

**Brand attributes and personal values that shape
millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid
a global crisis**

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Acknowledgement

To my parents, thank you for the investments and sacrifices you have made in getting me this far in my journey of life. It has not always been easy, but through your unwavering love and support it was possible.

To my husband, I will forever treasure your continuous encouragement and commitment to my cause. Thank you for always being there, even when the going got tough.

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“God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?”

Numbers 23:19

Abstract

This study was conducted in South Africa, amid the COVID-19 pandemic when many clothing retail stores were closing, resulting in many retrenchments which exacerbated the high unemployment rate and reduced the industry's contribution to an already pressurised economy. This study aimed to investigate Millennials' beliefs about clothing brands' appropriateness, ethical worthiness and potential to support self-worth - the so-called legitimacy of the brands - arguing that this cohort, based on considerable market size and particular interest in clothing, significantly influences brands' survival in the marketplace. The study argued that to remain relevant, retailers have to understand the underlying motives that fundamentally influence millennial's brand legitimacy judgements to develop agile brand strategies that will "stand the test of time."

Anchored in Schwartz's ten-value typology (2012), the study implemented a mixed methods Means-End Chain (MEC) approach, incorporating a triple-stage Delphi technique, followed by an online focus group discussion, involving 50 and 10 participants, respectively. Data were analysed qualitatively, firstly uncovering the preferred brand attributes and related consequences that millennials anticipated to derive from preferred clothing brands. This guided the content design of the quantitative phase of the MEC procedure, where an online survey questionnaire was completed by 350 millennials.

Using MEC's series of hierarchical value maps, 'hedonism' and 'security' emerged as predominant personal values - per Schwartz's (1994) value continuum. Clothing brands that are perceived as legitimate (pragmatically, morally, and cognitively), would therefore be those that instigate feelings/emotions of pleasure and harmony within the individual as well as the groups that they associate with.

This study contributes to literature, by identifying the predominant values that direct millennials legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid a crisis period, which is a time when core values are highly prevalent, and consumers are more cautious and less inclined to splurge and be reckless. The findings - most prevalent values - are then translated in terms of more tangible brand attributes that could guide retailers' brand strategies. Future research could focus on other market contexts, explore gender and income differences, and even refinement within the millennial age category depending on retailers' regard for particular market segments.

Key words: Clothing brands, Millennials, Brand attributes, Personal values, Legitimacy judgement, Global crisis, Clothing retailers

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introducing the predicament

“...the impact of the crisis on a firm’s business is best understood by focusing on the impact of the crisis on the behaviour of consumers” (Dutt & Padmanabhan, 2011, p.491)

Consumers use brand names to identify products, and use brand attributes to assess the quality of products, to achieve a sense of fulfilment, and even to match it with their desired self-image (Cheng et al., 2012; Jacob et al., 2020). This is especially true for clothing brand attributes. When consumers refer to brand attributes, it extends beyond the physical characteristics of a product, because consumers also link the attributes to the benefits and envisaged consumption of a product, which encompasses a particular end-state or personal value that the consumer wants to support or achieve, for example, self enhancement (Jacob et al., 2020). Brand names and brand identity, therefore, play a crucial role in consumers’ judgements of products, and their willingness to support brands, in that the brand communicates information about the brand, and even about the wearer.

It is already hard for clothing retailers to pin down what consumers appreciate in selected/preferred brands (Saenger et al., 2017). This is exacerbated when a crisis occurs, as it gives rise to high levels of uncertainty, and instability and generates widespread negative judgements amongst people within the broader society (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Sheth, 2020). A crisis generally disturbs, disrupts, and even voids the analytical data and strategic plans once compiled by clothing retailers to better understand their customers, due to unexpected, and sudden changes in consumers’ behaviour (Sheth, 2020; Wolter et al., 2019). Crises, therefore, interfere with retailers’ normal operations (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015), threaten their survival (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Wang et al., 2020), make it difficult to assess realistic customer demands (Sharma et al., 2020), and disrupt the social fabric within societies, also severely affecting the livelihoods of consumers (Campbell et al., 2020). Examples of crises that have affected economies economically and socially are the 2008 global economic downturn and the COVID-19 pandemic which has probably changed consumers' judgements and behaviour forever.

Changes due to global crises pose unique situational demands (Castillo & Trinh, 2019), and create new realities that retailers cannot ignore if they wish to survive and gain momentum

again. The effects experienced in previous crises have prompted researchers to call for research that would aid in building resilience (DesJardine et al., 2019; Williams & Shepherd, 2016) and marketing innovation capabilities (Naidoo, 2010; Wang et al., 2020), finding survival mechanisms (Wang et al., 2020), and ways to better understand how to aptly manage crises to survive unexpected disasters in future (Wang et al., 2020). This is because generally, a crisis is characterised by loss, resulting in the realisation of a so-called 'new normal' that businesses such as clothing retailers were not necessarily ready for, and equipped to deal with (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020).

From the consumers' perspective, as explained by Ross et al. (2020), a global crisis has the effect of causing a reprioritisation in consumer values that are more strongly aligned with people's terminal values - the end state that an individual strives to achieve considering what a person has been through, and is confronted with in life (Chen et al., 2017). Deephouse et al. (2017) indicate that global crises trigger people's re-assessment of institutions, and subsequently threaten the existing cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements that existed before the crisis (Valor et al., 2021). Suchman (1995) describes these legitimacy dimensions by indicating that pragmatic legitimacy prevails if an entity's activities can meet an individual's needs and self-interests. Moral legitimacy is inferred on the basis that the activities of an entity are what is considered the right thing to do, for the betterment of society. Cognitive legitimacy is inferred when taking for granted that the activities of an entity are necessary or inevitable. Of particular interest for this study, is the notion that a crisis is likely to change the consumers' legitimacy judgements of clothing products and brands (Fritz et al., 2017), following evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed consumers' product demands and purchasing behaviours significantly, creating significant challenges for clothing retailers, specifically (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Consumers' legitimacy judgements matter for clothing retailers, because of the consequences for their brands, as consumers are more inclined to interact with brands that they perceive as being legitimate (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Hakala et al., 2017). Being legitimate in the eyes of consumers, is an essential resource for clothing retailers (Hakala et al., 2017) in terms of their survival (Baumann-Pauly, et al., 2016; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Hakala et al., 2017; Lamin & Zaheer, 2012; Suddaby et al., 2017; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), as it enhances brand authenticity (Fritz et al., 2017), enhances brand trust (Chen et al., 2020a; Guo et al., 2017), improves brand credibility (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021), and increases consumers' purchase intentions, which are highly sought after by clothing retailers (Chaney et al., 2016). Favourable legitimacy judgements furthermore improve brand status, which is particularly important to growing a particular brand among certain consumer segments (Hu et al., 2018),

hence enhancing the financial performance of a brand (Fisher et al., 2017; Parsons et al., 2014), while boosting market access, as well as access to other resources (Deephouse et al., 2017; Ruffo et al., 2020). According to Hakala et al. (2017), legitimacy serves as a precondition for value creation, and therefore, brands that are lacking legitimacy are unlikely to gain favourable evaluations from consumers. Following evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed consumers' product demands and purchasing behaviours significantly, creating significant challenges, specifically for clothing retailers (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Wang et al., 2020), it is essential that clothing retailers ensure that the brands they are offering are perceived as being legitimate, as that determines the popularity and growth of the brand.

It is therefore not surprising that strategic management scholars have taken considerable interest in gaining a better understanding of legitimacy as a construct and as a strategic tool (Deephouse et al., 2017). Despite its importance, scholars have to date however mainly focused on legitimacy granted by influential sources at a collective level of analysis (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Deephouse et al., 2017; Haack et al., 2020; Jahn et al., 2020; Tost, 2011), largely neglecting attention to consumers' legitimacy judgements. Previous studies have therefore not placed much focus on the consumer as a legitimacy-granting agent (Alexiou & Wiggins, 2019; Luo et al., 2008; Tost, 2011), despite the consumer being a retailer's most important client (Chen et al., 2020a; Ruffo et al., 2020; Sen & Cowley, 2013).

Because legitimacy is voluntarily inferred by stakeholders (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Drori & Honig, 2013; Fisher, 2020; Fisher et al., 2016; Suchman, 1995; Suddaby et al., 2017; Tost, 2011; Zhao et al., 2017) scholars concede that legitimacy, per se, should be understood from the perspective of different audiences (Finch et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2017; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2011; Navis & Glynn, 2011; van Werven et al., 2015), as each audience has different norms, beliefs, rules, and subsequently, different legitimacy granting procedures, which influence their legitimacy judgements. Haack et al. (2020) state that focusing on the collective level of legitimacy has impaired scholars' ability to satisfactorily theorise legitimacy processes that precede institutional change (that is also applicable to changes in retailers' strategic decisions). Generally, individuals have distinct beliefs about a brand, which influence their legitimacy judgements (Hakala et al., 2017). Although consumers may be exposed to the same stimuli, under the same conditions, they generally recognize, select and interpret the stimuli related to brand names and brand logos differently, within their individual and unique frames of reference, needs, values, and expectations (Jacob et al., 2020). Eventually, individuals' values and norms serve as a benchmark of consumers' expectations of a brand's performance (Jahn et al., 2020). In that regard, scholars (Hakala et al., 2017; Ruffo et al., 2020) have called for more research on

individuals' legitimacy judgements to better understand the implications of consumers' legitimacy judgements in the marketplace.

It is, however, only in recent times that research on micro-level legitimacy inferences has gained momentum (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Jahn et al., 2020; Tost, 2011). Although a few scholars have attempted to measure legitimacy judgements empirically (Chung et al., 2016; Jahn et al., 2020), they concur that legitimacy is a complex construct (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2017), that is rather difficult to measure (Alexiou & Wiggins, 2019), resulting in scholars mostly focusing on theoretical aspects of legitimacy (Jahn et al., 2020).

Furthermore, even though previous studies admit that legitimacy judgements depend on individuals' beliefs and perceptions (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Hofer & Green, 2016), they have not yet explicated what these beliefs are (Hofer & Green, 2016; Jahn et al., 2020). Understanding the underlying motives and beliefs that are aligned with people's underlying values, and that drive consumers' consumption decisions, will therefore be useful to better understand consumers' behaviour amid a global crisis where values become a pertinent driver of consumers' decision behaviour (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2017).

As a legitimacy-granting agent (Alexiou & Wiggins, 2019; Luo et al., 2008; Tost, 2011), a consumer's judgement forms a foundation that a brand has to conform to, to be accepted (Slimane et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2020b). The level of support conferred by the consumer as a stakeholder has the potential to cause macro-level effects, and shape other fundamentals (Chen et al., 2020b; Hofer & Green, 2016; Tost, 2011) that may be favourable or unfavourable to the brand, for example avoiding or recommending the brand. Also, because legitimacy judgements imply a social judgement formed by personal opinions (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Finch et al., 2015; Fisher, 2020; Suddaby et al., 2017), a consumer's perspective has a bearing on the ability of a brand to garner legitimacy from other sources, in that consumers aid as a signal to stakeholders that a brand is appropriate and worthy of support, or not (Swaminathan et al., 2020).

Apart from the need to understand consumers' legitimacy judgements in general, much still needs to be understood concerning consumers' brand legitimacy judgements amid a global crisis. During crises, consumers generally more cautiously contemplate their purchase and consumption behaviour due to prevailing financial challenges and evidence of social disarray. An understanding of consumers' legitimacy judgements of brands that unavoidably influence their activity in the marketplace will aid in facilitating faster business and economic recovery (Coskuner-Balli, 2020). Marketing scholars have recently taken a keen interest in how global crises influence consumers' choices and behaviour in the marketplace (Campbell et al., 2020;

Coskuner-Balli, 2020; Galoni et al., 2020; Huang & Sengupta, 2020; Ross et al., 2020), explaining why an investigation of consumers' legitimacy judgements of brands is relevant, and worthwhile to pursue.

However, marketing scholars have not yet devoted much attention to the impact of global crises on the behaviour and thought processes of particular consumer segments (Hampson & McGoldrick, 2013; Ross et al., 2020). This leaves a void, as research outcomes that are generalised across market segments, and negating prevailing conditions such as a crisis period, may be biased (Hampson & McGoldrick, 2013) and lead to missed opportunities for retailers. Generational literature clearly states that each generational cohort possesses unique expectations, values, lifestyles, and experiences, which influence their buying behaviour (Boyd, 2010; King et al., 2017; Twenge et al., 2010). Doubt exists about whether market segmentation necessarily yields greater returns over reliance on data analytics, specifically sales statistics when tailoring marketing initiatives for specific consumer groups (Artun & Kelly, 2016; Dawar, 2016). Data analytics is individualised and focuses on a retailers existing customer base. Market segmentation, and an understanding of the characteristics and decision behaviour of certain segments enable retailers to understand a segment in its entirety thus opening avenues for retailers to gain new clients. This study addresses this uncertainty.

No studies could be found that have assessed a particular market sector's brand legitimacy judgement, particularly amid a global crisis that has significantly influenced the entire scene of retailing, shopping, and market communication. This is particularly important in the clothing product category, which is a major contributor to the local and global economy. The fashion industry contributed almost 70% of the world's e-commerce revenue and worldwide, clothing generated USD 360 billion in 2019, which is expected to reach USD 514 billion in 2024 (Statistics South Africa, 2020a). An initiative to explore the brand attributes and underlying personal values that drive the largest market segment's (millennials') (Dash et al., 2021) brand legitimacy judgements, is therefore apt and timely to guide clothing retailers' marketing initiatives during a critical time of reflection, realignment, and positioning in the marketplace.

1.2 The research setting

The study is set in South Africa, an emerging market that is part of an emerging global consumer culture (Ladhari et al., 2011), whose clothing retail sector has been affected severely by the COVID-19 pandemic (Smith, 2021). The study focused on the millennial consumer segment which is currently the largest market segment, globally as well as locally with considerable buying potential in the future (Thompson et al., 2018). The study was specifically interested in the brand attributes (on a primary level) and the personal values (on

a deeply rooted higher order level) as a driving force of millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands that influence their purchase intentions. This differs from data analytics which merely provides numerical evidence of the outcome rather than an understanding of consumers' purchase and consumption choices.

Millennials - persons born between 1980 and 1999 (Statistics South Africa, 2018) - have been reported as making up approximately 1.8 billion people in the world in the year 2020, thus an estimated 23% of the global population (MSCI, 2020). Having been born in an era of technological advancements such as mobile phones, personal computers, and the internet, the millennial generation has sparked an interest among market researchers because of their unique choices and expectations in the marketplace (Ronda et al., 2020). Moreover, evidence of millennials' strong interest in clothing (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Dash et al., 2021), and brand consciousness (Licsandru & Cui, 2019), have made them an ideal market segment for this study. For clothing retailers to manage their product offerings in accordance with what is perceived to be legitimate in the eyes of their customers, they will need to demonstrate that their actions (market offerings) are congruent with this prominent market segments' norms, values, and beliefs (Durocher et al., 2016).

1.3 Problem statement

Nowadays, clothing brands are operating in a global environment that is increasingly interconnected, both socially, technologically, and economically. A global crisis can therefore cause a 'butterfly effect' (Annarelli & Nonino, 2016), causing a dramatic and almost instant alteration of societal and consumer livelihoods. Global crises generally adversely affect consumers' financial circumstances and their awareness of a related social impact (Dutt & Padmanabhan, 2011; Hampson & McGoldrick, 2013; Pantano et al., 2020), resulting in changes in consumers' consumption behaviour. This may be detrimental to retailers when caught off guard. Problems encountered by sectors such as the clothing retail sector are due to their vulnerability to consumers' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements amid a time of crisis. The clothing retail sector's vulnerability stems from the categorisation of clothing merchandise as durable non-essential items (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020), which prompts changes in consumers' purchase intentions.

Notable, are global crises such as the 2008 Global Economic Recession, and the COVID-19 pandemic, that has severely threatened consumers' well-being (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020), and has changed what consumers consider important and instrumental in terms of their everyday functioning, and decision-making (Sharma et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020). For instance,

the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in people being more concerned about their health and safety, fundamentally changing how they view the world around them, hence influencing their product preferences and purchasing patterns (Wang et al., 2020).

In South Africa, several clothing retail stores that had expanded into the country as prominent, highly sought-after brands, have had to close down in recent years (McGinn, 2020). The problem commenced even before the COVID-19 pandemic, when several international clothing brands, that have extended their operations into South Africa, like Express, Geox, Lucky Brand, One Green Elephant, Tom Tailor, River Island, and Vero Moda, have had to depart due to poor performance, locally (Daily Sun, 2017). While these clothing brands specifically target the younger, more affluent market, the reasons for their poor performance are not yet fully understood. To make matters worse, clothing retailers, globally, have experienced a drop in sales amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). For any clothing brand, an unexpected sudden slump in sales as well as a reduction in consumer demand will cause considerable damage and job losses amid fierce competition for survival (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). Generally, a global crisis is characterised by long recovery periods, during which retailers, such as the clothing retail sector, have to be very decisive on how to adapt their strategies in response to disrupted environments (Wang et al., 2020). Evidence has shown that retailers that had not factored risks associated with global crises into their operations are bearing the brunt of the adverse effects posed by the crisis for a considerable period (Pantano et al., 2020).

Because consumers change their buying and shopping habits and begin to rethink what they consider valuable amid trying times (Sheth, 2020), questions may arise concerning the legitimacy of, for example, international clothing brands on the South African scene when witnessing local businesses and locally manufactured brands suffering amid times of hardship (Pantano et al., 2020; Yohn, 2020). The issue becomes particularly intricate for the millennial market segment, which is known to be very interested in clothing and is very fashion and brand-conscious (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Dash et al., 2021). Any quest to re-evaluate their retailer and brand choices involves an understanding of the underlying personal values that serve as an instrumental guide to achieve the terminal, desired outcomes that they wish to achieve (Chen et al., 2017; Gutman, 1982). For example, status and prestige may be sought-after to support the inner need for self-enhancement, or when benevolence is the driving force, it would realise as a demonstration of compassion for locally manufactured goods that will contribute to the well-being of local communities amid trying times.

Ross et al. (2020) explain that crises may instigate a stronger reliance on underlying personal values - those enduring values that were developed and confirmed over time through socialisation processes and which are difficult to change (Finch et al., 2015). Admittedly, these may be somewhat suppressed for periods, for example living a life of lavishness during times of affluence to fit in with peers, despite ingrained core values that will direct an individual's choices under stressful conditions. This is crucial for retailers to understand, to adapt their product and service offering so that they do not continue with "business as usual" when a crisis occurs and when consumers are inclined to revert to their underlying core values when evaluating products and services. Retailers, therefore, have to be able to adapt and rely on marketing innovations to assist them to deal with risks posed by a crisis (Naidoo, 2010; Wang et al., 2020).

An understanding of the personal values that drive the millennial market segments' decision behaviour in the marketplace, will guide clothing retailers in terms of these consumers' prioritisation of clothing brand attributes and brand information and what their target markets will favourably respond to (Barbopoulos & Johansson, 2017). It will furthermore assist clothing retailers to enhance their value proposition without a drastic, sudden overhaul of their product and service offerings when a crisis occurs (Almquist et al., 2016; Pantano et al., 2020). Considering the magnitude and the instantaneity with which a global crisis may occur, it is not easy for any clothing retailer to suddenly, completely redeploy resources and change business models to accommodate consumers' changing needs. Recent evidence of the failure of prominent brands in South Africa's clothing retail sector confirms a dire need to have a better understanding of consumers' brand preferences and brand choices, despite an apparent positive track record of an established international brand that enters the retail scene.

1.4 Research questions

Focusing on the constructs of brand attributes, personal values, and legitimacy judgements, the research questions were formulated against the backdrop of the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the clothing retail sector in South Africa. The study relies on evidence of changes in consumers' choice behaviour that led to rather drastic changes in clothing retail sales statistics (Statistics South Africa, 2021c). It also acknowledges the departure of several prominent, international clothing brands from the local scene in recent years that have signalled changes in consumers' choice behaviour.

The primary research question for this study was:

Amid a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which brand attributes and personal values drive millennial consumers' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands?

Using the means-end chain approach, which is explained in detail in Chapter 5, four sub-questions were formulated to achieve the anticipated outcomes:

- What clothing brand attributes support millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands?
- What consequences do millennials anticipate to derive from the clothing brand attributes that they prioritise?
- Which underlying personal values are associated with the consequences that millennials expect to derive from clothing brands that they consider to be legitimate, hence worthy to support?
- Which prominent personal values signify millennials' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements of clothing retail brands?

1.5 Purpose of the study

Following a global crisis that shook the existence of clothing brands in the South African clothing retail scene, this study focused on the millennial market segment that is viable in terms of its market size (Dash et al., 2021), and keen interest in clothing, particularly the conspicuous consumption of clothing brands in a social context amongst peers (Licsandru & Cui, 2019). Millennials are also highly regarded in terms of their future potential as influencers as they, as parents, are raising the consumers of the future. The research ultimately sought to identify the preferred clothing brand attributes whereby millennials would achieve the desired consequences that are aligned with their underlying personal values. Therefore, the research aimed to identify and explain deeply rooted personal characteristics that direct millennials' legitimacy judgments of clothing retail brands amid a global crisis to explain their stronger support of certain clothing brands. Findings would guide retailers on how to more aptly address this market segment's clothing needs and preferences. Schwartz's value typology (Schwartz, 1994) served as the theoretical anchor of the research.

1.6 Theoretical perspective: Schwartz's Value Typology

Personal values serve as an underlying driving force that drives consumer decisions and becomes particularly important at a time of crisis (Ross et al., 2020). Personal values are,

therefore, the end-states that direct consumption behaviour (Gutman, 1982; Jacob et al., 2020), exerting an important role in consumers' legitimacy inferences, more especially individuals' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements of, for example, brands and products (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Kibler et al., 2018; Suchman, 1995; Überbacher, 2014).

This study was anchored in Schwartz's Value Typology (Schwartz, 1994), which provided insights into personal values that directed consumers' legitimacy judgements. This particular value typology has been used very successfully in previous research (Diedericks et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2014) as part of the means-end chain (MEC) analysis, which this research applied. Hereby, the study aimed to distinguish desirable clothing brand attributes that were expected to affirm the consequences that millennials anticipated to derive from certain clothing brands, and which concur with underlying personal values. Ultimately, these values signify their cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements of, for example, competing clothing brands in the South African marketplace. Marketing scholars have proposed a link between brand attributes and personal values, in that brand attributes imply certain consequences, which in turn satisfy personal values (Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017; Gutman, 1982; Kim et al., 2017; Park et al., 2020). The theoretical anchor is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.7 Practical contributions of the research

This study targeted the sought-after millennial generational cohort's clothing consumption behaviour, due to their market size and strong interest in clothing, which they use as a tool for self-expression. The study aimed to guide clothing retailers and marketers in the development of agile brand and marketing strategies that would counteract the devastating consequences of a drastic decline in sales during a crisis as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. From this study, clothing retailers can gain an understanding of what drives the millennial market's brand needs and preferences amid times of economic uncertainty, to enable them to proactively respond to changes in this generational cohort's consumption patterns in the future, so that they would survive and recover faster.

The study further provides useful evidence that clothing retailers can optimise when strategising, and developing business continuity plans that will factor in consumer preferences in times of uncertainty, thus implementing an understanding of what consumers value the most. This will guide clothing retailers' choices concerning product (brand) offerings whenever economic crises in their industry arise. Evidence that retailers understand their customers'

product needs and preferences, will enhance their target markets' trust in their business, and boost customer retention amid trying economic times.

1.8 Contribution to literature

The study contributes to the body of knowledge of how instrumental personal values are as an end state that reveals the underlying motives behind consumers' clothing brand decisions, particularly amid a crisis period, when uncertainty prevails. Although previous studies acknowledge that legitimacy judgements depend on the beliefs and perceptions of individuals (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Hofer & Green, 2016), they have failed to explain what these beliefs are, and how they link with consumers' values (Hofer & Green, 2016; Jahn et al., 2020). As such, the study contributes to the literature on value (worth) creation (Hakala et al., 2017), indicating how personal values direct a specific consumer segment's brand preferences amid times of uncertainty, which differs from times of affluence and welfare when value/worth derived from an acquisition may be based on different parameters (Deephouse et al., 2017; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020; Schwartz, 1992).

The study responded to scholarly calls to assess consumers' legitimacy judgements, and to also distinguish differences among different audiences (Fisher et al., 2017; Navis & Glynn, 2011; van Werven et al., 2015), for example, different market segments. This study focuses on millennials as a viable market segment for clothing retailers, arguing that an entity perceives a brand, judges its legitimacy, and acts upon it (Tost, 2011; Ruffo et al., 2020). In this instance, the so-called entity is a predominant market segment with considerable purchase potential that is highly interested in clothing, and therefore worthwhile for clothing retailers to acknowledge.

The study also aimed to serve as a platform for research on consumers' (millennial consumers) legitimacy judgements amid a global crisis, to expand research that has assessed the impact of global crises on consumers' behaviour in the marketplace (Campbell et al., 2020; Coskuner-Balli, 2020; Galoni et al., 2020; Huang & Sengupta, 2020; Ross et al., 2020). Conducting this study in a South African context, as an example of an emerging economy, enhances an understanding of consumers' choice preferences and behaviour in a market context other than First-World economies which the bulk of the literature is derived from. The South African clothing industry is strongly affiliated globally, in this product category (Remy et al., 2014; Musau, 2017; Ndweni, 2015), where brand image and brand origin are noteworthy.

1.9. Methodological contribution

The methodological contribution of the study was through the integration of the Delphi Technique with the means-end chain (MEC) analytical approach, which is still under-explored in marketing research. The Delphi technique departed with a qualitative phase to obtain Millennials' views of preferred brand attributes (A) that signified their legitimacy judgements, to supplement theory related to brand attributes obtained from literature, as well as the corresponding consequences (C) that millennials expected to derive from the preferred clothing brand attributes (A). The implementation of the Delphi Technique was regarded as a suitable option to involve a broad spectrum of clothing consumers across the country during the developmental phase of the research. This technique was used to establish a list of preferred brand attributes to be listed as part of the MEC analysis. Hereby, participants provided inputs that were integrated with brand attribute literature, and participants got another opportunity to confirm the researcher's summary and interpretation of their previous contributions for inclusion in the final measuring instrument.

While in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (even virtual) were considered, initially, it was decided that the Delphi Technique provided an avenue to target people across the country, with participation not being restricted to particular time slots for interviews or online group discussions amid times when people are already heavily burdened with virtual meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Responses to the Delphi questionnaire could be dealt with when it suited participants best, therefore allowing for 'real' insights to be obtained. Also, in-depth interviews can be costly and time-consuming (Park et al., 2020), while the Delphi-Technique can be performed effectively in a relatively short period.

All the contributions were in written format, and all the contributions were "member checked" in that the researcher distributed the conclusive summary to all for consent before inclusion in the measuring instrument, assuming that approval of more than 80% would be acceptable (Bohn & Kundisch, 2020; Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004). This has not been done in a clothing retail investigation before. The Delphi technique was then followed by an online focus group discussion to verify the final list of attributes and consequences for inclusion in the MEC process that involved the Association Pattern Technique (APT) that produced hierarchical value maps (HVMs) which eventually elevated the most prominent personal values, that this study aimed to elicit, quantitatively.

1.10. Conclusion

This chapter presented and explicated the primary constructs of the study, namely brand attributes, personal values, and legitimacy judgement, also explicating the focus on the millennial market segment, and the reason for attending to clothing brands. It further provided the background for the study, sketching the research problem, highlighting the research questions, and the aim of the research, as well as an introduction of the theoretical perspective as well as some aspects of the research setting, along with the practical, literature and methodological contributions that the study envisages to make.

The following chapter provides the research setting in which the study was undertaken, explaining the contextual characteristics which made the chosen setting ideal for the study. It further demonstrates the importance of the chosen research segment in the identified setting.

The document is structured as follows:

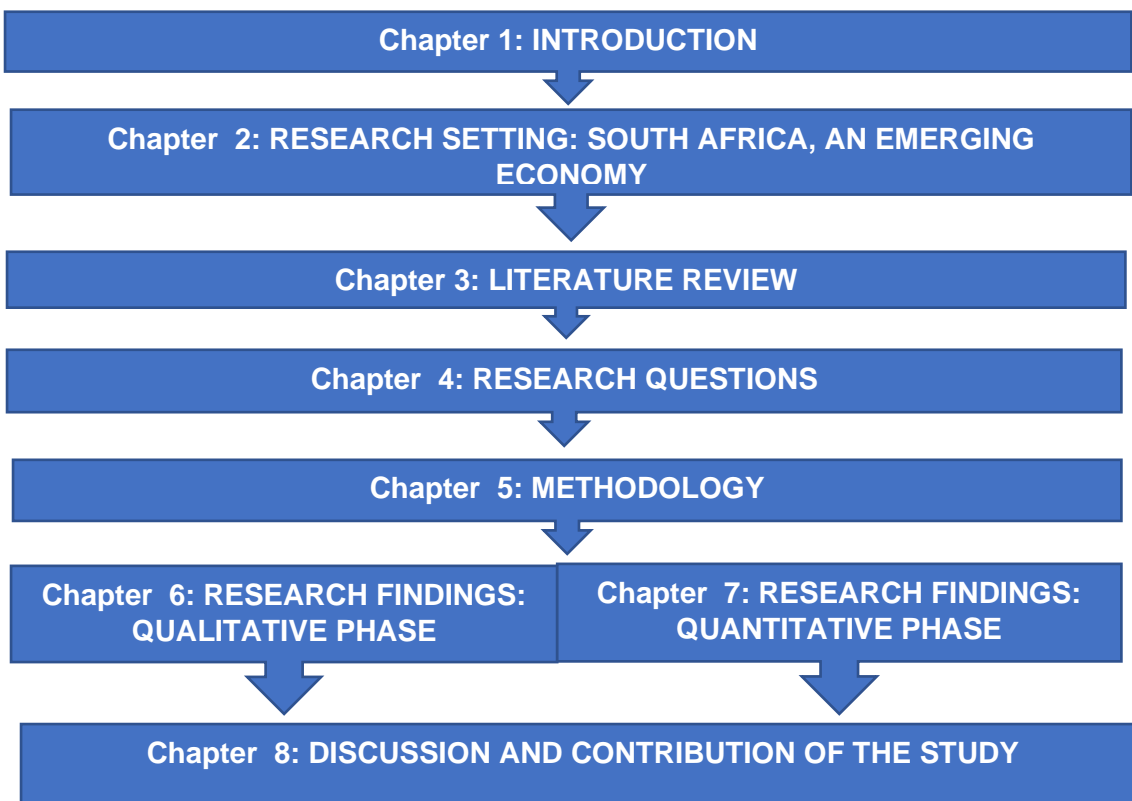


Figure 1: Document layout

Chapter 2: Research setting: South Africa, an emerging economy

2.1 Introduction

The literature proposes that any context that an individual consumer is exposed to, provides situational opportunities and challenges, that lead to certain behaviours (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2016). This section of the proposal contextualises the proposed research setting, South Africa. Its main purpose is to articulate and identify contextual attributes that are relevant to the research problem, to aid in answering the main research question, namely: Amid a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which brand attributes and personal values drive millennial consumers' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands? On a more practical level, therefore, which clothing brand attributes that millennial clothing consumers prioritise will translate into the desirable consequences that millennials expect from brands that they consider legitimate on the clothing retail scene, and therefore, consider worthy of support?

Neither of the assessed journal articles on consumers' clothing brand preferences was based in an African setting, which is characterised by strong cultural influences (George et al., 2016), particularly concerning clothing choices as a visual commodity that bears social significance. Contextualised in an African setting, this research aimed to enhance an understanding of consumers' brand preferences and choice behaviour in an emerging market context that is also strongly affiliated globally in a product category such as clothing where brand image and brand origin have proven to be important (Huang & Wang, 2018; Sharma et al., 2020). Literature (Sharma, 2011; Shukla, 2012) has shown that consumers' behaviour in emerging economies is vastly different from consumers' behaviour in developed economies, partly due to differences in the prevailing socio-economic circumstances that influence consumers' awareness of the well-being of fellow citizens. Shukla (2012) explains that an understanding of the product decisions and consumption behaviour of consumers in emerging economies is important, due to these markets' potential, growth, and aspirations that are of global significance. Major clothing brands' expansion into emerging economies such as South Africa is testimony to the country's global importance.

Although South Africa has been able to attract foreign clothing retail investments over the years, the country has also embraced initiatives to promote locally manufactured 'Proudly South African' brands. It is expected that the research setting will provide an opportunity to gain insight concerning consumers' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements of

clothing retail brands, having been exposed to a global crisis that may have triggered consumers to revert to predominant personal values that are instrumental in their brand choices. For example, the prevailing situation may have influenced how consumers critically assess the legitimacy of imported versus local brands, or locally manufactured brands considering their role in the country in terms of job creation and social upliftment.

2.2 South Africa as the research setting

Within the BRICS Association of emerging economies that includes Brazil, Russia, India, and China, South Africa is the only African member country. In recent years, emerging economies have received increased attention due to their noteworthy growth potential (Ahlstrom & Bruton, 2006; Gupta & Thomke, 2018; Omri, 2020), leading to a customer-centric market orientation. This explains why clothing brands would attempt to establish new ventures in these economies. However, new entries into the market should possess an ability to tailor their product and service offerings to the needs of local consumers, which requires an understanding of South African consumers' product and brand preferences.

Being an emerging economy means that South Africa has the characteristics of both underdeveloped and developed institutions, and is prone to institutional voids (Ahlstrom & Bruton, 2006; Barbour & Luiz, 2019; Ge et al., 2019; Harrison et al., 2018). Luo and Chung (2013) define institutional voids as missing or underdeveloped formal market structures, which result in inadequate informational flows, along with market imperfections. An important distinction between emerging and developed economies is their degree of volatility in economic activity. Researchers have found that emerging economies demonstrate economic resilience in the wake of a global crisis, based on their ability to start their economic recovery faster compared to developed economies, and their ability to revert to their pre-crisis growth rates much faster (Didier et al., 2012). Statistics indicate that more than 80% of the world's consumers reside in emerging and transitional economies (Horváth & Adıgüzel, 2018). Despite the potential of emerging economies to recover faster, it does not negate the fact that South Africa's economy has been affected severely by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the 2008 financial global crisis (Statistics South Africa, 2021b). This can be attributed to the country being highly reliant on imports and also being one of the major trade gateways into Africa.

Scholars (Desai, 2011; Lamin & Zaheer, 2012; Suddaby et al., 2017; Voronov et al., 2013) concur that legitimacy is ascribed by stakeholders in terms of their expectations - that may vastly differ - as well as unique predispositions. This explains why it is worthwhile to conduct such a study in a South African context, where conditions are unique and not comparable to countries elsewhere in First-World contexts (Kolk & Rivera-Santos, 2018). Being a democratic state that is governed by the Constitution of the country which is the supreme law, means that citizens can exercise freedom of speech, and most importantly, have freedom of choice. Individuals are therefore at liberty to make decisions as they deem fit, provided their actions do not encroach on the beliefs and values of others. The South African setting, therefore, is expected to generate a true reflection of individual legitimacy judgements that are free from prejudice, and likely to reflect some empathy or understanding of fellow citizens, particularly in trying economic times. Also, being the only African country in the BRICS association, indicates that the South African context has attracted international attention and therefore presents an opportunity to expound on research in Africa, which remains underdeveloped (Atiase et al., 2018; George et al., 2016).

2.3 The South African clothing retail sector

The South African retail market is regarded as the largest and most sophisticated across Sub-Saharan Africa (PWC, 2012). Its clothing retail sector is regarded as one of the country's most labour-intensive sectors of the economy, whereby in 2018, the South African retail sector employed 795 841 people, with 22,2% of the workforce employed in clothing retail, which is the second largest contributor to employment within the local retail sector (Statistics South Africa, 2020a). Clothing occupied the third most popular product in terms of retail sector sales for 2018. Therefore, clothing retailers are important for the South African economy due to their substantial contribution towards direct and indirect employment. The important role of the clothing retail sector is cemented in the encouragement and efforts made by the government for consumers to support Proudly South African brands - an initiative launched in 2001 - following the 1998 Presidential Job Summit that was convened by former President Nelson Mandela (Proudly South African, 2021). Despite its importance in the economy, the South African clothing sector has increasingly been confronted with international competition, especially due to relatively cheap exports from East Asian countries, and also suffers from the availability of counterfeit products (Edwards & Jenkins, 2014).

Consumers globally were adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, South African consumers had to grapple with changes in employment conditions resulting in a reliance on government aid (Bhorat et al., 2021). The changes in income, employment status, and imposition of lockdown regulations resulted in a decline in consumer spending patterns as depicted in Figure 2, which is important to this study, because it affected consumers' clothing expenditure, particularly because clothing is a so-called non-essential commodity.

Amid a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, many large clothing retail outlets experienced major losses in profits that led to the closure of several of their stores (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020), resulting in many retrenchments, with devastating consequences for employees (BusinessTech, 2020). On the other hand, discount retailers such as Pepkor which pride themselves in the provision of value at discounted prices, and predominantly offer locally produced brands, enjoyed gains in market share and sales performance (Pepkor, 2020), indicating changes in consumers' sentiment. Figure 2 provides a visual overview of rather dramatic changes in overall retail trade sales in South Africa for the period January 2016 to March 2021, specifying March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the country, as a turning point. Therefore, any effort to contribute to recovery has merit. In March 2020; the inception of the pandemic in South Africa; the textiles, clothing, footwear, and leather goods sector experienced the biggest year-on-year percentage change of -94, 5% (Statistics South Africa, 2020b) which is the biggest change compared to other retailers in the sector.

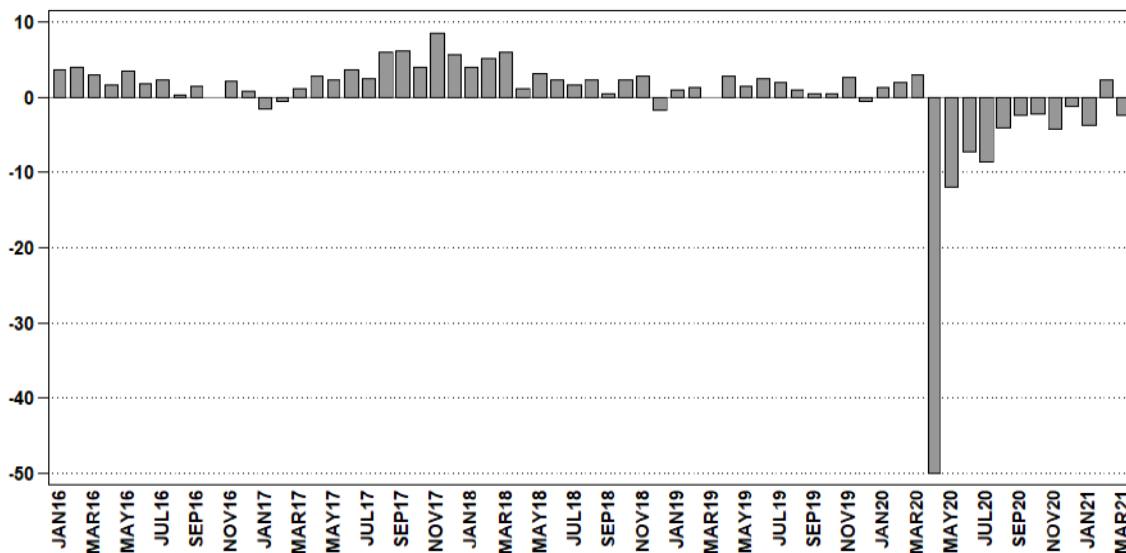


Figure 2: Percentage change in retail trade sales

Statistics South Africa (2021)

2.4. The importance of millennials in the market place

Consumer behaviour studies are concerned with the behaviour and decision-making processes of individuals who purchase products or services for personal consumption. Studies often focus on specific generational cohorts' consumption behaviour to guide marketers' understanding of the expectations of consumers who belong to a specific target market. This is because each generation that has experienced similar developments during their upbringing, such as exposure to, and experience of natural disasters, political turmoil, technological developments, and health crises, possesses typical characteristics that distinguish them from other generations (PWC, 2015; Statistics South Africa, 2018). Generations are often considered according to their lifespan, although there is no exact science as to what the lifespan for a specific generational cohort should be (Durocher et al., 2016). Generally, the historical cycle that generations experience, shapes their behaviour, attitudes, values, and thinking styles (Licsandru & Cui, 2019). Generational literature explains that different generational cohorts undergo different personal and social experiences in their formative years (King et al., 2017; Ronda et al., 2020), which strongly impact their decision-making later on (King et al., 2017).

Because this study was set in South Africa, it adopted the Statistics South Africa definition of millennials, namely persons born between 1980 and 1999 (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Although the definition incorporates 'born-free' millennials – persons born from 1994 onwards – this study focuses on those born between 1980 and 1999, not distinguishing the so-called “born-frees”, and focusing on individuals aged 23 years and older, as part of the working population in the country. This study targeted millennials who are already in the workforce and who earn an income that they have control over, hence individuals who can freely exercise clothing brand choices and express their brand preferences. The millennial generation, specifically, has sparked attention to generational differences (Tang et al., 2017), and is regarded as the largest market segment of the current workforce globally (Ronda et al., 2020), representing an important buyer segment (Dash et al., 2021). They make a notable direct contribution to the economies of countries and account for sufficient purchasing power to significantly influence current and future world economies, thus currently being the most powerful consumer group in the marketplace (Bucic et al., 2012).

Millennials have distinct characteristics that distinguish them from previous generations (Licsandru & Cui, 2019), being better educated, and more technologically savvy than prior generations (Durocher et al., 2016; Licsandru & Cui, 2019). They trust and rely on peer group reviews to inform their buying decisions, and therefore, social affiliation is important to them, meaning that they will mutually approve brands and products (Dash et al., 2021). They are

known to be brand and status-conscious (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Dash et al., 2021). More specifically, they consider clothing retail stores as important, and clothing as an important commodity in their lives, which is purchased and worn to convey who they are, what they represent, and who they strive to be. In this regard, brands are particularly important. According to Licsandru and Cui (2019), from a consumption and branding perspective, millennials are inclined to be more interested in foreign brands, foreign consumer lifestyles, and global advertising than any of the other generational cohorts. Also, millennials are distinct in what motivates them and their decision rationale (Boyd, 2010). They have been found to seek additional forms of value beyond functional benefits when choosing clothing merchandise (Ronda et al., 2020). Generation Z, or the centennials, which has sparked growing interest in marketing research of late, are the offspring of the millennial generation and is therefore influenced by millennials through socialisation processes.

In 2018, the millennial cohort made up 20,5 million (35,3%) individuals of the South African population (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Figure 3 demonstrates that the millennial generation comprises a large proportion of the population across all provinces in South Africa.

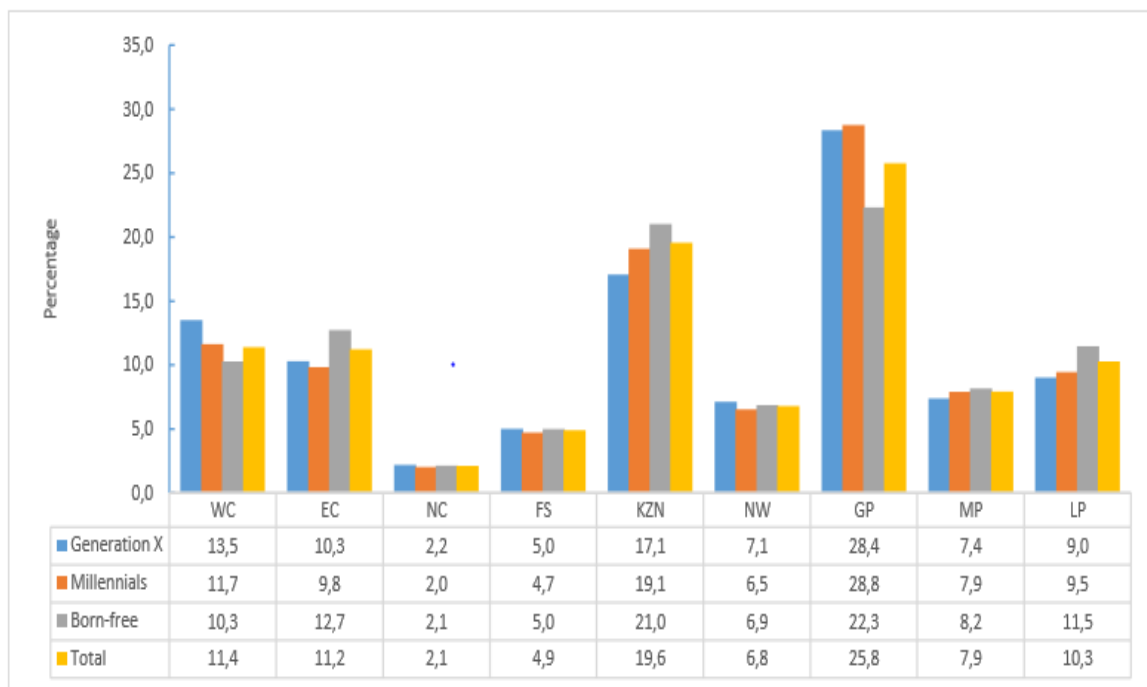


Figure 3: Distribution of generations by province, 2018

Source: StatsSA mid-year population estimates, 2018

Despite being deemed as narcissist behaviour (Durocher et al., 2016; Twenge et al., 2010), the millennial generation has also been found to be the most socially and environmentally conscious than other generations (Bucic et al., 2012; Vadakkepatt et al., 2020), therefore contributing notably towards socially responsible initiatives and organisations (Durocher et al.,

2016; Vadakkepatt et al., 2020; White et al., 2019). Because of the age of millennials at the time of the study, being between 22 and 41 years of age, they occupy various roles in society, being parents, employees, students, and caretakers of younger generations. Undoubtedly, therefore, the millennial generation was adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A global survey conducted by Deloitte in 2020, revealed that, although some millennials had lost their jobs, most were working longer hours without a corresponding pay increase, which contributed to higher anxiety and stress levels. The millennial generation cohort has been found to show traits of resilience, and steadfastness. As shown in Figure 4, the survey has accordingly shown that the global pandemic brought about a greater sense of individual responsibility, with three-quarters of those surveyed, admitting that they felt more sympathetic towards others and the needs of their communities. The survey (Deloitte, 2020) further highlighted that 80% of millennials indicated that on the easing of the pandemic, they will do more to buy products and services from small, local businesses to contribute to their survival. Similarly, 60% of the millennials surveyed, indicated that they will buy from large organisations that have positively affected society amid the pandemic, which aligns with personal values of benevolence, and universalism, rather than self-enhancement (Schwartz, 1994), which is all too often associated with the millennial cohort.



Figure 4: Millennial consumers' mindfulness following the pandemic

Source: Deloitte (2020)

A survey study conducted by McKinsey and Company (2020) on South African consumer sentiments amid the COVID-19 crisis, as shown in Figure 5, reported that 79% of people surveyed, indicated that they had changed stores, brands, or how they shop. Reasons cited for the change as depicted in the below chart, are attributed to price, social responsibility, convenience, hygiene, and brand availability.

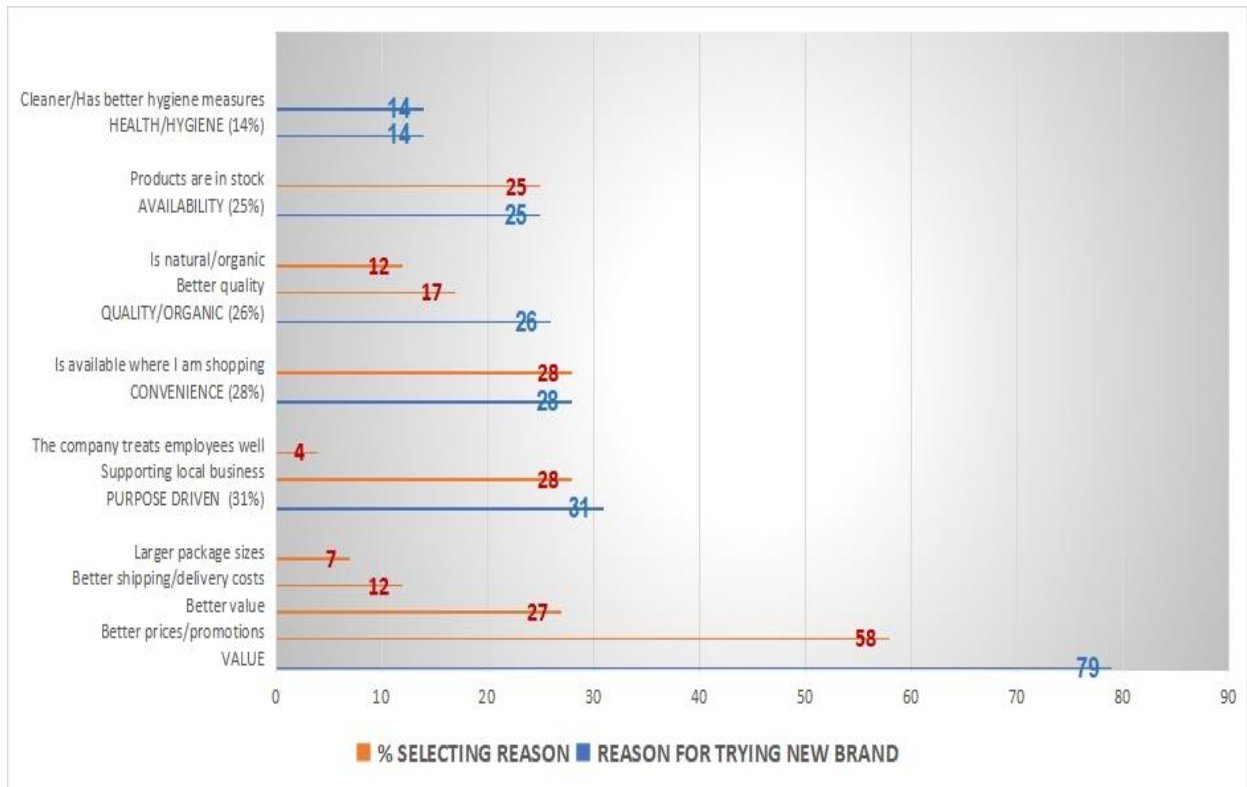


Figure 5: Reasons for change in South African consumers' brand choice

Source: Redrawn from McKinsey & Company (2020)

In a similar study, a South African survey conducted by TransUnion (2021) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on South Africans' consumption patterns, indicated that 67% of the millennials surveyed, indicated that their salaries were negatively impacted by the pandemic. Some earned less because they worked fewer hours than before, or experienced salary cuts, while others had lost their jobs or supported family members who lost their jobs. The majority of the surveyed population indicated that they had cut back on discretionary spending, such as eating out, and entertainment, while, 49% of the participants maintained that their spending on retail items, including clothing, remained unchanged.

2.5. Conclusion

Literature confirms the importance of the clothing retail sector in terms of the performance and growth of the South African economy as an emerging economy that is of interest, globally, within the BRICS affiliation of countries. The millennial generational cohort constitutes a significant percentage of the working population in South Africa, and as such, forms a viable, important market segment, especially for clothing retailers, due to their interest in clothing and clothing brands, particularly imported and status brands. This is because millennials are generally brand and status conscious and consider clothing retail stores as important, because clothing is an important commodity in their lives. Clothing is purchased and worn by millennials to convey who they are, what they represent, and who they strive to be. In this regard, clothing brands are particularly important. Additionally, millennials' trust and rely on peer group reviews to inform their buying decisions, as well as their social affiliation, which is important to them. Therefore, they are likely to mutually approve or avoid certain brands and products.

The next chapter presents the literature review that will introduce literature related to the constructs of brand attributes, personal values, and legitimacy judgements. Insights are provided concerning what is already known about consumers' legitimacy judgements, a gap that is explored in this research. Attention is devoted to branding and brand attributes and how they are linked to consumers' clothing purchase decisions. Discussions are expanded to indicate links between preferred clothing brand attributes, and the related consequences that consumers expect to derive from it, progressing to personal values that inherently shape consumers' (millennials') legitimacy judgements of clothing brands. Discussions are contextualised in terms of the realities of an emerging economy amid a prevailing global crisis that has caused considerable harm, specifically to the clothing retail industry. The chapter also provides the theoretical anchor that will direct the research and interpretation of the findings, namely Schwartz's Value Typology (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

The research aimed to identify the underlying personal values that drove millennial consumers' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid a global crisis. Particularly important, on a practical level, are the brand attributes that millennials considered important in terms of achieving anticipated, desirable consequences when choosing certain clothing brands as these would indicate the pertinent underlying personal values. The study was conducted against the background of a prevailing disastrous global health pandemic that severely threatened the existence of many clothing brands in South Africa, even imported status-bearing, rather popular clothing brands. The study was conducted to gain an understanding of how the clothing retail sector could align itself to cope with major threats, such as global crises, in the future. The study focused on the brand preferences and behaviour of the millennial generational cohort which is significant in terms of their particular interest in clothing, and their current as well as future market contribution considering their market size and earning potential over time. This chapter presents the theoretical lens against which the study was anchored, namely Schwartz's Value Typology (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz et al., 2012) and further unpacks the theoretical constructs of brand attributes, personal values, and legitimacy, in the context of a global crisis.

3.2. Theoretical anchor for the study

3.2.1 Arguing the use of Schwartz's Value Typology

The study aimed to identify the prominent brand attributes and personal values that drive millennials' brand legitimacy inferences as an indication of their clothing brand preferences. The data collection procedure implemented the Association Pattern Technique (APT) as part of the means-end chain (MEC) analysis that relies on a series of matrices (HVMs: hierarchical value maps) to identify cognitive structures in a person's mind, and dominant means-end chain. This laddering technique, which is highly recommended in research, is generally used to elicit hierarchical constructs and is very popular to investigate relevant personal values (Lin, 2002; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988; Wansink, 2003). In this study, the APT technique was used to sequentially link millennials' preferred brand attributes (A), to envisaged consequences of their brand preferences (C), and their personal values (V), establishing a so-called A-C-V sequence that Gutman (1982) referred to as a means-end chain (MEC), or ladder. The various ladders that are identified, are eventually presented as a Hierarchical Value Map (HVM).

Per the definition by Rokeach (1973, p. 5), personal values refer to “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence”. Subsequently, personal values were distinguished in terms of instrumental and terminal values. Accordingly, instrumental values represent a person’s belief about the appropriate mode of conduct that is typically linked to personality traits, involving values such as loyalty and honesty (Jacobs & Maree, 2019; Maio, 2017) that are instrumental in achieving a specific end-state, or terminal value that implies envisaged end goals (end-states) such as social recognition, and self-respect (Maio, 2017; Rokeach, 1973). Scholars, however, differ concerning the distinction between instrumental and terminal values. Schwartz (1994), for example, having done extensive research, could not find supporting evidence to distinguish between the terminal and instrumental values, while others have taken the view that the difference between an instrumental and a terminal value is merely linguistic (Maio, 2017). Hereby, empirical evidence that these two levels of abstraction are fundamentally different, is still lacking (Maio, 2017). This study applied the Association Pattern Technique (APT) as the main measuring instrument that forms part of MEC analysis. Similar to previous APT studies (Choi, 2016; Lee et al., 2014; Moghimi et al., 2016; Schauerte, 2009), this study did not differentiate between instrumental and terminal values and relied on the value typology of Schwartz (1994), using his 2012 extended version to supplement the final discussion.

The foundational work of Schwartz's Value Typology can be traced back to 1987, when Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) established a set of seven motivational value types, which were later expanded to ten (Schwartz, 1992), and eventually refined to 19 value types (Schwartz et al., 2012). The latter value typology was refined to provide a more heuristic, and more refined explanation of the earlier ten value typology (Schwartz et al., 2012). This study relied on the ten-value typology shown in Table 1, to maintain the reliability of the study, as 19 values would have complicated the construction of the HVMS, and even more so, have complicated participants’ choices. Similar to what has been done in a multitude of previous MEC studies, the ten-value typology was used to produce more comprehensible hierarchical value maps, while the extended value typology served to explicate the findings in more detail.

Table 1: Schwartz's 10-Value Typology

Value	Conceptual definition	Definition components
Self-direction	Independent thought and action - choosing, creating, exploring	Autonomy of thought Autonomy of action
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life	Excitement, Novelty, Challenge
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself	Single component: Pleasure
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards	Personal success Demonstrating competence
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources	Dominance over people Control of material resources Face: status and prestige
Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships and of self	Societal security Personal security
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms	Interpersonal: Avoiding upsetting others Compliance with social norms
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provides	Single component: Maintaining cultural and religious traditions
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact	Single component: Caring for ingroup members Tolerance
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature	Societal concern Protecting nature

Source: Redrawn from Schwartz et al. (2012)

Values are defined as “...(1) concepts or beliefs, (2) that pertain to desirable end states or behaviours, (3) transcend specific situations, (4) guide selection or evaluation of behaviour and events, and (5) are ordered by relative importance” (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987, p. 551). Hereby, the following assumptions were made, and applied in this research:

- Values serve as a motivation for a consumer’s behaviour, and will direct a consumer to act or respond to a brand in a particular manner (Tang et al., 2017). This study, therefore, assumed that personal values will direct a consumer's brand preferences and will direct an individual's response to brands.
- An action taken in the pursuit of a specific value type (to choose or not) has consequences (positive or negative) that may either be compatible or in conflict with

the value type that a person (consumer) strives to uphold, and will hence be in conflict with other value types (Schwartz, 1992). A consumer will therefore choose particular brands to be compatible with prevailing personal values, such as being kind to others, such as when supporting local brands (benevolence).

- To people, certain values are more important than others. The study, therefore, assumed that a consumer acts per specific underlying values that are not equally important or relevant. Hereby, people can be characterised, and better understood.
- Values are enduring and are not easily changed, therefore, it is worthwhile for clothing retailers to be aware of the personal values that drive their target markets' brand decisions. Therefore, a study that elicits the values that are prominent in driving millennials' brand choices, makes a valuable contribution in terms of retailers' marketing strategies for the future, as the prevailing dominant values are expected to be enduring.
- Values are not context-specific, and will therefore transcend different situations to consistently influence a person's behaviour, similarly, across different situations. It, therefore, makes sense to explore the underlying personal values that direct consumers' clothing brand judgements and choice behaviour amid trying times when people (consumers) are challenged in various ways of everyday living because that would, for example, make it possible to serve customers' needs more aptly.

Despite the progression in the theory over time, Schwartz's (2012) explanation that the relationship among the different personal values should be understood in terms of a circular continuum that is arranged based on compatibility among the values/motivational goals. Figure 6 presents Schwartz's Refined Value Typology (Schwartz et al., 2012). The inner circle represents the ten-value typology, while the three outer circles represent a refinement of the typology that other scholars view as terminal values.



Figure 6: Schwartz's Refined Value Typology

Source: (Schwartz et al., 2012)

The refinement of Schwartz’s initial value typology was prompted by scholars (Davidov et al., 2008; Knoppen & Saris, 2009) who experienced challenges with the statistical validity of the theory. In their study, Davidov et al. (2008), sought to establish how well the European Social Survey Human Values scale – a widely used tool to study changing values, attributes, and behaviour patterns across Europe - measured the ten basic values in the Schwartz typology. Findings from their study revealed a lack of discriminant validity due to multi-collinearity between some adjacent pairs of values namely power/achievement; benevolence/universalism and tradition/conformity, resulting in the scale only being able to measure seven of the ten values posited by the Schwartz Value Theory. Attending to insights revealed by the study of Davidov et al. (2008), the study of Knoppen and Saris (2009) similarly found that some of the ten motivational values theorised by Schwartz (1992) presented high cross-loadings with other values, complicating the distinction between certain concepts. Therefore, Knoppen and Saris (2009) suggested a narrowing (granularity) of values, which led to the establishment of a refined value typology, when compared to the fuzzy boundaries in the previous theory, where some values expressed elements of motivation for adjacent values (Schwartz et al., 2012). Apart from the modification made by Schwartz et al. (2012), the refined theory was further tested and found to be valid (Schwartz et al., 2017; Schwartz & Butenko, 2014). Table 2 presents the conceptual definitions of each value type.

Table 2: The 19 Values in the Refined Theory

Value	Conceptual definitions in terms of motivational goals
Self-direction–thought	Freedom to cultivate one’s own ideas and abilities
Self-direction–action	Freedom to determine one’s own actions
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and change
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification
Achievement	Success according to social standards
Power–dominance	Power through exercising control over people
Power–resources	Power through control of material and social resources
Face	Security and power through maintaining one’s public image and avoiding humiliation
Security–personal	Safety in one’s immediate environment
Security–societal	Safety and stability in the wider society
Tradition	Maintaining and preserving cultural, family, or religious traditions
Conformity–rules	Compliance with rules, laws, and formal obligations
Conformity–interpersonal	Avoidance of upsetting or harming other people
Humility	Recognizing one’s insignificance in the larger scheme of things
Benevolence–dependability	Being a reliable and trustworthy member of the ingroup
Benevolence–caring	Devotion to the welfare of ingroup members
Universalism–concern	Commitment to equality, justice, and protection for all people
Universalism–nature	Preservation of the natural environment
Universalism–tolerance	Acceptance and understanding of those who are different from oneself

Source: (Schwartz et al., 2012)

Although the refined value typology of Schwartz (2012) retains the ten motivational value types, it is distinct in that it takes into account different perspectives of the value, which resulted

in the generation of sub-types. For example, an individual who values security could do so from the perspective of personal security i.e., a sense of belonging, feeling healthy, etc. Alternatively, the value 'security' could be relevant from the perspective of society, i.e., social order, national security, etc.

3.2.2 The value continuum explained

The ordering of values in the continuum of Schwartz (2012) reflects the compatibility of or conflict between values. Specifically, values that are in agreement with each other, are adjacent to one another in the circle, for example, universalism and benevolence, which both relate to caring about the welfare of other people. Conflicting values are positioned opposite each other, for example, achievement and benevolence, where achievement signifies self-motivation, whilst benevolence suggests motivation for the greater good.

Table 2 has provided the conceptual definitions for the 19 refined motivational goals, which form the inner part of the continuum. The three outer circles provide the conceptual basis for the ordering of the values. Values bounded by the top half of the circle express growth, which is likely to occur when a person is less anxious. On the contrary, the values bounded by the lower half of the circle, express the need for self-protection, which is likely to dominate when a person tries to avoid anxiety or threats. The second circle is concerned with the focus of each value, as either personal or societal. Therefore, the values indicated in the right half of the circle are values that are aimed at individual outcomes (a personal focus), while the values on the left side of the circle present outcomes directed at the broader collective (a societal focus). The third circle presents the four higher-order values whereby the values can be grouped, namely openness to change, self-enhancement, conservation, and self-transcendence. For example, values that are grouped under "openness to change" as the higher order value, represent freedom and autonomy that has a strong personal focus, which is in direct contrast to values grouped under conservation as the higher order value on the opposite of the continuum, which indicate rigidity, and a stronger societal focus.

3.2.3 Relevance of Schwartz's Value Typology for the proposed study

Scholars concur that values play an important role in the legitimacy judgement inferences of individuals as per the definition of construct (Bitektine, 2011; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Kibler et al., 2018; Suchman, 1995; Überbacher, 2014), more especially for purposes of understanding an individual's cognitive, moral and pragmatic legitimacy judgements. The micro-level (individualistic) focus of Schwartz's Value Typology, is therefore expected to provide insights into consumers' personal values that direct individuals' legitimacy inferences. Similarly, marketing scholars have proposed a link between brand attributes and personal

values, in that brand attributes are linked to consequences, which in turn, satisfy personal values (Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017; Gutman, 1982; Kim et al., 2017; Park et al., 2020).

Generational literature often distinguishes generations by their value and belief systems, which have been shaped by the historical cycle to which individuals in the generational cohort have been exposed (King et al., 2017; Licsandru & Cui, 2019). Schwartz's theory (1992, 2012) is therefore expected to provide a better understanding of the personal values which direct the millennial generation's legitimacy inferences.

Although several value typologies exist, Schwartz's value typology (1992, 2012) is among those most widely used value theories (Tang et al., 2017), has been cross-culturally validated (Schwartz et al., 2017), and has been experimented with in over 60 countries with sample sizes exceeding 200 (Lee et al., 2014). On this basis, it can be said that the set of values encapsulated by the theory provides a fair representation of universal values that individuals strive to achieve. This served as motivation to rely on Schwartz's value typology in this study.

3.3 Brand legitimacy

3.3.1 Defining the construct

Legitimacy refers to a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman, 1995, p. 574). Although several scholars have shown interest in understanding legitimacy as a construct (Castello et al., 2016; Etter et al., 2019; Fisher et al., 2016; Fisher, 2020; Hengst et al., 2020; Jacqueminet & Durand, 2020; Tracey et al., 2018) they have mainly focused on legitimacy at the organisational level (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Fisher et al., 2016, 2017; Fisher, 2020; Kuratko et al., 2017; Suddaby et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2020). Legitimacy has also predominantly been studied in management and organisation studies (Haack et al., 2020). It is only in recent years that marketers have taken an interest in understanding brand legitimacy (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Humphreys, 2010a, 2010b), which scholars refer to as the "social fitness" of a brand (Fritz et al., 2017; Guo et al., 2017; Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021; Kates, 2004). Discussions on brand legitimacy, or the social fitness of a brand, have mainly referred to how organisations can build legitimacy for their brands through media framing (Humphreys & Latour, 2013), narratives, and texts, which could convey appropriate signals to the consumer (Gustafson & Pomirleanu, 2021). In this research area, researchers have studied constructs such as rejection legitimacy (Hu et al., 2018), brand authenticity (Fritz et al., 2017), and the effects of technology on brand legitimacy (Swaminathan et al., 2020).

Foundational work on legitimacy distinguishes three dimensions of legitimacy, namely the moral, cognitive and pragmatic dimensions of the construct (Hakala et al., 2017; Suchman, 1995). As indicated by Suchman (1995), pragmatic legitimacy rests on the self-interests of the consumer, whereas moral legitimacy reflects a pro-social logic, which differs from the self-interest perspective of pragmatic legitimacy. Also, moral and pragmatic legitimacy are based on active evaluations whereas cognitive legitimacy (as explained below), is not.

This study focused on all three dimensions of the construct because they are interrelated and operate in conjunction with one another (Humphreys & Latour, 2013; Valor et al., 2021). Although scholars (Finch et al., 2015; Tost, 2011) have mainly focused on the pragmatic and moral legitimacy judgements because of their evaluative nature, citing that cognitive legitimacy only serves as a validity cue, Peng et al. (2021) argue that crises do threaten the legitimacy of an entity, resulting in a cognitive re-orientation of an existing schema. Because this study was conducted in the context of a global crisis, it is of the view that the cognitive legitimacy inferred before the crisis may have shifted, thus prompting a change in clothing brand choice as evidenced by the migration of brands from host countries as well as a change on brand choices as revealed in the study by McKinsey and Company (2020). Although brands are socially embedded within a system of norms (Bowen, 2019), are used as a mechanism to portray the wearer's image (Cheng et al., 2012; Jacob et al., 2020) and self-interests (Suchman, 1995), and their relevance is subject to the prevailing environmental circumstances (Peng et al., 2021), it is important to evaluate brands' appropriateness in the broader frame of cognitive, moral and pragmatic legitimacy judgements.

Cognitive legitimacy judgements are based on a categorisation of the brand within memory as belonging to a certain known form, based on a set of recognisable, brand characteristics (Bitektine, 2011). It is inferred based on a brand's necessity and how well a consumer understands and comprehends the clothing brand. This means that the brand is subjected to limited scrutiny because it is presumed to be essential (Semadeni & Krause, 2020). According to Molecke and Pinkse (2020), cognitive legitimacy is a judgment that requires a qualifying yes or no as to whether or not a brand fits into a recognisable schema. The support for the brand, therefore, is based on a "taken for grantedness" that its offerings are essential (Chung et al., 2016; Hakala et al., 2017; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). According to Tost (2011), cognitive legitimacy culminates when a brand is no longer a target of evaluation along moral and instrumental dimensions, which normally requires a high level of monitoring and cognitive energy on the part of the individual to continually re-evaluate the brand. From the cognitive perspective, brands are legitimate when they are understandable and when clarity exists about their offerings.

Pragmatic legitimacy is inferred upon a brand based on the brand's ability to offer something valuable to the individual, for example, status (Reast et al., 2013). Its major evaluation criterion is based on the self-interest of the consumer. From a brand perspective, Hakala et al. (2017) explain pragmatic legitimacy as a reflection of whether the consumption of a product or service is of benefit to the consumer's image in a specific social context, and whether the values held by the collective are similar to their own. In the context of this study, pragmatic legitimacy, therefore, refers to how well a clothing brand meets the consumer's self-interests. It is regarded as a transaction or exchange-related form of legitimacy because it is inferred based on the brand's ability to cater to the needs of its consumers (Bowen, 2019). Therefore, based on Schwartz's Refined Value Typology, it can be said that pragmatic legitimacy inferences are evoked by personal values that are grouped as a higher-order value of self-enhancement.

Moral legitimacy is regarded as a reflection of the normative evaluations of a brand, which is based on the consumer's judgement if the brand presents activities that are regarded as the 'right thing to do' and therefore worthy of moral support. It focuses on the ethical foundations and reciprocal responsibilities of a brand (Bowen, 2019), which enhance brand trust because the brand will be seen as being ethical and concerned about the interests of society (Ahn & Park, 2018). Moral legitimacy is inferred based on the personal value system of the consumer, which serves to guide the personal standards whereby consumers align their behaviour (Melé & Armengou, 2016; Reast et al., 2013; Ruffo et al., 2020). The evaluation criteria of moral legitimacy involve determining if the conduct of a brand is socially relevant, which serves as an aid for resource acquisition and social support (Ahn & Park, 2018). Like personal values, moral principles are enduring (Melé & Armengou, 2016) and remain rather stable over time (Ahn & Park, 2018). According to Suchman (1995), brands can attain moral legitimacy in four ways. Firstly, it is possible by way of consequence, based on actions that spark public interest. Secondly, it is possible structurally, by implementing systems and procedures which enable the brand to meet societal ethical standards. Thirdly, it can be attained procedurally, by being involved in procedures, such as campaigns that are viewed as socially correct. Fourthly, it is possible personally, through the actions and behaviour that are associated with the leader of a brand. Melé and Armengou (2016) propose four criteria to make moral evaluations, namely that an individual should consider the morality of the intended end; the means to achieve such an end; the contribution to the common good; as well as foreseeable consequences. Whenever the consequences are foreseen to be negative, the benefits should outweigh the negative consequences for something (a brand, for example) to be considered moral. From the perspective of Schwartz's Refined Value Typology, it can be said that moral legitimacy inferences are evoked by personal values grouped under the higher orders of self-

transcendence (universalism and benevolence), and conservation (conformity, tradition, and societal security).

In some instances, scholars have found tension concerning pragmatic and moral legitimacy judgements, because people may conflict with doing the right thing for the greater good as opposed to serving personal interests (Bowen, 2019; Islam et al., 2021). This finds relevance in Schwartz's value continuum (2012), which positions values with a personal focus (pragmatic legitimacy), on the opposite side of the continuum of values with a societal focus (moral legitimacy). This is further demonstrated by the hierarchical placement of personal values which is an indication that values are not equally important/relevant.

3.3.2 Legitimacy judgement formation

Tost (2011) sought to explain the process whereby individuals formulate legitimacy judgements. She argued that the legitimacy judgement entails a three-step cyclical process, which comprises two judgement stages, namely the judgement formation and the judgment assessment processes as illustrated in Figure 7. Tost (2011) explains that, in the judgement formation stage, an individual engages in an evaluative, or passive judgement mode of information processing, which results in a generalized inference of whether the organisation (or brand) is socially appropriate or not.

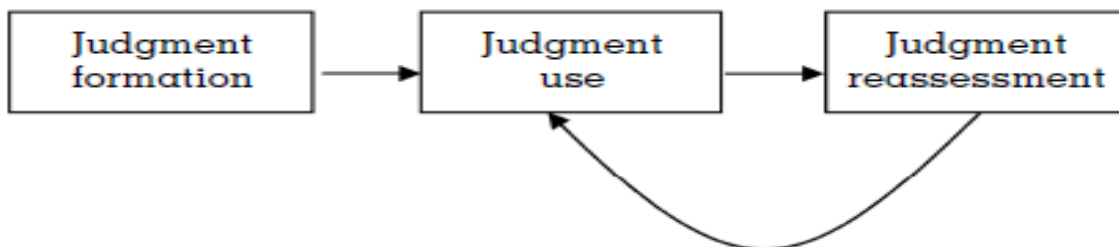


Figure 7: The legitimacy judgement cycle

Source: Tost, 2011

Evaluative mode judgements are generally based on conformance to an individual's moral and instrumental norms. These evaluations are however prone to cognitive bias and are influenced by an individual's social identification/affiliation with the group/peers that are associated with the brand, as would be expected with millennials who have a strong social affiliation. The passive evaluation mode process differs from the evaluative mode in that individuals simply accept a brand based on its conformance to expectations. However, other scholars (Moisander et al., 2016; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Valor et al., 2021), are of the

view that expectations are influenced by media and regulatory requirements that are believed to cause semiotic shifts which underpin legitimacy judgements. Despite the opposing views, it is evident that individuals' legitimacy judgements are formed relative to a reference point (Finch et al., 2015), namely their personal values. Tost (2011) further explains that the mode (passive or evaluative) used in judgement formation, depends on the availability of validity cues. In the absence of validity cues, for example not knowing the origin of a brand, the evaluative mode is more likely to be implemented. This view is supported by scholars Valor et al. (2021), as well as Hoefler and Green (2016), who explain that the exchange of arguments amongst audiences aids in the co-production, interpretation, and formation of a legitimacy judgement.

Scholars (Hakala et al., 2017) further differentiate legitimacy judgements by making a distinction between judgements stemming from a collective level – validity judgements - and from an individual level, suggesting that the brand represents something desirable and appropriate, referred to as propriety judgements. Propriety legitimacy judgement refers to the individual's belief about the appropriateness of a brand (Haack et al., 2020), which has important behavioural consequences, because if an object (brand) is not consistent with the standards (values) and principles of the evaluator/consumer, then propriety will not be granted, and support may be withheld. Validity legitimacy judgments, on the other hand, relate to judgments of the collective on the appropriateness of a brand. This study focused on consumers' legitimacy judgements, where propriety legitimacy judgements as well as validity legitimacy judgements are relevant in terms of consumers' overall legitimacy inferences (Ruffo et al., 2020; Suddaby et al., 2017) of clothing brands. Hakala et al. (2017) explain that validity legitimacy judgements influence consumers' pragmatic and cognitive legitimacy inferences, in that it would encourage the consumption of brands, because consumers tend to feel pressurised to conform with the majority, in pursuit of approval within society, a phenomenon that is typical of millennials.

Gustafson and Pomirleanu, (2021, p. 22) explain that a brand is "...experienced, shaped and changed in communities" indicating that brand legitimacy, like legitimacy judgements, is inferred. Foroudi et al. (2018) add the relevance of brand loyalty as a notable component of consumer behaviour and motivations, in that loyalty indicates a consumer's attachment to a brand. When the level of loyalty is high, consumers actively interact with a brand, and the more a person interacts with a brand, a passive judgement mode is ignited, resulting in cognitive legitimacy inferences.

Consumers' legitimacy judgements are also influenced by the type of market category within which the organisation or brand operates (which is the clothing retail context, in the case of

this research) (Pontikes & Barnett, 2015), the venture threshold (Fisher et al., 2016; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), and the audience's risk appetite (Fisher et al., 2016). This is undoubtedly influenced by the time and context, such as the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on millennials. Generally, judgements are inferred based on an institutional logic that is adopted by the consumer, and which serves as a cognitive structure that will impart meaning to situations (Ngoye et al., 2019; Reay & Hinings, 2009). Institutional logic, in this context, refers to the practices and symbolic systems, including personal values and beliefs, by which individuals assign meaning to their daily activities, how they devote their time, and live their lives in a particular context. Trust, which Pirson et al. (2017) regard as the willingness of individuals to become vulnerable to another party, is also instrumental in individuals' legitimisation of brands. McKnight et al. (1998) posit that an individual's decision to trust something (a brand) is largely influenced by their personal values. In the context of this study, brand trust concerns the intrinsic 'believability' that a brand evokes, based on related products' behaviour and performance, creating the foundation of a strong connection with certain brands, and converting simple awareness of a brand to a strong commitment towards the brand. Brand trust is often used to develop and portray the image of a business, globally (Baumann-Pauly, et al., 2016; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Guo et al., 2017) and is very important for brands' survival in a competitive marketplace.

3.4. The impact of crises on consumers' personal values and legitimacy judgements

The role of personal values in the formation of evaluations has transcended numerous disciplines such as the fields of political science (Smith, 1949), psychology (Davidov et al., 2008; Feather, 1995; Knoppen & Saris, 2009; Schwartz, 1994; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987), marketing (Anker et al., 2015; Slimane et al., 2019; Vinson et al., 1977) and organisational behaviour (Ruffo et al., 2020). Marketing studies have found that consumers develop an attachment to a brand (brand loyalty), and as a result, consumers defend preferred brands with much fondness. Indications are that consumers prefer products that correspond with their self-image, and hence express their personality or characteristics through the products that correspond with their self-image. For example, when a quality-conscious consumer perceives a brand as being of high quality (a pertinent brand attribute), the person develops a self-association with, and a fondness for the brand, resulting in brand loyalty, which is further enhanced by the associated utility (a consequence) derived from the brand (Foroudi et al., 2018).

However, a global crisis challenges the notion of brand loyalty, because, some consumer habits wither due to an adaptation to a so-called new normal (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Sheth, 2020). Sheth (2020) explains that consumers may identify alternative, more convenient ways of doing things amid a crisis. Generally, a crisis adversely affects individuals' finances and spending patterns (Dutt & Padmanabhan, 2011; Hampson & McGoldrick, 2013; Pantano et al., 2020), mostly resulting in a reduction in consumers' spending on non-essential items (Dutt & Padmanabhan, 2011; Ross et al., 2020). This implies a change in consumers' judgements which can result in a long-term change in consumer preferences, norms, and trends (Sharma et al., 2020) during which consumers will prioritise their choices in terms of what they value most (Ross et al., 2020). Ross et al. (2020) propose a preference refinement, in that the goods that a consumer considers to be non-essential amid a crisis, often remain non-essential items after the threat has subsided because consumers undergo a process of reconstructing their individual preferences, which over time, stabilize and become the norm.

On the contrary, attribution theorists have found that individuals tend to develop causal explanations for the occurrence of significant events, which influence their behaviour and judgements (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). As such, Sheth (2020) explains consumption as being habitual and contextual. Crises evoke attributional thinking, and therefore consumers assess whether or not a crisis was in the control of the brand or whether the crisis occurred as a result of forces beyond the management of the brand (Singh et al., 2020). Fear induced by crises influences consumers' behaviour and how they process information (Coleman et al., 2017; Morales et al., 2012; White et al., 2013; Winterich & Haws, 2011). For example, the fear of being unemployed may result in a reduction of spending patterns and encourage increased savings, while the fear of scarcity will lead to stockpiling, as was the case during high levels of lockdown amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Crises may also make consumers more mindful of their consumption choices (Sheth, 2020), for example taking into consideration the effect on the environment, nature, society, and sustainability issues. According to a study by Ng et al. (2021), amid crises, consumers with a stronger global identity, prefer local brands, while consumers with a stronger local identity prefer global brands, attributing the change in preferences to a change in divergent thinking styles, that influence their preferences. On the contrary, Yu et al. (2021) posit that consumers with a high brand attachment before a crisis, maintain their brand support post-crisis. Accordingly, researchers (Cheng et al., 2012; Wolter et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2021) believe that consumers with a stronger brand identification will maintain their purchase intention to protect their self-concept, arguing that brands symbolically represent who consumers are and whom they want to be (Cheng et al., 2012).

Research has also shown that crises evoke a mindset of scarcity among consumers, causing consumers to focus on whatever they consider valuable (Ross et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2015).

The perceived scarcity of goods or services can significantly change consumers' choices, also increasing price sensitivity (Pantano et al., 2020). Hampson and McGoldrick (2013) found that in recessionary times, consumers reduce the amount spent on conspicuous products and services, and reduce their consumption of non-essential items, to afford more essential items. At the same time, the notion of scarcity also increases consumers' consideration of the importance, and preference for scarce products or services (Ross et al., 2020; van Herpen et al., 2009), even resulting in panic buying (Pantano et al., 2020), and compulsive buying (Horváth & Adıgüzel, 2018).

Scholars have also shown increased interest in consumers' intuitive and affective judgements of organisations (brands) (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Highhouse et al., 2009; Kraatz & Love, 2009). Given that legitimacy is considered a deliberate judgement, the respective contribution of analytical versus intuitive judgement is still being debated (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). The onset of a crisis is generally dominated by intuitive, heuristic, and affective information processing (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015) due to a lack of information, misinformation, or conflicting information that may threaten consumers' ability to understand, plan, and cope with social threats (Campbell et al., 2020). These voids instigate emotional reactions to the perceived negative consequences of a crisis (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015) and consumers' reliance on whatever information is available (Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017). Mostly, in states of uncertainty, individuals' decisions are more strongly based on financial implications (Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017; Gorn et al., 2001).

Although the literature indicates that consumers do not perceive Corporate Social Responsibility as being compatible with luxury brands (Janssen et al., 2017), global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic have challenged this notion as is evident from a change in consumers' judgements of luxury brands. This is due to the fear that a preference for luxury brands would signify neglect of people for the sake of profits. Prominent brands such as Gucci, Armani, Burberry, Ralph Lauren, Prada, and Bulgari have therefore made vast financial contributions to fight poverty, and have even introduced new product lines to show that they care about people's lives (Pantano et al., 2020).

Some scholars are however of the view that a brand can be deemed legitimate without consumers necessarily attaching any affective values to their judgements (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Haack et al., 2014; Pfarrer et al., 2010), rather depending on prior experiences and perceptions as a cognitive shortcut (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). The different views, therefore, indicate that consumers' legitimacy inferences of brands are not yet clearly understood.

3.5. The relevance of personal values in consumers' decision processes

Due to the many dimensions and interpretations, value, per se, is regarded as a complex construct (Chen et al., 2017). In this study, values refer to the enduring, intrinsic personal beliefs that an individual holds (Finch et al., 2015), and which strongly influence people's (consumers') behaviour, attitudes, desires, and needs (Ladhari et al., 2011). Values have been regarded as a good predictor of future consumer behaviour (Ha & Jang, 2013) because they are deemed as the end state which consumers wish to satisfy through their consumption (Ha & Jang, 2013; Ryu et al., 2012). Finch et al. (2015) posit that an individual's legitimacy judgement is influenced by a personal belief system, which comprises personal values that are ranked hierarchically. They distinguish two types of values, namely global values and domain-specific values. Global values are described as relatively stable and enduring beliefs that influence judgements across different situations, while domain-specific values are influenced by global values as well as direct and indirect experiences with the subject matter. For example, a consumer's behaviour may be influenced by concern for economic development (global value) and therefore advocate for support of Proudly South African brands. But the belief in supporting Proudly South African brands, holds more strongly in times of global crises such as the COVID pandemic (domain-specific value).

Based on Schwartz's Refined Value Typology (Schwartz et al., 2012) it is expected that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may direct millennial consumers away from a personal focus (that is generally used to describe millennials' behaviour in the marketplace), to being more socially focused due to witnessing the hardship caused by a crisis. Hence, consumers' behaviour will probably portray concern, which is associated with the value universalism as illustrated in the motivation continuum (see Figure 6, Section 3.1.1). For example, hurricane Katrina resulted in celebrities and business people showing acts of generosity by donating food parcels and financial support for families to rebuild their homes (Marbley, 2007). Such an act of benevolence demonstrated a shift from a stronger personal focus to a social focus. Despite an apparent strong focus on themselves (Durocher et al., 2016; Twenge et al., 2010), studies have also found the millennial generation to be socially and environmentally conscious (Bucic et al., 2012; Vadakkepatt et al., 2020), therefore contributing notably towards socially responsible initiatives and organisations (Durocher et al., 2016; Vadakkepatt et al., 2020; White et al., 2019). A Deloitte survey (2020) revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic increased a sense of individual responsibility among millennials, with increased sympathy towards others, and the needs of their communities. Noteworthy for this research, is that the Deloitte survey (2020) revealed that 80% of the millennials surveyed indicated that, when the

pandemic eases, they will rather buy products and services from small, local businesses to contribute to their survival. Similarly, 60% of the millennials surveyed, would support large organisations that have supported society amid the pandemic. These sentiments inevitably have consequences for how millennials view and evaluate the legitimacy of brands.

3.6. Brand attributes and their consequences

Clothes serve as signals and vessels that are used by individuals to express their mood, their status, or what they aspire to be (Maran et al., 2021; Robinson & Baum, 2020) and are used to satisfy both physiological and emotional needs of the wearer (Millan et al., 2013). This is because clothes and the clothing brand that an individual wears, influence an observer's judgement of the individual (Maran et al., 2021). Apart from the functional and psychological experiences derived from brands, scholars also indicate that brands can be regarded as symbolic and experiential (Millan et al., 2013; Tynan et al., 2010). Individuals, therefore, use clothes and brands to manage their appearance and create a desired image about themselves. Scholars also posit that an individual's social values can be expressed through consuming certain clothes and clothing brands (Maran et al., 2021; Rose et al., 1994), therefore regarding clothing as a predictor of one's personal values (Rose et al., 1994).

A consumer engages with a brand through its attributes, that is, through the functional features of the brand or based on the emotions evoked by the brand. It is through the brands' attributes; either tangible or intangible, that consumers form a connection with it and derive benefits. Literature suggests that the consumers' connection with a brand, is a result of the benefits - outcomes provided by the attributes and include for example social status, prestige, and role identification - obtained from using the brand (Park & Sullivan, 2009). Lin and Yeh (2013) explain benefits as "post-consumption feelings" (p. 377), which implies that a benefit can only be obtained once it has been experienced or consumed. Therefore, it can be said that consumers seek benefits from brands to satisfy a need (to feel a certain way), or to portray certain aspects of themselves (to be seen as fitting into a certain social group). It is for this reason that advertisers focus on both the brand's attributes and the benefits (consequences) derived from using the brand (Cohen, 2014; Massara et al., 2020).

Torres and Bijmolt (2009) describe the association between brands and their attributes as a directional one, and therefore, the association is either from the brand to the attribute or from the attribute to the brand. Brand association is for example made when a consumer is asked to list the brands he or she associates with the attribute of comfort. A brand-to-attribute association is for instance if a consumer is asked to list the attributes that he or she associates

with a particular brand. Advertising effectiveness can hence be determined by assessing attributes evoked by the brand and attributes likely to be evoked by the brand name.

A clothing brand's attributes can range from price, quality, and fit to place of origin, and style. Moriuchi (2021) explains that in most cases, consumers regard imported brands as luxurious, of higher quality than local brands, and thus worthy of the high price tag. Whilst the favour for local brands would stem from a consumer's strong sense of association with the local environment and the pride associated with consuming brands, which support the local economy. This does not necessarily mean that local brands are of inferior quality because the literature on brand heritage and brand authenticity expresses the value of brands being able to narrate the history behind their establishment. This enables consumers to connect and relate with the brand, such that they are willing to pay a premium for the clothing item (Hamby et al., 2019; Scarpi, 2021). Scarpi (2021) argued that brands which share their heritage are more likely to be regarded as authentic and reliable. In the same vein, scholars have argued that local brands which can obtain local icon brand status are mostly able to outperform global brands (Halkias et al., 2016; Hoskins et al., 2021; Shelton & Minniti, 2018; Sichtmann et al., 2019).

Brand attributes are also used to communicate characteristics about a brand, which serve as an aid for positioning the brand in the mind of the consumer (Jewell & Saenger, 2014; Saenger et al., 2017), as well as its ability to fulfil the claims it makes, for example portraying status (Morhart et al., 2015). In this regard, brand attributes serve as a signal of the appropriateness (legitimacy) of the brand to a consumer. For example, retailers whose brands demonstrate the use of organic elements may be seen to be caring for the environment, and are thus able to garner moral legitimacy inferences. The brand will then be positioned in the consumer's mind as an environmentally friendly brand.

Brand attributes provide consumers with a means to claim a desired end state and express their respective identities (Jacob et al., 2020; Roux et al., 2017). Therefore, based on Schwartz's Refined Value Typology (Schwartz et al., 2012), a consumer that values achievement – success according to social standards - may choose clothing brands that are regarded as authentic, because an authentic brand resembles a sense of status and prestige (Hamby et al., 2019). Scholars (Jewell & Saenger, 2014; Saenger et al., 2017) are of the view that the relationship between brand attributes and the consumer's identity is so strong, that it is often difficult for the consumer to foster new brand associations for brands which they are familiar with. This, they attribute to the cognitive legitimacy already inferred upon the brand, and therefore a change in judgement would require cognitive effort to accommodate changes about the brand in their brand meaning structure. Furthermore, consumers have schematic

structures which categorically position a brand in the mind of the consumer. Therefore, any change in brand attributes will most likely be rejected, because it does not fit into the category that the consumer has already developed for the brand.

On the contrary, attribution theorists (Hewett et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2020; Weiner, 2008), would argue that the above-postulated position is prone to attribution bias because of the inability to take into account factors in the external environment, which may force consumers to alter their cognition. They argue that consumers infer attributes based on the interaction between the consumer and his/her environment. As seen amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many consumers indicated that they had made changes to the brands which they once consumed (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Although scholars (Park & Sullivan, 2009) argue that benefits are part of the reasons why an individual chooses to purchase a product, they have not explained why the benefit derived from the consumption of a particular product is important, especially given that the researchers indicate that benefits derived from the consumption of a product influence pre-consumption expectations. For example, although consumers perceive expensive products as more suited for persons of higher authority and higher financial status, scholars (Dubois & Duquesne, 1993; Tynan et al., 2010) have argued that the purchase of expensive products is not necessarily governed by an individual's financial situation. Whilst admitting that income is necessary, it is not sufficient to explain a consumer's motivation for purchasing a product.

3.7. Conclusion of the literature review

From literature, it is understood that legitimacy, in whichever dimension (moral, cognitive, or pragmatic), is inferred upon a brand based on the ability of the brand to align itself with the values of the consumer. Additionally, the literature suggests that consumers infer legitimacy in accordance with three dimensions that integrate how they identify with the brand, how it makes them feel, the benefits/consequences derived from using the brand, how the brand links with what they perceive to be appropriate, and ultimately, the ability of the brand to facilitate their achievement of certain goals that are associated with personal, deeply rooted personal values. Crises may however disrupt how consumers categorise and prioritise their values, being influenced strongly by their emotions and intuition that are an integral part of their core values. This inevitably influences consumers' decision-making, including their judgement of brands. Although the literature has indicated how consumers' choice behaviour is impacted by a crisis, evidence is lacking concerning the underlying personal values that direct consumers' behaviour amid a crisis, having been exposed to the turmoil and hardship that have affected people's and businesses' existence. What is known, though, is that global

crises influence people's legitimacy inferences about products and brands. This study aimed to explore the personal values of a prominent generational cohort (millennials), that direct their brand legitimacy judgements, and subsequent clothing brand preferences amid the global crisis, assuming that values are enduring and that a crisis will strongly push to the forefront which values are prevalent in driving their brand preferences. Empirical evidence will be useful to guide clothing retailers' brand strategies for the future so that they would be able to survive, and recover faster if a crisis arises.

The research questions outlined in Chapter 1, are presented in the following chapter with supporting arguments for each of the questions, anchored in the literature. Chapter 4 also outlines areas concerning the research topic that scholars have not yet explored fully.

Chapter 4: Research questions

Values play an indisputable role in consumers' legitimacy judgements of products and brands (Suchman, 1995). Scholars (Ahn & Park, 2018; Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Hoefler & Green, 2016; Melé & Armengou, 2016; Schwartz et al., 2012) concur that consumers are motivated to behave in accordance with their values, which are deemed as enduring and can transcend different contexts. However, because of the hierarchical nature of values (Gutman, 1982), in times of crisis, consumers tend to re-assess their legitimacy inferences (Deephouse et al., 2017), and the ordering of their values. In this regard, from the literature, it is clear that consumers' behaviour may change as a result of a global crisis due to a realignment of their core personal values. Unfortunately, as argued by scholars (Hoefler & Green, 2016; Jahn et al., 2020), literature has not been able to outline what the predominant personal values of specific market segments are, moreover in the context of the a global crisis that affects society and businesses in many ways, rather severely (Campbell et al., 2020; Coskuner-Balli, 2020; Galoni et al., 2020; Huang & Sengupta, 2020; Ross et al., 2020). Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, many clothing brands departed from South Africa, and many prominent branded stores closed down rather unexpectedly. This prompted the main research question:

Amid a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which brand attributes and personal values drive millennial consumers' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands?

The main question is further divided into four sub-questions to provide insights concerning the main research question. These sub-questions are structured in alignment with the means-end chain approach, which provides the sequence in which attributes, consequences and personal values are linked. The questions emanate from literature, where it is indicated that brand attributes are used intentionally by consumers to portray a certain image about themselves (Jacob et al., 2020; Roux et al., 2017). Although literature indicates that a global crisis adversely impacts the financial circumstances of consumers (Dutt & Padmanabhan, 2011; Hampson & McGoldrick, 2013; Pantano et al., 2020), Tynan et al. (2010) caution that the type of products purchased by consumers do not entirely depend on the economic circumstances of the consumer. Accordingly, Foroudi et al. (2018) have argued that consumers make strong associations with certain brands, resulting in loyalty toward the brands. Despite economic challenges, consumers could hence still seek clothing brands that portray attributes that are consistent with their self-image, regardless of financial circumstances. This may especially be

true for the millennial generation which has been described as status driven and strongly socially connected (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Dash et al., 2021).

Millennials are, therefore, regarded as status-driven consumers (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Dash et al., 2021) and also as a generation that is interested in affairs related to the social well-being of society (Durocher et al., 2016; Vadakkepatt et al., 2020; White et al., 2019). From Schwartz's value typology (Schwartz et al., 2012) this generation would therefore be expected to portray values of self-transcendence and self-enhancement and thus seek brands whose attributes result in obtaining benefits (consequences) that would satisfy these values. But it is not clear what these consequences are, and which underlying personal values motivate millennials to seek particular benefits. On this basis, the following sub-questions were formulated to direct the research:

- ***What clothing brand attributes support millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands?***
- ***What consequences do millennials anticipate to derive from the clothing brand attributes that they prioritise?***
- ***Which underlying personal values are associated with the consequences that millennials expect to derive from the preferred clothing brands that they consider to be legitimate?***
- ***Which prominent personal values signify millennials' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements of clothing retail brands?***

The following chapter provides an explanation and motivations for the envisaged research methodology that aimed to gather reliable and valid data to address the research questions. Techniques used to analyse data and to maintain data quality, as well as to ensure ethical conduct are presented, noting possible limitations and indicating how these limitations were addressed.

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

5.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the means-end chain (MEC) mixed methods methodology which was used to address the research questions related to preferred brand attributes, obtained benefits (consequences), underlying personal values, and their relation to millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands on the retail scene, amid a global crisis. This chapter describes the data collection processes, and the relevant procedures used for data analysis, whilst noting measures to ensure ethical conduct as well as to uphold the quality of the entire research process. The first section of the chapter outlines the qualitative methods used during the first phase of the research that served as the introduction to the second (quantitative) phase as presented in the second section of the chapter.

The study (1) responded to scholarly calls to assess legitimacy as a phenomenon from the perspective of different audiences (Fisher et al., 2017; Navis & Glynn, 2011; van Werven et al., 2015); (2) envisaged to establish the underlying personal values which shape clothing consumers' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands in the South African retail scene amid the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic (Hoefler & Green, 2016; Jahn et al., 2020); and (3) to expand the scarce body of knowledge about the impact of crises on consumers' behaviour in the market place as has been evident amid the COVID-19 pandemic (Campbell et al., 2020; Coskuner-Balli, 2020; Galoni et al., 2020; Huang & Sengupta, 2020; Ross et al., 2020).

5.2. Research objectives

The study was conducted as a two-phase, sequential, mixed-method endeavour which is a characteristic of a MEC research process (Ronda et al., 2020). The mixed method comprised a first, qualitative phase, that supplemented the second, quantitative phase. The qualitative phase aimed to solicit clothing brand attributes with their associated consequences from the perspective of middle- and upper-income millennials, exploring what they considered relevant as part of their legitimacy judgements of clothing brands, amid a global crisis. This phase was appropriate to empirically identify the relevant constructs, to support the theoretical constructs derived from literature, and to specify the options included in the subsequent quantitative phase of the MEC design that is based on an Association Pattern Technique (APT). The APT served to link selected brand characteristics and desired consequences in terms of the

underlying personal values of the millennial age cohort. This provided both breadth and depth of understanding of the relevant phenomena in the given context.

The research objectives are presented separately for the two phases of the study as follows:

5.2.1. Objectives for Phase 1: Qualitative phase

Phase one of the study aimed:

- To identify the sought-after attributes of clothing brands that millennials considered to be legitimate, and worthy of their support.

Legitimacy refers to a generalised perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions (Suchman, 1995). Thus, should a consumer regard a brand as legitimate, it would stand to mean that the brand is worthy of the consumers support, resulting in purchasing the brand, positive word-of-mouth, etc.

- To identify the consequences that millennials expected to derive from clothing brands that they considered legitimate and worthy of support, therefore the reasons for the identified brand attributes.

During phase one, when implementing the Delphi technique, no effort was made to pertinently link preferred clothing brand attributes and desired consequences. The outcomes were merely summarised as a list of brand attributes, and a separate list of reasons/ consequences that participants concurred with, after three repetitive rounds. The links were only made during phase two of the study.

5.2.2. Objectives for Phase 2: Quantitative phase

The quantitative phase was survey-based and entailed the completion of an online self-administered questionnaire designed in the format of the Association Pattern Technique (APT) of Ter Hofstede et al. (1998), as part of the established MEC approach. This phase aimed to identify the personal values that directed millennials' clothing brand legitimacy judgements amid a global crisis.

The objective of phase two was to identify the links between the attributes (A), consequences (C), and personal values (V) that drove millennials' brand legitimacy judgements, whereby participants had to:

- select the particular attributes of clothing brands (from a given list, derived from phase 1 of the study) that they used to infer the cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy of clothing brands; thereafter

- specify (link) the consequences that they anticipated to derive from each of the desirable attributes (indicated in the previous step) of clothing brands; thereafter
- specify (link) the consequences that they anticipated to derive from each of the desirable consequences (indicated in the previous step) of clothing brands; and then
- link the consequences that they expected to derive from the selected attributes with personal values through means-end chain analysis that assimilated relevant Hierarchical Value Maps (HVM) that ultimately specified the predominant personal values that drove millennials' clothing brand preferences in this sequential three-step process.

This phase identified and translated the predominant personal values that were identified in the HVM's, in terms of millennials' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements of clothing brands. Literature served to support the researcher's interpretations.

5.3. Research Philosophy

The philosophical orientation of the study was that of pragmatism, as legitimacy is considered a complex construct (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Suddaby et al., 2017). Additionally, scholars have acknowledged the difficulties in measuring legitimacy (Díez-Martín et al., 2013; Suchman, 1995), due to its subjective nature. The ontological assumption of the study was that reality is constructed through processes and practices of how consumers perceive the legitimacy of brands in the clothing retail sector amid a global crisis. The research problem emanated from a practical problem due to many prominent clothing brands departing the country, and many established clothing retail stores closing down following the global financial and health crises in recent years (Favaro & Romberger, 2009; Yohn, 2020).

The study intended to aid as a practical guide for clothing retailers, to tailor their product offerings in a manner that is consistent with middle- and upper-income millennial consumers' personal values that are inherently important in directing their product and brand choices, and to aid clothing retailers in understanding and aptly serving this important market segment's needs. Consistent with the pragmatic philosophical orientation, a mixed methods approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mamabolo & Myres, 2019; Mitchell, 2018; Morgan, 2014; Venkatesh et al., 2013) was used for the study.

5.4. Research Paradigm

This study was grounded in the post-positivism paradigm (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Phase one entailed a qualitative exploration to comprehend how millennials described clothing brands that they considered to be legitimate in the clothing retail scene amid the COVID-19 pandemic,

thus eliciting brand attributes from the target population's perspective (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2011). The qualitative phase provided an opportunity to prompt a sample from the targeted population to spontaneously share their thoughts so that the research does not rely on textbook information only (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Phase two was quantitative in nature with a post-positivistic philosophical approach, relying on numerical data, which is required to draw contingency maps drawn from the frequency of responses (Creswell, 2014).

5.5. Research Design

The research was designed in two phases according to the established procedure for MEC studies, representing a sequential, exploratory research endeavour, i.e., small qualitative, big quantitative study. The study aimed to determine the personal values that direct millennial consumers' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid a sudden global crisis, hence, at a particular moment in time. Admittedly, global crises are not 'everyday' phenomena but rather occur suddenly, adversely impacting people's livelihoods as well as businesses for a prolonged period before recovery starts. As indicated by Foroudi et al. (2018), consumers show a strong preference, loyalty, and connection towards certain brands for various reasons, and therefore, a longitudinal study would not have been appropriate, because brands may change over time due to some entering and others exiting for various reasons.

The study was, therefore, conducted using a cross-sectional study time horizon, which is defined as an instantaneous point in the research process during which data collection occurs (Rindfleisch et al., 2008), which is also a cost-effective approach (Moorman et al., 2008). Cross-sectional studies are, however, prone to Common Method Variance and Causal Inferences (Fuller et al., 2016; Moorman et al., 2008). Common Method Variance is a systematic method error that occurs when employing the same participants for a particular study (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Cross-sectional studies are also prone to causal inferences (CI), namely inferring causality based on responses from the same participants. To address these challenges, scholars (Moorman et al., 2008; Ostroff et al., 2002; Podsakoff et al., 2003) recommend that the researcher involves multiple participants to reduce error; obtain multiple types of data; and gather data over multiple periods.

5.5.1 The Means-End Chain (MEC) approach

5.5.1.1 The unique contribution of MEC to research

Marketing and strategic researchers have attempted to link consumer values with their behaviour through means-end chain (MEC) analysis, which seeks to discover the personal values that direct consumers' product-related decisions, particularly preferred clothing product attributes that they expected will produce desirable consequences that are aligned with their underlying personal values (Ha & Jang, 2013). This approach has been used before by scholars in the domain of consumer behaviour, motivation studies, marketing, and organizational management (Park et al., 2020; Diedericks, 2018; Rugg et al., 2002). The approach has, for example, been used by scholars to discover the underlying motivations which direct consumers' behaviour (Park et al., 2020); to determine reasons for consumers' support for abstract goals such as ideas, and perceptions (Bagozzi & Dabholkar, 2000); to determine dining values for a restaurant segment (Ha & Jang, 2013); and motivations behind employment choices (Ronda et al., 2020). The MEC approach has aided researchers in the past to understand the direction of individual behaviour by determining what they are trying to achieve, why they want to achieve it, and how they plan on achieving it (Ronda et al., 2020; Diedericks, 2018).

The MEC approach (Gutman, 1982, 1997) is a conceptual framework that aids in understanding motivations behind individuals' choices (of, for example, clothing brands) and posits that values govern an individual's behaviour. It seeks to explain how preference for a clothing brand (in the instance of this research), a product, or a service, can facilitate achieving a desired end state (value). As explained by Ha and Jang (2013), the MEC approach uncovers the hidden values that direct consumers' assessment of the clothing attributes and associated consequences of choosing or supporting a brand, product, or service. The outcome of the model is a chain, which specifies linkages between product attributes (A), and related consequences (C), which together, support the consumer's underlying values (V) that are identified in a subsequent "chain" (Gutman, 1982; Ha & Jang, 2013; H. Park et al., 2020). In this study, the MEC framework served as the analytical lens to identify the values that govern millennial consumers' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands.

The means-end chain as outlined in Figure 8, explains the hierarchical cognitive process that depicts a consumer's decision process to consume a particular brand, product, or service, for example indicating the characteristics of preferred clothing brands that are expected to produce the desired outcomes that will concur with millennials' underlying values, hence supporting their legitimacy judgements of clothing retail brands. Typically, a consumer

assesses a brand based on its attributes/properties which then facilitates a desired end state when consuming the branded product (Gutman, 1982). Attributes can either be tangible or intangible (Gutman, 1997). They form the lowest layer in the means-end chain and are associated with certain consequences that can eventually be linked to personal values (Park et al., 2020). Karikari et al. (2017) describe the consequences as the expected outcomes that are derived from a specific decision. Gutman (1982) refers to consequences as benefits that are derived from consuming a product, brand, or service. He explains that consequences refer to the benefits that the consumer expects to receive, whilst the attributes are features that are inherent in a product or service, for example, an imported product, and excellent construction. The consequences can be physiological or psychological in nature. Physiological consequences have a direct impact on a person's body, such as wearing clothes as protection from cold, hence warm, comfortable clothing. Psychological consequences have an impact on the mental and emotional state of an individual, for example influencing an individual's self-esteem. In terms of the psychological consequences of certain brand choices, a chosen designer brand may boost a person's confidence, which is associated with an underlying personal value of self-enhancement. Accordingly, scholars (Burke et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2017) posit that consumers choose products (brands) based on their perceived benefits. Kim et al. (2017) explain that companies develop products by manipulating product attributes, which consumers derive utility from, and generally, consumers achieve a level of fulfilment from product and brand attributes that are perceived to provide certain desired benefits.

According to the MEC approach, values are defined as desirable end states of consumption. People cope with the diversity in products by ordering and grouping products per what would align with their predominant underlying personal values to avoid complexity (Gutman, 1982, 1997). Values are therefore the higher order in the means-end chain because they serve as the 'end state' that consumers aim to satisfy. This suggests a hierarchical order for how consumers conclude consumption decisions, and also, that values can be ranked in order of preference. Gutman (1982) makes a distinction between instrumental and terminal values. Chen et al. (2017) explain instrumental values as a means (instrument) to achieve a desired end state, while terminal values are the end state that an individual strives to achieve. Hereby, instrumental values act as a vehicle by which terminal values are achieved. Scholars such as Schwartz (1994) and Maio (2017) do however not concur that instrumental and terminal values are distinguishable. This study did not endeavour to make this distinction.

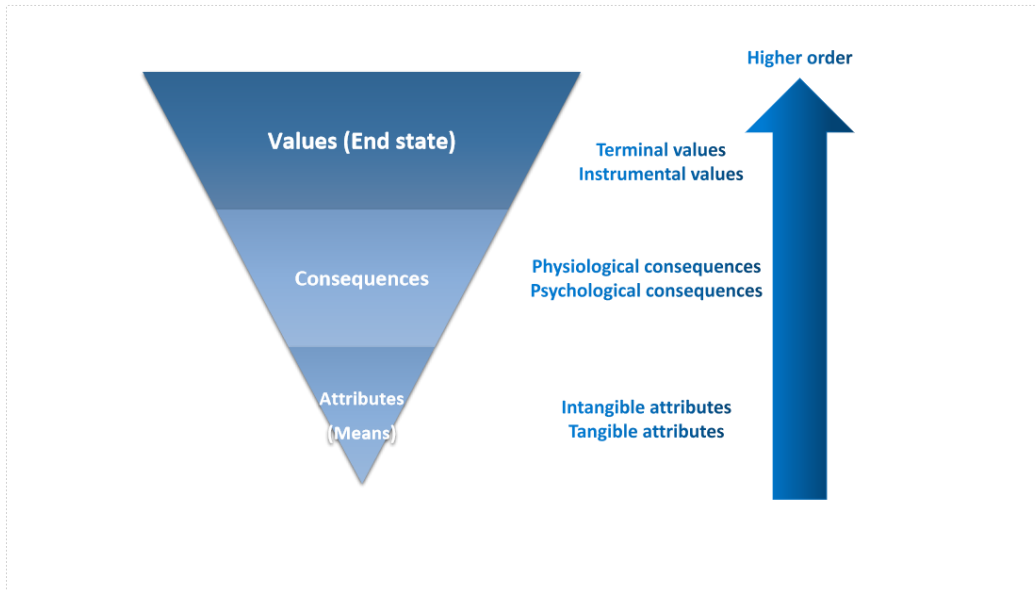


Figure 8: Illustration of the MEC approach

Source: Researcher’s interpretation of the means-end chain approach adapted from (Gutman, 1982)

Figure 9 illustrates the interpretation and outcomes typically generated through MEC analysis. For example, an attribute such as ‘organic’ in the mind of a consumer, could either be linked to ‘good for the environment’ and subsequently to ‘universalism’, which indicates care about the preservation of the natural environment. Alternatively, it could be associated with ‘status’ because that is what is topical at the time and these products are generally more expensive, thus supporting ‘achievement’ as a personal value.

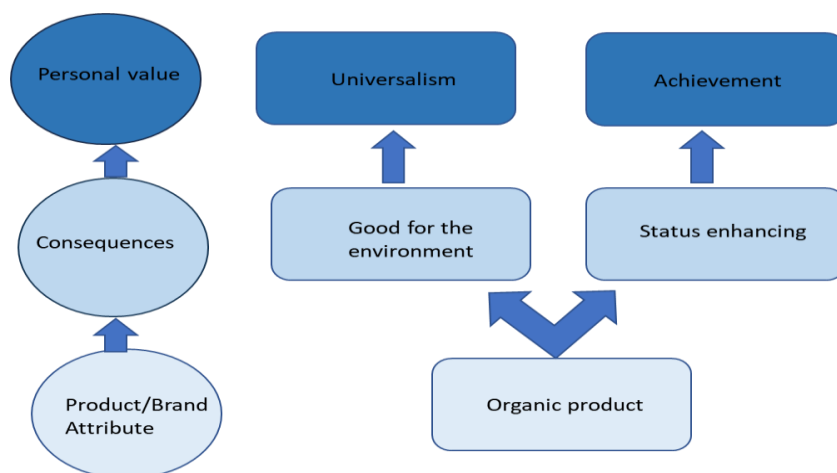


Figure 9: Interpretive illustration of the MEC approach

Source: Researcher’s own

Based on the former explanation, the following assumptions were made in this study:

- Personal values are key in determining consumers' purchase intentions (Ha & Jang, 2013), thus that consumers' decision behaviour is directed by personal values.
- Consumers readily know what they value highly, and hence personal values are ranked hierarchically.
- All consumer choices have consequences for the consumer (as well as the retailer).
- Human behaviour is directed by a connection of attributes, consequences, and values. Therefore, a consumer will make a consumption decision when believing that the underlying personal value that an individual strives to uphold, is linked to certain consequences derived from certain attributes of the commodity (Park et al., 2020).
- Personal values are expressed/supported through consumption consequences that arise from consumers' preference for certain brand attributes

A body of work (Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017; Pham, 1998; Strack et al., 2006) posits that individuals do not only base their judgements and decisions solely on attribute information but that individuals also rely on their subjective feelings towards the end state. For example, consumers sometimes base their consumption decisions according to how they feel about available alternative products/brands, and these feelings are associated with their underlying personal values (Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017; Pham, 1998; White & McFarland, 2009).

For the study, the MEC approach implied that a consumer infers a cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgement upon clothing brands based on their attributes, and related consequences that support the consumers' personal value orientation. The consumer's personal values will therefore serve as the higher order, and evaluative standard to consider a brand as legitimate, thus worthy of support, or not. Magids et al. (2015) explain that, inherently, consumers are emotionally connected to brands, which are aligned with their motivations that stem from personal values. However, it is easier for a consumer to indicate preferred attributes and desired consequences than to admit and explicate the underlying personal values that direct their product decisions.

5.5.1.2. Explication of the sequential mixed method research design

This study opted for a sequential exploratory mixed methods research design, using the means-end chain (MEC) approach (Gutman, 1982). The use of mixed methods has gained traction among researchers more notably in social sciences and business management research (Bryman, 2006; Mitchell, 2018). Scholars who support this research approach applaud its ability to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of the quantitative and qualitative research approaches when used on their own (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004;

Mitchell, 2018), thus viewing the methods as complimentary (Dzwigol, 2020; Jick, 1979). Four types of mixed method designs exist (Venkatesh et al., 2013), the first being triangulation, which merges both quantitative and qualitative data to understand a research problem. Secondly, embeddedness which uses either method to answer a research question within a largely quantitative or qualitative study. Thirdly, an explanatory design, which uses qualitative data to explain or elaborate quantitative data or results. An exploratory design collects quantitative data to test and explain a relationship found in qualitative data. This study implemented a mixed method design to triangulate brand attribute descriptors from literature with what participants (the selected study population) freely shared concerning the topic. It was also important in this study, to identify the terminology that millennials use to express certain brand attributes and consequences because previous MEC studies have found that textbook terminology is not necessarily appropriate (Diedericks, 2019), requiring the use of synonyms of textbook terminology to enhance participants' understanding.

5.5.2 Research population, unit, and level of analysis

The research population, unit and level of analysis for both phases of the study were restricted to millennial consumers residing in South Africa and born between 1980 and 1999 (Statistics South Africa, 2018), thus aged between 23 years and 42 years of age in the year 2022. To prevent bias that could stem from multiple contributions of a single participant when allowed to make inputs in different stages of the research process (implicating the method used (common method variance), and ensuring that the research process determines the actual effect of a particular phenomenon (causal effect) that is a component of a larger system (causal inferences) (Moorman et al., 2008; Ostroff et al., 2002; Podsakoff et al., 2003) an individual was only allowed to participate in a single phase, so nobody took part in both phases of the study.

The unit of analysis entailed a demographic limitation, specifying that participants had to be employed, earning at least R150 000 per annum, to ensure that participants possessed reasonable purchasing power (because clothing is considered a non-essential commodity), and could exercise a choice in the marketplace of what they would or prefer to buy. To ensure relevant experience, participants furthermore had to generally conduct their clothing purchases. Participants who committed to the Delphi phase also had to commit to complete all three rounds of the Delphi study, within set time limitations as explained in the instructions, as only complete data sets could be captured for analysis.

5.6. Phase one: Qualitative Phase

Qualitative research can reveal what lies behind complex and poorly understood phenomena and can provide contextual meaning (Reast et al., 2013). It has been hailed for its ability to capture the experiences of the informants, for example, millennials, to bring the researcher closer to the phenomenon being studied, in this instance, brand legitimacy judgements (Bansal & Corley, 2011). The aim of phase one of the study was to derive attributes (A), and their corresponding consequences (C), as is customarily done in the methodological approach of MEC analysis. It was anticipated that the outcome of phase one would produce the clothing brand attributes (A), and related consequences (C) that millennial clothing consumers deem relevant in terms of their legitimacy judgements of clothing brands. This phase was meant to produce meaningful information (Park et al., 2020), rather than bluntly relying on literature that may be too generic.

To ensure rigor, the qualitative phase encompassed three sources of data collection namely:

- The Classical Delphi Technique
- A focus group discussion to triangulate the Delphi findings.
- Conclusive literature review following the previous phases

5.6.1 The Delphi Technique explained

In traditional MEC studies, individual interviews and a soft laddering approach are used to gain qualitative insights about the subject matter (Ronda et al., 2020). This process is time-consuming and requires a lot of probing to gain richer insights; is therefore labour intensive, and costly (Botschen et al., 1999; Park et al., 2020). The quality of this approach depends on the ability of the researcher to conduct the interviews skilfully and to actively introspect on their bias. This approach also involves small sample sizes and is often limited to a certain geographic area for the sake of convenience (Diedericks et al., 2020; Ter Hofstede et al., 1998). Because the essence of the first phase in this research was to merely elicit attributes (A), and corresponding consequences (C), the use of soft laddering techniques was regarded as excessive in terms of time and effort, and more limited in terms of the number of participants that could be involved compared to using the Delphi technique, and the geographical area that participants could be recruited from. In comparison, the Delphi technique allows participants to freely share their views, in their own time, without interference, from any location. Moreover, the Delphi technique allowed participants to reflect on their contributions when they were asked to verify the summary in the subsequent rounds two and three (if necessary) of the

process, which is a verification of the data. Scholars (Graefe & Armstrong, 2011; Green et al., 1990; Paraskevas & Saunders, 2012; Park & Kim, 2017; Pfleegor et al., 2019) applaud the Delphi technique for its distinct characteristics in ensuring anonymity of responses, iteration, controlled feedback, and its ability to utilise technology to gain access to "experts" more easily across a larger geographic area. Most importantly, the strength of the technique lies in its ability to recognise subjectivity (Kaartemo & Nyström, 2021; Meijering & Tobi, 2018; Sobaih et al., 2012), although ensuring convergence of an opinion (Kaartemo & Nyström, 2021; Pfleegor et al., 2019). With the Delphi technique, a panel of experts is recruited to obtain reliable information about future trends concerning a specific issue or topic.

Although several Delphi Techniques exist (van Looy et al., 2017), this study specifically employed the Classical Delphi Technique which involves several experts to reach a consensus about a topic of investigation (Chang et al., 2020). This technique has been applied successfully in previous studies that sought consensus among so-called experts regarding a topic (which was clothing brands, in the context of this study) (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004; Park & Kim, 2017; Sobaih et al., 2012; van Looy et al., 2017). In this study, the so-called "experts" that are commonly referred to in Classical Delphi studies, comprised of millennial clothing consumers, who possessed personal experience with clothing purchases and brand choices in the market. (The so-called "experts" are further explicated in section 5.6.4.1). This technique has also been used before, to analyse complex situations (Luo et al., 2018; Meijering & Tobi, 2018) characterised by uncertainty, and imperfect knowledge with no correct answer (Chartrand et al., 2008). It has also been used to study contexts for which "...the future depends less on the past and more on the agency of actors..." (Kaartemo & Nyström, 2021, pp. 461), which aligns with the context of this research, namely amid a global crisis. The Delphi Technique has been popular in studies that encompassed information systems, and forecasting (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004), but is novel in terms of its application in consumer behaviour research.

In this study, the Classical Delphi Technique served as the first step to identify the brand attributes (A) that participants associated with so-called "legitimate" clothing brands, as well as to solicit consequences (C) that millennials expected to derive from the clothing brands that they considered legitimate and worthy of support, whilst refining the opinions of the selected group of people (Sobaih et al., 2012). The tactic to commence with open-ended questions allowed participants to freely share as much information as possible related to the topic, namely brand attributes that they associated with legitimate clothing brands, producing richer content. The key, for this study, was the aspect of anonymity, which enabled participants to

freely express themselves, allowing the researcher to gather honest and subjective opinions and experiences, without feeling intimidated.

The Delphi process comprised three rounds. When agreeing to participate, every participant first had to agree to complete all the rounds, as only complete data sets could be used. However, a participant who withdrew at any stage, for whatever reason, was not penalised, although the individual's contributions in previous rounds were discarded. This was communicated to participants at the start. It was explained, at the outset, that the response time for participants for every round would be at most two days, so that the time lapse from one round to the next that included data analysis, would be approximately 11 days to complete, and so that the entire process could be completed within one month. Willing participants had to agree to the short turn-around time. Instructions were clear, and responses were provided in written format. Participants who terminated their contribution along the way were thanked for their contributions although their data were withdrawn from the sample data.

5.6.2 The focus group discussion explained

Stylos et al. (2021) describe focus groups as a key qualitative research data-gathering technique used to obtain in-depth responses. Focus groups furthermore aid to enrich data that has been collected (Pham et al., 2021). Following the completion of the Classical Delphi Technique, a focus group discussion was held for rigor and to obtain additional insights and perspectives (Richard et al., 2018) on the information gathered through the different rounds presented by the Classical Delphi Technique. In advertising research, scholars have previously used focus groups to gain insights into consumers' purchase motivations, beliefs perceptions, and attitudes (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). The group, in this study, was required to look at the attributes and consequences elicited through the Delphi Technique, which a cohort of millennials indicated was important to judge the legitimacy of clothing brands amid a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.6.3 Conclusive literature check

Existing literature was explored as a final step to check the final list of attributes and consequences that were elicited in the first phase of the study to finalise an attribute-consequence (AC) matrix, and a consequence-consequence (CC) matrix before initiating the second, quantitative phase of this study involving an Association Pattern Technique (APT), using MEC analysis.

5.6.4 Sample and sampling

Both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study used non-probability sampling methods, implementing purposive sampling with a maximum variation strategy (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). Millennials were targeted for both the Delphi process, the online focus group discussion, and the online survey questionnaire specifying their years of birth, and minimum annual income per the definition of middle and upper-income consumers of Statistics South Africa (2018), further specifying their clothing purchase experience to qualify for inclusion in the study.

Data triangulation was used for the data collection process, because of the view that no single data collection method is enough to adequately solve a problem (Patton, 1999). In this regard, data for the first phase were collected using three processes i.e., through the Classical Delphi Technique, followed by an online focus group discussion, and a literature review to enhance the validity and reliability of the qualitative research findings (Farquhar et al., 2020). All contributions were made in English.

5.6.4.1 The Delphi phase

Whilst most Delphi studies solicit inputs and opinions from a panel of subject matter experts (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Paré et al., 2013; van Looy et al., 2017), scholars (Baker et al., 2006; Sobaih et al., 2012) agree that literature has not been able to provide a clear definition of the term “expert”. According to Sobaih et al. (2012), scholars (Adler & Ziglio, 1996) indicated that Delphi participants should meet four expertise requirements, namely: knowledge or experience of the issue under investigation; capacity and willingness to participate; time to participate in all the rounds of a Delphi research process; and effective communication skills. Additionally, Donohoe and Needham (2009) indicated that an expert participant is a person with continuous closeness to the issue or problem, as this ensures that the expert participant has direct knowledge and experience with the decision-making process and is therefore more likely to provide valid and relevant consensus. It is for this reason that Sobaih et al. (2012) indicated that the criteria for being a so-called expert, always depends on the aims and objectives of the study. They further found that studies evaluating a social phenomenon, have found no difference between the expert and non-expert-constituted panels as was the case for studies conducted by Walker (1994) and Duffield (1993). On this basis, for this study, the expert panel for the Delphi process had to comprise millennials with personal experience of clothing purchases, as they were the subject of interest for the study, who possessed lived experiences of the phenomenon being studied and were, therefore, able to make valid and

relevant contributions. Although some scholars propose a minimum sample size of 20 people per stage of the Delphi Technique (Luo et al., 2018; Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004), Park and Kim (2017) reported variations in the number of participants involved in different studies and concluded that there should be no rule of thumb on the sampling size for a Delphi study.

Because the Delphi Technique was executed in phases, the researcher had to mitigate against participants dropping out of the research. It was hence important to maintain a tight turn-around time between the invitations, data analysis, and subsequent rounds to ensure that participants remained engaged. Additionally, the researcher had to ensure that responses to the questions would be a seamless process presenting clear instructions and clearly articulating the objectives of the study. The criteria for participation were clearly outlined in the invitation for participation, indicating that qualifying participants had to:

- be born between 1980 and 1999.
- earn a minimum annual income of R150 000 as an indication of their ability to conduct clothing purchases, and to exercise some form of preference concerning brands and merchandise.
- generally purchase their own clothes, or clothes on behalf of others.

Convenience and snowball sampling strategies (Palinkas et al., 2015) were used to recruit participants via Facebook and WhatsApp contacts and subsequent referrals. It should be noted that WhatsApp contacts referred to in this instance, were colleagues and old classmates which whom the researcher is not close. Participants did not know the study, and only included acquaintances, colleagues, and friends of acquaintances who had no insight about the specifics of the study. To mitigate against all the foreseen challenges outlined above, a heterogenous (male and female) sample was envisaged to enhance the validity and the transferability of the findings (Alexiou & Wiggins, 2019; Baker et al., 2006; Peterson, 2001), aiming to recruit a minimum of 50 participants. Willing participants were asked to volunteer details of acquaintances across the country.

Data collection for the Delphi rounds commenced with the development of a database comprising of 80 participants, but due to non-responsiveness, the database was increased by 10 participants, which brought the total to 90 millennials (55 males and 35 females) across South Africa. This process took 28 days to complete, as prospective participants needed to confirm participation. Most of the participants were from Gauteng Province, the most urbanised province in the country and is regarded as the most populous, being home to the highest number of millennials in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Results from the General Household Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa (2021), indicate that access

to the internet using all available means was highest in Gauteng. It is believed that this may have contributed to a higher response rate from this province.

5.6.4.2 The focus group

The participation criteria for the online focus group discussion that was conducted after completion of the Delphi process, was the same as for the Delphi technique, although excluding individuals who had participated in the Delphi rounds. Therefore, individuals who participated in the study, only participated once, to prevent bias (Ketokivi, 2019). The focus group discussion involved nine individuals, which was more than the proposed six to eight participants as suggested by scholars (Donaldson & Conway, 2015; Lobe & Morgan, 2021; O'Neill, 2012; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017; Stylos et al., 2021).

5.6.5 Data collection

Data collection commenced after ethical clearance was affirmed by the Ethics Committee (Appendix 1).

5.6.5.1 The Delphi phase

Background: Although at a minimum, the Delphi technique can consist of two rounds (Meijering & Tobi, 2018), this study used a three-stage approach, comprising of the initial stage, core stage, and final stage as implemented by Sobaih et al. (2012), as depicted in Figure 10. This aided in reaching saturation of useful clothing brand attributes and anticipated consequences. Most studies that have used the Classical Delphi technique, have implemented up to three rounds, with the third round serving as a confirmatory stage (Park & Kim, 2017; Pfleegor et al., 2019; Sobaih et al., 2012). Only individuals who met the pre-selection criteria were included. The Delphi process was explorative in nature and elicited relevant brand attributes as well as related consequences in text format from participants as narrative descriptions of how they would describe legitimate clothing brands. Data collection for the Delphi phase is explicated in terms of the phases that characterise this technique:

Preparation phase: This phase entailed defining the research problem and question(s), which the participants were required to address. Key to this round was the identification of so-called expert participants (millennials with personal experience in clothing purchases). Because the study relates to personal values which drive the legitimacy judgements of millennial consumers, the so-called expert panel comprised millennial consumers based on their lived experiences. As explained by Bohn and Kundisch (2020), experts are regarded as persons with a deep understanding of the topic, as their experiences and knowledge, and opinions are central to the study. In this regard, the millennial consumer is the subject expert based on generally purchasing their own clothing, and having experienced a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Willing participants had to commit to participating in all three

subsequent rounds for inclusion in the study. The researcher kept track of responses per e-mail addresses that were coded to ensure that the number of expert participants per round was documented (Schmidt, 1997) to enhance confidence in the findings.

Initial invitations for participation were forwarded to potential participants from different disciplines across the country, to ensure diversity. They were asked to forward the names of acquaintances for possible participation, as a means of preventing the occurrence of an 'echo chamber' when only relying on the researcher's network.

The following procedure was followed:

- An invitation for participation was distributed, including an explanation of the prerequisites for participation accentuating willingness to commit to three subsequent rounds with a short turnover period.
- Assurance of anonymity and confidentiality was provided in the invitation.
- An explanation of the purpose of the research was provided in the cover letter.
- Instructions for the completion of the request were given, as described in Appendix 2.
- Contact details of the researcher and the supervisor were provided for those who needed additional clarification, at any stage.

Core stage: Willing participants' first task was to specify attributes that they regarded relevant to infer the legitimacy of clothing brands. Schmidt (1997) proposes that participants should not be limited on the number of issues (attributes) that they can provide so that the researcher could uncover other pertinent issues (attributes) that they perhaps had not thought of, or had not discovered in the literature. In a second question, as part of the first request, participants were asked to indicate the consequences that they wish/anticipate to derive from the preferred brand attributes that they had specified, without linking the attributes and the brands. Participants were requested to express their preferences in the form of a narrative of how they would describe legitimate clothing brands in the time of a prevailing global crisis (see Appendix 2). These were used to extract the list of attributes and the list of consequences to eventually identify a short list of descriptors to be incorporated in the matrices in the MEC procedure of phase 2 of the study.

Once the participants had submitted their contributions, the researcher consolidated the responses into a single list for each of the two issues (attributes, and consequences), and consolidated that in the form of a narrative. Where separate terms were used to describe the same attribute, the researcher listed all the terms and consolidated similar terms. Feedback was given to the participants to confirm that their responses had been properly captured and documented. When compiling the narrative, the recommendations of Schmidt (1997) were

taken into consideration, namely that the description should at most contain 20 constructs. If difficult to achieve, the lists were supposed to be returned to the participants to further assess and reduce/shorten the list in round 2. The researcher could also arbitrarily reduce the list, based on a ranking of the attributes and consequences in the two lists based on the frequency mentioned. In this study, the information gathered, did not require a review by the participants.

For purposes of validity and reliability, the responses were compared with attributes and consequences found in literature as a last opportunity to amend/expand the list of attributes and consequences for review in rounds 2 and 3.

The experts were asked to give feedback (rank attributes and consequences) which the researcher assessed and ranked (both constructs) based on the frequency mentioned. The ranked lists were then returned to the participants to gain consensus, which Haack et al. (2020) describe as an agreement of the propriety beliefs of the participants.

Final stage: In the last stage, the participants indicated their agreement with the lists of attributes and the consequences derived during the preceding rounds. Constructs that were excluded from the list, and which were raised by participants when evaluating the list in round two, were highlighted to be resolved during the following focus group discussion. Data analysis during the final stage concurred with the process followed for the previous round.

The process is outlined in Figure 10 below.

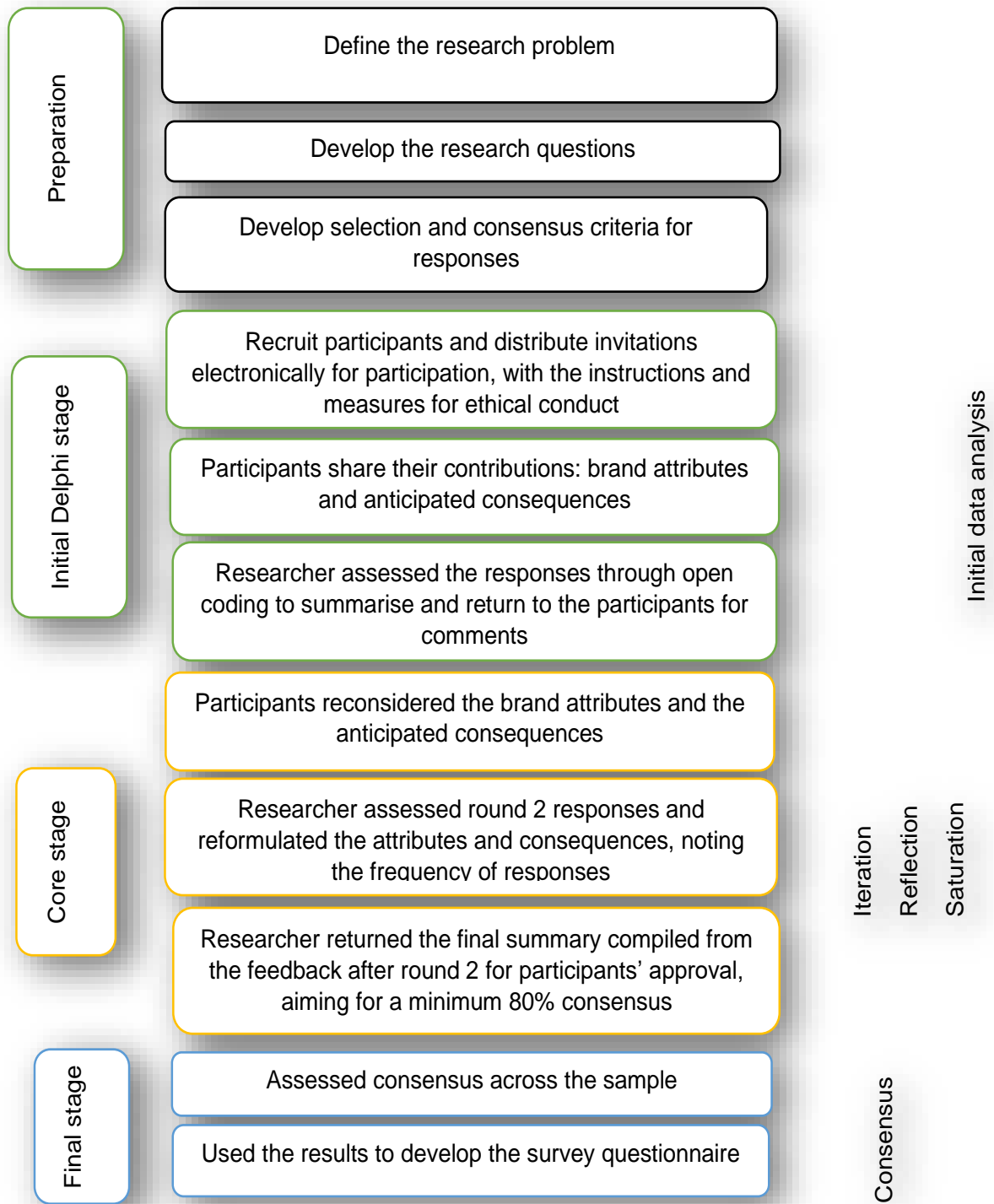


Figure 10: The Delphi Process

Source: Researcher's modified version of the diagram of Sobaih et al. (2012, pg. 891)

5.6.5.2 Online focus group discussion

On completion of round three of the Delphi process, an online focus group discussion was held. Scholars (Lobe & Morgan, 2021; Matthews et al., 2018; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017; Wilkerson et al., 2014) recommend the use of online focus groups for their flexibility in accommodating participants that would be difficult to reach and are located in different geographical locations, which would mean that it would be difficult to bring them into a central location. The prospective participants were recruited from the researcher's contact list, excluding close contacts and family members, and including colleagues, former classmates, and referrals from prospective participants, using WhatsApp messaging, as it is an efficient method to convey a message and check if the message was read.

Prospective participants were recruited using WhatsApp based on the following features as reflected in a desktop exercise and the researcher's experience:

- Ability to broadcast a single message to multiple users.
- Ability to backup chats.
- Ability to share documents.
- Ability to readily determine if a message has been sent.
- The ability of the researcher to pin contacts for ease of access to chats with the respective participant.
- Ability to transfer files to and from a computer.

It was deemed important to commence with the recruitment of prospective participants in advance so that those who agreed to participate would have ample time to consider the request and avail themselves, as recommended by scholars (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). The online focus group discussion outline was shared via WhatsApp with 13 prospective participants, to ascertain that they met the criteria, were willing to participate and had access to the proposed Microsoft Teams online platform which would be used. Being an online focus group discussion, scholars (Lobe & Morgan, 2021; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017) stress the importance of informing participants of the online platform to be used in advance, to ascertain their ability to use the technology and determine bandwidth capabilities to ensure uninterrupted access. The Microsoft Teams online platform was proposed due to the following features, which were regarded essential for the credibility of the research:

- Opportunity for recording;
- Transcription possibility with identifiers and length of input per participant;
- Messaging opportunity on the chats feature, which is automatically stored for a referral;
- Compilation of an attendance register; and because
- It can be accessed on different electronic devices (cell phone, laptop, or tablet).

Only one focus group discussion with participants who met the same criteria as for the Delphi Technique was held. This was regarded as sufficient as the aim of the discussion was merely to confirm the findings obtained from the Delphi process. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) indicate that in instances where the question being answered is simple in nature, one focus group is regarded as sufficient. The questions posed in the focus group discussion merely required participants to indicate whether or not they agreed or disagreed with the attribute and consequence descriptors elicited as part of the Delphi process. The discussion was facilitated by the researcher, using the Microsoft Teams online platform. Because the study was premised in the context of a global crisis, the study used an online focus group discussion as it catered for any unforeseen lockdown restrictions which may be imposed at the time of data gathering because participants were not confined to the same geographical setting. The online meeting allowed flexibility in terms of the location of participants and the time of the discussion (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017).

Six questions directed the content of the focus group discussion, after the introduction and explanation of the purpose of the discussion, namely:

Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with the listed attributes?

Question 2: What are the top five characteristics that are of extreme importance to you, especially in a time of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, or the global recession which we encountered a few years ago? What would you say?

Question 3: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the list of provided benefits of the sought-after brand attributes.

Question 4: Please indicate the five most important benefits (consequences) that can be derived from legitimate brands that possess the preferred attributes.

Question 5: Please identify the least important benefits (consequences)

Question 6: Is there anything else that you feel the researcher should take into consideration?

5.6.6 Literature check

As previously stated, studies could not be found that had assessed a particular market sector's brand legitimacy inferences, particularly amid a global crisis, especially about a specific generational cohort. A literature review that focused on the brand preferences of the millennial generational cohort was undertaken as another confirmatory method to determine whether related evidence or any in/consistencies existed within the findings obtained in the Delphi process and online focus group discussion.

5.6.7 Data analysis

5.6.7.1. Delphi process

To achieve the required outcomes, inductive thematic analysis of the phase one data was performed, aiming to generate coherent themes that revealed related constructs, for inclusion in phase two of the study. Its use in this study was based on scholarly explanations of thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting themes within a data set (Ayikoru & Park, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Nowell et al. (2017) confirm that other scholars regard the method as an analytical process, which forms part of other methods, arguing that thematic analysis can be regarded as a qualitative research design method that can be used across a range of research questions and epistemologies.

The Delphi process incorporated a method triangulation analytical approach, as the process entailed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis (Farquhar et al., 2020). Thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify the listed constructs and then rank them, whereby the constructs most frequently mentioned, were retained for further evaluation in instances where too many attributes were listed for inclusion in the MEC matrices.

To maintain consistency in the data analysis and to concur with the thematic analysis research design, the researcher used Atlas.ti 22 software and the so-called apply coding feature, to code participants' responses. The software was used for qualitative data analysis as it is one of the most widely used and trusted qualitative research data analytical software (Paulus et al., 2017; Woods et al., 2016). A desktop exercise reflected that the software supports a variety of media types, comes with user support, and is regarded as user-friendly software.

Additionally, data obtained from the five-point Likert-type scale used in the Delphi process for the establishment of the level of consensus was analysed using the SPSS software. This enabled the researcher to calculate frequencies, mean scores, and standard deviations, and determination of minimum and maximum numbers ascribed by participants per descriptor.

5.6.7.2. Online focus group discussion

The micro-interlocutor analysis method for focus group discussions developed by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), in addition to the Atlas.ti 22 software, was used for the analysis of the findings from the online focus group discussion. The Atlas.ti 22 software was used to refer to the specific line in the transcription where a participant would have made a particular statement. For purposes of the analysis, this is reflected as the participant number: Atlas ti line. For example, where the researcher refers to a statement made by participant P1, whereby on Atlas.ti the statement is regarded as line 20, the analysis will reflect this (P1:20).

The micro-interlocutor analytical method, which has grown in traction amongst scholars (Agarchand & Laishram, 2017; Donaldson & Conway, 2015; Gabrielli et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019) was used because most focus group analysts use the group as the unit of analysis, although cautioning that a group analysis results in the exclusion and non-acknowledgment of individual contributions, or lack thereof. An individual analysis, therefore, allows the researcher to readily detect consensus or any dissenting views. They further argue that group analysis prevents the researcher from identifying whether or not individual participants' responses were based on conforming to the majority of the group's responses.

As done by Donaldson and Conway (2015), the micro-interlocutor analytical method implied:

- inclusion of parts of the verbatim statements made by participants;
- inclusion of the questions posed to participants;
- depicting information about participants who agreed; and.
- indicating information from participants who disagreed.

As part of the micro-interlocutor analytical method, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) recommend the use of a matrix as presented in Table 3 to individually plot each participant's response to each question. This analytical method was used to readily assist the researcher in determining whether or not there was consensus amongst participants and determining any peculiarities that participants may highlight (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Table 3: Matrix for assessing the level of consensus in focus group discussions

Focus group question	Member 1	Member 2	Member 3	Member ...
1				
2				
...				

Source: Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009)

Because the objective of the qualitative phase was to identify attributes (characteristics) and consequences (benefits), the matrix of Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), facilitated the identification of each participant's input. The matrix columns also distinguished participants' gender to possibly uncover other insights, e.g. possible gender differences. However, because such analysis would need to lead to generalisability, Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) suggest that, in addition to the verbatim statements, the researcher should indicate the proportion of participants who concede, as well as those who hold a dissenting view, carefully assessing any suggestions, using abbreviations to portray agreement, disagreement, significant information, or no response. These abbreviations were inserted in the matrix, following

significant statements made by each participant. The abbreviations suggested by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) are:

- A = Agreement
- D = Dissent
- SE = Provided a significant statement or example related to an agreement
- SD = Provided significant statement or example related to dissent
- NR = Neither indicated agreement nor dissent (i.e., non-responsive)

5.6.8. Data quality

5.6.8.1. Credibility

The credibility of the Delphi Technique rested on participants' return of their written responses to the researcher on time (Chang et al., 2020) to ensure that their responses were documented and captured verbatim, therefore mitigating any misinterpretations. The literature recommends that the researcher determines a "measure of group consensus" beforehand, which could range from 60% agreement among panellists, or the decision that less than 10% of the sample may deviate from the median in any direction for the results to be accepted (Donohoe & Needham, 2009). In Delphi, the percentage of agreement is particularly important: certain studies recommend a very explicit percentage cut-off point at the start of the study, for example, 80% consensus (Paraskevas & Saunders, 2012). Accordingly, this study specified an 80% consensus level for the final Delphi stage results beforehand.

The credibility of the online focus group discussion rested on the recording of the discussions after the completion of the discussions. This allowed the researcher to reflect on her interpretation of the discussions and revert to the discussion to ensure that there were no misrepresentations of what had been discussed. The MS Teams platform enabled participants to provide written responses on the group chat, enabling a transcription as the discussion was taking place.

5.6.8.2 Transferability

The transferability of the research was obtained through purposive sampling, i.e., targeting millennials who are employed and who have experience with clothing purchases. Because the study identified the millennial consumer cohort as the target population, it is unlikely that the findings of the research will be transferable to other age groups, although it is anticipated that the findings will be transferable to other research settings where researchers attempt to understand millennials' consumption choices.

5.6.8.3 Dependability

The dependability of the qualitative phase of the study was obtained utilising the incorporation of successive rounds of the Delphi questionnaire until consensus was reached amongst participants.

The conclusions from the online focus group discussion are regarded as dependable as the discussion was recorded, and transcribed, and in most instances, participants provided written responses. All these activities allowed for the creation of an audit trail. Moreover, the focus group discussion was part of a triangulation process in which most findings replicated those from the Delphi process.

5.6.8.4. Confirmability

The core stage of the Delphi technique was designed to accommodate multiple iterations (Bohn & Kundisch, 2020) as a means for construct validation (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004), which was key in ensuring that the researcher was able to demonstrate that the findings accurately represented the views of the participants. The core stage of the Delphi technique allowed participants to respond to the researcher, indicating their agreement with the researcher's interpretation of their submissions (Sobaih et al., 2012). Additionally, responses for all three Delphi rounds were submitted in writing, via email by the respective participants.

Results from the online focus group discussion are considered confirmable because participants provided their responses via the MS Teams chat messaging feature, which left no room for the researcher to make any changes. The researcher also recorded (with permission) the discussion, and transcribed the discussion verbatim. The recording has been stored in an electronic format, in a protected folder if needed for any future inquiry.

5.7 Phase two: The quantitative research phase

5.7.1 Overview

The quantitative phase implemented the Association Pattern Technique (APT) of Ter Hofstede et al. (1998), which was designed to respond to the research objectives for phase two of the study as outlined in section 5.2 of the research methodology. For this phase, the MEC adopted a descriptive, quantitative research design. The approach was used to identify the most important brand attributes from a list of attributes that represented participants' responses in phase one, and to link them with anticipated consequences identified in phase one of the

study, subsequently making a final link with the relevant values in the form of a hierarchical value map (HVM), which is a crucial element of the APT. The matrices that were developed in phase two, are shown in Appendix 10, starting with an attribute-consequence (AC) matrix, and a consequence-consequence (CC) matrix. Similarly, the consequences (C) derived from the brand attributes obtained in the qualitative phase, were linked to relevant, predominant personal values (V) identified by the participants to develop a consequence-value (CV) matrix, incorporating the personal values of Schwartz (1992).

- All three matrices (AC, CC & CV) were presented to the participants in a survey questionnaire designed on Qualtrics XM, a widely used survey platform (Carpenter et al., 2019), that has been used very successfully in a similar recent study (Diedericks, 2019). Participants made linkages per instruction for the various matrices. A desktop assessment of the platform reflected features that would be beneficial to the data collection and analysis of results, i.e.:
- A real-time view of responses as they are completed;
- Ease of use for participants;
- Ability to share and complete the survey on various devices (cell phone, laptop, WhatsApp, etc);
- The ability to create matrices as required for making linkages;
- The ability to export and import data to and from the excel spreadsheet for analysis;
- The ability to readily view frequencies and percentages of linkages made between variables.

Whilst the MEC approach involved a quantitative phase, it should be noted that no hypotheses were generated, because neither the MEC approach nor the study objectives sought to determine the strength or impact of the relationship between variables as is the purpose when posing hypotheses in research (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007). Additionally, the study entailed an open line of inquiry, because existing literature is not yet clear about brand attributes and personal values that drive millennial consumers' clothing brand consumption decisions amid a global crisis. The researcher therefore could not infer any hypotheses. The quantitative aspects of the MEC technique were based on the data collection instrument (survey questionnaire) and data analysis methods used. As shown later in this chapter, the data analysis entailed descriptive statistics by way of assessing frequencies for constructing the hierarchical value maps, to reflect the strength of associations, but did not involve any tests of statistical significance.

5.7.2 Design of the survey questionnaire

The Association Pattern Technique (APT), developed by Ter Hofstede et al. (1998) is a hard laddering technique that follows a quantitative approach that can separately measure the links

between attributes-consequences and between consequences-values (Ter Hofstede et al., 1998). It ideally involves a three-step abstraction of attributes, consequences, and values (A-C-V). It has been commended for its efficiency in obtaining a means-end chain (Reynolds, 2006) as well as its ability to be used in large quantitative surveys that require representative samples (Ter Hofstede et al., 1998). The APT has been found to satisfy validity and reliability requirements, keeping the interviewer free from bias toward participants' responses (Botschen et al., 1999; Park et al., 2020).

As shown in Figure 8, MEC (Gutman, 1982) considers both abstract and concrete attributes, consequences, and values. On this basis, six steps of abstraction can be carried out (AA, CC, VV) according to Ter Hofstede et al. (1998) when using the APT. Scholars have however mostly advocated for the need to develop an additional consequence-consequence linkage (CC) to the basic AC, CV elicitation. This is to address the issue when a participant initially links a consequence to another consequence (CC), before linking the consequence to an underlying personal value, which produces a consequence-consequence (CC) association (Diedericks et al., 2020; Reynolds, 2006). The need for the inclusion of more levels was also recommended by Ter Hofstede et al. (1998) as they envisaged that the APT could be criticised for providing a simplified representation of the MEC by only considering linkages between adjoining levels (AC and CV). It was, however, contemplated by other scholars (Chiu, 2005) as well as Ter Hofstede et al. (1998) that the inclusion of an additional level may burden participants, and reduce the response rate. This has, however, not been tested (Schauerte, 2009; Ter Hofstede et al., 1998), and also taking into account scholars' critique of the basic APT, this study proceeded with a four-level APT approach, similar to previous APT studies (Diedericks, 2019; Kwon et al., 2015; Schauerte, 2009).

As indicated above, the survey was designed using the Qualtrics XM platform. The cover page of the survey provided an introduction to the study, along with the consent form. The first three sections of the questionnaire required participants to indicate their demographic information (gender, year of birth, annual income, and province of residence). The survey was designed to exclude participants who did not meet the pre-selection criteria of the year of birth, annual income, and the province of residence. This was achieved by placing a 'none of these' option which, if chosen, automatically took the participant out of the survey. This ensured that only contributions of participants who met the pre-requisites for the survey were captured. Following the completion of the demographic questions, participants were required to choose between three and seven attributes from a list of twelve attributes obtained in phase one of the study. The requirement for three to seven attributes is based on the concept of an evoked set, where it is believed that when making a buying decision, consumers generally take into consideration a relatively small number of alternative brands based on the information they

have at their disposal (Gronhaug, 1973). Thus three to seven choices were regarded as sufficient due to the uncertainty brought about by a global crisis (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Sheth, 2020). Figure 11 presents a summary of the APT process.

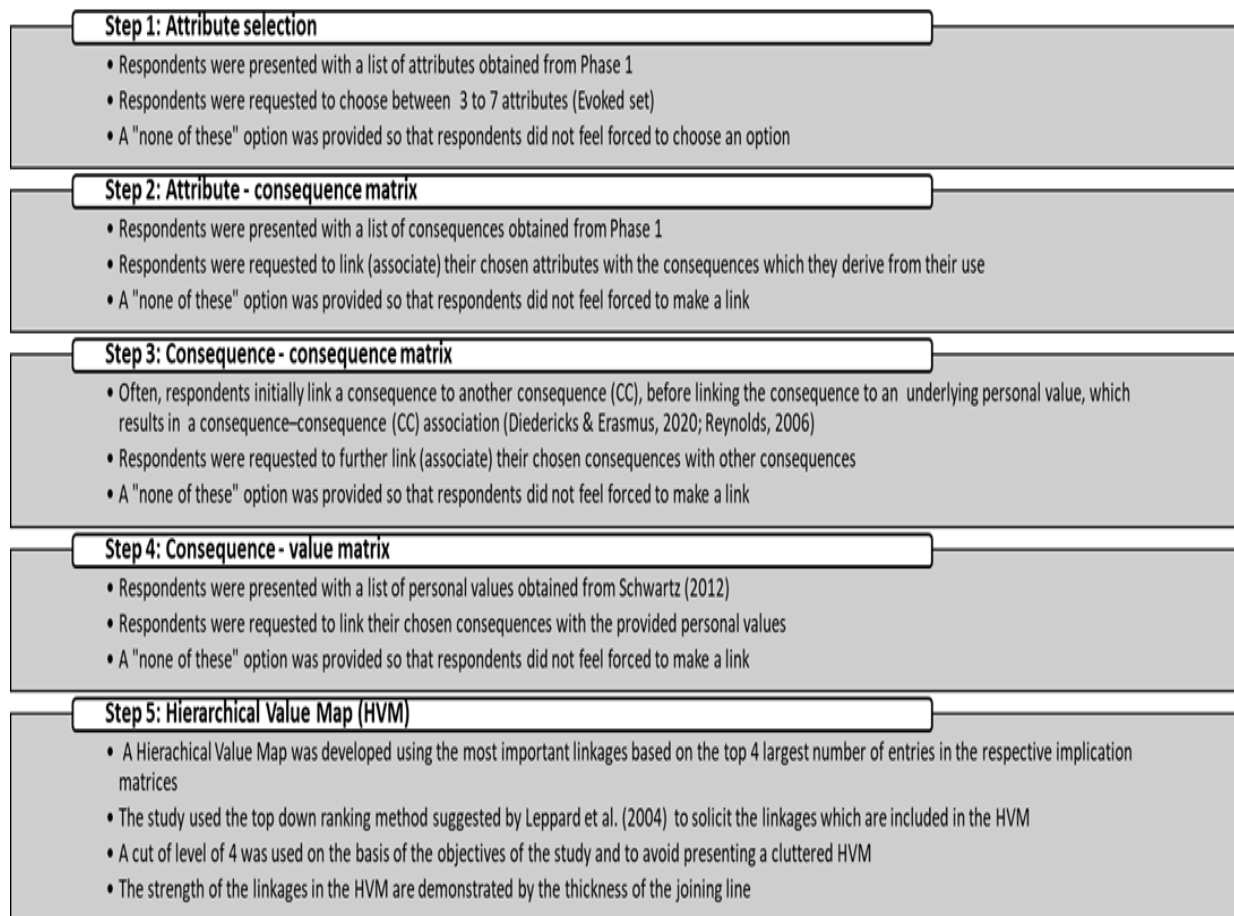


Figure 11: The Association Pattern Technique

Source: Researcher’s interpretation

The completion of the survey entailed three steps:

Step 1: Compilation of the attribute-consequences matrix (AC matrix)

The attributes-consequences linkage is the first link determined with the APT, by establishing an attribute-consequence (AC) matrix, which is also referred to as an implication matrix, as it shows the implication of a chosen attribute with a consequence (Diedericks et al., 2020). The AC-matrix for this study is illustrated in Table 4, using attributes and consequences derived from phase one of the data collection process produced by the Delphi-Technique, plus inputs from the online focus group discussion, as well as existing literature. The AC matrix is designed so that the attributes associated with the phenomenon are listed in the rows, vertically, whilst the consequences are listed in the columns, horizontally (Ter Hofstede et al., 1998). Participants developed an association between the attributes and consequences by

linking an attribute with a consequence from left to right. In this instance, a participant could, for example, link the attribute " well-known brand" with the consequence "worth the money."

In step 1, in this study, participants received instructions to select five to seven attributes that they considered relevant and to link those attributes with the relevant consequences. The far-right hand column of every matrix specified "none of these" to ensure that participants did not feel forced to make a link.

Table 4: Attribute - Consequence matrix

1. A legitimate clothing brand is ↓ 2. This means to me →	Durability	Status	Exclusivity	Enhanced Confidence	Comfort	Makes me feel good	Expression of my identity	Value for money	Upliftment of local designers	Speedy delivery	Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	Makes me look good	None of these
A brand that suggests the use of quality materials													
A brand that offers unique style													
A brand that is affordable													
A brand that fits my body well													
A brand that looks expensive due to premium quality													
A brand that is fashionable													
A brand that is versatile for different occasions													
A brand that is locally produced													
A brand I can identify with													
A brand that is made from sustainable (environmentally friendly) materials													
A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends													
A brand that is accessible													

Source: Researcher's adaption of Lee et al. (2014) using attributes and consequences identified during phase 1 of the study

Step 2: Compilation of the consequence-consequence matrix (CC matrix)

The second step of the APT involved the establishment of a consequence-consequence (CC) matrix. As explained above, the consequence-consequence link did not form part of the seminal development of the APT of Ter Hofstede et al. (1998). However, the authors as well as subsequent studies that have implemented the technique before, concluded that the non-inclusion of this link created limitations for their studies, negatively impacting the validity of their research findings (Chiu, 2005; Phillips & Reynolds, 2009). Therefore, Ter Hofstede et al. (1998) recommended that the additional matrix should contain the same concepts (consequences) in both the vertical rows and horizontal columns, although cautioning participants that they cannot link similar constructs, for example, QUALITY and QUALITY. Therefore, the CC matrix developed in this study maintained the same consequences in both rows and columns, but unlike Schauerte (2009), the corresponding consequences could not be blacked out on the survey platform. To mitigate the shortcoming, participants were requested to not choose the same consequence, because a consequence cannot lead to itself. It was decided that in instances where a participant nevertheless linked similar consequences; those responses would be disregarded when analysing the implication matrices. The CC matrix for this study was designed as indicated in Table 5.

It should be noted that for every participant, only the consequences indicated in step 1, were to be listed on the left-hand side vertically for completion of step 2, while all the consequences obtained in the qualitative phase were to be listed horizontally, in the columns. Similar to the AC matrix, the CC matrix was read from left to right, requiring participants to link a consequence with another consequence.

Table 5: Consequence - Consequence matrix

1. This benefit ↓ 2. Means to me →	Durability	Status	Exclusivity	Enhanced Confidence	Comfort	Makes me feel good	Expression of my identity	Value for money	Upliftment of local designers	Speedy delivery	Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	Makes me look good	None of these
Durability	■												
Status		■											
Exclusivity			■										
Enhanced Confidence				■									
Comfort					■								
Makes me feel good						■							
Expression of my identity							■						
Value for money								■					
Upliftment of local designers									■				
Speedy delivery										■			
Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs											■		
Makes me look good												■	

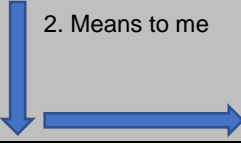
Source: Researcher's adaption of Lee et al. (2014) using consequences derived from Phase 1 of the study

Step 3: Compilation of the consequence-value matrix (CV matrix)

Step 3, which was the final step of the APT, involved the development of a consequence-value (CV) matrix, using consequences derived from the qualitative phase of the data collection process. The values, however, were derived from value typologies found in literature as is the case with Association Pattern Technique studies (Diedericks et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2014). The reason is, that scholars deem values as being universal (Diedericks et al., 2020; Vriens & Ter Hofstede, 2000), and therefore have either used the value typologies from Schwartz (1992) or List of Values (LOV) by Kahle et al. (1986). Because the value typologies presented by Schwartz et al. (2012) have been cross-culturally validated (Lee et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2017) and experimented with in over 200 samples in over 60 countries (Lee et al., 2014), this study used Schwartz's ten value typology for purposes of developing the consequence-value (CV-matrix). The CV matrix is shown in Table 6, which incorporates Schwartz's ten-value typology. Although Schwartz's Value Typology was later refined to 19 types, it should be reminded that the additional nine values are a mere breakdown of some of the values in the previous typology, and not necessarily an addition of overall new value types. On this basis, this study used the ten-value typology (Schwartz, 1994) which is more practical to implement in a MEC study (Diedericks, 2019). It was reasoned that the inclusion of 19 values may have resulted in participant dropout as it would have been more difficult to complete the questionnaire, and participants may have regarded the exercise as being too lengthy and time-consuming. Using the 19 values would have complicated the development of the HVMs, which would have compromised the reliability of the findings. It should be noted that, despite the existence of a refined 19-value typology, MEC studies have, without exception, opted to use the ten-value typology of Schwartz.

In step 3, therefore, participants had to link the consequences that they had identified in step 2, with the ten values that were presented in the columns, horizontally, as depicted in Table 6.

Table 6: Consequence-value matrix

1. This benefit 2. Means to me 	Pleasure (Hedonism)	Independent in thought & action (self-direction)	Personal success (Achievement)	Safety & stability (Security)	Social status (Power)	Avoid upsetting others (Conformity)	Maintain cultural & religious traditions (Tradition)	Wanting to be challenged/ novel (Stimulation)	Caring for those close to you (Benevolence)	Consideration towards others & nature (Universalism)	None of these
Durability											
Status											
Exclusivity											
Enhanced Confidence											
Comfort											
Makes me feel good											
Expression of my identity											
Value for money											
Upliftment of local designers											
Speedy delivery											
Upliftment and expansion of sustainable designs											
Makes me look good											

Source: Researcher's adaption of Lee et al. (2014) using consequences derived from Phase 1 of the study and personal values from (Schwartz, 1992)

5.7.3 Envisaged completion of the questionnaire

The introductory screen presented an explanation of the study, prerequisites for participation, an explanation for the use of the progress bar while continuing the different questions, all ethical statements as explained in section 5.8, as well as the contact details of the student and the supervisors.

Question 1 presented the demographic questions, concerning the year of birth, gender, province of residence, and monthly household income to eventually describe the profile of the sample and to initially consider the intentional recruitment of additional participants where certain demographic sub-segments were not well represented to ensure a more balanced outcome. Completion of every matrix was compulsory, and participants were not able to proceed to the next screen unless a matrix had been completed fully.

Question 2 of the questionnaire presented the same request to every participant, with the AC matrix comprising all the attributes organised vertically in different rows and the a-priori-defined consequences derived from the previous phase, horizontally for the columns, at the top. The attributes and the consequences were derived from phase 1. A column labelled "none of these" was included on the far right-hand side to make provision for participants whose cognitive links differed from the options presented to ensure that they did not feel forced to exercise an option that they did not agree with (Reynolds, 2006). Participants were asked to select between three to seven important attributes from the list and could indicate one or more cognitive links for each attribute to the consequences, producing so-called "forked" answers. When choosing the option "none of these", the other consequences were deactivated for that row.

Question 3 presented a CC matrix, as done in the study conducted by Schauerte (2009), and recommended in the seminal work of Ter Hofstede et al. (1998). The CC matrix presented customised rows vertically for each participant based on the individual's responses in the previous AC matrix (hence only listing the consequences that individuals had selected in the previous screen). The horizontal columns contained all the consequences as was done in the previous AC matrix, plus the "none of these" option. This matrix has been proven to be very successful in previous studies (Diedericks, 2019; Reynolds, 2006), also negating critique related to a three-level hierarchical structure.

Question 4 presented the final CV matrix, including a customised list of consequences (C) derived from the individual's preceding AC and CC matrices vertically, in the rows, and the

values, horizontally (V), in the columns. Schwartz's basic human values were displayed in the value columns, again including the "none of these" option. For the sake of clarity, the wording for the values in Schwartz's value typology was slightly modified to make the constructs more understandable, hence using synonyms that participants may be more familiar with, for example, hedonism/pleasure (Diedericks, 2019).

5.7.4 Sample, sampling, and data collection

Similar to phase one of the study, data collection in phase two commenced when ethical clearance approval was received from the Ethics Committee (Appendix 11).

In phase two, millennials were targeted in the same way as in phase one. The survey questionnaire was pre-tested with ten people who met the criteria for inclusion in the research beforehand, to ensure that the questionnaire was understandable and easy to complete.

Data for the final round was initially collected by distributing an online survey questionnaire, using a snowballing data collection method. Participants were initially recruited through referrals, and social media platforms such as the researcher's Facebook, Facebook Messenger, and LinkedIn pages. Some participants assisted to share the survey on their respective social media pages and WhatsApp groups. Additionally, the researcher approached employees from organisations to assist with the completion of the survey and further distribution. To secure a sizable sample, the researcher then solicited the assistance of Consulta (Pty) Ltd, a market research firm with 24 years of market research experience. Part of their service offerings includes customer experience studies that aim to provide a deeper understanding of consumers' behaviour, which is central to the purpose of this study. The firm had at its disposal technologies that ensured that a participant only participates once, as well as resources to track the completion of responses whilst also sending reminders, offered live viewing of results, and possessed a millennial database. Initially, the researcher had contracted with the company to piggyback off the Verint online platform, which Consulta (Pty) Ltd is licensed with, to design and distribute the survey to the millennial population across South Africa. However, during the survey design, it was found that the Verint platform had deficiencies, which if left unattended, would have adversely impacted the validity of the research. Noting this concern, it was agreed that the research firm would assist with the distribution of the survey link that the researcher had generated using the Qualtrics XM survey platform. The agreement was that the research firm would monitor feedback from participants who received a link to the study, which was administered on the Qualtrics XM online survey tool. The contract with the company, which honoured the confidentiality of the study, is presented in Appendix 9. The design of the survey using the Qualtrics XM platform is provided in Appendix 10.

This phase only implied a single round and generated a sample of 350 participants from various provinces across South Africa. This sample size (N = 350) was considered sufficient, considering that other MEC studies had relied on smaller sample sizes (N = 100) (Ha & Jang, 2013; Langbroek & De Beuckelaer, 2007; Vannoppen et al., 2001); N = 180 (López-Mosquera & Sánchez, 2011); N = 200 (Orsingher et al., 2011).

5.7.5 Data analysis

The data analysis for the quantitative phase commenced with a data clean-up process which was executed with the following conditions:

- The study purposely targeted millennial consumers born between 1980 and 1999. Responses from persons who fell outside the birth year specification were discarded.
- Because the study is set in South Africa, only responses from persons residing in South Africa were considered.
- Incomplete matrices were discarded and not considered for analysis to protect the validity of the research findings.
- Persons who opted to not choose any of the provided attributes were not included as part of the data.

The data analysis was processed per the following steps.

Step 1: Constructing implication matrices with frequencies

The first step in the data analysis phase of the APT involved the construction of implication matrices which provided summaries of all the frequencies (the number of times each element led to every other element in the same row of links) in a matrix format (Bolzani, 2018; Orsingher et al., 2011). This implication matrix was constructed by using participants' data, representing the numbers of associations between attribute–consequence (AC) consequence–consequence (CC), and consequence–value (CV). Similar to other studies (Diedricks, 2019; Lee et al., 2014; Schauerte, 2009), Microsoft Excel and SPSS were used for the development of the summary implication matrices. A feature on the Qualtrics XM platform allowed for the exportation of the data into an Excel spreadsheet, outlining the text choices of participants.

Step 2: Development of a hierarchical value map (HVM)

The second step involved the development of a hierarchical value map (HVM), which is a visual presentation of the relationship between the attributes, consequences, and values that participants have indicated (Amatulli & Guido, 2011). Reynolds and Gutman (1988), describe the HVM as a tree diagram mapping an individual's thought process across different levels of abstraction. As was done in previous studies (Diedricks, 2019; Lee et al., 2014) the HVM was

computed using Microsoft PowerPoint. Figure 12, is an example of an HVM extracted from the study by Lee et al. (2014) who sought to understand the personal values that drive Chinese consumers' consumption behaviour of healthy drinks.

The HVM was constructed from the information contained in the implication matrices outlined in step 1. Before the development of an HVM, scholars (Lee et al., 2014; Leppard et al., 2004; Lin et al., 2020; Reynolds, 2006) concede that the researcher must first determine a cut-off level for the information to be contained in the map. In this regard, the cut-off level reflects the threshold for the number of links to be included in the HVM. Although there is no exact science on what the cut-off level should be Leppard et al. (2004) explain that a high cut-off level may provide a simplified map as only a few linkages will be illustrated, with the possibility of omitting useful information. Whilst a low cut-off level may result in a complicated HVM which may be difficult to analyse and interpret. This study used the top-down ranking method proposed by Leppard et al. (2004) to guide which links to include in the HVM and to reflect the strength of the links. Essentially, this method is based on an assumption that the most important linkages are those with the largest number of entries in the respective implication matrices. Therefore, the rank order of frequencies is used to illustrate the importance.

As such, the most prominent links that were distinguished by participants were used to structure the hierarchical value map (HVM), but only the strongest links, based on the highest frequencies, formed part of the HVM (Barrena et al., 2017). Inclusion in the HVM was therefore determined by a cut-off level of 4 for the frequencies, i.e. the point at which the researcher chose to exclude certain aspects due to non-significance, based on low frequencies. Leppard et al. (2004) argued that there is no rule of thumb concerning what the cut-off level should be and that researchers should base their decision on the aim of the research. Because this study aimed to determine the most pertinent attributes and prevalent personal values which drive millennial consumers' legitimacy judgements, the cut-off line was based on the strongest linkages as weak links would not significantly contribute to the outcome of the study. If, on the contrary, the study had aimed to assess product attributes and personal values that are least prominent in consumer decision-making to simplify marketers' strategies, then those linkages with the lower frequencies would have been noteworthy. Caution was exercised when choosing the cut-off level for the links that are included in the HVM, as a very high cut-off level would discard too much information, resulting in a very simple HVM. On the contrary, a low cut-off level would include more information but would have produced an HVM that is too complex (López-Mosquera & Sánchez, 2011). On this basis, the researcher was guided by the data, deciding on a cut-off level of four as being sufficient.

For the HVM, the concepts were linked with lines that indicated the associations made by the participants, with the line width indicating the strength of the association (Wagner, 2007). Looking at Figure 12 below, the HVM was constructed based on a three-layer level of abstraction, i.e., attributes, consequences, and values. Those links with the dashed lines indicate a weaker (30%) linkage with the next level of abstraction, while the bolded thick lines indicate a strong linkage. In this instance, the attribute "well-known brands" is strongly linked with the consequence "food safety", whilst the attribute "imported" drink is weakly linked with the consequence "food safety".

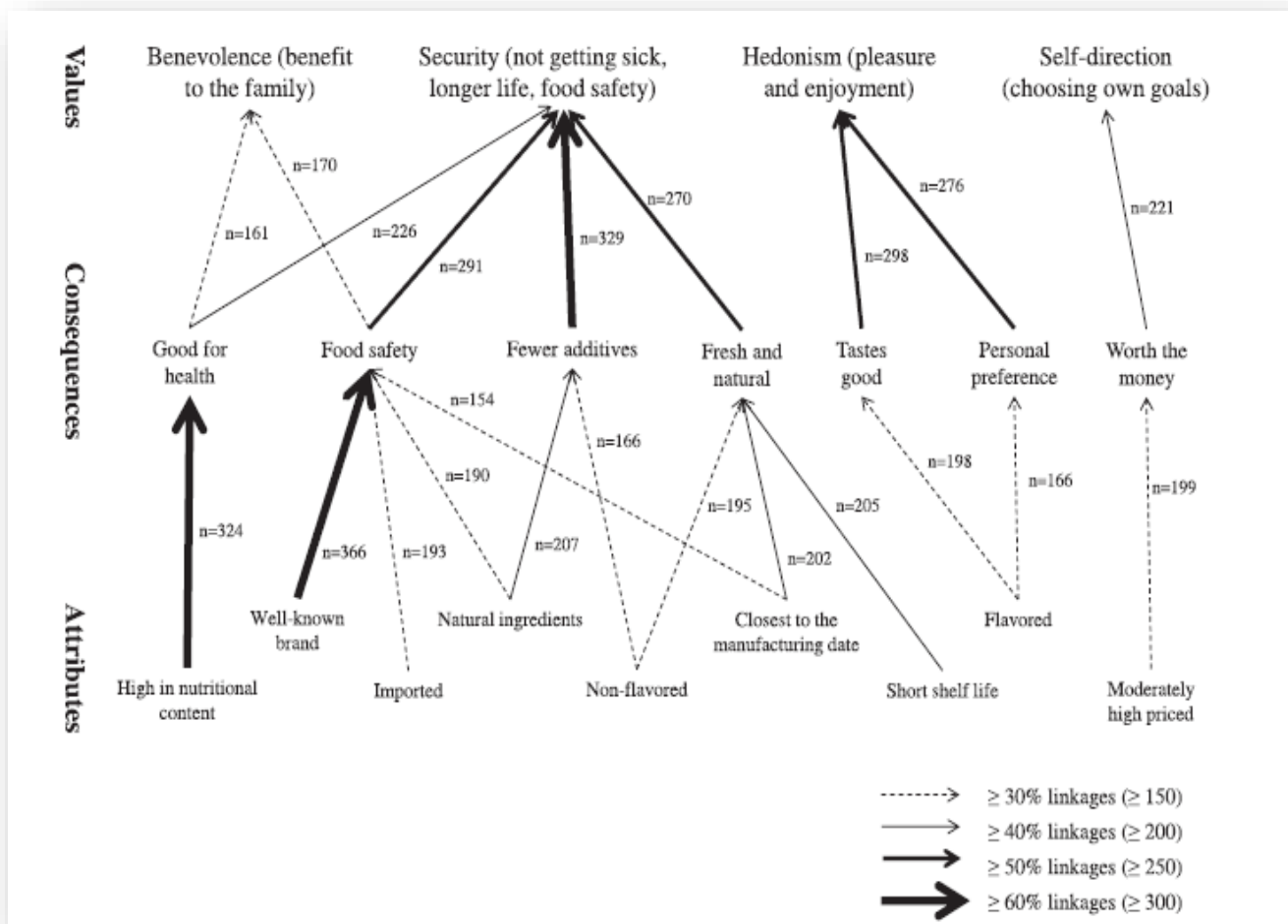


Figure 12: Example of a Hierarchical Value Map

Source: (Lee et al., 2014)

However, the consequence "food safety" has a moderately strong (50%) link with the value "security", whilst the consequence "fewer additives" has a stronger (60%) link with the value "security". Therefore, the HVM reflects to marketers and company owners who wish to venture into the health drink sector, that Chinese consumers value the security – not getting sick, longer life - brought about by the consumption of health drinks. Thus, an organisation that wishes to market a new health drink to the Chinese market, would need to ensure that the drink accentuates aspects related to security. This is also shown by the fact that 4 out of the 7 consequences are linked to the value of security. From a MEC perspective, the HVM shows that health drink attributes of a "well-known brand" are used as a means to be aligned with the personal value of "security", which is important for marketers to be aware of.

Because the proposed study comprised of a consequence-consequence (CC) level of abstraction, the HVM was constructed as demonstrated in Figure 13.

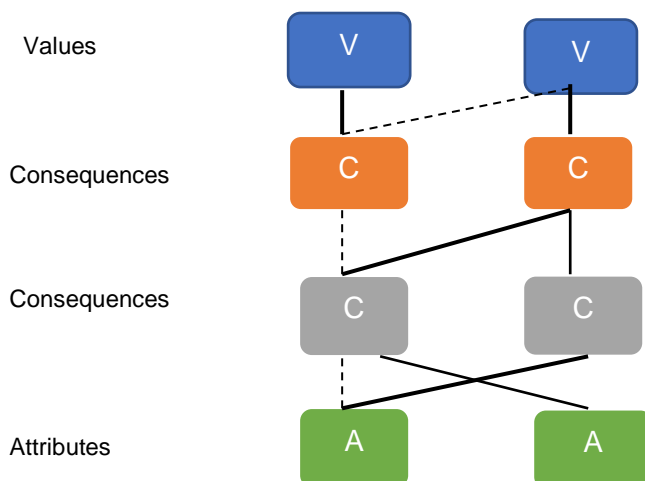


Figure 13: Example of an HVM with an added level of abstraction

Source: Researcher's illustration based on the proposed study context

As was done by Phillips and Reynolds (2009), attributes were linked to the first list of consequences indicated by participants, which provided reasons for why the chosen attributes were important. These consequences were then linked to the second list of consequences which participants provided as reasons of importance for previous consequences. The second set of consequences were then linked to the respective personal values of Schwartz (2012).

5.7.6. Data quality

The APT is a self-regulating process because individuals recognise linkages on their own and are not forced to recognise characteristics that they cannot relate to, hence the inclusion of a column labelled 'none of these' for each matrix so that nobody was forced to exercise a decision. Therefore, mechanisms to address the data quality aspects of validity, reliability, and bias were incorporated into the APT.

5.7.6.1. Bias

The APT is designed to directly capture participant information, leaving no room for the researcher to make any adjustments to the links that had been made. The implication matrices that were provided to participants were pre-populated with attributes, consequences, and values based on participants' responses, thus the researcher only analysed what was provided at face value.

5.7.6.2. Validity and reliability

For validity and reliability, participant's responses in phase 1 were compared to literature and existing attribute scales (Carayon et al., 2006) to allow the researcher to add additional attributes and consequences that the participants may not have included in their responses for the second round. This was returned to the participants to review where after the focus group discussion presented another opportunity to verify the constructs for inclusion in the APT. Due to how the APT is designed, the findings will have high internal validity as the researcher had little control over the outcomes of the study (Chaplin et al., 2018). It will have high external validity as the results are based on actual events in the real world.

5.7.7. Limitations

The following limitations of the methodology are acknowledged:

- Because the researcher relied on technology to reach participants, she had no control over the distractions where participants were completing the questionnaire. An estimated time of 15 minutes for completion of the questionnaire was indicated so that participants would be at ease when starting the survey, using the progress bar to indicate the status of completion of the survey.
- The use of social media platforms to recruit participants meant that the researcher had no control over who received the questionnaire. The survey questionnaire provided

'none of these' options for instances where participants did not meet the participation criteria. These were discarded from the sample set.

- The researcher aimed to recruit participants across a broad geographic area across South Africa but had no control over who eventually willingly completed the survey.

5.8. Ethical conduct

Ethical conduct throughout the study followed the framework of Arnold (2021), who provided five core normative values, which research papers must comply with, namely, honesty, fairness, openness, objectivity, and accountability. From the onset, the researcher understood that ethical conduct was required for the entire research process and as such committed to abiding to research ethical codes.

As seen in the questionnaires provided in Appendices 2, 7, and 9, the researcher thoroughly informed participants of the purpose of the study, before they provided informed consent. In this regard, before commencing the qualitative and quantitative data collection processes, participants were informed that they had to give consent that the information they shared may be used as part of a dataset that would be analysed for academic research purposes as part of a Doctoral degree. Participants were informed that by agreeing to participate, it was assumed that they willingly agreed to take part in the research.

Participants were informed about what was expected of them, clearly indicating that:

- Every willing participant in the Delphi phase had to commit to complete all three subsequent rounds of investigation which would take approximately ten minutes to complete per round. It was explained that only completed data sets (of all three rounds) would be eligible for inclusion in the final study. However, participants were informed that should they choose to opt out later, there would be no penalty/consequences to be concerned about.
- During the Delphi phase, instructions were sent out for every round approximately ten days after the completion of the preceding round. Every round took approximately ten minutes to complete and had to be submitted to the researcher within two days.
- Participants were informed that their contributions were highly valued and that there were no right or wrong answers. They were requested to provide honest insights on the subject.
- Participants were informed that all information shared in the survey, would remain confidential, and anonymous.

- Participants were informed that only aggregate data would be used in the end and that it would not be possible to trace a specific contribution to the individual who shared the information.
- No participant benefited directly, financially or otherwise, from participating in this research.
- No personal details were stored. Rather, codes were assigned to electronic responses to link respective contributions.
- The aggregate data was analysed and reported as part of an academic thesis.
- Under the Protection of Personal Information Act, the information provided by participants will only be used for purposes of this study

5.9. Data storage

The data gathered in both phases have been stored in a password-protected file on a computer to which only the researcher has access. To mitigate against the loss of data, the data has been stored on iCloud, which is a cloud storage that enables lifetime and secure access to stored information. Such an application is key for maintaining the integrity of the data collection and data analysis.

The research findings are split between two chapters, namely chapter 6 which presents the results of the qualitative phase, and chapter 7 which presents the quantitative results.

Chapter 6: Research findings - Qualitative phase

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the research findings for phase one (qualitative phase) of the study. It starts with a description of the demographic characteristics of the participants and their response behaviour. The findings from the respective data collection methods is provided onwards from section 6.2.3.1.

Phase one of the research, namely the qualitative phase, commenced on receipt of ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee (Appendix 1), and was conducted with the following research objectives:

- To identify the sought-after attributes of clothing brand attributes that millennials considered legitimate on the clothing retail scene in terms of deserving their support, amid the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic.
- To identify the consequences that millennials expected to derive from the preferred attributes of clothing brands that they considered legitimate and worthy of support (therefore the reasons for brand attributes that they have identified).

The Classical Delphi-Technique was implemented to elicit the list of attributes and consequences of clothing brands used by millennial consumers in inferring legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid a global crisis such as the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic. E-communication methods, namely email, messenger, and WhatsApp were used throughout all the Delphi rounds, ensuring the anonymity of participants' contributions as they were coded from the start rather than using names as identifiers, which is an advantage of the Delphi technique (Graefe & Armstrong, 2011; Green et al., 1990; Paraskevas & Saunders, 2012; Park & Kim, 2017; Pfleegor et al., 2019), as well as to maintain the conditions outlined in the consent form that participants had signed beforehand. The Delphi process took place over three consecutive rounds. For triangulation and data saturation purposes, the Delphi process was followed by an online focus group discussion, as well as an analysis of existing attribute and consequence descriptors found in literature, to enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

6.2 The Delphi process

6.2.1 The participants

As explained in Chapter 5, of the 90 participants contacted across South Africa, only 50 eventually completed all three rounds of the Delphi process. Most participants were from Gauteng Province, which is regarded as the most urbanised, populous province in South Africa comprising the highest number of millennials in the country (Statistics South Africa, 2018).

6.2.2. Cross-sectional data collection process

The qualitative data collection phase was launched once prospective participants had confirmed their participation. Despite being collected over three rounds, the data collected is cross-sectional in nature because responses and subsequent feedback were limited to approximately 12 days per round. Data collection for all three rounds took approximately one month to complete, starting 1 March 2022 with the last response received on 3 April 2022. Special care was taken to ensure that participants met the sample criteria, that they had responded to all the questions, and to allow thorough analysis and detailed feedback for subsequent rounds. Participants' response rates were captured in an Excel spreadsheet, which was exported into SPSS to determine the average number of days taken to respond to each round, the frequency of people who took a specified number of days to respond, and their corresponding representation of the sample size (Appendix 6). Although a total of 53, and then 52 participants completed round one and round two of the Delphi process respectively, the researcher only exported information on the timeframe it took the 50 participants who completed all three rounds into SPSS, as only participant information of those who completed all three rounds were considered for analysis per the preconditions for the Delphi process. This is reflected in Table 7 below

Table 7: Participants' response time frame (days)

		Round_1	Round_2	Round_3
N	Valid	50	50	50
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		5.26	3.22	2.06
Minimum		0	0	0
Maximum		21	9	6

The researcher attributes the high average for round 1 to:

- Participants required time to become accustomed to what was required of them to do;
- Participants had to provide paragraphs/narratives with the requested information that they were not necessarily accustomed to doing;

- The survey questionnaire was launched on the 1st of March, which was a working day. Given that participation was limited to employed millennials, being a working day, may have caused time pressure.

The time required to respond was reduced to an average of around three days for round two. The researcher attributes this to the second round being distributed on a weekend when participants possibly had more time to devote to the task. Additionally, round two merely required three brief tasks from the participants, namely:

- An indication of whether or not they agreed with the provided list of attributes and consequences obtained in round 1 of the study;
- An indication of whether they wished to provide additional descriptors;
- An indication of whether they wished to remove any descriptor(s) from the provided list.

Therefore, round two was a relatively easy round to complete.

In round three, responses were received within approximately two days, possibly because:

- The task was relatively easy to complete: participants only needed to assign a number between 1 and 5 based on a 5-point Likert-type scale to the listed attributes and consequences;
- Participants, by this time, were well accustomed to the process and its requirements.
- The researcher continually makes follow-ups and sends reminders to all participants.

Table 7 shows that some of the participants indeed responded on the same day after receiving the request. The longest that it took a participant to respond to a round, was 21 days. This response was from participant D40, who preferred to only communicate through e-mail and did so infrequently. Her response time frame improved in subsequent rounds. The frequency tables per round are provided in Appendix 5.

6.2.3 Round one of the Delphi process

Invitations to participate in round one were sent out to 90 participants that had been secured through previous communications, to aid as a buffer in case some participants opted to drop out or took too long to respond. As is the case in most studies, not everyone that had confirmed to participate initially, ended up providing feedback. Some replied that they had not read the criteria properly and therefore did not meet the age criteria; or withdrew due to personal reasons. Others simply did not honour their commitment to respond in time, despite three reminders.

Round one of the qualitative phase was divided into two steps, as it required participants to provide both attributes and consequences for their choices. The introduction to the study, consent form, and questionnaire (Appendix 2), were sent to participants via email, and responses were also received via email, except for three participants who sent their responses via WhatsApp voice note, or WhatsApp messenger. The responses received via WhatsApp voice notes were transcribed. Because every participant's identity and personal information is supposed to be kept confidential and anonymous, as outlined in the consent form that they were given, each participant's response was coded 'D' and a number ranging from 1 to upwards. After one week, reminders were sent to all the participants. At the third failed attempt, it was deemed that the 53 responses received from 19 females and 34 males that had been secured at the time, would suffice as it met the sample size which was aimed for. This indicated a response rate of 58,8%. It was important for the researcher to ensure that all 53 of the participants in round one, would continue to respond in subsequent rounds, as this was key for establishing consensus as stipulated in the criteria for implementing the Delphi Technique (Park & Kim, 2017). The process is presented in Figure 14.

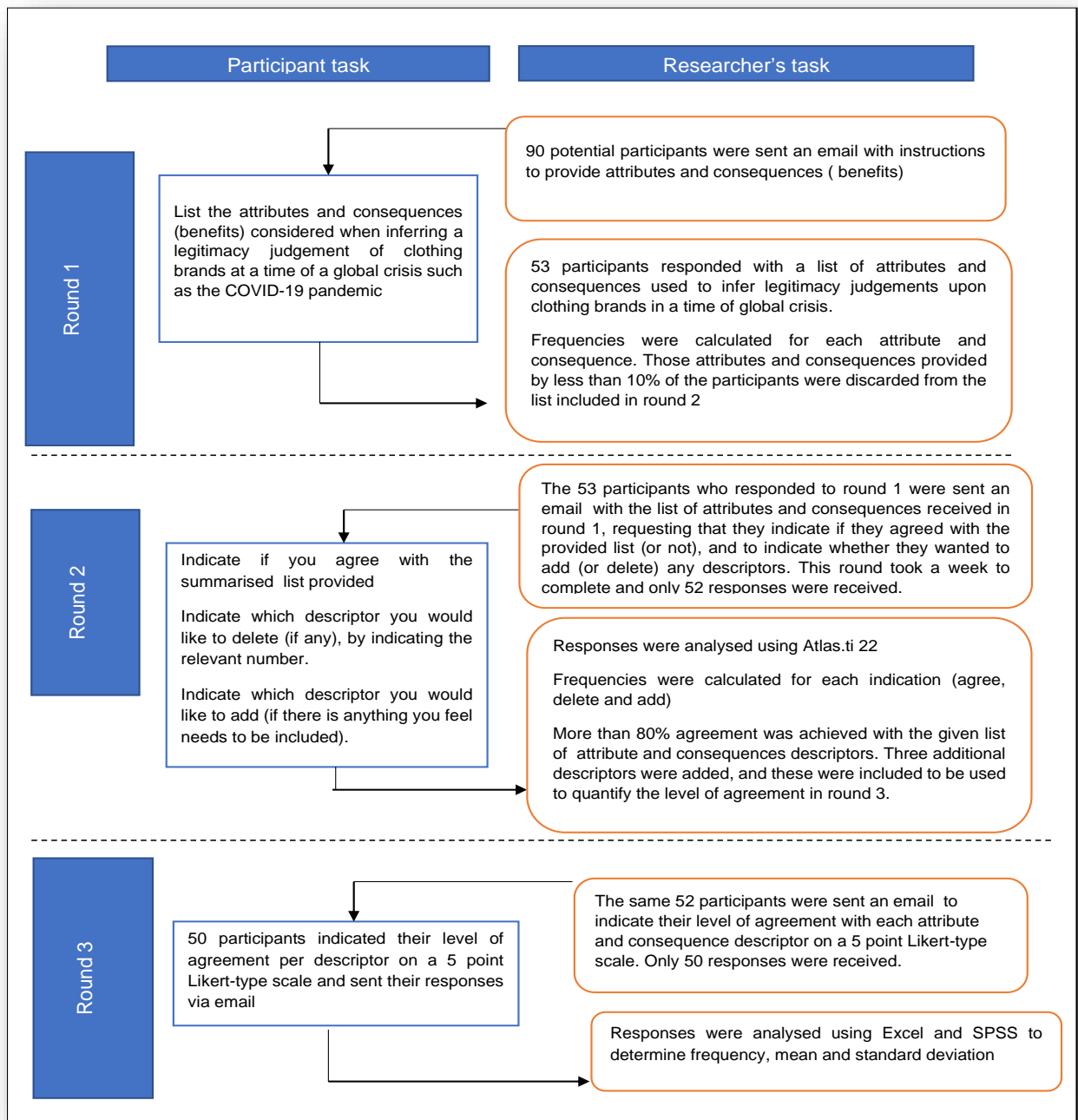


Figure 14: Graphical representation of the Delphi data collection process

Adapted from Barrios et al. (2021)

6.2.3.1 Step one of round one

Step one required participants to provide descriptors to clearly outline the characteristics of clothing brands that they considered legitimate in terms of being on the clothing retail scene considering the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenging times that prevailed at the time. Participants' feedback was analysed using the Atlas.ti 22 software, the apply coding function, which allowed the researcher to identify whether or not a descriptor provided by the participant had already been used to avoid duplication and assisted to determine the frequencies per descriptor. At the end of step one, 17 attribute codes were identified, which were reduced to 12 attributes after merging similar descriptors, namely:

- Multipurpose & can use for different occasions = A brand that is versatile for different occasions.
- Expensive & premium quality = A brand that is expensive and of premium quality
- Fit & accentuates figure = A brand that fits the body well
- Classic & classic look that outlasts fashion trend & timeless = A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends
- Fashionable & makes me look young & pop culture style & urban = A brand that is fashionable and makes me look young

Only those attributes which came from at least 10% of the participants were retained for inclusion in round two, producing 12 attribute descriptors for inclusion in round two. The final results for step one, of round one are illustrated in Figure 15. It should be reminded that participants had the opportunity to object when they missed certain descriptors that they wanted to be included.

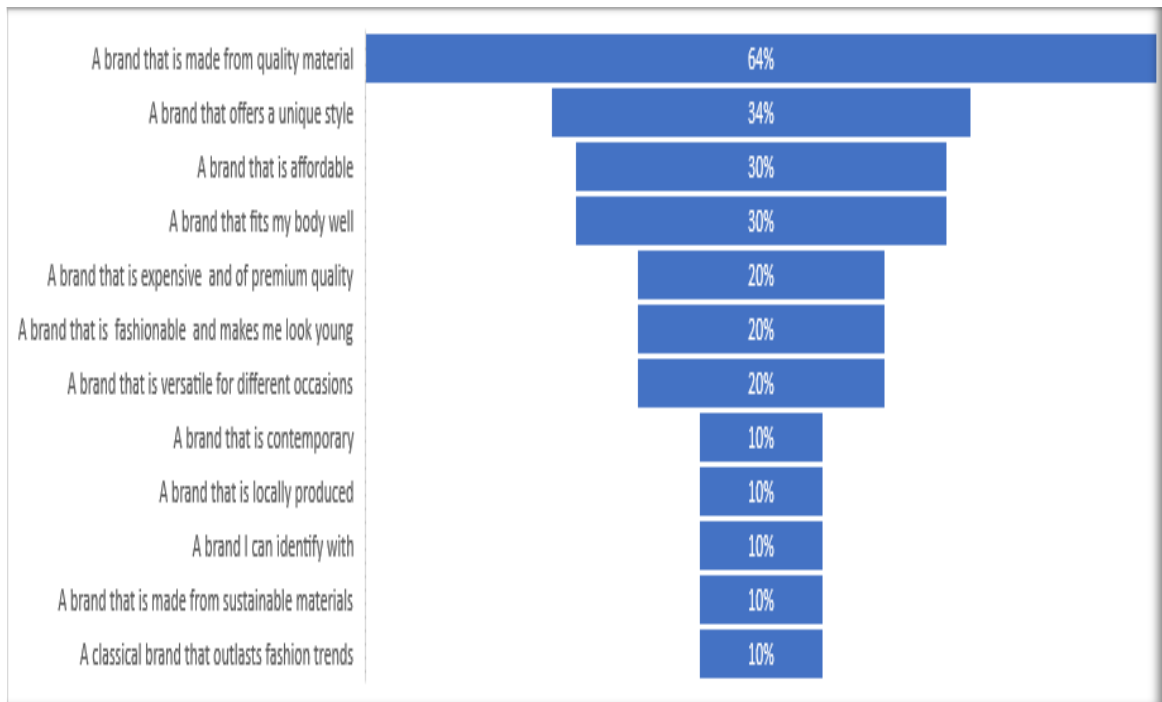


Figure 15: Round one attributes frequency chart

Source: Outcome from the Delphi process

6.2.3.3 Step two of round one

Step two required participants to reflect on the brand characteristics (attributes) that they had mentioned in step 1, and to indicate why the attributes which they provided are important to them. Again, feedback from participants was analysed using the Atlas.ti 22 software, the apply coding function to code the descriptors and determining the frequency for each descriptor. A total of 27 consequences were initially derived from the responses. Due to similarities, some of the descriptors were merged:

- Assists with reputational branding + street credibility + makes me more respectable + allows me to be perceived as being intelligent + perceived as well-groomed + perceived as an upward moving person + gives recognition + enhances social status + social acceptance = Status
- Boosts confidence + provides self-assurance = Enhances confidence
- Ease of care + quality assurance = Durability
- Reflection of my personal beliefs on societal issues + self-love represents where I come from + allows me to express myself = Expression of my identity
- Support for my country + uplift local designers = Upliftment of local designers
- Being unique + makes me stand out from the crowd = Exclusivity

After merging similar consequences, 13 consequence codes were identified, and like in step one, only consequences which came from at least 10% of the participants were retained for

inclusion in round two. Because there was a subsequent round, participants who felt strongly about a specific consequence could request to put it back on the list. This procedure resulted in nine consequence descriptors to be used in round two, as illustrated in Figure 16.

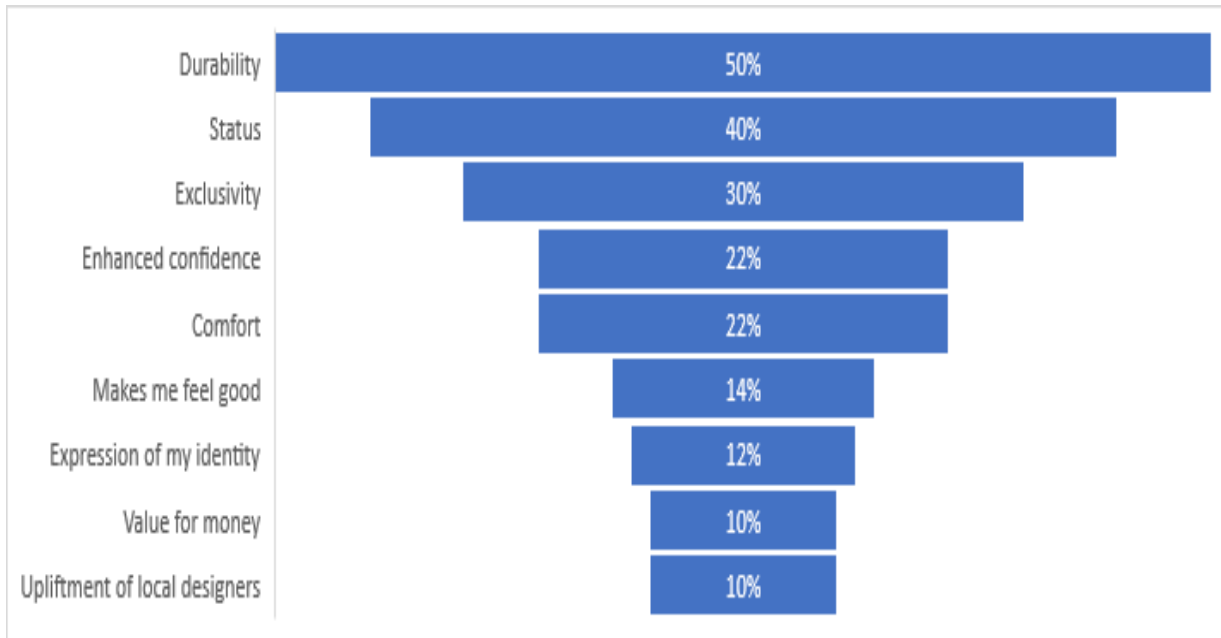


Figure 16: Round one consequences frequency chart

Source: Outcome from Delphi process

6.2.4 Round two of the Delphi process

The purpose of round two was to ensure that participants' responses had been captured and interpreted accurately and to reach some consensus among participants concerning the list of attributes and consequences provided by the sample. Although the literature has not prescribed a set percentage for consensus (Falzarano & Zipp, 2013), some studies regard a 51% consensus among participants as acceptable (McKenna, 1994). This study aimed for 80% agreement among participants as was achieved in other studies (Green et al., 1999; Paraskevas & Saunders, 2012).

In round two, participants were provided, via email, with the list of the 12 attribute descriptors and 9 consequences derived from round one. They were numbered for ease of completion (Appendix 3). In this round, participants were requested to:

- Indicate if they agreed with the summarised list provided;
- Indicate which descriptor - specified in terms of the relevant number - they would rather delete (if any);
- Indicate any descriptor they would like to add (if they felt something needed to be added as either an attribute or a consequence).

The requirements of the Delphi technique are, that the same participants must respond to all rounds, therefore, round two of the questionnaire was only sent out to 53 participants who had responded to round one. Of importance was that the instructions bolded the context of the study to continually remind participants of the context in which they were providing their responses. The feedback was analysed using the Atlas.ti 22 software to determine the frequency of responses, which were as follows:

- 78% of the participants fully agreed with the provided list.
- 14% of the participants wished to delete some descriptors.
- 8% of the participants agreed with the descriptors but wished to add to the list.

There was consensus among 86% of the participants concerning the list of attributes and consequences, which exceeded the 80% consensus level that the study had aimed for. Requests for the addition of the attribute '*a brand that is accessible*, and the consequences, '*speedy delivery*' as well as '*upliftment and expansion of sustainable designs*', were attended to, and they were added to the list of attributes and consequences for round three. Although 14% of the participants indicated that they would delete certain descriptors, they did not object to the descriptors in the summarised list, indicating that they agreed with the list in principle, except for a few descriptors. They did not make suggestions for additional descriptors. Hereby, it was assumed that the provided list would be a sound representation of the attributes and consequences that participants accepted as a representation of criteria used for their legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Only 52 responses were received for round two, as one of the participants fell sick and could not continue participating in the survey.

6.2.5.1 Round three of the Delphi process

In round three of the Delphi process, the level of consensus among participants with the list of attributes and consequences that were needed to conduct the quantitative phase of the study was assessed.

Barrios et al. (2021) emphasise that reaching consensus in the Delphi process is a key feature, where researchers determine consensus based on the percentage agreement among participants with a particular response, followed by the percentage of participants who rated

items at the upper extremes (e.g., items that have scored as 4 and 5 on the 5-point Likert-type scale used). Scholars regard a Likert-type scale is an appropriate means of assessment in market research (Moorman et al., 2008). A 5-point Likert-type scale was deemed appropriate for this study as it allowed participants to specify their level of agreement as well as possible uncertainty. This was regarded as important so that participants did not feel that they had to agree or disagree, but rather were allowed space to be neutral without feeling forced towards a particular choice. On this basis, in round three, the 52 participants rated their level of consensus accordingly, based on the following levels:

- 1 = I strongly disagree and think this item should be excluded
- 2 = I disagree about including this item
- 3 = Uncertain
- 4 = I agree about including this item as part of the description
- 5 = I strongly agree that this item belongs as part of the description.

It should be noted that only 50 of the 52 participants responded to round three, despite continued reminders via email, and WhatsApp messaging. The non-responsiveness of the two participants led the researcher to discard their inputs for rounds one and two. Because it was only two participants whose responses had to be removed, the exclusion of their inputs did not make a significant difference, because, for round two, they had indicated that they agreed with the list of attributes and consequences that they were provided with.

Participants' responses were captured on an Excel spreadsheet and exported into SPSS to conduct the descriptive statics per scale item as done in other studies (Biondo et al., 2008; Cohen et al., 2009; Falzarano & Zipp, 2013) calculating the mean and the standard deviation, which are presented in Table 8.

6.2.5.2 Attribute and consequence descriptors results

Attribute descriptors: The frequencies per attribute descriptor is presented in Appendix 4. Hsu and Sandford (2007) indicate that when using the Likert-type scale, a consensus is reached when 80% of the participants rate 3 or higher on a 4-point Likert-type scale with a median of 3.25 or more. As done by Cohen et al. (2009), the mean served as an indicator of the strength of participants' agreement per descriptor. A mean higher than 3 would be considered worthy of inclusion, with a mean score of 4 or higher indicating strong consensus. The researcher included all the descriptors with a mean score of 3 and higher in the final list shown in Table 8, in descending order.

Table 8: Means indicating participants' level of consensus on attribute level

Attributes	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1) A brand that fits my body well	50	2	5	4.7	.6
2) A brand that is affordable	50	2	5	4.5	.8
3) A brand that suggests the use of quality material	50	2	5	4.5	.7
4) A brand that is accessible	50	1	5	4.3	1.0
5) A brand that is versatile for different occasions	50	2	5	4.2	.9
6) A brand I can identify with	50	2	5	4.2	1.0
7) A brand that is locally produced	50	2	5	4.1	.9
8) A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends	50	2	5	4.1	1.1
9) A brand that is made from sustainable materials	50	2	5	4.0	1.0
10) A brand that offers a unique style	50	2	5	4.0	1.0
11) A brand that looks expensive due to premium quality	50	2	5	3.6	1.1
12) A brand that is contemporary	50	1	5	3.6	1.0
13) A brand that is fashionable and presents a young image	50	1	5	3.3	1.1
Valid N (listwise)	50				

Consequence descriptors: For the consequence descriptors, and similar to how the attributes were dealt with, the Likert-type scores of participants were captured in an Excel spreadsheet, and retrieved into SPSS to calculate frequencies and descriptive statistics. The frequencies are presented in Appendix 5. Like the attribute descriptors, consequences with a mean score of 3 and above were considered for inclusion in the prospective list to be used for the quantitative phase of the study as a cut-off mean score of 3 and above was considered to reflect a consensus among participants concerning the sought after consequences of a preferred brand. Results are presented in Table 9., in descending order.

Table 9: Descriptive statistics of the consequences measure

Consequences	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
1) Comfort	50	3	5	4.7	.5
2) Value for money	50	2	5	4.6	.7
3) Makes me feel good	50	2	5	4.6	.7
4) Durability	50	2	5	4.5	.8
5) Enhanced confidence	50	2	5	4.2	.9
6) Expression of my identity	50	1	5	4.2	1.0
7) Upliftment of local designers	50	1	5	4.2	1.0
8) Speedy delivery	50	2	5	4.1	1.0
9) Upliftment and expansion of sustainable designs	50	1	5	4.0	1.0
10) Exclusivity	50	1	5	3.6	1.4
11) Status	50	1	5	2.8	1.3
Valid N (listwise)	50				

6.3 Online focus group

Wilkinson (1998, p182), describes a focus group as an "informal discussion among selected individuals about specific topics", conducted to elicit people's opinions or views about a specific topic (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). An online focus group is computer-mediated discussion (Lobe & Morgan, 2021) that can be asynchronous or synchronous (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). Scholars (Lobe & Morgan, 2021; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017) explain that this enables real-time discussions and data collection, with the researcher and participants being online, simultaneously, but not necessarily within proximity.

6.3.1 Participants of the online focus group discussion

Although the online discussion aimed to solicit the participation of six to eight people as suggested by scholars (Donaldson & Conway, 2015; Lobe & Morgan, 2021; O'Neill, 2012; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017; Stylos et al., 2021; Wilkinson, 1998), experience from the Delphi process showed that people may agree to participate, but may withdraw when encountering challenges at the time that they are needed. It is for these reasons that Stewart and Shamdasani (2017) suggest that the researcher should rather over-recruit the number of prospective participants. Some scholars (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) indicate that the researcher should over-recruit by at least 20% of the required participants. Participants for the focus group discussion excluded those who had participated in the Delphi process, as the objective of the online focus group discussion was to triangulate and confirm the findings obtained from the Delphi process, as well as to obtain further insights as a

personal discussion generally allows participants to spontaneously express themselves (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017). Therefore, having new participants was deemed essential.

Once participation was confirmed, two dates and times were proposed for participants to indicate their availability, resulting in the discussion being scheduled for Monday the 18th of April 2022 between 9h00 and 10h00 on the Microsoft Teams online platform. This was a public holiday, which meant that participants were available and could provide their undivided attention. But also, being a public holiday meant that the facilitator needed to be cognisant to not drag the discussion beyond the allocated one hour which participants committed to when accepting the invitation. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) indicate that well-designed focus group discussions should last between an hour and two hours. In the end, 10 participants (5 males and 5 females) agreed to participate in the discussion, of which one female withdrew on the day of the discussion, resulting in a final sample size of 9 participants..

The participant sample for the online focus group was heterogenous, comprising five males and four females. Participants were from various provinces within South Africa as follows:

- Two participants were from the Western Cape Province
- One participant was from the Eastern Cape Province
- Five participants were from Gauteng Province and
- One participant was from KwaZulu Natal

6.3.2 Online focus group discussion

The online focus group discussion was facilitated by the researcher, using the facilitator's guide attached in Appendix 7. Stewart and Shamdasani (2017), recommend that the facilitator should make use of a discussion guide to prevent the discussion from deviating from its intended purpose. Participants were informed that the discussion would be recorded, and the conditions of participation were read out before commencement, to which all participants confirmed that they met the research criteria. As suggested by scholars (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2017) the overview of the process was outlined to participants in advance to put them at ease, and for the researcher to build rapport.

As recommended (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009; Wilkinson, 1998), the discussion was recorded and transcribed verbatim. The discussion was held in English and thus transcribed in English. The transcription included the "air time" used by each participant to allow the researcher to determine possible hesitancy in responses. As outlined in the consent form, where participants were informed that their identity would remain anonymous, participants' responses were coded with a 'P' number ranging from 1 to 9, except for the facilitator who was identified as 'Facilitator.' Participants kept their videos turned off at all times to aid with the anonymity of

participants' identities. Additionally, after the discussion, the Teams platform indicated that participants no longer had access to the chat. This meant that only the Facilitator (the meeting organiser) had access to the discussion chat messages, transcription, recordings, and attendance register which contained participants' email addresses. Where participants mentioned brands by name, these were recorded as AB or EB and a number. AB in this instance reflected a brand that the participant regarded as an affordable brand and EB reflected a brand that the participant regarded as an expensive brand. A number was assigned after the acronym as an indication that the speaker was referring to another brand name in that category.

As an introduction to the study, participants were shown the list of 13 attributes that were obtained through the Delphi process and were asked to comment on the list, which is presented in Appendix 7A.

6.3.3. Findings of the online focus group discussion

As suggested by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), a facilitator's guide is necessary to pose and facilitate the discussion of selected questions. The facilitator's guide is provided in Appendix 7. Furthermore, as indicated in section 5.6.6. of this study, a consensus matrix was used to analyse the discussion of the online focus group. This matrix is provided in Appendix 8. The findings per question are thus provided below:

Question 1: You have been introduced to the aim of the research and the aim of this discussion. Considering the outcome of the previous phase of the research, do you agree or disagree with the listed attributes?

Participant P1 was highly engaged throughout the discussion, was the first to respond to the question, and displayed himself as someone who knows what he likes and dislikes as is evident in his choice of words, stating "...*absolute top of my list... a brand that fits my body well...*" (P1: 29). He was, however, less decisive with the attribute of a fashionable brand, stating "...*I'm not too fussy, uhm, how fashionable something is...*" (P1:29). From his response, it was, however, clear that a brand regarded as fashionable did matter to him, indeed, although it may not be top of his list. He went on to indicate that second on his list is the attribute of a brand that suggests the use of quality materials, but he raised concerns on the use of the terms affordable and expensive, regarding these as "relative" terms. Only

Participant P2 concurred with his opinion concerning affordability being relative. Because nobody else aired any other views on the matter, the researcher retained the attributes of an affordable and expensive brand as originally indicated.

P1 boldly disagreed with the attribute of 'a brand I can identify with' stating that "*...I just feel I do not ever want to make myself feel owned...*" (P1:51)

Participant P2 presented herself as someone who does not move with the majority and rather challenges opinions that she does not agree with, as is evident in her disagreement with the view of Participant P8 that good quality does not go with affordability. P8 expressed the view that "*...good quality is always expensive...*" (P8:39), to which P2 reacted that "*...you can get affordable merchandise at affordable, prices... you can get affordable premium quality.*" (P2:41). She did however indicate that affordability was top of her list.

Participant P3 indicated his agreement with displayed attributes but suggested that the word affordable needs to be replaced with value, believing that "*...something which you value is based on how much you can afford and, how you think it serves your purpose...*" (P3:31). He expressed his disregard for a brand that is locally produced as well as a brand that is made from sustainable materials, suggesting that he would remove them from the list. He gave a mixed reaction to the attribute of a classical brand that outlasts fashion trends as irrelevant, firstly stating that "*... we live in a world where trends change and we have to yeah, move with them if you're into that, so...*" (P3:53), however in the same statement indicated that "*...I don't really care about trends... I buy stuff for myself*" (P3:53). Later on, he indicated that he would remove the attribute 'fashionable' brand. He came across as being sure of what he agreed with, or not, and did not see himself as a trend follower.

Participant P4 brought a different dimension to the topic, by distinguishing between the different lockdown levels, indicating that "*...during hard lockdown, I just needed something that fits my body. I wouldn't care of any other thing... But then as soon as it gets to the other level of lockdown, I needed something that is versatile for different occasions cause then I can start attending different functions.*" (P4:34).

Participant P5 repeatedly mentioned her agreement with attributes 'quality material', 'fits my body well', and 'a classical brand that outlasts fashion trends'. She added the descriptor of "*...something that suits my body...*" (P5:35), which the researcher did not add to the list because it is similar to the existing listed attribute descriptor 'a brand that fits my body well'.

Participant P6 experienced challenges with his microphone on the day, but was able to provide his responses via the chats feature. He indicated his agreement with all the descriptors, but emphasised his preference for a brand that is "*...versatile for different occasions given that*

COVID-19 resulted in many people having to work from home". Hereby, he agreed with P4 who linked legitimacy judgements to the different phases of the lockdown.

Participant P7 made strong assertions on the need for the inclusion of selected attributes on the list, as reflected in her statement "*...at the top of my list will be a brand that is affordable ...it should definitely fit my body well; it needs to look expensive due to premium quality ... it has to be fashionable*" (P7:37).

Despite her opinion of a disjuncture between affordable quality brands, participant P8 agreed with 'a brand that is affordable' and 'a brand that fits my body well'. She however indicated that whilst she agreed with the attribute 'a fashionable brand', she indicated "*that being fashionable*' does not mean "*that a person wants to look young*", therefore suggesting that the attribute only be stated as a fashionable brand. The researcher agreed because on analysis of the statements from those who agreed with the attribute 'fashionable brand', nobody associated it with 'a young image'.

Participant P9 posted his response on the chat expressing an opposing view to that of P3, in that he agreed with the attribute 'a brand that is locally produced'. His view was that, "*...this will allow us to circulate the money within the country to sustain and create jobs*". also touched on an attribute that others did not mention, namely 'a brand that is accessible' "*...because I don't want to wait too long to get a product I have ordered...*"

In summary, two of the nine participants (P3 & P5) agreed with the attribute descriptors, but later on, indicated that certain brands resonated more with them over others. Seven of the nine participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P7, P8 & P9) provided very insightful comments suggesting agreement. They highlighted selected attributes that they related to the most. Although P8 made an argument that "*... good quality does not go with affordability...*" (P8: 39) The researcher did not take this argument into account because the provided list of attributes did not link affordability and good quality as a single descriptor.

Three of the nine participants provided a dissenting view for some of the attribute descriptors: A brand I can identify with - "*...there's one that definitely doesn't sit very well with me... A brand I can identify with. I just feel I do not ever want to make myself feel owned...*" (P1: 51) 'A brand that is locally produced – "*...locally produced...does not mean anything to me...*" (P4: 59). A brand made from sustainable materials and a brand that is fashionable and presents a young image - "*...the third last point again for me is irrelevant a brand that is made from sustainable materials. Umm, that's, I'm again, I'm neither here nor there. But if I was to choose I would probably, probably remove that one...and uh, fashionable...*" (P3:53)

Noteworthy is that the three above-mentioned descriptors were ranked lower in the list of attribute descriptors in round one of the Delphi process, as only 10% of the participants indicated that these mattered concerning legitimacy judgements of clothing brands in a time of global crisis. Because there was no concurrence from other participants to have these descriptors removed, the researcher retained them as part of the list of attributes.

- Although he agreed, participant P3 did, in some parts of his statement, provided comments that suggested disagreement, namely:
 - 'A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends' – "*...we live in a world where trends change and we have to, yeah, move with them...*" (P3:53)
 - 'A brand that is locally produced' – "*...does not mean anything to me...*"; "*I am neither here nor there with regards to it being locally produced...it doesn't really matter where it is produced.*" (P3:31)

Although these statements by P3 may reflect uncertainty, his closing remarks on the matter served as confirmation of his agreement with the provided list, with an exception of the few already listed. In this regard, he closed his response stating "*...as long as it meets that the rest of the other criteria then I'm fine for my side.*" (P3: 31)

- Two out of the nine participants suggested a change in wording for parts of some attribute descriptors, namely:
 - A brand that is affordable – "*...but I think the affordable one for me is quite umm I think maybe value is the word that I'd use instead of affordable... something which you value is based on how much you can afford and, how you think it serves your purpose, right...*" (P3 : 31)
 - Participant P8 indicated that she would remove parts of the descriptor that indicated a brand that is fashionable and presents a young image. Although she agreed with fashionable, she indicated that it didn't have to present a young image – "*Let's say I'm old now. Do I still want to look at or do I still want to look like youngsters? So, for me, I would just take out that represent uh young image part*" (P8:55)

Noting the comment of P8, pertaining to the attribute of 'a brand that is fashionable and presents a young image', the researcher changed the attribute to 'a brand that is fashionable', because all participants who agreed with the attribute only mentioned the aspect of fashionable without including the component of '*...and presents a young image.*' The input made by P3 was not considered, due to a lack of support from other participants.

Participants were then requested to answer the following question:

Question 2: What are the top five characteristics that are of extreme importance to you, especially in a time of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, or like the global recession which we encountered a few years ago. What would you say?

Eight of the nine participants provided their inputs using the Microsoft Teams chats feature, which meant that inputs were provided directly by the participants. Only P8 provided a verbal response to the question. Of interest to the researcher, was her explanation of why she chose the attribute 'a brand that is made from sustainable material'. She indicated that *"Sustainable material. Yeah, so that if I wear it, let's say I wear it, after a wash it doesn't stretch, it's material that will last. It's pointless buying an outfit that will not last as it will be a waste of money as well"* (P8: 72). Her response made the researcher reflect on whether or not the attribute in its current form would be well understood if used for the quantitative phase of the study, as it seemed as though sustainable material could be interpreted as durable material. The researcher hence decided to add a short explanation of what sustainable material means (i.e., clothes that use organic materials /products that are not harmful to the environment).

Figure 17 graphically presents the results provided by the nine participants who indicated their top five important attributes in the chat box. The graph reveals that they prioritised the following:

- A brand that fits my body well
- A brand that suggests the use of quality material
- A brand that is affordable
- A brand that is versatile for different occasions
- A brand that is made from sustainable materials

These five attributes obtained the highest mean scores in the Delphi process. Specifically, the first three attributes achieved the highest mean scores. A brand 'that is versatile for different occasions' ranked fifth, whilst a brand 'that is made from sustainable materials' ranked ninth.

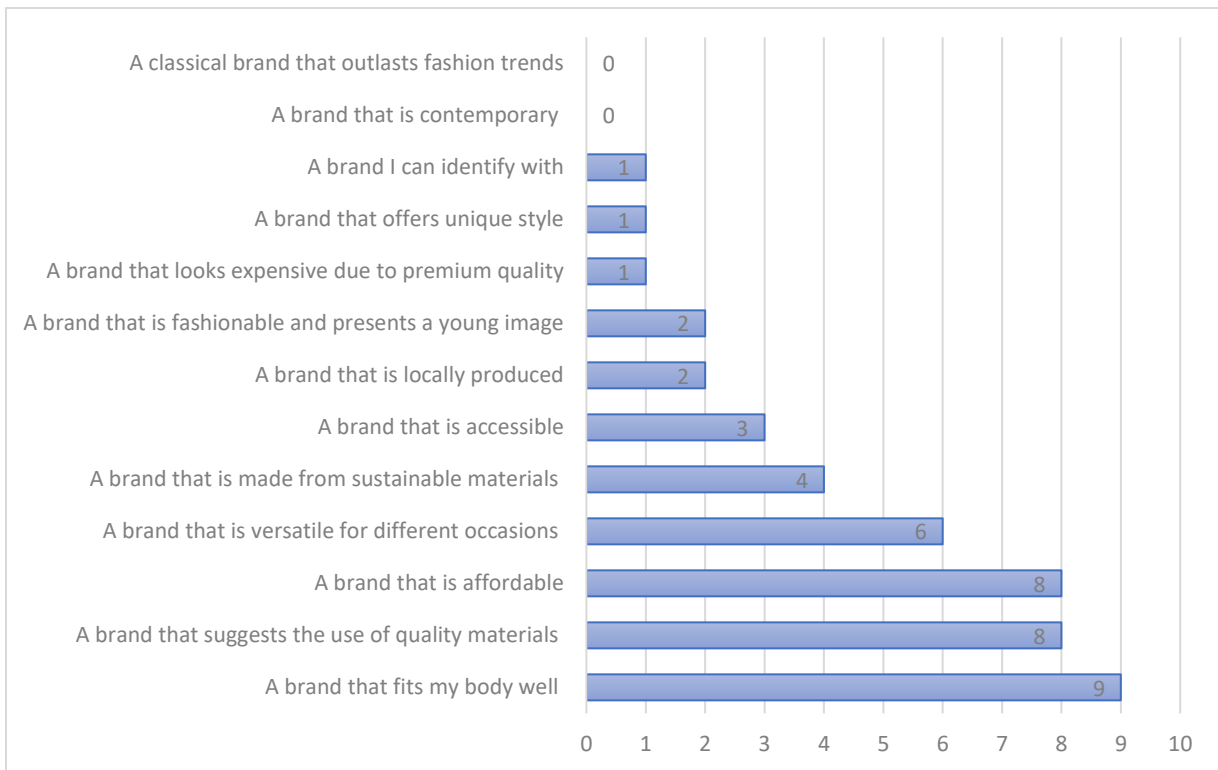


Figure 17: Most important attributes of a legitimate brand

Once participants had ranked the five most important attributes, the facilitator displayed on the screen, the list of consequences that were provided by the 50 participants that participated in the Delphi process. She requested that they indicate whether or not they agreed with the benefits (as outlined in Appendix 7A), by asking the following question:

Question 3: Having completed the discussion of the attributes, and having ranked them, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the list of provided benefits 9 consequences) associated with the sought-after brand attributes.

Only five of the nine participants responded to the question (P1, P2, P4, P5, and P7). Because the discussion was not aimed at forcing people to give inputs if they had none to offer at the time, the researcher, regarded it as being okay. Out of the five participants, only P1 indicated that he would like to add to the list "*I do have something that I would like to add here 'and I think that it looks good on me'. I think that's the benefit that I normally go for... that probably will be the top priority on me*" (P1:153), which P7 agreed with. When asked why 'looking good' was important in the context of the pandemic, P1 indicated that "... *I think overall, we did not necessarily just hide and become completely invisible to the world, so looking good always*

matters. And I think another reason is when you look good irrespective of where you are, you generally feel good...." (P1: 159).

Participant P5 agreed with all the listed consequences, except for 'upliftment of local designers' indicating "...*the upliftment of local designers. It's not really a factor for me.*" (P5:163). Rather, P5 indicated that she is "...*not too fussy about status...*" (P5:163), the researcher interpreted this to be a statement that suggests agreement with the descriptor, because in essence, what she is saying, is that status may not be top of her list, but it is a factor that does influence her clothing brand legitimacy judgement.

Participant P7 explicitly concurred with the list that was provided, but noted that "... *I am not really fussy though when it comes to upliftment of local designers. As well as the last one (upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs)...*" (P7: 157). Her indication of 'not really too fussy', was taken to mean that, in fact she does fuss, perhaps not as much as she does with the other descriptors. In a separate statement, following other speakers, P7 indicated "... *I don't really care about status, so that would not really be important for me...*" (P7: 167). The researcher recalled that P7's earlier response to question one, indicated that a clothing brand "...*needs to look expensive due to premium quality...*" (P7:37). However, when asked why she had chosen expensive, if status was not the reason, she took a defensive posture and instantly replied that "*No, I said that 'for me, it was a top being affordability. That was my first, so that would definitely coincide with the fact that it has nothing to do with status...*" (P7:169). At this point, the researcher took note of the argument made by Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), of not being able to distinguish between an individual's subjective opinion and an opinion made due to conformity. In this regard, the researcher was of the view that P7 was conforming to the views of the group as they had not made any comment about their agreement with the descriptor of status.

Similar to his response to question one, P4 provided a response concerning the various lockdown levels by indicating that "...*during hard lockdown really what I was looking for it was just comfort nothing else. Makes me feel good, not really much. But then I do feel that it is important. And durability, value for money not that much during the what's called hard lockdown, but then it was just for comfort...*" (P4:161). Although his distinction of the lockdown levels was regarded as insightful by the researcher, the researcher was of the view that this could be used in a future study. P4's statements, however, suggested agreement with the provided list, as he structured his response to indicate the various levels of his agreement with the provided descriptors.

No further inputs were made, and therefore, the next question was posed:

Question 4: Please indicate the five most important benefits (consequences) that can be derived from legitimate brands that possess the preferred attributes.

All participants provided their inputs using the Microsoft Teams chats feature. Results obtained, are presented in Figure 18.

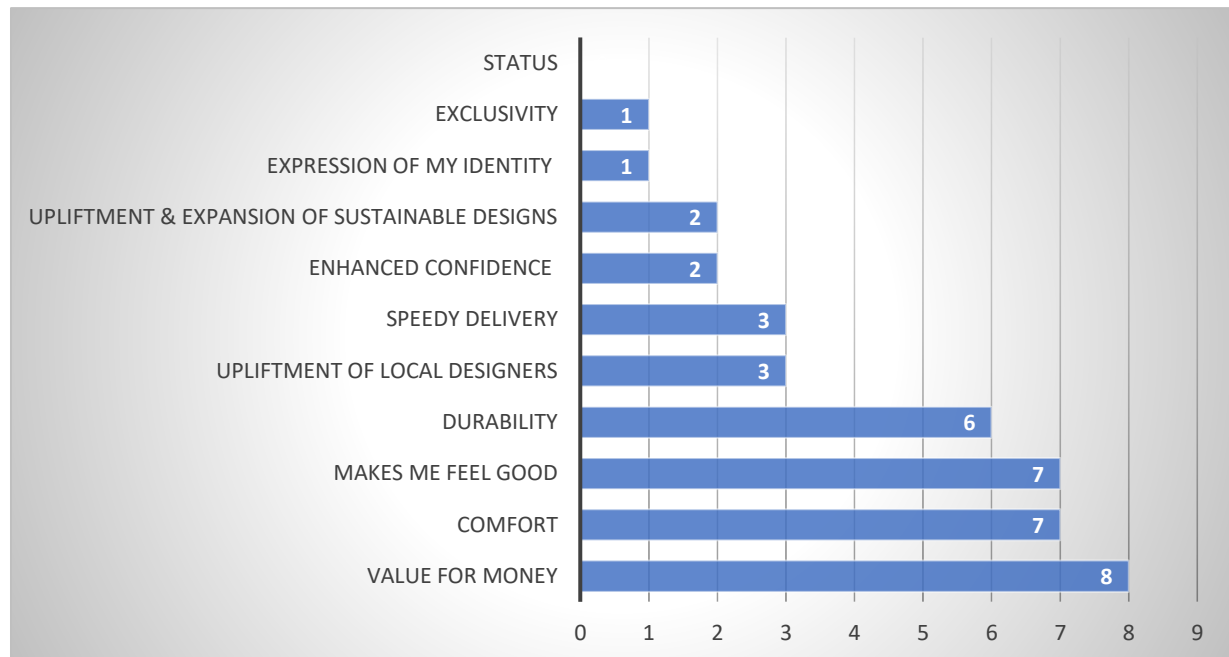


Figure 18: Most important benefits (consequences)

Eight of the nine participants indicated that 'value for money' was an important consequence, followed by 'comfort' and 'makes me feel good,' which were both identified by seven of the participants. 'Durability' and 'upliftment of local designers' and 'speedy delivery' were regarded the third, fourth and fifth most important consequences, respectively. Compared to the results from the Delphi process, 'comfort', 'value for money', 'makes me feel good' and 'durability' were among the top-rated consequences. Additionally, 'upliftment of local designers' and 'speedy delivery' were highly regarded. Despite being asked for the top five most important benefits, P1 added a sixth benefit, namely 'makes me look good,' which he had provided in question three.

Participants were subsequently requested to also indicate the least important benefits to verify their responses to the previous question, to some extent:

Question 5: Please identify the least important benefits (consequences) that can be derived from legitimate brands that possess attributes that you prefer.

Figure 19 provides a graphical summary of the results which depict that 'status' and 'exclusivity' were regarded as the two least important consequences. These results confirm the ranking of the most important descriptors in the Delphi process where 'status' and 'exclusivity' achieved mean scores of 2.8 and 3.6 respectively. 'Upliftment of local designers' was the third least important consequence overall, although three participants regarded this descriptor as one of the most important. This is not surprising, because literature indicates that millennials are characterised as being narcissists (Durocher et al., 2016; Twenge et al., 2010), yet also as caring for their communities (Deloitte, 2020). A contradiction, however, is that literature regards millennials as status-driven (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Dash et al., 2021), while in this study, 'status' was one of the least important consequences in both the Delphi process and online focus group discussion.

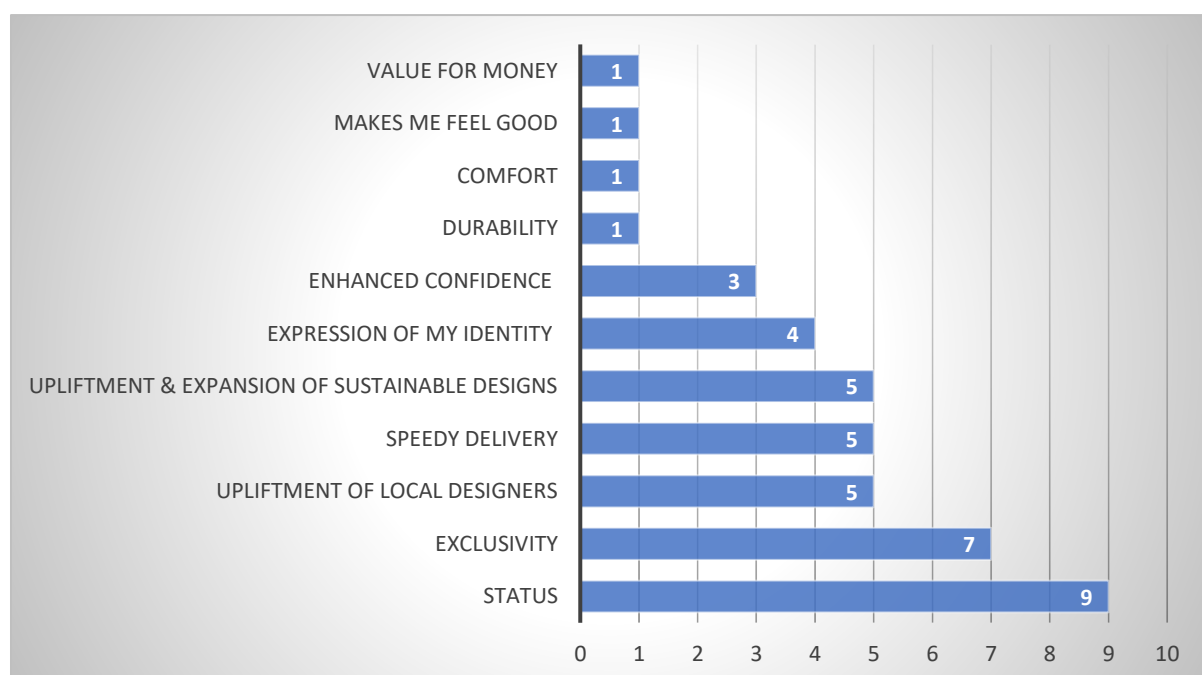


Figure 19: Least important benefits (consequences)

The researcher concluded the discussion with a final question:

Question 6: Is there anything else that you feel the researcher should take into consideration?

Only five participants responded, namely P1, P2, P3, P4, P5. Noteworthy is the contribution of P3 who suggested the need to distinguish the income categories of participants, which will be included in the questionnaire to be sent out in phase two of the research. This should also be noted for future research that aims to understand the consumption behaviour of the millennial generation cohort.

Contributions made by P2, P4, and P5 were rather related to suggestions for further studies as the issues raised fell outside the scope of the current study. These have been noted as suggestions for future research at the conclusion of the thesis.

6.4. Theoretical coherence

At the conclusion of the online focus group discussion, a literature review was conducted to establish whether any more attribute and consequence descriptors could be added to the list provided by participants, who participated in both the Delphi process and online focus group discussion. This was done to ensure saturation and also possibly confirm the findings from the two qualitative processes already embarked upon. However, no new descriptors were identified.

The researcher could not find literature that had assessed the millennial generational cohort's brand legitimacy judgements, particularly amid a global crisis that significantly influenced the entire scene of retailing, shopping, and market communication. The researcher attributed this to the novelty of the COVID pandemic, thus an absence in research on its effect on millennials' consumer behaviour amid a crisis. Because generational literature emphasises the vast differences in consumer behaviour among generations, the researcher regarded it important to ensure that literature that is specific to the millennial cohort, in the context of a global crisis, would be the most relevant.

However, in the absence of relevant literature, and to confirm the qualitative research findings, the literature review entailed a desktop assessment of online articles concerning millennials' buying behaviour for fashion during the COVID-19 pandemic. Online articles revealed that

millennials were concerned about environmental sustainability, and therefore were more in favour of brands that demonstrated diversity, equality, and ethics (Kalscheur, 2021; Alonso, 2021). According to Alonso (2021), convenience and price were also considered. Comfort, according to a study by YPulse (2020) was a benefit that was highly regarded, as seen by the rise in sales of loungewear and slippers. This is particularly true, as one participant from the online focus group discussion indicated that during a hard lockdown, all he had looked for, were clothes that made him feel comfortable. These findings are consistent with descriptors 'comfort' and 'value for money', which are part of the top five most important consequences identified during the Delphi process and online focus group discussion. Additionally, clothing brands made from sustainable materials emanated as one of the top ten attributes identified during the Delphi process.

6.5 Challenges encountered during the qualitative phase

Establishing a database with representation from all provinces was challenging. It is for this reason that participants were mostly from Gauteng province. This was however expected as Gauteng Province is a highly urbanised province, where broadband access is easier compared to other provinces (Statistics South Africa, 2021a).

At times, responses trickled in slowly, and therefore, participants had to be reminded to submit their inputs. Using WhatsApp messaging made it easier to send a reminder due to the instantaneous acknowledgement that the researcher would get. Lessons learned from round 1 of the Delphi process, were that participants were more responsive to emails during the week than on weekends, probably, because during the week, participants were at work and therefore readily accessed their emails. Having noted this, all requests were sent during the week.

Despite the different interventions, some participants dropped out of the survey, especially for the online focus group discussion. However, because this was anticipated, the researcher recruited more than the required number of participants, which ensured adequate attendance in the end.

6.6 Conclusion

From the triangulation processes, it was evident that there existed agreement concerning the attributes and consequences provided by participants, which was also confirmed by related online articles under review. Findings mostly concurred with the literature review conducted in Chapter 3 of the study. From the three data collection processes, the researcher identified 12 preferred brand attributes that are associated with brands that are legitimate and worthy of support, as well as 12 consequences related to these sought-after attributes, which were used as part of phase two of the study, as presented in Table 10.

The data gathered in Phase 1 formed the basis for the implementation of the Association Pattern Technique as part of the means-end analysis in phase two of the study, to facilitate drawing of the envisaged Hierarchical Value Maps.

It should be noted that although 'status' scored low in the Delphi process, the researcher decided to retain the descriptor, because according to literature (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Dash et al., 2021), millennials are inclined to be status-driven, and it might have been challenging for participants to admit that. Additionally, in the focus group discussion, P7 had alluded to the descriptor being a priority, although later on taking a different stance. Again, this was assumed to be rather challenging to admit in the presence of others. However, due to previous research (Agarchand & Laishram, 2017; Donaldson & Conway, 2015; Gabrielli et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2019), one of the risks of online focus group discussions is that individuals tend to conform to the views of the majority. In the case of this study, status per se, may have been a sensitive topic to discuss in the presence of others. The researcher regarded the denial as that the participant who raised the topic, maybe did not want to be perceived as status conscious.

However, taking into consideration the suggestion of P3, that the focus group discussion excluded the participation of higher-income millennials from higher LSMs, higher-income segments may hold different views, presenting an opportunity for further investigation.

On reflection, the researcher decided to merge the attributes of 'a brand that is contemporary' with 'a brand that is fashionable' regarding them as meaning the same thing. Therefore, the descriptor 'a brand that is contemporary' was removed.

Table 10 presents the final list of attributes and consequences for inclusion in Phase 2 of the research. These listed attributes and consequences outlined in Table 10, are not yet linked to one another in any way.

Table 10: Final list of attributes and consequences to be used in Phase Two

No	List of Attributes
1	A brand that fits my body well
2	A brand that is affordable
3	A brand that suggests the use of quality material
4	A brand that is accessible
5	A brand that is versatile for different occasions
6	A brand I can identify with
7	A brand that is locally produced
8	A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends
9	A brand that is made from sustainable materials
10	A brand that offers a unique style
11	A brand that looks expensive due to premium quality
12	A brand that is fashionable
No	List of Consequences
1	Comfort
2	Value for money
3	Makes me feel good
4	Durability
5	Enhanced confidence
6	Expression of my identity
7	Upliftment of local designers
8	Speedy delivery
9	Upliftment and expansion of sustainable designs
10	Exclusivity
11	Status
12	Makes me look good

Source: Outcomes from Phase One of the study, through triangulation of findings

Chapter 7: Research findings – Quantitative Phase

7.1. Introduction

The quantitative phase of the study commenced on receipt of ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee as presented in Appendix 11. This phase required that participants:

- Select the particular attributes of clothing brands that they used to infer cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy.
- Specify (link) the consequences that they anticipated to derive from each of the desirable attributes (indicated in the previous step) of clothing brands.
- Link the consequences that they expected to derive from the selected attributes with personal values through means-end-analysis that assimilated relevant hierarchical value maps (HVM). These ultimately specified the predominant personal values that drove millennials' clothing brand preferences in this sequential three-step process.

For the pre-test, referred to in the methodology section (5.7.4), the survey was distributed to ten people for purposes of testing the ease of completion of the task, understandability and confirming that the information in the introduction was aligned with their experience of the survey. The feedback received from those who completed the test survey was:

“The questionnaire is user-friendly and easy to complete”; “It’s pretty easy to complete because of the examples and instructions”; “The study is understandable and straightforward and the questionnaire design is user-friendly”; “The questionnaire is straightforward and easy to use/access”

Based on the positive feedback, the survey went live.

7.2. Data clean-up

On closing the survey, a total of 555 people had started the survey, although 205 responses were discarded because:

- Participants were not born in the required years of birth i.e., 1980-1999, and/or
- Participants indicated that they resided outside of South Africa, and/or
- Participants did not complete the survey, and/or
- Demographic information was incomplete.

Therefore, only 350 of the participants who accounted for 63% of the participants, fully participated in the survey

7.3. Demographic characteristics of the sample

The study was conducted with a sample of 350 employed millennials earning a minimum salary of R150 000 per annum, residing across South Africa. Specifically, the study comprised 163 males, 178 females, and 9 participants who opted not to disclose their gender by describing themselves as gender-neutral. The age distribution of the participants is as per the definition of millennials as being persons born between 1980 and 1999, thus aged between 23 to 42 years of age in the year 2022. The age distribution of participants who completed the survey is represented in Figure 20 below.

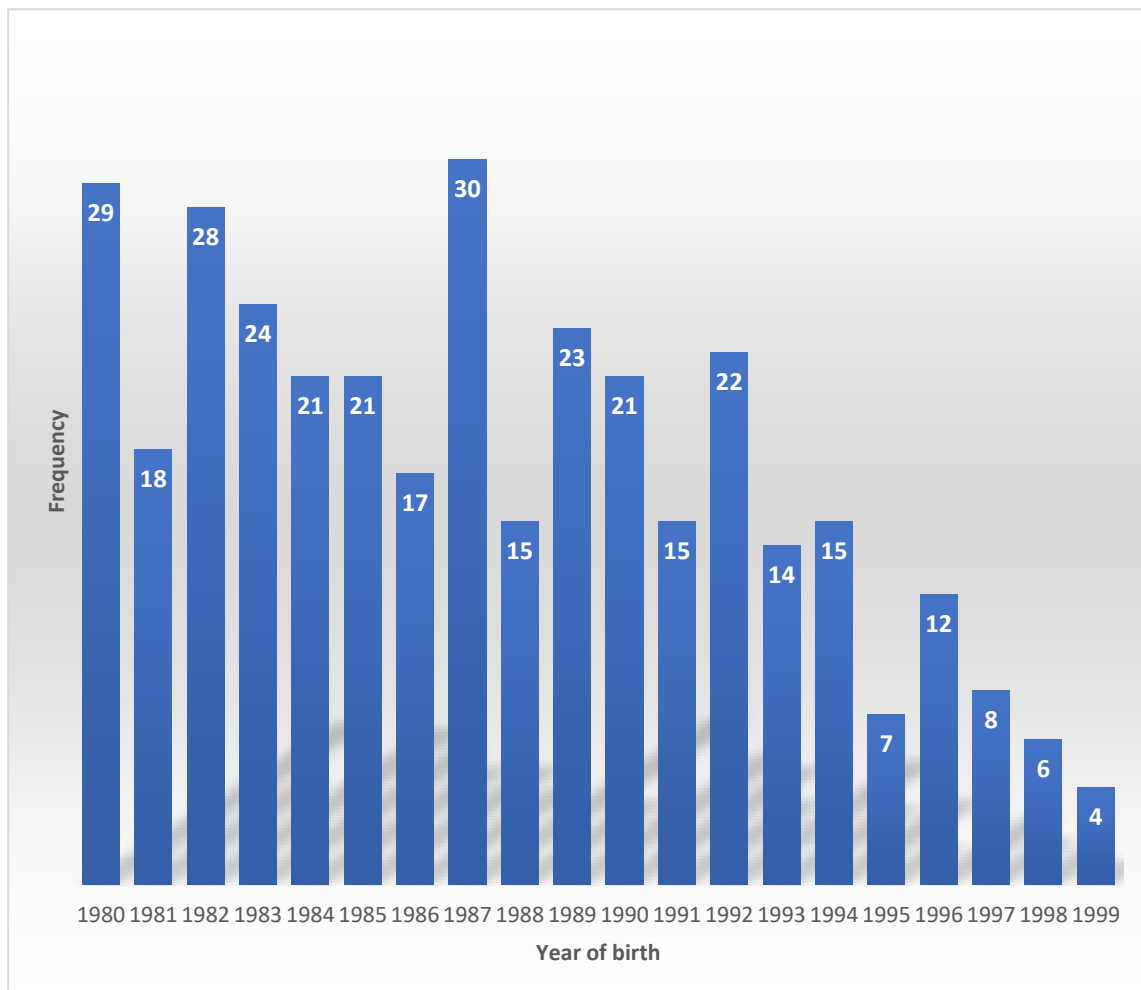


Figure 20: Age distribution of participants (N=350)

Although the survey was shared widely across South Africa, it should be noted that the final results reflect a skewed representation as the researcher had no control over who finally responded to the survey. Moreover, a non-probability snowball data collection method was utilised. As seen in Table 11 below, the majority of the participants were from Gauteng Province

Table 11: Province of residence (N= 350)

No	Province	Frequency	% of sample
1	Gauteng Province	268	76.57
2	Kwazulu Natal Province	30	8.57
3	Free State Province	11	3.14
4	Mpumalanga Province	18	5.14
5	Limpopo Province	7	2.00
6	Eastern Cape	1	0.29
c7	Northern Cape	1	0.29
8	North West Province	7	2.00
9	Western Cape	7	2.00

As reflected in Table 12, the sample's annual income could be distributed across seven income brackets, and the majority of the participants fell within the income bracket of R150 000 – R 300 000, followed by those in the income bracket of R 300 001 – R 450 000.

Table 12: Participant income distribution (N = 350)

No	Annual income bracket (Rands)	Frequency	% of sample
1	150 000 – 300 000	114	32.57
2	300 001 – 450 000	75	21.43
3	450 001 – 600 000	44	12.57
4	600 001 – 750 000	37	10.57
5	750 001 – 900 000	26	7.43
6	900 001 – 1 000 000	16	4.57
7	1 000 000 and above	38	10.86

7.4. Implementation of the Association Pattern Technique

The Association Pattern Technique (APT) of Ter Hofstede et al. (1998) directed the data collection process, which required participants to link their preferred clothing brand attributes selected from the given list (derived from phase 1 data), to a consequence of choice, and then linking the chosen consequences with another consequence in a subsequent action. This was followed by the linking of the final selected consequences with the personal values of Schwartz (1994) in a subsequent screen. All linkages in the matrices were read and interpreted from left to right, linking concepts in the rows, with those in the column.

As was done in the study conducted by Reynolds (2006), this study implemented a cut-off level of four for the construction of the HVMs. The cut-off level was based on the objective of the study, which aimed to reflect the dominant linkages made by participants, to determine the brand attributes and personal values that shape millennial consumers' clothing brand legitimacy judgements amid a global crisis. The researcher assessed the significance of increasing the cut-off level to five, but found that the results were similar to the cut-off level of four., merely complicating the analysis of the HVM.

7.4.1. Compilation of the AC matrix

The researcher commenced by compiling the Attribute - Consequence (AC) Matrix shown in Table 13. This was done by calculating the frequencies between linkages. The four highlighted frequencies reflect the highly rated attributes and consequence linkages.

The following is evident from Table 13:

- 182 participants regarded "a brand that is affordable" as providing "value for money"; as the most important linkage, based on the highest frequency recorded.
- 105 participants regarded a brand "that fits my body well" as providing "comfort", which was the second highest linkage, hence considered as important.
- 93 participants indicated that a "brand that fits my body well" made them "feel good", reflecting a moderately important link.
- 76 of the participants indicated that a brand that "fits my body well" makes them "look good", hence a slightly important link.

Table 13: Attribute-consequence matrix*

	Durability	Status	Exclusivity	Enhanced Confidence	Comfort	Makes me feel good	Expression of my identity	Value for money	Upliftment of Local Designers	Speedy delivery	Upliftment , expansion of sustainable designs	Makes me look good
A brand that suggests the use of quality materials	70 (20)	15 (4.29)	15 (4.29)	18 (5.14)	41 (11.71)	32 (9.14)	17 (4.86)	44 (12.57)	12 (3.43)	2 (0.57)	7 (2)	23 (6.57)
A brand that offers a unique style	7 (2)	10 (2.86)	49 (14)	20 (5.71)	24 (6.86)	26 (7.43)	18 (5.14)	18 (5.14)	3 (0.86)	3 (0.86)	5 (1.43)	20 (5.71)
A brand that is affordable	48 (13.7)	2 (0.57)	11 (3.14)	19 (5.43)	69 (19.71)	42 (12)	13 (3.71)	182 (52)	17 (4.86)	13 (3.71)	6 (1.71)	40 (11.43)
A brand that fits my body well	22 (6.29)	0	7 (2)	63 (18)	105 (30)	93 (26.57)	24 (6.86)	40 (11.43)	4 (1.14)	5 (1.43)	3 (0.86)	76 (21.71)
A brand that looks expensive due to premium quality	20 (5.71)	13 (3.71)	19 (5.43)	8 (2.29)	13 (3.71)	14 (4)	4 (1.14)	19 (5.43)	0	0	1 (0.29)	8 (2.29)
A brand that is fashionable	6 (1.71)	23 (6.57)	13 (3.71)	16 (4.57)	11 (3.14)	23 (6.57)	20 (5.71)	11 (3.14)	2 (0.57)	2 (0.57)	0	0
A brand that is versatile for different occasions	33 (9.43)	5 (1.43)	16 (4.57)	22 (6.29)	63 (18)	26 (7.43)	20 (5.71)	54 (15.43)	10 (2.86)	6 (1.71)	9 (2.57)	32 (9.14)
A brand that is locally produced	19 (5.43)	5(1.43)	4 (1.14)	11 (3.14)	18 (5.14)	15 (4.29)	21 (6)	28 (8)	66 (18.86)	13 (3.71)	15 (4.29)	12 (3.43)
A brand I can identify with	15 (4.29)	10(2.86)	12 (3.43)	20 (5.71)	33 (9.43)	32 (9.14)	51 (14.57)	23 (6.57)	16 (4.57)	6 (1.71)	4 (1.14)	21 (6)
A brand that is made from sustainable materials	16 (4.57)	4(1.14)	5 (1.43)	5 (1.43)	18 (5.14)	12 (3.43)	3 (0.86)	16 (4.57)	5 (1.43)	3 (0.86)	14 (4)	9 (2.57)
A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends	31 (8.86)	5 (1.43)	18 (5.14)	13 (3.71)	23 (6.57)	17 (4.86)	13 (3.71)	28 (8)	6 (1.71)	4 (1.14)	8 (2.29)	13 (3.71)
A brand that is accessible	15 (4.29)	5 (1.43)	4 (1.14)	6 (1.71)	15 (4.29)	13 (3.71)	9 (2.57)	64 (18.29)	13 (3.71)	75 (21.43)	5 (1.43)	12 (3.43)

Source: Elicitation of attribute - consequence links provided by N = 350 participants (Note*: Numbers in brackets indicate percentages)

7.4.2 Compilation of the CC matrix

As explained in Chapter 5, step two of the APT required the compilation of the consequence–consequence matrix. The consequences used in the survey and for the compilation of the matrix, are those that participants provided in phase one of the study. Table 14 provides the survey results where participants had made linkages between consequences. Although the survey cautioned participants not to link consequences that are alike, from Table 14, some of the participants did so anyway (as revealed in orange in Table 14). Because these were of no significance to the study, the researcher did not take these frequencies into account for the compilation of the HVM, which is presented later in this chapter.

Like the AC matrix, the top four links with the highest frequencies as reflected in Table 14, were highlighted and used for the compilation of the HVM. The following are evident:

- The consequence “enhanced confidence” was associated with the consequence of “looking good”, and this link was made by 133 of the participants.
- The consequence “comfort” was associated with the consequence of “looking good”, by 86 participants, being less important than the previous link,
- The consequence “durability” was linked to the consequence “value for money”, by 85 of the participants.
- The consequence of "feeling good" lead to the consequence of "comfort" according to 82 of the participants.

7.4.3. Compilation of the CV matrix

Step three of the APT comprised the compilation of the consequence–value (CV) matrix, which demonstrates the linkages made between the consequences obtained in phase one of the study and the ten-value typology of Schwartz (1994). As values are regarded as the end state which direct consumers' behaviour and decision-making (Gutman, 1982, 1997), the CV matrix is thus the last of the matrices that were compiled. Table 15 provides the frequencies obtained per link between the consequences and personal values. The highlighted blocks depict the top four, based on the highest frequencies calculated from a sample size of 350 respondents.

Table 14: Consequence - Consequence Matrix

	Durability	Status	Exclusivity	Enhanced Confidence	Comfort	Makes me feel good	Expression of my identity	Value for money	Upliftment of Local Designers	Speedy delivery	Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	Makes me look good
Durability	30 (8.57)	6 (1.71)	8 (2.29)	11 (3.14)	43 (12.29)	20 (5.71)	15 (4.29)	85 (24.29)	15 (4.29)	8 (2.29)	15 (4.29)	21 (6)
Status	1 (0.29)	10 (2.86)	38 (10.86)	25 (7.14)	9 (2.57)	23 (6.57)	20 (5.71)	34 (9.71)	8 (2.29)	5 (1.43)	12 (3.43)	43 (12.29)
Exclusivity	5 (1.43)	28 (8)	12 (3.43)	16 (4.57)	17 (4.86)	23 (6.57)	34 (9.71)	29 (8.29)	15 (4.29)	10 (2.86)	17 (4.86)	28 (8)
Enhanced Confidence	9 (2.57)	22 (6.29)	29 (8.29)	18 (5.14)	42 (12)	68 (19.43)	45 (12.86)	28 (8)	10 (2.86)	7 (2)	14 (4)	133 (38)
Comfort	14 (4)	6 (1.71)	16 (4.57)	50 (14.29)	27 (7.71)	75 (21.43)	19 (5.43)	81 (23.14)	14 (4)	16 (4.57)	13 (3.71)	86 (24.57)
Makes me feel good	12 (3.43)	18 (5.14)	24 (6.86)	57 (16.29)	82 (23.43)	24 (6.86)	40 (11.43)	75 (21.43)	19 (5.43)	3 (0.86)	10 (2.86)	77 (22)
Expression of my identity	3 (0.86)	9 (2.57)	24 (6.86)	28 (8)	17 (4.86)	37 (10.57)	13 (3.71)	14 (4)	20 (5.71)	6 (1.71)	11 (3.14)	40 (11.43)
Value for money	34(9.71)	9 (2.57)	17 (4.86)	11 (3.14)	40 (11.43)	24 (6.86)	21 (6)	40 (11.43)	23 (6.57)	46 (13.14)	9 (2.57)	33 (9.43)
Upliftment of local designers	2 (0.57)	3 (0.86)	5 (1.43)	7 (2)	7 (2)	5 (1.43)	15 (4.29)	18 (5.14)	14 (4)	11 (3.14)	10 (2.86)	11 (3.14)
Speedy delivery	1 (0.29)	1 (0.29)	1(0.29)	2 (0.57)	2 (0.57)	6 (1.71)	3 (0.86)	18 (5.14)	10 (2.86)	4 (1.14)	10 (2.86)	6 (1.71)
Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	2 (0.57)	4 (1.14)	4 (1.14)	6 (1.71)	6 (1.71)	4 (1.14)	6 (1.71)	16 (4.57)	28 (8)	4 (1.14)	5 (1.43)	11 (3.14)
Makes me look good	6 (1.71)	11 (3.14)	15 (4.29)	30 (8.57)	27 (7.71)	31(8.86)	19 (5.43)	21 (6)	7 (2)	2 (0.57)	10 (2.86)	20 (5.71)

Source: Elicitation of consequence - consequence links provided by N = 350 participants

Table 15: Consequence - Value matrix

	Pleasure	Independent in thought & action (self-direction)	Personal Success / Achievement	Safety & Stability (Security)	Social status, prestige (Power)	Avoid upsetting others (Conformity)	Maintain cultural & religious traditions (Tradition)	Wanting to be challenged / novel (Stimulation)	Caring for those close to you (Benevolence)	Consideration towards others & nature (Universalism)
Durability	42 (12)	23 (6.57)	19 (5.43)	107 (30.57)	11 (3.14)	9 (2.57)	15 (4.29)	7 (2)	7 (2)	29 (8.29)
Status	3 (0.86)	22 (6.29)	56 (16)	14 (4)	62 (17.71)	7 (2)	12 (3.43)	13 (3.71)	6 (1.71)	6 (1.71)
Exclusivity	26 (7.43)	76 (21.71)	59 (16.86)	25 (7.14)	42 (12)	8 (2.29)	17 (4.86)	39 (11.14)	10 (2.86)	20 (5.71)
Enhanced Confidence	67 (19.14)	51 (14.57)	98 (28)	33 (9.43)	47 (13.43)	15 (4.29)	21 (6)	32 (9.14)	18 (5.14)	9 (2.57)
Comfort	105 (30)	26 (7.43)	32 (9.14)	111 (31.71)	21 (6)	20 (5.71)	20 (5.71)	11 (3.14)	13 (3.71)	24 (6.86)
Makes me feel good	103 (29.43)	37 (10.57)	86 (24.57)	53 (15.14)	28 (8)	18 (5.14)	25 (7.14)	15 (4.29)	18 (5.14)	17 (4.86)
Expression of my identity	35 (10)	54 (15.43)	46 (13.14)	33 (9.43)	22 (6.29)	16 (4.57)	74 (21.14)	17 (4.86)	17 (4.86)	17 (4.86)
Value for money	49 (14)	31 (8.86)	54 (15.43)	96 (27.43)	27 (7.71)	33 (9.43)	14 (4)	19 (5.43)	48 (13.71)	41 (11.71)
Upliftment of local designers	17 (4.86)	17 (4.86)	20 (5.71)	20 (5.71)	10 (2.86)	7 (2)	22 (6.29)	12 (3.43)	45 (12.86)	49 (14)
Speedy delivery	22 (6.29)	9 (2.57)	12 (3.43)	40 (11.43)	8 (2.29)	16 (4.57)	9 (2.57)	10 (2.86)	8 (2.29)	12 (3.43)
Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	14 (4)	16 (4.57)	15 (4.29)	12 (3.43)	13 (3.71)	13 (3.71)	18 (5.14)	15 (4.29)	18 (5.14)	45 (12.86)
Makes me look good	115 (32.86)	46 (13.14)	103 (29.43)	40 (11.43)	70 (20)	17 (4.86)	20 (5.71)	23 (6.57)	19 (5.43)	18 (5.14)

Source: Elicitation of consequence - value links provided by N =350 participants

Reading from left to right, the following consequence–value linkages are depicted in Table 15

- 115 participants reported that “looking good” was most important as it brought “pleasure”
- 111 participants reported that “comfort” was important as it brought them “a sense of security”
- 107 of the participants indicated that the consequence of "durability" brought them a sense of "security"
- 105 of the participants regarded the consequence of "comfort" as also providing "pleasure".

7.4.4. Constructing the Hierarchical Value Map (HVM)

The construction of the HVM was the final step of the APT, as it consolidated the most pertinent findings from the three implication matrices by way of illustration, as shown in Figure 21 below. As indicated in Chapter 5, the study used the top-down ranking method suggested by Leppard et al. (2004) to solicit the linkages which are included in the HVM and to also show the links which were important to the participants. Based on a cut-off level of four, only four levels of importance are provided in the HVM.

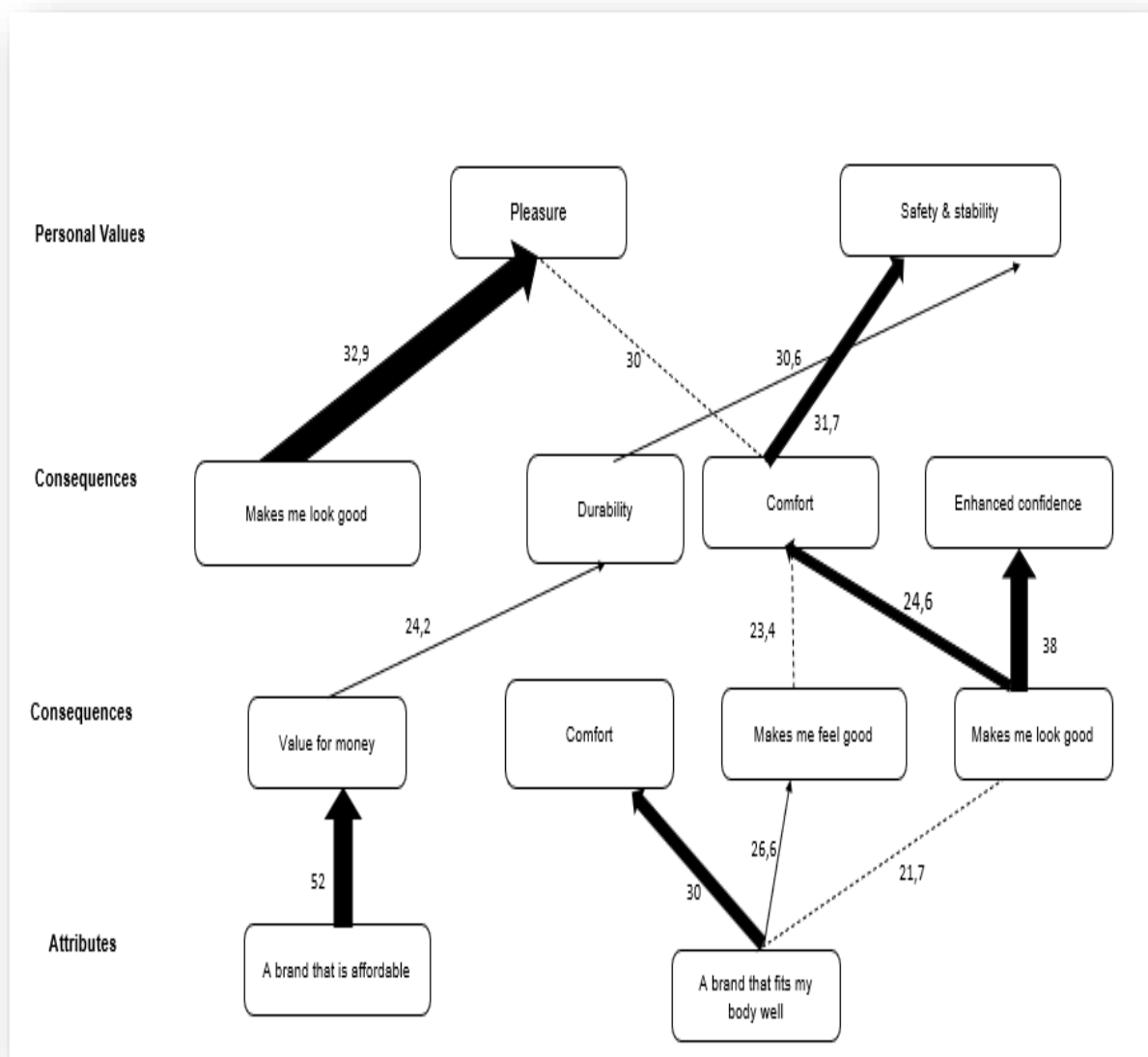
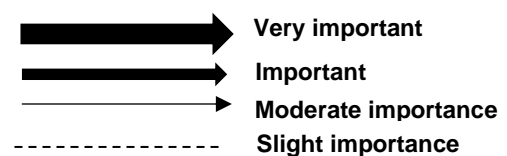


Figure 21: Hierarchical Value Map



In Figure 21, the thickness of each line represents the level of importance based on the frequencies obtained in the three implication matrices, respectively (AC, CC, CV), in that the thicker the line, the more important the link is. The frequency percentage is indicated next to every link, for ease of interpretation. Therefore, from the HVM it is evident that the millennials' clothing brand legitimacy judgements amid a global crisis are strongly driven by the attributes "affordability" and "fit", to derive "value for money", "comfort", and "look and feel good".

The HVM indicates that the related and dominant underlying values that were satisfied, through the prioritised attributes and desired consequences, are:

- "pleasure or hedonism" which encompasses pleasure derived from a combination of aesthetic satisfaction, reminding of millennials' fashion consciousness (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Dash et al., 2021; Licsandru & Cui, 2019), and their interest in clothing and fashion (Rahman et al., 2021; Sanny & Gerardo, 2018), which can be seen from sales figures for this age cohort (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019a).
- to sense "security, or to feel safe and stable", which implies coherence with society, stability of relationships, and oneself (Schwartz et al., 2012), suggesting that millennials would prefer brands that they feel comfortable with and are acceptable to their peers within society, hence not wanting negative publicity surrounding a brand, for whatever reason, to fit in with what is deemed acceptable in society.

7.5 Challenges encountered during the quantitative phase

The following challenges were encountered in the second phase of the study:

- The researcher had initially agreed with a research firm to assist with the design and distribution of the survey, using their survey design software and database. During survey design, the firm's survey platform presented some limitations and therefore could not be used. Using the license of the University of Pretoria, the researcher used the Qualtrics XM survey platform for the design, publishing, and monitoring of the survey responses.
- Additionally, the research firm was unable to recruit sufficient responses for the survey. As the research had opted for a snowballing data collection technique, the researcher made use of her networks and social media platforms to distribute and solicit responses. In addition to these platforms, the researcher physically approached employees from various government departments and private organisations and attended social events, so that she could 'on the spot,' via mobile device, share the

survey link with prospective participants. This contributed to the majority of the responses being from Gauteng Province.

- As explained in the data analysis section, 205 of the 555 responses submitted by participants could not be used in the final analysis. This required the researcher to continually stress the importance of completing the survey when sharing the survey.

7.6. Conclusion

Through the Association Pattern Technique, only two predominant personal values came to the fore in this research, namely, 'hedonism, and 'security'. According to Schwartz et al. (2012), the value 'hedonism' borders on "openness to change" and "self-enhancement". According to the Schwartz et al. (2012) depiction of the ten-value typology, one may assume that in this study, "security", which is adjacent to "power" in the typology borders on self-enhancement rather than conservation.

Past research had also found hedonism to be the prominent personal value that directs consumer shopping (Hashmi et al., 2020; Salim et al., 2019; Sundström et al., 2011), although these studies were not performed in the context of a crisis. Reflecting on the outcomes of this study, the assumption posed by Schwartz (1996, 2012), also supported by other studies, that values are enduring (Finch et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2020), is confirmed, also indicating that values transcend the situation (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987) (which was a crisis period in this study). Thus, the need for clothing to express a sense of security (value-based) is regarded as new, which is perhaps attributed to the context of a crisis that scholars have described as being characterised by uncertainty, scarcity, and fear (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Pantano et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020).

The findings of both phases as presented in Chapters 6 and 7 are discussed in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8: Discussion and contribution of the study

8.1. Introduction

Crises such as the recent global COVID-19 pandemic cause significant changes to consumers' shopping behaviour (Sheth, 2020). Mostly, the changes are instigated by uncertainty in people's lives (Kim & Song, 2022) that threaten consumers' well-being in multiple ways (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020), changing what they consider important and instrumental in terms of their everyday functioning, and decision-making (Campbell & Price, 2021; Sharma et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020). For some time, clothing retailers in South Africa have been struggling in a highly competitive global market: many established high-end brands have left the country, even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and then, the pandemic, further contributed to their demise (Ratakam & Petison, 2022; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020), resulting in many iconic clothing retail stores closing down (Yohn, 2020; Pantano et al., 2020). Information on how the clothing retail sector can secure business continuity and thrive amid global crises (of which the COVID-19 pandemic is a recent example that one can easily identify with), particularly the economic downturn, remains scant (Kim & Song, 2022). This has necessitated the need for retailers to adopt and implement strategies that will aid to maintain and legitimise their competitive edge in the marketplace during times when consumers' shopping behaviour is influenced by fear of the unknown and when their evaluation of the pros and cons as well as the affective and more sensitive aspects of their purchase decisions are prioritised (Eger et al., 2021).

In addressing the problem, this study sought to determine the brand attributes and personal values that shape millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid a global crisis. As explained by Ross et al. (2020), global crises cause consumers to reprioritize their actions per deeply rooted values, therefore questioning their cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements that existed before the crisis (Valor et al., 2021). To aid in understanding shopping behaviour, scholars suggest the use of market segmentation based on generational cohorts, due to the similarities within, and differences across generations (Eger et al., 2021). This research specifically focused on the legitimacy judgments of clothing brands of the millennial market segment, which is regarded as potentially the most disruptive (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019b), and most powerful consumer group in the marketplace in terms of market size and spending potential in recent times (Bucic et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2022; Moreno et al., 2017; Ratakam & Petison, 2022). Millennials are very fashion- and brand-conscious (Blazquez et al., 2020; Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Dash et al., 2021; Ratakam & Petison, 2022), and have hence been adversely impacted by the recent global crisis that threatened

the survival of clothing retailers and clothing brands. The closure of retail stores affected millennials in particular, because clothing is of social significance to their being, serving a purpose that surpasses functionality. For millennials, clothing is a way of physical adornment that has social significance, signifying the status of the wearer (Blazquez et al., 2020; Eastman & Liu, 2012).

Set in a South African context, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the study journeyed through millennial consumers' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands by firstly identifying millennials' preferred brand attributes, subsequently, the associated benefits anticipated to be derived from the brand preferred attributes, followed by an identification of the underlying personal values that millennials aspired to satisfy through their clothing brand choices. This was done by implementing the means-end chain methodology (MEC) (Gutman, 1982), which is a mixed methods approach, relying on the Delphi Technique (Okoli & Pawlowski, 2004) to conduct the first qualitative phase of the study to elicit millennials' preferred clothing brand attributes as well as the related consequences that they expected to derive. The second phase of the study entailed using the quantitative, Association Pattern Technique (APT) during which hierarchical value maps (HVMs) were constructed that linked the most prominent brand attributes with related consequences, and finally, the underlying values associated with these linkages. Schwartz's value typology (Schwartz, 1992) served as the theoretical anchor to structure the initial research process in terms of the personal values for inclusion in the HVMs, for data interpretation. The extended version of Schwartz's value typology (2012) served to interpret the findings in more detail.

The chosen methodologies aided in addressing the challenges raised by previous scholars, of creating a link between the emotional and psychological attachment of millennials to brands in an important product category (Ratakam & Petison, 2022). Thus, through the means-end chain methodology, this study was able to link prioritised, tangible product attributes with the intangible, predominant personal values that millennials inherently aim to satisfy through their clothing brand choices.

8.2. Answering the research questions

The study was conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to gain answers to the main research question, namely:

Amid a global crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which brand attributes and personal values drive millennial consumers' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands?

This question was narrowed down to four sub-questions to answer the research question in detail. The sub-questions were assigned objectives, which guided the focus of the respective questions. Below are the findings related to each sub-question:

- **Sub question 1: *What clothing brand attributes support millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands?***

Recent studies (Blazquez et al., 2020; Ratakam & Petison, 2022) on millennials' consumption behaviour revealed a change in this generational cohort's product attribute choices during a pandemic. For the first step of this study which aimed to elicit millennials' preferred clothing attributes spontaneously, without hints or guidelines to influence their contributions, a total of twelve brand attributes emerged that were considered relevant cues in terms of millennials' assessment of the legitimacy of clothing brands, hence how they would describe clothing brands that are worthy of support. The final list of brand attributes were verified during a focus group discussion, and a final theoretical literature check, during which “status” was added to the list that advanced to the MEC procedure, for further analysis. In the second, quantitative phase that implemented the Association Pattern Technique as part of MEC, and which involved 350 respondents, two brand attributes were identified as being the most important in terms of signifying brand legitimacy, namely “a brand that fits my body well”, and “a brand that is affordable”. When identifying the most important brand attributes, every respondent selected a maximum of seven brand attributes from the list of twelve, which they regarded most important to infer brand legitimacy, which was then used to identify the most important brand attributes as discussed below.

A brand that fits my body well: Chrimes et al. (2022) explain clothing fit as being the most important consideration during a consumer's clothing appraisal process. McKinney and Shin (2016) support this view, indicating that store buyers also regard clothing fit as the most important attribute in their buying decision-making. In this regard, Shin (2013) distinguishes between three types of fit. Firstly, *physical fit* relates to the relationship between the dimensions of the garment, for example, length, tightness, and comfort. *Aesthetic fit* enhances one's appearance and attractiveness due to how the garment adorns a person's body. *Functional fit* relates to the extent to which clothing allows for freedom of movement, including aspects of comfort, based on the intended purpose of the garment.

Fit is an intrinsic clothing product attribute that is difficult to determine from obvious product characteristics. Generally, associating a clothing brand with a good fit is based on experience.

Millennials might therefore prioritise certain brands because, based on previous experience of wearing the specific branded products, they are aware that product ranges from those brands fit them well.

An affordable brand: Chae et al. (2020) describe millennials as being trend orientated and interested in possessing the latest fashion products. Ratakam and Petison (2022), describe millennials as being more concerned about style than price when making purchase decisions, although admitting that millennials are becoming rather difficult to predict.

Price is an extrinsic product characteristic that is often used to determine whether a product can be afforded, or not. Price is also used as a heuristic to assume quality (Chi et al., 2021; Diddi et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2019). The attribute "affordable" brand, as identified in this study, confirms this unpredictability as it contradicts the notion that millennials are price insensitive. It should be reminded, however, that the study was done amid a crisis that increased financial pressure, inter alia due to job losses. It is therefore not surprising that affordability was highlighted as a very important attribute. Also, affordability is relative and does not necessarily mean cheap.

● ***Sub question 2: What consequences do millennials anticipate to derive from the clothing brand attributes that they prioritise?***

Millennials are described as not being brand loyal, instead, they seek clothing brands that match their personality, lifestyle, and values. Their brand purchase decisions are said to be driven by cultural, social, political, and economic changes, resulting in a constant revisit of their buying behaviour (Moreno et al., 2017).

Participants were presented with a total of twelve consequences that emerged from the first, qualitative phase of the study, in which every participant had to link to the brand attributes that they had prioritised in a previous exercise (hence a maximum of seven).

Six of the twelve consequences emerged as the so-called strongest of all the consequences listed, hence the most important consequences anticipated to be derived from legitimate brands. These were: 'comfort'; 'value for money'; 'makes me feel good'; 'makes me look good'; 'durability'; and 'enhanced confidence', and are discussed below:

Value for money, durability: Scholars (Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017; Gorn et al., 2001) indicate that crises lead to financial constraints, and as a result, one would expect that consumers become more price sensitive during this time. Subsequently, consumers search for brands

that offer value for money. However, Nilssen et al. (2019) indicate that value for money does not necessarily imply a low price, and therefore, consumers might not necessarily opt to select a garment merely based on a lower price. From the study, value for money emerged as a consequence associated with an affordable brand. Value for money was further linked with durability, which Klepp et al. (2020) associate with the increased lifespan of a garment.

Comfort, makes me feel good, makes me look good, enhanced confidence: Participants in this study, indicated comfort as an important consequence in terms of their legitimacy inferences of clothing brands. Similarly, Liu et al. (2021) have found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers' clothing consumption changed, reflecting stronger preferences for comfortable clothes. This change was a result of a need to feel less anxious, less constrained, and less stressed, which concurs with the findings of this study, as 23% of the participants linked 'comfort' with 'a brand that makes me feel good'. This coincides with the findings from the CV matrix where 31% of the respondents had linked 'comfort' and 'safety and stability'. Lee et al. (2020) support the link between 'goodness of fit' and 'comfort'. In this study, 30% of participants linked the benefit 'comfort' with 'a brand that fits them well'.

Although scholars have long held the view that millennials' consumption behaviour is primarily driven by status and prestige (Chae et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2022), the findings from this study, indicate otherwise. Although status was listed as one of the consequences that participants could choose from, it did not make it to the list of the four highly ranked, sought-after consequences, demonstrating that crises indeed disrupt what is known about consumer markets, challenging the status quo.

● **Sub question 3: *Which underlying personal values are associated with the consequences that millennials expect to derive from clothing brands that they consider to be legitimate?***

The results of this study revealed that amid a global crisis, two predominant personal values direct millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands, namely 'hedonism', and 'security', as discussed below.

Hedonism: Blazquez et al. (2020) regard hedonism as a subjective, intangible emotional benefit that can be associated with consumption. According to Schwartz (1992, 2012), the motivational goal for the value of hedonism, is that of pleasure or enjoying life. A widely held belief exists that people seek pleasure and try by all means to avoid pain. Moreover, during a time of uncertainty and resource scarcity, consumers seek to avoid experiences that diminish

their pleasure, and therefore rather engage in consumption experiences that are enjoyable and give them a sense of control (Yang & Zhang, 2022).

From this study, it is evident that respondents regarded clothing brands that make them feel good as the most sought-after consequence to achieve a sense of pleasure. Studies have found that consumers engage in hedonic consumption to enhance self-esteem, optimism, and hope for achieving a brighter future (Ratakam & Petison, 2022). This study suggests that millennials represent a generation whose brand choices are largely motivated by the potential to experience enjoyment. Scholars have found that brands that offer pleasure, will enhance satisfaction, and evoke positive emotions (de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019a; Schmitt et al., 2015). Millennials, in this regard, have been found to love fashion brands that incite pleasure and happiness in their lives (Ratakam & Petison, 2022).

Security: Safety and stability emerged as the second, highly (most) important personal value that directs millennials' clothing brand legitimacy judgements. As a result of the uncertainty and helplessness triggered by a global crisis (as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic), Cannon et al. (2019) posit that consumers seek comfort through the consumption of products that provide some sense of security and personal control. Security is usually sought in products that are not classified as a scarce resource (Schwartz, 2012). Generally, consumers face financial constraints during a time of crisis, and therefore, seek products that can guarantee them a sense of stability. During the recent global crises, i.e. the 2008 economic crisis and the recent COVID-19 pandemic, many people were retrenched, with some companies having to close down, which increased consumers' fear, anxiety, and depression (Chauhan et al., 2021). Security, as the second most prevalent personal value that directs millennials' clothing brand legitimacy judgements, according to Schwartz (2012), reflect an inner goal to secure harmony within the individual and the larger community

In summary, therefore:

Values are deeply rooted motives that indicate what people consider important in life, representing the goals that direct people's behaviour, mostly without conscious awareness of their role. Not all the values that people hold, are equally important. This study, therefore, made a very important finding in identifying the values that are more prevalent in directing millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands. The findings of this study hence distinguish the inner forces/goals that reveal how millennials decide what is important to them. Because this is very difficult to communicate off-hand, this study commenced on a more practical level, identifying clothing brand attributes that millennials consider as cues to infer clothing brand legitimacy. By subsequently indicating the consequences that they expect to derive from the identified clothing brand attributes, respondents could be prompted to relay

their brand attribute choices through a series of hierarchical mapping to conclusively distinguish the underlying personal values that influence their perception of what can be coined as legitimate clothing brands.

According to Schwartz (1992, 2006, 2012), when values are activated, feelings develop. For example, in the context of this study, if the value 'hedonism' is activated when judging clothing brands, a feeling of joy/happiness emerges (or the contrary), which will influence millennials' behaviour towards clothing brands (accept/reject). The same applies to the value 'security' that is defined by Schwartz (2012, p. 6) as "signifying a need to maintain safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self". In essence, then, the pleasure that is derived from a clothing brand is supported by a brand that enhances a sense of harmony and stability, which is translated as security in terms of established value terminology (Schwartz, 2012). Identifying millennials' preferred brand attributes, as was done in the first phase of the study, was the logical way to eventually deduce how this value can be supported, and interpreted correctly in the consumer decision-making process. Especially, the value of security should be interpreted within context.

Without exception, values refer to the desired goals that motivate consumers' behaviour/judgements. This study concludes that hedonism/enjoyment is the predominant value that directs millennials' brand legitimacy judgements, and that will direct their behaviour in the marketplace. It will surpass other influences to direct millennials' brand choice behaviour, notwithstanding the situation. Therefore, even social pressure in a specific context will not overrule millennials' regard for clothing brands that are aligned with their prevailing dominant values, namely hedonism (pleasure/enjoyment) and security (translated as harmony/stability). These two personal values that were identified, hence serve as standards or criteria for brand/product choice and -evaluation, in terms of what is acceptable (or not), and worth supporting (or not), based on possible consequences that they aim to achieve. This highlights the importance of the outcomes of this study, where the consequences that millennials expect to achieve when selecting clothing brands, were identified and prioritised across two phases of the study. Brand attributes and consequences are generally easier to express than the associated values that people/millennials cherish.

What was important in this study, which followed a step-by-step process to identify the most prevalent values that direct millennials' brand legitimacy judgements, is that the impact of deeply rooted personal values on everyday consumer judgements and brand choice decisions is seldom conscious. It is usually when actions/judgements imply conflicting consequences that values come to the fore in consumers' minds. For example, an important clothing brand

that is available at a good price and which offers multiple attractive advantages, but that is associated with child labour will cause conflict despite apparently favourable attributes.

Because values are ordered in terms of relative importance (Schwartz, 2012), it was possible for this study, through the APT and the related HVMs, to identify hedonism and security as the most prevalent, and second most prevalent personal values, respectively, that direct millennials' clothing brand legitimacy judgements. The relative importance of different values that are prevalent, guides consumers' (millennials') behaviour/choices/judgements. Often, trade-offs are made among relevant, competing values that then guide consumers' judgements and behaviours (Schwartz, 1992, 1996). Particularly, values influence consumers' actions when they become relevant (are activated) in a particular context, and hence become important to the individual. The prevalence of the combination of hedonism and security, in the context of this research, is therefore not far-fetched even though they might seem opposing, to some extent (are not adjacent on Schwartz's value continuum). It suggests that millennials' brand legitimacy judgements are driven by hedonism, but that a sense of security should not be underestimated in achieving sought-after enjoyment. To explain: hedonism as a value is associated with pleasure, self-indulgence, and how satisfying life experiences can be achieved. Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) explain that happiness can be derived from whatever outcomes people value, which sheds more light on the prevalence of security as a predominant value. According to Sagiv and Schwartz (2000), happiness can be derived when the value of security, is honoured/ respected, in that a sense, security can reflect contentment with oneself, as well as within the community.

In the theoretical model of Schwartz et al. (2012) (see Figure 6, Chapter 3), the value 'security' is part of the higher order value 'conservation' that suggests a need for anxiety avoidance that could have a personal, or social focus. This value is adjacent to 'self-enhancement' on the value continuum (Schwartz et al., 2012) that is again adjacent to the higher-order value of 'openness to change'. On the continuum, hedonism and security are neither opposing nor immediately adjacent. Rather, the value 'security' is adjacent to 'power' and 'achievement' which are both parts of the higher-order value of self-enhancement that includes hedonism (that has a personal focus). Hedonism as well as security have a personal focus on the value continuum, which enhances our understanding of the relative, and joint contribution of these two predominant values in terms of millennials' brand legitimacy judgements, as this study concludes. The precondition is that security should be interpreted within the context, as explained before. Schwartz (2012, p. 6) defines the value 'security' as signifying a need to maintain "safety, harmony, stability of society, of relationships, and of self", that is associated with basic individual and group requirements, hence a personal as well as a social focus,

according to Schwartz (2012). Millennials are typically focused on the self but also value their peers highly (Dash et al., 2021). In this sense, security does not refer to physical safety.

● **Sub question 4: *Which prominent personal values signify millennials' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements of clothing retail brands?***

Tost (2011) sought to explain the process whereby individuals formulate legitimacy judgements, arguing that any legitimacy judgement comprises a judgement formation and a judgement assessment processes. Judgement formation entails an evaluative, or passive judgement mode resulting in a generalised inference that a brand is socially appropriate or not. Generally, evaluative mode judgements are based on the conformance of a brand to an individual's moral and instrumental norms, although they are prone to cognitive bias and are influenced by individuals' social identification/affiliation with the group/peers that are associated with the brand, as would be expected with millennials who have a strong social affiliation. The passive evaluation mode process differs from the evaluative mode in that individuals simply accept a brand based on its conformance to expectations, although scholars (Moisander et al., 2016; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Valor et al., 2021) caution that expectations are influenced by media and regulatory requirements that may cause semiotic shifts in consumers' legitimacy judgements. During the COVID-19 pandemic, regulations were imposed on social interaction and retailing that would have influenced millennials' legitimacy judgments, acknowledging that consumers' legitimacy judgements are influenced by the type of market category within which the organisation/brand operates, hence the clothing retail context, in the case of this research (Pontikes & Barnett, 2015).

Generally, judgements are inferred based on an institutional logic that is adopted by the consumer, and which serves as a cognitive structure that will impart meaning to situations (Ngoye et al., 2019; Reay & Hinings, 2009). Institutional logic, in this context, refers to the practices and symbolic systems, including personal values and beliefs, by which individuals assign meaning to their daily activities, how they devote their time, and live their lives in a particular context. Trust, which Pirson et al. (2017) regard as the willingness of individuals to become vulnerable to another party, is also instrumental in individuals' legitimisation of brands. McKnight et al. (1998) posit that an individual's decision to trust something (a brand) is largely influenced by personal values. In the context of this study, brand trust concerns the intrinsic 'believability' of a brand, based on its behaviour and performance, creating the foundation of a strong connection with certain brands, and converting simple awareness of a brand to a strong commitment towards the brand. Brand trust is often used to develop and portray the

image of a business, globally (Baumann-Pauly, et al., 2016; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Guo et al., 2017), and is very important for brands' survival in a competitive marketplace.

Whatever the context, individuals' legitimacy judgements are formed relative to a reference point (Finch et al., 2015), specifically, their personal values, and according to Tost (2011), the passive or evaluative judgement formation depends on the availability of validity cues, for example, a desired attribute of a brand (such as good fit) will serve as a validity cue. If the relevant validity cues (attributes) are not distinguishable, the evaluative mode of the legitimacy judgement (of the brand) is likely to be implemented, for example, the acceptability of a brand to peers (propriety judgements) (Hoefler & Green, 2016; Valor et al., 2021).

Scholars (Hakala et al., 2017) differentiate legitimacy judgements by making a distinction between judgements stemming from a collective-, and an individual-level. This study focused on consumers' legitimacy judgements, namely propriety legitimacy judgements (where the influence of the social group is important) as well as validity legitimacy judgements (on a personal level) in terms of millennials' overall legitimacy inferences (Ruffo et al., 2020; Suddaby et al., 2017) of clothing brands. Hakala et al. (2017) explain that validity legitimacy judgements influence consumers' pragmatic and cognitive legitimacy inferences, in that it would encourage the consumption of brands, because a millennial would tend to feel pressurised to conform with the majority, in pursuit of approval within society, a phenomenon that is typical of this generational cohort. Propriety legitimacy judgement hence refers to the individual's belief about the appropriateness of a brand (Haack et al., 2020), which has important behavioural consequences. If an object (brand) is not consistent with the standards (values) and principles of the evaluator/consumer (within a social context), then propriety will not be granted, and support may be withheld.

The personal values hedonism and security emerged as the two prominent personal values that direct millennial consumers' legitimacy judgements of clothing retail brands. To interpret the findings in terms of millennials' cognitive, moral, and pragmatic legitimacy judgements, this study consulted the refined value typology continuum of Schwartz et al. (2012), to gain further insight.

A **cognitive and moral legitimacy judgement** is inferred from interaction with a brand, and often, loyalty towards a brand, to the extent that a passive judgement mode is ignited, even assuming certain outcomes (the consequences associated with a brand). Gustafson and Pomirleanu, (2021, p. 22) explain that a brand is '...experienced, shaped and changed in communities' minds, suggesting that brand legitimacy is inferred, and according to Froudi et al. (2018), cognitive legitimacy is enhanced by brand loyalty and a consumer's attachment to a brand. Translated in terms of the predominant value whereby the cognitive legitimacy of a

brand can be inferred, the final HVM (Figure 21) produced by the APT in the MEC analysis, indicates that a sense of security (a predominant underlying value) is derived from the desirable consequences 'comfort' and 'durability' that is characterised by the attributes 'value for money', 'make me feel good', and 'makes me look good', which suggests experience with a brand.

The refined value typology (Schwartz, 2012) indicates that security can be distinguished as social security and personal security. On this basis, from the findings of the study, the value of security emanated as the prominent value that signifies millennial consumers' moral legitimacy judgements. According to literature, moral legitimacy assumes that a brand is appropriate in terms of what the individual within a society deems proper. Society influences an individual's brand legitimacy judgements because the individual is a member of society (peer group is very important to millennials), and pleasure/enjoyment will be derived as a consequence of meeting personal goals as well as those imposed by society on the individual consumer.

Therefore, the study concludes that cognitive legitimacy, as well as moral legitimacy of a brand, stems from personal experience of a brand, and positive references/feedback by significant others that facilitate evaluative mode judgements that are linked to an individual's moral and instrumental norms. These evaluations are not made in isolation and are influenced by individuals' social identification/affiliation with the group/peers that are associated with the brand, which is expected with millennials who have a strong social affiliation (Moisander et al., 2016; Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013; Valor et al., 2021).

A **pragmatic legitimacy judgement** is a matter-of-fact judgement that is made on a personal level. Because hedonism primarily has a personal focus, this value can be regarded as being prominent in signifying millennial consumers' pragmatic legitimacy judgement (Suchman, 1995). Hedonism can be said to signify cognitive legitimacy based on the individuals' taken-for-grantedness for the need to buy clothes to satisfy a personal value of pleasure, despite experiencing financial constraints, anxiety, and uncertainty amid a prevailing crisis. This study hence concludes that hedonism (enjoyment) is the prominent personal value that signifies millennials' pragmatic legitimacy judgements of clothing retail brands.

On a practical level, the pragmatic legitimacy of a brand would be deduced from how much enjoyment can potentially be derived from the brand. In answering the question of how that can be achieved, the final HVM (Figure 21) produced by the APT in the MEC analysis, indicates that pleasure (hedonism) is strongly supported by the consequence 'makes me feel good', and to a lesser extent, by 'comfort'. On an attribute level, the cue would be 'a brand that fits my body well', suggesting some experience with the brand, and trust.

8.3. Contributions of the study

8.3.1. Contribution to literature

The role of personal values in the formation of evaluations has transcended numerous disciplines such as the fields of political science (Smith, 1949), psychology (Davidov et al., 2008; Feather, 1995; Knoppen & Saris, 2009; Schwartz, 1994; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987), marketing (Anker et al., 2015; Slimane et al., 2019; Vinson et al., 1977) and organisational behaviour (Ruffo et al., 2020). Marketing studies have found that consumers develop an attachment to a brand, and brand loyalty, even defending preferred brands with fondness. However, it can be said that a global crisis challenges the notion of brand loyalty, because, whilst most consumers' habits eventually return to normal after a crisis, some habits wither due to an adaptation to a so-called new normal (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Sheth, 2020), where consumers may identify alternative, more convenient ways of operating (Sheth, 2020). The adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on individuals' finances and spending patterns (Dutt & Padmanabhan, 2011; Hampson & McGoldrick, 2013; Pantano et al., 2020), negatively influenced consumers' spending on non-essential items (Dutt & Padmanabhan, 2011; Ross et al., 2020), changing consumers' judgements, with a possible long-term change in consumer preferences, norms, and trends (Sharma et al., 2020) so that consumers would most probably have reconsidered what they value most (Ross et al., 2020).

Attribution theorists have found that individuals tend to develop causal explanations for the occurrence of significant events, which influence their behaviour and judgements (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). As such, Sheth (2020) explains consumption as being habitual and contextual. Crises evoke attributional thinking, and therefore, consumers assess whether or not a crisis was in the control of the brand, or whether the crisis occurred as a result of forces beyond the management of the brand (Singh et al., 2020). Fear induced by crises influences consumers' behaviour and how they process information (Coleman et al., 2017; Morales et al., 2012; White et al., 2013; Winterich & Haws, 2011), for example, the fear of being unemployed may result in a reduction of spending patterns, and encourage increased savings, while the fear of scarcity will lead to stockpiling, as was the case during high levels of lockdown amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Crises may also make consumers more mindful of their consumption choices (Sheth, 2020), for example taking into consideration the effect on the environment, nature, society, and sustainability issues. According to a study by Ng et al. (2021), amid crises, consumers' brand preferences change, while Yu et al. (2021) posit that consumers with a high brand attachment before a crisis, maintain their brand support post-crisis.

Research has also shown that crises evoke a mindset of scarcity among consumers, causing consumers to focus on whatever they consider valuable (Ross et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2015). The perceived scarcity of goods or services can significantly change consumers' choices, also increasing price sensitivity (Pantano et al., 2020). The onset of a crisis is generally dominated by intuitive, heuristic, and affective information processing (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015) due to a lack of information, misinformation, or conflicting information that may threaten consumers' ability to understand, plan, and cope with social threats (Campbell et al., 2020). These voids instigate emotional reactions to the perceived negative consequences of a crisis (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015) and consumers' reliance on whatever information is available (Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017). Mostly, in states of uncertainty, individuals' decisions are more strongly based on financial implications (Faraji-Rad & Pham, 2017; Gorn et al., 2001).

Some scholars are of the view that a brand can still be perceived as legitimate and worthy of support without consumers necessarily attaching any affective values to their judgements (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Haack et al., 2014; Pfarrer et al., 2010), rather depending on prior experiences and perceptions as a cognitive shortcut (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015). The different views, therefore, indicate that consumers' legitimacy inferences of brands are not yet clearly understood.

The findings of this study have specifically extended prior research on millennials and their clothing brand consumption behaviour by assessing their legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid a time of global crisis, considering what is known about consumers' behaviour during times of crisis. Whilst scholars have asserted that values are an instrumental driving force for consumers' consumption decisions, evidence could not be found in literature concerning what these values are, especially in a time characterised by immense uncertainty and anxiety, amid a global crisis. While scholars concur that millennials from different countries have distinctive characteristics, information about millennials from an emerging country context remains scant. This study has produced findings about South African millennials' clothing brand preferences that challenge what scholars have reported to date concerning this generational cohort, namely, that they are believed to be status driven and price-insensitive. Rather, in this study, South African millennials' clothing brand preferences are linked to brand attributes and anticipated consequences that are aligned with the personal values (Schwartz, 2012), hedonism, and security that both have a personal focus (higher order value).

The need for clothing to express a sense of security (value-based) is a new contribution to literature, which is perhaps attributed to the context of the crisis that prevailed when conducting the study, and which scholars have described as a time characterised by

uncertainty, scarcity and fear (Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Pantano et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2020; Sheth, 2020).

Also, in terms of millennials' legitimacy judgements, this study confirmed the relevance of previous experience with brands and social interaction (which is characteristic of millennials) in terms of millennials' moral and cognitive legitimacy judgements, and personal experience in terms of millennials' pragmatic legitimacy judgement of brands. This has not been reported in the literature before.

8.3.2. Methodological contribution

While MEC analysis has been used across various disciplines, including marketing and clothing-related studies specifically (Diedricks, 2019; Ha & Jang, 2013; H. Park et al., 2020; Rugg et al., 2002), individual interviews and a soft laddering approach have mainly been used to gain qualitative insights about the subject matter (Ronda et al., 2020). This research project was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic which complicated data gathering, specifically techniques involving interviews that were predominantly limited to virtual interviews. This is also true when data collection is done across a larger geographical area (Diedericks et al., 2020; Ter Hofstede et al., 1998). Because the essence of the first phase in this research was to merely elicit attributes (A), and corresponding consequences (C), the use of soft laddering techniques as typically used in MEC studies posed practical problems that implied consequences in terms of the reliability of the study. The researcher then opted to implement the Delphi technique which seemed a viable option but which had yet not been used as part of MEC research, and which had not been optimised in marketing research to date. The Delphi technique, specifically the Classical Delphi technique seemed a viable option as it allowed participants to freely share their views, in their own time, without interference, from any location in the country. Moreover, the Delphi technique allowed participants to reflect on their contributions when they were asked to verify the summary in the subsequent rounds two and three (if necessary) of the process, to verify the data. Scholars (Graefe & Armstrong, 2011; Green et al., 1990; Paraskevas & Saunders, 2012; Park & Kim, 2017; Pfleegor et al., 2019) applaud the Delphi technique for its distinct characteristics in ensuring anonymity of responses, iteration, and controlled feedback, and its ability to utilise technology to gain access to "experts" more easily across a larger geographic area. Most importantly, the strength of the technique lies in its ability to recognise subjectivity (Kaartemo & Nyström, 2021; Meijering & Tobi, 2018; Sobaih et al., 2012), although ensuring convergence of an opinion (Kaartemo & Nyström, 2021; Pfleegor et al., 2019). Using the Delphi technique, a panel of experts (millennials with experience in clothing purchases) was recruited to obtain reliable

information about future trends concerning the legitimacy of clothing brands amid a global crisis.

The successful implementation of the Classical Delphi Technique within the means-end chain methodology served as a central methodological contribution. The qualitative phase of the means-end chain ordinarily solicits information through interviews, and to honour this practice, further enhancing the quality of the data, an online focus group discussion was held to confirm the findings of the Delphi Technique. The success of this implementation is undoubtedly worth considering in future MEC studies.

8.3.3. Practical contribution

This study provides insight to clothing retailers and marketers on how to evaluate clothing brands, ensuring that the related attributes will produce sought-after consequences that are aligned with the personal values that direct their target market's (millennials') brand legitimacy judgements. Millennials represent a viable generational cohort from the point of view of clothing retailers' survival (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2016; Bundy & Pfarrer, 2015; Hakala et al., 2017; Lamin & Zaheer, 2012; Suddaby et al., 2017; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), and therefore, an understanding of the deeply rooted values that direct millennials' brand legitimacy judgements, which have elevated the role of millennials' previous experience and social interaction, is crucial for marketers and clothing retailers to aptly communicate with these consumers and address their clothing product needs.

The research was conducted amid a global crisis that had affected clothing retailers rather severely. This study explains the importance of pleasurable shopping experiences amid times of uncertainty, linking them to the predominant personal values that direct millennials' brand legitimacy judgments. These are then translated on a more practical level in terms of desirable clothing brand attributes that are easier to interpret, on a practical level.

Clothing retailers should be cognisant that although millennial consumers' choice of clothing brands may primarily be driven by underlying hedonistic motivations for inferring legitimacy judgements upon their brand offerings, it is also important that the brands instill a sense of security, hence supporting feelings of content. On a more practical level - when consulting Figure 21 - to translate the brand characteristics/requirements on a more practical level, so-called legitimate clothing brands (from millennials' point of view) are identified by and associated with *value for money* that is linked with *durability*, *comfort*, and *good fit*. These are all aspects that will positively uplift the wearer, and enhance a positive feeling among peers.

Brands' reputation is therefore very important because all these associations stem from positive experiences with a brand. Retailers could, for example, more closely look at product complaints, product returns, and declining sales figures to spot potential problems earlier.

8.4. Study limitations

Although a considerable effort was made to conduct the study scientifically, and to optimise every opportunity to gather reliable, valid data, the study has to acknowledge certain shortcomings that may have influenced the outcomes of the study.

Firstly, the participants recruited for this study comprised millennials born between 1980 and 1999, relying on the categorisation per the Statistics South Africa (2018) definition. From generational literature, generations are often considered according to their lifespan, although there is no exact science as to what the lifespan for a specific generational cohort should be (Durocher et al., 2016). Therefore, a country's generation age bracket may differ slightly by a few years from another country. Subsequently, this study may have excluded inputs from individuals that other countries would have included as part of their millennial generational cohort. It would, however, not have contributed to a significant percentage of the sample, and therefore, the researcher believes that the categorisation used, would not have jeopardised the findings of this study.

Although this study acknowledged that Schwartz's ten-value typology was since refined to 19 values (Schwartz et al., 2012), it was decided not to bombard respondents with a questionnaire that would have included almost twice the number of items when presenting the last screen during the MEC procedure. Apart from being the last exercise in an already time-consuming task, an extensive list of values might have been discouraging. It was decided to follow the route taken by previous scholars (Diedricks, 2019; Hastreiter & Marchetti, 2016; Lee et al., 2014), to rather rely on a more user-friendly ten-value typology, and then use the extended value typology for further interpretation of the findings. The 19-value typology maintains the original ten values, with the only difference being more contextual, which provides further insights into the perspective from which an individual considers a value.

As mentioned earlier, 'security' was identified as a pertinent value, however, the design of the study did not specifically explore whether 'security', in the context of this research, is based on a personal or social focus. From the HVM's, however, a more personal focus was assumed.

The study was undertaken in a cross-sectional time horizon, which may have resulted in participants only providing their legitimacy judgements at a specific point in time, basing their responses on their perceptions at the time when they completed the survey. From Coombs and Laufer (2018), it is understood that crises can be broken into different phases, with each phase evoking a different mindset. In this instance, the COVID-19 pandemic imposed different levels of lockdown. It may be that each level of lockdown may have evoked different degrees of uncertainty, influencing respondents' responses.

Despite only indicating a minimum income as pre-requisite for inclusion in the study, the majority of those who participated in the study earned an annual income of less than a million rand. Thus the findings of the study, may not necessarily hold for millennials who earn more, and probably not for those who earn less.

The study was conducted in an African emerging market context, with no comparison of whether these findings may also hold in other emerging markets.

8.5. Suggestions for future research

As indicated in section 8.4, the findings of the study reflect some limitations that future researchers should keep in mind. Schwartz et al. (2012) acknowledge that the ten-value typology does not provide further insight into how an individual may resonate with a certain value, hence he introduced the refined value typologies in 2012. Future research could make use of the 19 refined values to obtain greater depth on the focus of the chosen values, using another methodology, as the HVMs of the APT present certain challenges when the matrices become too complicated.

As the study included millennials from an income bracket of R150 000 and above, opportunities exist to narrow the income bracket of participants, perhaps only focusing on higher-income individuals, to for example, determine the relevance of status as a consequence during times of a crisis, which previous studies have associated with millennials (Chae et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2022).

The same study can be replicated in other contexts, not limited to emerging countries, to determine whether the findings of this research reflect universal behaviour .

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Phase one ethical clearance

**Gordon
Institute
of Business
Science**
University
of Pretoria

27 January 2022

Khanyisa Nkuna

Dear Khanyisa

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

Please note that approval is granted based on the methodology and research instruments provided in the application. If there is any deviation change or addition to the research method or tools, a supplementary application for approval must be obtained

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards

GIBS Doctoral Research Ethical Clearance Committee



Doctoral Chair Signature

Appendix 2: Delphi Technique - Round one questionnaire

A: Email body

Dear Participant

I trust this email finds you well.

Thank you for taking an interest in participating in my research study. In this email, I have attached the introduction to the study (as previously shared) and instructions for Round 1 of the study, of which you need to send responses to Round 1 in the next two days (Thursday, 3 March 2022). It will be appreciated if responses can be sent back via email - you can provide the response on the body of the email.

Please feel free to contact me should seek clarity or have any questions.

Thank you once again for your valued assistance, without which it will be impossible to complete my studies.

Kind regards

Khanyisa Nkuna

B: Email attachment

INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT FORM

Dear participant

Thank you for showing an interest in participating in this online survey. Please note that participation is limited to:

- **individuals born between 1980 and 1999**, and
- **who are earning at least R150 000 annually**, and
- who are **generally purchasing their own clothes**, or clothes on behalf of others.

Before you agree to participate and commence with the task, you are required to give your consent that the information that you share in this survey may be used as part of a data set that will be analysed for academic research purposes as part of a Doctoral degree. **By agreeing to participate, it is assumed that you willingly agree to take part in this research endeavour** that seeks your contribution in terms of a selected target market's perceptions of clothing retail brands. The study is specifically interested in the characteristics of clothing brands that you as a consumer perceive as legitimate, thus worthy of being part of the South African clothing retail scene, amid a global crisis such as the COVID -19 pandemic that all of us have been encountering since 2020.

Please take note that, for the successful completion of this survey:

- Every willing participants is kindly requested to commit to complete all three subsequent rounds of investigation that will take approximately ten minutes to complete per round. **This is because only completed data sets (of all three rounds) are eligible for inclusion in the final study, your contribution is highly valued!** However, even if you agree to participate now, you may withdraw at any stage without any consequences to you.
- You will receive the instructions for every round approximately ten days after completion after the preceding round. Very importantly, every round that takes approximately ten minutes to complete, has to be submitted to the researcher within two days.
- Please note that your contribution is highly valued and that there are no right or wrong answers. Your honest insights on the subject are crucial in terms of the outcomes of this study.
- All information that you share in this survey, will remain confidential, and anonymous.
- Only aggregate data will be used in the end, and it will not be possible to trace a specific contribution to the participant who shared the information.

- No participant will benefit directly, financially or otherwise, from participating in this research.
- No personal details will be stored. Rather, codes will be assigned to electronic responses to link respective contributions.
- The aggregate data will be analysed and reported as part of an academic thesis.
- Under the Protection of Personal Information Act, the information which you will provide will only be used for purposes of this study
- You are free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

If you agree to become part of this important research project, you may commence with the ROUND 1 inquiry outlined on the next page.

Highly appreciated

Khanyisa Brenda Nkuna (DBA student) (Cell: 072 107 6210)

Prof Alet C Erasmus (Supervisor) (082 784 2467)

ROUND 1:

Dear participant,

Brand names are used to distinguish products, and to communicate important information even if we do not necessarily consciously think about brands in that way. Considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the times we are living in presently:

1. Step 1 of round 1:

Please think about **clothing brands that you prefer** and consider legitimate role players in the market, that are worthy of your support on the South African retail scene presently. Without disclosing any brand names, please describe in a return e-mail in approximately 50 words the **characteristics of the clothing brands that YOU favour, and prefer**. Please be very specific, using clear descriptors to present your view.

For example:

When choosing clothing brands, I look for brands that are *****, and *****, and *****. Therefore, by simply looking at the brands, I assume the following attributes that distinguish them from other brands in the same store, or other stores. (You can fill in the missing information, or write your own paragraph, mentioning as many attributes that you consider important)

2. Step 2 of round 1:

Reflecting on the brand characteristics (attributes) that you have mentioned in step 1, please explain in approximately 50 words **why the attributes that you have are important to you**. Therefore, what advantages or benefits do you anticipate to gain from the attributes that you have specified.

For example:

When purchasing the brand names that I prefer, I will enjoy benefits such as ***** and ***** and ***** that is not necessarily true for all the clothing brands. To me, the brands offer advantages such as ***** and ***** and ***** that are important to me.

(You can fill in the missing information, or write your own paragraph, mentioning as many attributes that you consider important)

HINT: In your return e-mail, you can copy the instructions, and complete in whichever way you want to.

Please conclude by stating that:

I consent that my contributions may be used for study purposes as explained in the recruitment e-mail., and I understand that it is important to complete three similar rounds to complete the data sets.

In ROUND 2 and ROUND 3, you will receive the aggregate information after the researcher has analysed participants' contributions. You will then have the opportunity to indicate which parts you agree with (or not), with an opportunity to make recommendations.

Your assistance is highly appreciated

Khanyisa Brenda Nkuna (DBA student) (072 107 6210)

Prof Alet C Erasmus (Supervisor) (082 784 2467)

Appendix 3: Delphi Technique - Round two questionnaire

Dear Participant

I trust you are well.

Thank you for your participation in Round 1 of the research. It is highly appreciated. As indicated

earlier, you need to participate in two more rounds. If you fail to respond, I unfortunately have to remove your valuable first round contribution as I can only use complete data sets. It is therefore extremely important that you complete all the rounds.

From the feedback received in Round 1, and based on the participant's contributions, the below summary reflects the majority view of the characteristics of **"a clothing brand that is worthy of being included in the clothing retail scene and that can be considered a legitimate brand at a time of a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic that we have experienced recently"** is :

1. A brand that suggests the use of quality materials
2. A brand that offers unique style
3. A brand that is affordable
4. A brand that fits my body well
5. A brand that looks expensive due to premium quality
6. A brand that is fashionable and presents a young image
7. A brand that is versatile for different occasions
8. A brand that is contemporary
9. A brand that is locally produced
10. A brand I can identify with
11. A brand that is made from sustainable materials
12. A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends

These characteristics are important to me because of the following benefits that I expect to derive:

13. Durability
14. Status
15. Exclusivity
16. Enhanced confidence
17. Comfort
18. Makes me feel good
19. Expression of my identity
20. Value for money
21. Upliftment of local designers

The characteristics and the benefits are numbered to ease completion of the second round, and the numbering does not indicate order of importance! Please evaluate the above characteristics and benefits, and kindly indicate:

- a) If you agree with the summary (then state that you agree with all)
- b) Indicate which descriptor you would like to delete (if any), by indicating the relevant number
- c) Indicate which descriptor you would like to add (if there is anything that you feel that needs to be added)

As was done for Round 1, it will be appreciated if your responses can be received within the next two days. Thank you once again for your valuable contributions. The last round will merely contain the consensus information for you to approve.

With sincere appreciation!

Khanyisa Nkuna, Doctoral student

Prof Alet C Erasmus (Supervisor) (082 784 2467)

Appendix 4: Delphi Technique Round three - Attribute frequency tables

Attribute: A brand that suggests the use of quality material

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	3	1	2.0	2.0	4.0
	4	18	36.0	36.0	40.0
	5	30	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that offers a unique style

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	7	14.0	14.0	14.0
	3	5	10.0	10.0	24.0
	4	21	42.0	42.0	66.0
	5	17	34.0	34.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that is affordable

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	3	2	4.0	4.0	10.0
	4	10	20.0	20.0	30.0
	5	35	70.0	70.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that fits my body well

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	3	1	2.0	2.0	4.0
	4	10	20.0	20.0	24.0
	5	38	76.0	76.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that looks expensive due to premium quality

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	11	22.0	22.0	22.0
	3	10	20.0	20.0	42.0
	4	17	34.0	34.0	76.0
	5	12	24.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that is fashionable and presents a young image

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	3	6.0	6.0	6.0
	2	10	20.0	20.0	26.0
	3	16	32.0	32.0	58.0
	4	13	26.0	26.0	84.0
	5	8	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that is versatile for different occasions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	3	7	14.0	14.0	18.0
	4	18	36.0	36.0	54.0
	5	23	46.0	46.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that is contemporary

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	2	8	16.0	16.0	18.0
	3	11	22.0	22.0	40.0
	4	21	42.0	42.0	82.0
	5	9	18.0	18.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that is locally produced

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	3	12	24.0	24.0	28.0
	4	14	28.0	28.0	56.0
	5	22	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand I can identify with

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
	3	5	10.0	10.0	20.0
	4	15	30.0	30.0	50.0
	5	25	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that is made from sustainable materials

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
	3	9	18.0	18.0	28.0
	4	17	34.0	34.0	62.0
	5	19	38.0	38.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	7	14.0	14.0	14.0
	3	5	10.0	10.0	24.0
	4	16	32.0	32.0	56.0
	5	22	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Attribute: A brand that is accessible

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	2	3	6.0	6.0	8.0
	3	3	6.0	6.0	14.0
	4	16	32.0	32.0	46.0
	5	27	54.0	54.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Appendix 5: Delphi Technique Round three - consequences frequency tables

Consequence: Durability

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	3	3	6.0	6.0	10.0
	4	11	22.0	22.0	32.0
	5	34	68.0	68.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Status

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	7	14.0	14.0	14.0
	2	20	40.0	40.0	54.0
	3	5	10.0	10.0	64.0
	4	11	22.0	22.0	86.0
	5	7	14.0	14.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Exclusivity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	2	10	20.0	20.0	28.0
	3	4	8.0	8.0	36.0
	4	14	28.0	28.0	64.0
	5	18	36.0	36.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Enhanced confidence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	4	8.0	8.0	8.0
	3	2	4.0	4.0	12.0
	4	22	44.0	44.0	56.0
	5	22	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Comfort

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	4	15	30.0	30.0	32.0
	5	34	68.0	68.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Makes me feel good

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	3	4	8.0	8.0	10.0
	4	11	22.0	22.0	32.0
	5	34	68.0	68.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Expression of my identity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	2	2	4.0	4.0	6.0
	3	9	18.0	18.0	24.0
	4	11	22.0	22.0	46.0
	5	27	54.0	54.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Value for money

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	3	3	6.0	6.0	8.0
	4	10	20.0	20.0	28.0
	5	36	72.0	72.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Upliftment of local designers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	2	3	6.0	6.0	8.0
	3	6	12.0	12.0	20.0
	4	16	32.0	32.0	52.0
	5	24	48.0	48.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Speedy delivery

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	6	12.0	12.0	12.0
	3	6	12.0	12.0	24.0
	4	16	32.0	32.0	56.0
	5	22	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Consequence: Upliftment and expansion of sustainable designs

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	2.0	2.0	2.0
	2	3	6.0	6.0	8.0
	3	8	16.0	16.0	24.0
	4	20	40.0	40.0	64.0
	5	18	36.0	36.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Appendix 6: Cross-sectional data collection frequency tables

Round 1 frequency table

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	1	5	10.0	10.0	14.0
	2	12	24.0	24.0	38.0
	3	3	6.0	6.0	44.0
	4	2	4.0	4.0	48.0
	5	2	4.0	4.0	52.0
	6	12	24.0	24.0	76.0
	7	4	8.0	8.0	84.0
	8	1	2.0	2.0	86.0
	11	1	2.0	2.0	88.0
	12	1	2.0	2.0	90.0
	13	1	2.0	2.0	92.0
	14	3	6.0	6.0	98.0
	21	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Round 2 frequency table

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	5	10.0	10.0	10.0
	1	6	12.0	12.0	22.0
	2	2	4.0	4.0	26.0
	3	9	18.0	18.0	44.0
	4	22	44.0	44.0	88.0
	5	4	8.0	8.0	96.0
	7	1	2.0	2.0	98.0
	9	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Round 3 frequency table

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
	1	15	30.0	30.0	34.0
	2	15	30.0	30.0	64.0
	3	16	32.0	32.0	96.0
	4	1	2.0	2.0	98.0
	6	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total		50	100.0	100.0

Appendix 7: Online focus group discussion facilitator guide

Good morning, thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group discussion that forms part of my doctoral studies. **I would like us to discuss the legitimacy of clothing retail brands. Therefore, what do you regard as characteristics of clothing brands that you think deserve to be present on the South African clothing retail scene. We have gone through a recent period of turmoil that might have influenced the way in which we perceive brands, and what we are willing to support now, and in the future.**

Before we start, I would like to confirm that everyone on the call meets the following criteria as this study is particularly interested in the views of the Millennial age cohort who are at least in the middle income group higher. Therefore:

- a) Are you born between between 1980 and 1999?
- b) Do you earn at least R150 000 annually?
- c) Do you generally purchase your own clothes, or clothes on behalf of others?

Please raise your hand to indicate that you qualify to participate in the conversation.

Now, in order to organise this discussion:

Please use the hand icon to raise your hand whilst a person is speaking to indicate that you wish to contribute to the conversation. You can also use the “chats” function to make further comments.

As stated in the discussion outline that I sent earlier, by participating, it is taken that you consent that the information that you share in this online focus group discussion may be used as part of a data set that will be analysed for academic research purposes as part of a Doctoral degree.

Please take note of the following:

- There are no right or wrong answers. Your honest insights on the subject are crucial in terms of the outcomes of this study.
- The session will be recorded for purposes of transcription and ensuring that I accurately capture your valuable contributions
- All information that you share, will be kept confidential, and will remain anonymous unless you wish to be acknowledged in the final contribution for being part of the study.
- Only aggregate data will be used in the end, and it will not be possible to trace a specific contribution to the participant who shared the information.
- No participant will benefit directly, financially or otherwise, from participating in this research.
- No personal details will be stored. Rather, codes will be assigned to electronic responses to distinguish respective contributions.
- The aggregate data will be analysed and reported as part of an academic thesis.
- Under the Protection of Personal Information Act, the information that you will provide will only be used for the purposes of this study and related scientific publications.

At this point, does anyone have a question about the study or the process this morning?

Thank you for your confirmation and welcome once again. Please feel free to speak your mind. You need not necessarily agree with the contributions of other participants: your contribution might spark another conversation that is very important to me.

[Facilitator to display on the screen, the list of attributes and consequences provided from participants who participated in the Delphi Technique]

This morning's discussion follows a previous round where 50 participants have made written contributions that I want you to critically review and discuss in terms of retaining them in my study, or adding something else that may have been overseen.

Firstly, please look at the list of clothing brand attributes that the previous group have identified as indicators that they would use to identify or select a clothing brand that they regard as being legitimate (worthy of existence) in the clothing retail scene in South Africa in the time of a global crisis such as the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic that has made us all more aware of our surroundings and our existence.

1. Firstly, please look at every attribute listed, starting from the top and indicate whether you agree or disagree with what you see on the screen. **THE ATTRIBUTES HAVE NOT BEEN ARRANGED IN ORDER OF PRIORITY!**
2. So, do we retain every one listed? **GIVE TIME TO DISCUSS EVERY ATTRIBUTE FROM THE TOP DOWN. PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR OTHERS TO COMMENT.**
3. What would you like to add ? **GIVE TIME SO THAT EVERY ONE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A COMMENT AND THEN GIVE THE REST THE CHANCE TO DISCUSS THE ADDITION.**
4. Please identify the **5 most important brand characteristics of those listed** and indicate why
5. **IMAGINE I HAD TO SHORTEN THE LIST OF ATTRIBUTES**, Please identify the least important brand characteristics and indicate why?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS!

NOW WE NEED TO look at the list of benefits THAT YOU WOULD ASSOCIATE WITH SO-CALLED LEGITIMATE CLOTHING BRANDS. THERE ARE ** BENEFITS LISTED. PLEASE NOW indicate, AS BEFORE, whether or not you agree with the BENEFITS LISTED :

6. What would you like to add?
7. Would you take some of the information away?
8. Please identify the 5 most important benefits of those listed and indicate why
9. Please identify the least important benefits and indicate why?

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AFTER THIS DISCUSSION THAT YOU THINK I SHOULD TAKE NOTE OF IN MY STUDY CONCERNING THE LEGITIMACY OF CLOTHING RETAIL BRANDS?

Thank you so much for your participation and valuable contributions!

Appendix 7A: Listing of attributes and consequences used in online focus group discussion

"a clothing brand that is worthy of being included in the clothing retail scene and that can be considered a legitimate brand at a time of a global crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic that we have experienced recently" is :

1. A brand that suggests the use of quality materials
2. A brand that offers unique style
3. A brand that is affordable

4. A brand that fits my body well
5. A brand that looks expensive due to premium quality
6. A brand that is fashionable and presents a young image
7. A brand that is versatile for different occasions
8. A brand that is contemporary
9. A brand that is locally produced
10. A brand I can identify with
11. A brand that is made from sustainable materials
12. A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends
13. A brand that is accessible

These characteristics are important to me because of the following benefits that I expect to derive:

1. Durability
2. Status
3. Exclusivity
4. Enhanced confidence
5. Comfort
6. Makes me feel good
7. Expression of my identity
8. Value for money
9. Upliftment of local designers
10. Speedy delivery
11. Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs

Appendix 8: Online focus group discussion consensus matrix

Focus group question	P1 (Male participant)	P2 (Female Participant)	P3 (Male Participant)	P4 Male Participant)	P5 (Female participant)	P6 (Male Participant)	P7 (Female Participant)	P8 (Female Participant)	P9 (Male Participant)
Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with the listed attributes?	<p>absolute top of my list will probably be number 4 point number 4 a brand that fits my body well. (A)</p> <p>So, I'm not too fussy about, Uhm, how fashionable something is? (SE)</p> <p>But I just want to feel comfortable while wearing it</p>	<p>I tend to disagree with P8, because you can get affordable merchandise at affordable, you know, and prices... you can get affordable premium quality</p>	<p>I think I agree with most of them (A)</p>	<p>So ok, during hard lock down, I just need something that fits my body. I wouldn't care of any other thing else. (SE)</p>	<p>I would actually look at a brand that is the first point, you know, a brand that is, suggests the use of quality material and a brand that is that fits my body well and one that I think I saw something that it's classical and timeless you know (A)</p>	<p>I agree will all the points (A)</p> <p>but I will personally go for a brand that is versatile for different occasion. especial in this time of covid 19 where we work from home</p>	<p>at the top of my list will be a brand that is affordable (SE)</p>	<p>So for me, good quality does not go with affordability, if you're being honest, good quality is always expensive. So I'm just thinking if you going to buy something that's affordable, there's no way that's gonna be good quality (D)</p>	<p>a brand that is produced locally, cause this will allow us to circulate the money within the country to sustain and create jobs (SE)</p>
	<p>I will imagine the second one would be number 1 on your list, A brand that suggests the use of quality materials (A)</p>	<p>I think affordability for me matters most on top of the list</p>	<p>but I think the affordable one for me is quite umm I think maybe value is the word that I'd use instead of affordable... something which you value is based on how much you can afford and, how you think it serves your purpose, right (D)</p>	<p>But then as soon as it gets to the other level of lockdown, I need something that is versatile for different occasions cause then I can start attending different functions. (SE)</p>	<p>I want to buy Uhm, a brand or outfit, I'm looking at something that has good material that is affordable and fits my body well, (A)</p>		<p>it should definitely fit my body well and it needs to look at look expensive due to premium quality (SE)</p>	<p>But what I would choose is affordability and something that fits well in my body (SE)</p>	<p>A brand that is accessible because I don't want to wait too long to get a product I have ordered and affordability as well (SE)</p>
	<p>the term affordability for me, that remains a relative term the same as expensive remains in relative term... So when I hear the word affordable, I always find that little bit hard to scale it</p>	<p>agreed - what is our baseline for affordability?</p>	<p>I would not necessarily agree with that particular one (affordable) and the one of locally produced honestly, I am neither here nor there with regards to it</p>	<p>but in in it all I think I need something. That will be sustainable, I mean. I think that's the that one sustainable material (A)</p>	<p>something that good quality, timeless, something that suits my body, fits my body so that I can at least wear it for the next six years.(A)</p>	<p>well, I think the word affordable is fine for me (A)</p>	<p>then lastly, it has to be fashionable. (SE)</p>	<p>A brand that is fashionable and presents a young image fashionable I get, but it doesn't really have to present the young image. Let's say I'm old now. Do I still want to look at or do I still want to look like youngsters? So, for me, I would just take out that represent uh young image part (D)</p>	

Focus group question	P1 (Male participant)	P2 (Female Participant)	P3 (Male Participant)	P4 Male Participant)	P5 (Female participant)	P6 (Male Participant)	P7 (Female Participant)	P8 (Female Participant)	P9 (Male Participant)
			being locally produced or if it's not (D) as long as it meets that the rest of the other criteria then I'm fine for my side. (A)						
	Same as expensive. If someone comes and says, hey, I can't buy that car because it's expensive or rather let's stick to brands. If someone comes to, I can't buy those clothes because they're expensive. What exactly does that mean?		the third last point again for me is irrelevant a brand that is made from sustainable materials. Umm, that's, I'm again, I'm neither here nor there. But if I was to choose I would probably, probably remove that one and uh, fashionable.(D)	And considering affordability, also in in the midst of you know (A)					
	So there's one that's definitely doesn't sit very well with me and that's fourth from the bottom. A brand I can identify with. I just feel I do not ever want to make myself feel owned.... I would always buy a certain type of music and I've realized just how much I've missed out. (D)		And the second last one is classical brand that outlasts fashion trends. I think we live in a world where trends change and we have to Yeah. Move with them if you're into that, so.... I don't really care about trends in the way when I buy stuff, I buy stuff for myself (SD)	And so I think locally produced that does not. Yeah, does not mean anything to me, so I think it doesn't really matter where is it produced. You know, it could be anywhere I mean, as long as it meets the other, what it called uh criteria or other attributes that that that I think are important for me, the way is it produced, I					

Focus group question	P1 (Male participant)	P2 (Female Participant)	P3 (Male Participant)	P4 Male Participant)	P5 (Female participant)	P6 (Male Participant)	P7 (Female Participant)	P8 (Female Participant)	P9 (Male Participant)
				wouldn't care much about that. (D)					
Question 2: What are the top five characteristics which are of extreme importance to you especially in a time of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic or like the global recession which we encountered a few years ago, what would you say?	<p>A brand that is locally produced</p> <p>A brand that suggests the use of quality material</p> <p>A brand that fits my body well</p> <p>A brand that is affordable</p> <p>A brand that is made from sustainable materials</p>	<p>A brand that is affordable</p> <p>A brand that suggests the use of quality material</p> <p>A brand that fits my body well</p> <p>A brand that is made from sustainable materials</p> <p>A brand that looks expensive due to premium quality</p>	<p>A brand that suggests the use of quality materials</p> <p>A brand that offers a unique style</p> <p>A brand that fits my body well</p> <p>A brand that is versatile for different occasions</p> <p>A brand I can identify with</p>	<p>A brand that is affordable</p> <p>A brand that is made from sustainable materials</p> <p>A brand that is versatile for different occasions</p> <p>A brand that suggests the use of quality material</p> <p>A brand that fits my body well</p>	<p>A brand that suggests the use of quality materials</p> <p>A brand that is affordable</p> <p>A brand that fits my body well</p> <p>A brand that is accessible</p> <p>A brand that is versatile for different occasions</p>	<p>A brand that suggests the use of quality materials</p> <p>A brand that is affordable</p> <p>A brand that fits my body well</p> <p>A brand that is versatile for different occasions</p> <p>A brand that is accessible</p>	<p>A brand that suggests the use of quality materials</p> <p>A brand that is affordable</p> <p>A brand that fits my body well</p> <p>A brand that is versatile for different occasions</p> <p>A brand that is fashionable and presents a young image</p>	<p>A brand that is affordable</p> <p>A brand that fits my body well</p> <p>A brand that is versatile for different occasions</p> <p>A brand that is made from sustainable material</p> <p>A brand that is accessible</p>	<p>A brand that is affordable</p> <p>A brand that fits my body well</p> <p>A brand that is fashionable and presents a young image</p> <p>A brand that is locally produced</p> <p>A brand that suggests the use of quality material</p>
								Sustainable material. Yeah, so that if I wear it, let's say I wear it, after a wash it doesn't stretch, its material that will last. Its pointless buying an outfit that will not last as it will be a waste of money as well	
Question 3: Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the list of provided benefits (consequences)	I do have something that I would like to add here and I think that it looks good on me. I think that's the benefit that I normally go for... that probably will be top priority.	...obviously I want value for money and if I'm looking at the context in terms of COVID-19 and more cautious on how I spend my money	(NR)	during hard lockdown really that what I was looking for it was just comfort nothing else makes me feel good, not really much. But then I do feel that it is important (A)	I agree with everything. It's just fine. (A)	(NR)	I think I did say something that speaks of makes me feel good. So that will probably be exactly what the previous speaker was	(NR)	(NR)

Focus group question	P1 (Male participant)	P2 (Female Participant)	P3 (Male Participant)	P4 Male Participant)	P5 (Female participant)	P6 (Male Participant)	P7 (Female Participant)	P8 (Female Participant)	P9 (Male Participant)
							Umm, attributing to.		
	we did not necessarily just hide and become completely invisible to the world. So looking good always matters.	if I'm shopping online to speedy delivery matters to me, I don't want to wait seven days to get a product right matters.		And durability value for money not that much during the what's called hard lock down, but then it was just for comfort	The status part, I'm not really too fussy about status. (SE)		But basically, for me I think I'm. I'm happy with everything. I am not really fussy though when it comes to upliftment of local designers. As well as the last one, but the rest for me Uh, are perfect thank you.		
		I want something that makes me feel good and that is durable. And then if it does uplift and the expansion of sustainable designs, that's good for me			And, UM, the upliftment of local designers. It's not really a factor for me (SE)		I just wanted to quickly add, when I specifically said on my last when I last spoke that I don't really take into consideration the approval of local designers, but I just want to support also the status. I don't really care about status, so that would not really be important for me.		
		...I'm going to buy the products that			so I agree with everything else (A)				

Focus group question	P1 (Male participant)	P2 (Female Participant)	P3 (Male Participant)	P4 Male Participant)	P5 (Female participant)	P6 (Male Participant)	P7 (Female Participant)	P8 (Female Participant)	P9 (Male Participant)
		are made locally which encourages me to spend more on that product than I would on other. So, I think for me those are important for me							
Question 4: Indicate the five most important benefits.	Durability Comfort Makes me feel good Value for money Upliftment of local designers Makes me look good	Value for money Durability Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs Comfort Makes me feel good		Comfort Durability Makes me feel good Upliftment of local designers Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	Durability Enhanced Confidence Value for money Expression of my identity Speedy delivery	Exclusivity Comfort Value for money Upliftment of local designers Makes me feel good	Durability Enhanced Confidence Comfort Makes me feel good Value for money	Durability Comfort Makes me feel good Value for money Speedy delivery	Comfort Makes me feel good Value for money Upliftment of local designers Speedy delivery
Question 5: Identify the least important benefits	Status Exclusivity	Status Exclusivity Enhanced confidence Expression of my identity Speedy delivery	Status Upliftment of local designers Speedy Delivery Upliftment & expansion of sustainable Designs Value for money	Status Exclusivity Enhanced confidence Expression of my identity Upliftment of local designers Speedy delivery	Status Exclusivity Upliftment of local designers Comfort Makes me feel good	Durability Status Enhanced confidence Speedy delivery Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	Upliftment and expansion of sustainable designs Upliftment of local designers Status Exclusivity Speedy delivery	Status Exclusivity Expression of my identity Upliftment of local designers Upliftment and expansion of sustainable designs	Durability Status Exclusivity Expression of my identity Upliftment and expansion of sustainable designs

Focus group question	P1 (Male participant)	P2 (Female Participant)	P3 (Male Participant)	P4 Male Participant)	P5 (Female participant)	P6 (Male Participant)	P7 (Female Participant)	P8 (Female Participant)	P9 (Male Participant)
Question 6: Is there anything else that you feel that the researcher should take into consideration?	I don't know if we actually did describe what we consider brands you know, is it something that has a logo displayed in front of it? Is it a cut-off point in terms of pricing etcetera, etcetera? I think we generally have an idea of what we think brands are. And that's why all of us just jumped into it and expressed ourselves. But it will be beneficial maybe to just explain if you were to have another one of these kinds, if you didn't, maybe it would be nice to just explain or define what a brand is considered to be. Overall, I don't think it's a loss.	...like to spark a conversation on a brands leveraging on brand reliability that purports themselves as premium quality.	There's a need to further classify your either your incomes or your types of clothing... because I feel like the EB 1 and whatnot may not necessarily fall into these types of things because you buy them for, I think for different reasons.	...the pandemic umm affected us in different ways. And for others it could be that it put them in a worse of situation, for others it put them in a better of situation and I'm not sure if that influence, the thought of a. What do I buy and how do I buy?...	I would also have to agree with P2 with the points that she just really made...				

Source: Adapted from Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009)

Appendix 9: Engagement agreement between the researcher and market research firm



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ENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT

On Contract Work for the completion of certain Work known as Project:
**Doctral study Online Survey: Brand characteristics and personal values that
 shape millennial’s legitimacy judgment of clothing brands amid a global crisis.
 2022**

By and between

CONSULTA (PTY) LTD
 (Hereinafter referred to as "Consulta")

and

Khanyisa Nkuna

(Hereinafter referred to as the "Client")

It is agreed by the Parties that Consulta will on behalf of Khanyisa Nkuna, produce Data Collection as well as understand the level of experience and satisfaction of the quality of services available to her intended target market. The following Contract Work is to be carried out by Consulta and that the quoted fees, time scales and conditions are applicable:

Scope of the Contract Work and Payment

Activity	Fee (R)
Planning & Design, project management Scoping and Sign off Meetings, questionnaire capture, sample confirmation, pilot testing, quality assurance	R 2000,00
Data collection Collection of sample via direct email link to 300 members and	R 16000,00
Ex VAT	
Total Contract Price	R 18000,00

General Terms and Conditions

- The parties agree that their contractual relationship is governed by Consulta’s Standard Terms and Conditions that are incorporated by reference. The said Standard Terms and Conditions are available on request. In the event of any conflict between the Standard Terms and Conditions and any other term or condition in the Engagement Agreement, the latter will take precedence.

Directors:
 Bonang Mphahle (Chairman) - CA (SA), FIDM, F. Sc. Dip. Mgt (MBA) | Adigati Borikhatia (CCFO) - CPA Candidate, MBA (Hertie Bus. School UK) | Susan Mphahle - BA (Social Science (Wits) | Tshagiso Mphahle - MBA II Business School (MBAII) | Khensani Tshahle - PGDP | Keffentse Mafou - CA(SA)



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- The Client undertakes to acknowledge and honour the relationship between Consulta (Pty) Ltd and its Suppliers/Specialists.
- The Client has 14 days to respond in writing, should there be any dissatisfaction with the specific service/product that was rendered. Should the client not respond within this period, Consulta would accept that the client is satisfied, and that payment is forthcoming.

Special Terms and Conditions

Conditions for Effective date of Commencement, Invoicing and receipt of Payment

- The Effective date for commencement of project operations will be the date of approval of the Engagement Agreement (by client signature) OR the date of the Issue of a Purchase Order (PO), whichever date is the latest.
- Fifty percent (50%) invoice will be raised as a first invoice on the date of receipt of PO number (either for the full contract amount or identified phases).
- Payment by the client must be received within seven (7) days after receipt of invoice and in event of a longer payment term by the client, the project commencement will be extended to the date of receipt of payment of first invoice.
- The final Fifty percent (50 %) will be invoiced on presentation of final deliverables or earlier by arrangement with the client.
- The proposal is valid for a period of thirty (30) days.
- A 60% cancellation fee is payable if the project is cancelled after work has commenced.

Special provisions and/or limitations on use of research outcomes and/ technology:
(Specify details here)

This agreement is based on discussions with

SIGNED at _____ on _____ 2022.

For : The Client

Name and designation of signatory who warrants that he is duly authorized thereto

SIGNED at _____ on _____ 2022.

Directors:
Bonang Mahale (Chairman) - Ge (SA), PMA, P.Gr. Dip Adt (MBA) | Abigail Bhebebe (CEO) - CFA Candidate, MBA (Hewley Bus. School UK) | Susan Mahale - BA (Social Science (WU) | Tshabo Mahale - MBA II Business School (WU) | Hlamalani Tshabe - PGDP | Kadlindie Nelou - CA(SA)

Appendix 10: Online survey questionnaire

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT FORM

Dear participant

Thank you for showing an interest in participating in this online survey, which will take will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. This questionnaire is part of a Doctoral study that aims to determine the brand characteristics and personal values that shape millennials' legitimacy judgements of clothing brands amid a global crisis. Legitimacy in this regard, is how you as a consumer perceive a clothing brand as being worthy of being a part of the South African retail scene amid a global crisis such as the COVID -19 pandemic that all of us have been encountering since 2020.

Please note that participation is limited to:

- individuals born between 1980 and 1999, and
- individuals who are earning at least R150 000 annually, and
- individuals who are generally purchasing their own clothes, or clothes on behalf of others.

Before you agree to participate and commence with the task, you are required to give your consent that the information that you share in this survey may be used as part of a data set that will be analysed for academic research purposes as part of a Doctoral degree. By agreeing to participate, it is assumed that you willingly agree to take part in this research endeavour.

Please take note that, for the successful completion of this survey:

- You are kindly requested to commit to complete the questionnaire. This is because only completed data sets are eligible for inclusion in the final study. However, even if you agree to participate now, you may withdraw at any stage without any consequences to you.
- Please note that your contribution is highly valued and that there are no right or wrong answers. Your honest insights on the subject are crucial in terms of the outcomes of this study.
- All information that you share in this survey, will remain confidential, and anonymous.
- No participant will benefit directly, financially or otherwise, from participating in this research.

If you agree to become part of this important research project, you may continue by pressing the proceed button

Kind regards

Khanyisa Nkuna

GIBS: DBA student, Email: 23250179@mygibs.co.za

Prof Alet C Erasmus (Supervisor) (082 784 2467)

SECTION B: SCREENING QUESTIONS

Q1. In which year were you born ?

Drop down menu

Q2. Do you earn a minimum income of R150 000 per annum?

Q3. What is your annual salary? (salary range)

Drop down menu

Q4. Do you generally purchase your own clothes, or clothes on behalf of others?

Yes No

Q5. Please indicate your gender

Male

Female

Gender neutral

Q6. In which province do you reside?



Drop down menu

PLEASE PRESS PROCEED TO CONTINUE

HOW TO COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In the following 3 sections you will be requested to read from left to right and link variables in the rows with variables in the columns. For example, the below table is interpreted to mean that:

1. A legitimate clothing brand is a brand that suggests the use of quality materials.
2. This means to me value for money

1. A legitimate clothing brand is  2. This means to me 	Status	Exclusivity	Value for money	None of these
A brand that suggests the use of quality materials			X	

Note:

- In instances where you cannot match a variable, you may choose the 'None of these' option.
- NB: Only choose links that are applicable to you. You may choose as many as possible

PLEASE PRESS PROCEED TO CONTINUE

SECTION C: CLOTHING BRAND CHOICES

Section C1: Linking characteristics with benefits

In this section you are requested to **link** each brand characteristic with a benefit that you derive from that characteristic.

(Only choose what is applicable to you. You may choose as many as possible)

1. A legitimate clothing brand is ↓ 2. This means to me →	Durability	Status	Exclusivity	Enhanced Confidence	Comfort	Makes me feel good	Expression of my identity	Value for money	Upliftment of local designers	Speedy delivery	Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	Makes me look good	None of these
A brand that suggests the use of quality materials													
A brand that offers unique style													
A brand that is affordable													
A brand that fits my body well													
A brand that looks expensive due to premium quality													
A brand that is fashionable													
A brand that is versatile for different occasions													

<p>1. A legitimate clothing brand is</p> <p>↓</p> <p>2. This means to me →</p>	Durability	Status	Exclusivity	Enhanced Confidence	Comfort	Makes me feel good	Expression of my identity	Value for money	Upliftment of local designers	Speedy delivery	Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	Makes me look good	None of these
A brand that is locally produced													
A brand I can identify with													
A brand that is made from sustainable materials (i.e. made from environmentally friendly products)													
A classical brand that outlasts fashion trends													
A brand that is accessible													

PLEASE PRESS PROCEED TO CONTINUE

Section C2: Linking benefits with benefits

In this section you are requested to **link** each benefit with another benefit that you derive from.

(Only choose what is applicable to you. You may choose as many as possible)

1. This consequence ↓ 2. Means to me →	Durability	Status	Exclusivity	Enhanced Confidence	Comfort	Makes me feel good	Expression of my identity	Value for money	Upliftment of local designers	Speedy delivery	Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	Makes me look good	None of these
Durability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Status	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exclusivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enhanced Confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Comfort	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Makes me feel good	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Expression of my identity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value for money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. This consequence ↓ 2. Means to me →	Durability	Status	Exclusivity	Enhanced Confidence	Comfort	Makes me feel good	Expression of my identity	Value for money	Upliftment of local designers	Speedy delivery	Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs	Makes me look good	None of these
Upliftment of local designers													
Speedy delivery													
Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs													
Makes me look good													

PLEASE PRESS PROCEED TO CONTINUE

Section C3: Linking benefits with personal values

In this section you are requested to **link** each benefit with a personal value.

(Only choose what is applicable to you. You may choose as many as possible)

1. This benefit ↓ 2. Means to me →	Pleasure (Hedonism)	Independent in thought & action (self-direction)	Personal success (Achievement)	Safety & stability (Security)	Social status, prestige (Power)	Avoid upsetting others (Conformity)	Maintain cultural & religious traditions (Tradition)	Wanting to be challenged / novel (Stimulation)	Caring for those close to you (Benevolence)	Consideration towards others & nature (Universalism)	None of these
Durability											
Status											
Exclusivity											
Enhanced Confidence											
Comfort											
Makes me feel good											
Expression of my identity											
Value for money											
Upliftment of local designers											

1. This benefit 2. Means to me	Pleasure (Hedonism)	Independent in thought & action (self-direction)	Personal success (Achievement)	Safety & stability (Security)	Social status, prestige (Power)	Avoid upsetting others (Conformity)	Maintain cultural & religious traditions (Tradition)	Wanting to be challenged / novel (Stimulation)	Caring for those close to you (Benevolence)	Consideration towards others & nature (Universalism)	None of these
Speedy delivery											
Upliftment & expansion of sustainable designs											
Makes me look good											

PLEASE PRESS PROCEED TO CONTINUE

SECTION D: END

Thank you for taking time to participate in this study. It would be appreciated if you could share the link with other participants whom you think meet the criteria and would like to participate.

Thank you for your valuable inputs.

Appendix 11: Ethical clearance for quantitative phase

**Gordon
Institute
of Business
Science**
University
of Pretoria

30 June 2022

Khanyisa Nkuna

Dear Khanyisa

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

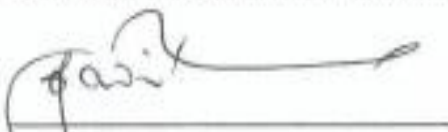
You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

Please note that approval is granted based on the methodology and research instruments provided in the application. If there is any deviation change or addition to the research method or tools, a supplementary application for approval must be obtained

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

Kind Regards

GIBS Doctoral Research Ethical Clearance Committee



Doctoral Chair Signature