactory choice of products/ Die handelaar bied 'n bevredigende keuse van produkte aan	5	4	3	2	1	V7.20	
The retailer has all the products that I want to buy/ Die handelaar het al die produkte wat ek wil koop in voorraad	5	4	3	2	1	V7.21	
The retailer offers a wide variety of products/ Die handelaar verskaf 'n groot verskeidenheid produkte	5	4	3	2	1	V7.22	
The products of the retailer cater for a wide range of preference/ Die produkte van die handelaar voorsien vir groot verskeidenheid smake	5	4	3	2	1	V7.23	
The retailer makes all products available in a variety of sizes / Die handelaar verskaf produkte in 'n verskeidenheid groottes	5	4	3	2	1	V7.24	



SECTIO

<p>8. To what extent do you agree with the following statements in terms of your preference of a clothing retailer? Tot watter mate stem u saam met die volgende stellings in terme van u keuse van 'n klere handelaar?</p>	Strongly agree/ Stem beslis saam	Agree/ Stem saam	Uncertain/ Onseker	Disagree/ Stem nie saam nie	Strongly disagree/ Stem beslis nie saam nie	FOR OFFICIAL USE
I consider the brand name when purchasing clothes for others/ Ek oorweeg die handelsmerk wanneer ek klere vir ander mense koop	5	4	3	2	1	V8.1
I will pay a higher price for clothing that is made by a popular designer/ manufacturer/ Ek sal meer betaal vir klere gemaak deur 'n gewilde ontwerper / vervaardiger	5	4	3	2	1	V8.2
I like to wear brand name clothing/ Ek hou daarvan om handelsmerk klere te dra	5	4	3	2	1	V8.3
I look my best when I wear brand name clothes/ Ek lyk op my beste as ek handelsmerk klere dra	5	4	3	2	1	V8.4
I prefer to buy clothes with bold, recognisable logos for myself/ Ek verkies om vir myself klere te koop met duidelik sigbare kentekens /logos	5	4	3	2	1	V8.5
Clothing made by a well known designer/ manufacturer is worth more money/ Klere gemaak deur 'n bekende ontwerper/ vervaardiger, is meer geld werd	5	4	3	2	1	V8.6
I prefer to shop at stores that carry high-quality clothing/ Ek verkies om te koop by winkels wat hoë-kwaliteit klere aanhou	5	4	3	2	1	V8.7
I usually buy high quality clothing/ Ek koop gewoonlik hoë kwaliteit klere.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.8
I like to be seen wearing high-quality clothes/ Ek hou daarvan as mense sien ek dra hoë kwaliteit klere	5	4	3	2	1	V8.9
When I buy clothes for others or as a gift, I buy clothes of superior quality/ As ek vir iemand anders klere koop of present gee, koop ek klere van goeie gehalte	5	4	3	2	1	V8.10
Wearing high-quality designer clothing makes me feel special/ Ek voel spesiaal as ek hoë-kwaliteit ontwerpers klere dra	5	4	3	2	1	V8.11
Giving high-quality clothing gifts makes me feel special/ Ek voel spesiaal as ek hoë kwaliteit klere vir iemand anders present gee.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.12
It is important to shop in the same clothing stores as my friends/ Dis belangrik om in dieselfde winkels as my vriendinne klere te koop.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.13
Sometimes I would like to know where important people buy their clothes/ Ek wil soms graag weet waar vername mense hulle klere koop.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.14
I like to shop in the same clothing stores as the people I admire/ Ek hou daarvan klere te koop in dieselfde winkels as mense wat ek bewonder.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.15
I like to shop for clothing at stores where wealthy people shop/ Ek hou daarvan om klere te koop waar goeie mense inkopies doen	5	4	3	2	1	V8.16
I often ask friends where they buy their clothes/ Ek vra dikwels vir my vriende waar hulle hulle klere koop.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.17
Planning and selecting my wardrobe is one of my favourite activities/ Om my klerekas te beplan en te kies, is een van my gunsteling aktiwiteite.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.18
Clothing is so attractive to me that I am tempted to spend more money than I should/ Klere is vir my so aantreklik dat ek neig om meer daarop te spandeer as wat ek behoort.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.19
I enjoy clothes like some people do such things as books, records and movies/ Ek geniet klere tot dieselfde mate as wat ander boeke, fliëks en musiek geniet.	5	4	3	2	1	8.20
If I suddenly receive more money than I have now, I would spend it on clothes/ As ek skielik meer geld sou kry as wat ek nou het, sal ek dit op klere spandeer.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.21
I like to shop for clothes/ Ek hou daarvan om klere te koop.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.22
It is important to me that a clothing store has a warm, inviting atmosphere/ Dis vir my belangrik dat 'n klere winkel 'n warm vriendelike atmosfeer het.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.23
It is important to me that the clothing store where I shop, has great service/ Dis vir my belangrik dat die klere winkel waar ek koop, uitstekende diens lewer	5	4	3	2	1	V8.24
I shop in clothing stores where the personnel are well dressed/ Ek koop by klere winkels waar die personeel goed geklee is	5	4	3	2	1	V8.25
I shop in stores that have artistic-looking displays/ Ek koop in winkels wat kunstige produkuittallings het.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.26
Personal service is important to me when buying clothes/ Persoonlike diens is vir my belangrik wanneer ek klere koop	5	4	3	2	1	V8.27
When buying clothes, I require the individual attention of at least one salesperson/ As ek klere koop, verlang ek persoonlike aandag van minstens een verkooppersoon	5	4	3	2	1	V8.28
I prefer to shop in classy stores/ Ek koop graag in hoë-status winkels.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.29
I like to shop in clothing stores that present a high-class image/ Ek koop graag in winkels met 'n hoë status beeld.	5	4	3	2	1	V8.30

GLOSSARY

Customer service (CS) represents all efforts that are made by an organization to meet customers' needs and expectations so that the shopping experience becomes pleasurable (Miao & Bassham, 2006, 54). These elements jointly represent the entire shopping experience that can potentially provide retailers with satisfied and ultimately, loyal customers. Customer service is a multi-dimensional phenomenon (Gilmour, Borg, Duffy, Johnston, Limbek & Shaw, 1994:18) that comprises of several **controllable elements** that represent the retail experience.

Service quality (SQ) is described as a judgement of service excellence and superiority and (intangible aspects) refers to how the actual service offering meets up to customer expectations (Herstein & Gamliel, 2006:306) or their interpretation of how the service is supposed to be performed (Lewison, 1997:495).

Consumers' expectations evolve from their experiences and knowledge through their socialization as consumers (Levy & Weitz, 2007:524) and represent the subjective desires or objective predictions of objects/services (Johnson & Mathews, 1996:290).

Store loyalty refers to consumers' commitment, preference, repeat patronage behaviour and/or allegiance with certain stores. When consumers regularly frequent a store to purchase certain types of merchandise, they are said to be store loyal (Levy & Weitz, 2007:108).

