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All we crave is pleasure! The motivation behind millennial men's clothing store choices when purchasing semi-formal/smart workwear for themselves

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Abstract

Multi-method research was conducted in South Africa to explore the personal values that shape millennial men's clothing retail store choices when purchasing semi-formal/smart workwear for themselves. The qualitative phase comprised in-depth, personal interviews with 25 participants, implementing soft laddering to elicit the preferred attributes and desired consequences that drive clothing retail store choices. These 'easier to communicate' properties formed the crux of the phase 2 measuring instrument. The online quantitative questionnaire, an interactive version of the established Association Pattern Technique (APT), was completed by 408 millennial men as part of the means-end chain (MEC) procedure. The stepwise process produced a series of hierarchical value maps (HVMs), disclosing two prominent underlying personal values that drive millennial men's clothing store choices. 'Pleasure' emerged as the most prominent personal value, signalling millennials' high regard for enjoyable shopping experiences. The importance of a sense of 'security' should also be noted. Accordingly, the underlying forces that drive this financially lucrative cohort's clothing retail store choices extend beyond the marketing principles taught in business schools. Retailers will, therefore, have to delve deeper to understand their target markets' needs to prosper in a highly competitive marketplace.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Millennial men's clothing purchase and consumption behaviour differ vastly from older generations in that they purchase clothing more frequently and spend far more on clothing for themselves (Ameen et al., 2021; Cho, 2017; Ryke, 2019), particularly to portray a desired image and fit in with their peers (Ryke, 2019; Sung & Yan, 2020). Because millennials constitute a large market segment globally, retailers regard them as exceptionally lucrative (Cham et al., 2018; Cho, 2017; Verdugo & Ponce, 2020). Rather than merely focusing on established marketing principles to explore and describe millennial

men's behaviour in the marketplace, this study adopted the view of Rokeach (1973), who proposed that underlying personal values ultimately drive consumers' decisions in the marketplace. Accordingly, this study aimed to explore the personal values that shape millennial men's clothing store choices as a theoretical contribution that goes beyond established, quantitative market-related statistics and traditional marketing guidelines that focus on market profiles and sales figures, providing insight concerning a particular market segment's behaviour in the market place. Millennials' clothing purchase behaviour is well-documented, highlighting their concern about appearance management and clothing in particular, although not

explaining their behaviour, which this study endeavoured to accomplish. Explicating the values that drive millennial men's clothing retailer choices is very promising in expanding retailers' future market strategies as it will demonstrate a better understanding of consumers' needs.

This study focussed on millennial men's clothing retailer choices in a selected clothing category, namely semi-formal or smart workwear. The product category choice is aptly explained by Roach and Eicher (in Cordwell & Schwarz, 2011, pp. 11–12), namely that in a social context, clothing serves as a way of differentiation. This is particularly useful, for example, in a working environment—when someone wishes to portray social worth and where certain brands types, and clothing styles can signify rarity and incite admiration. Perhaps more significant in this study is Keali'inohomoku's view that 'You dance what you wear, and you wear your cultural values' (in Cordwell & Schwarz, 2011, p. 77). This study assumed that millennial men, the target population in this study, would, because they are ambitious, make more effort when choosing this clothing category for themselves. The nature of the investigation was inspired by Gutman's (1982) means-end chain (MEC) theory that proposes that consumers' product choices are based on perceived store and/or product attributes that they consider beneficial to achieve a desired end-state/outcome (the focus of this study), which coincides with individuals' personal values. Theoretically, a MEC comprises a hierarchical structure based on an abstraction level that links product (or store) attributes with particular consequences, subsequently linking the desired consequences with related personal values. MEC studies traditionally focus on positive consequences (benefits), although attributes may also have negative consequences (Peter & Olson, 2010). The study's instructions during the final phase, therefore, clearly specified that respondents had to identify the preferred attributes and related desirable consequences of their menswear retailer choices. The preferred attributes constitute the so-called 'means', the most concrete descriptors, while the related consequences expected to be derived from the preferred attributes represent an intermediate level of abstraction. Personal values—which this study focused on—represent the 'end state' on the most abstract level (Gutman, 1982). For example, a consumer may deliberately support a particular store brand (where the brand name of the store signifies a preferred attribute that is easy to express, for example, store brand X because it is prestigious (a desired consequence), to ultimately experience a sense of status (supporting a principal underlying personal value) someone will find more challenging to express from the start.

A unique situation in South Africa—where this study was conducted—is major changes to the market profile of consumers in middle- and high-income groups after the introduction of the new socio-political dispensation in 1994. This change levelled the playing field for all population groups, providing previously disadvantaged consumers access to better-paid jobs and markets that were previously inaccessible to them (Leopeng & Langa, 2019). Specifically regarding clothing purchases, and very important to clothing retailers, is that the emerging middle class, which now incorporates previously disadvantaged population groups, is notably status- and brand-conscious (Diedericks & Erasmus, 2014; Leopeng & Langa, 2019).

Earlier, Amatulli and Guido (2011) reported that in emerging markets, including South Africa, middle- and upper-income consumers often display wealth visibly, and clothing is an accessible vehicle to achieve this.

South African retail has been under immense pressure recently due to the weak currency, inflation, the slump in credit growth, uncertainty in government fiscal policy, and decreasing disposable consumer income (MarketLine, 2021). Additional pressure was exerted on clothing retailers regarding their survival in a competitive marketplace when sought-after international brands started expanding into the country (Khumalo, 2019; MarketLine, 2021). Understanding consumers' store and brand preferences, beyond simple statistics and sales figures, is therefore essential for retailers to avert competition constructively. This study subsequently applied the assumptions of MEC theory to quantitatively explore and describe the principal personal values that drive South African millennial men's clothing store choices. The study aimed to provide empirical evidence to facilitate clothing retailers' strategic decisions to aptly address the needs of a lucrative market segment, to facilitate survival and boost their confidence in a competitive marketplace.

The study's unique theoretical contribution stems from examining the connection between tangible store attributes (the means), consequences, and intangible personal values (the ends) that drive millennial men's clothing retail store choices. Keali'inohomoku's view that 'You dance what you wear, and you wear your cultural/personal values' (in Cordwell & Schwarz, 2011, p. 77) probably best explains the theoretical contribution of this study, which explicitly turns the attention towards underlying personal values that direct millennials' clothing store choices. Unlike previous research that limits discussions to the importance of well-established marketing principles and concrete attributes when doing market segmentation (Bennur & Jin, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2016), this study envisages a deeper understanding of why more tangible marketing measures used to target selected market segments, are not necessarily on point. The findings of this study will provide an enhanced comprehension of the links that consumers make between store attributes, anticipated consequences and personal values that should facilitate retailers' understanding of the needs and behaviour of a selected, viable market segment, enabling them to distinguish their market offering as 'a cut above the rest'.

The literature review integrates all the relevant constructs, explaining their contribution to this investigation, citing seminal work and recent scholarly findings.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | Consumers' retail store preferences

Numerous factors influence consumer store preference, including demographic variables (Bansal & Gupta, 2021; Mehra & Shakeel, 2016), perceived risk (Maziriri & Mokoena, 2016; Rossetti et al., 2022), marketing initiatives (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2006), store image (Lee et al., 2010; Thompson & Chen, 1998), as well as personal values (De Ferran &

Grunert, 2007; Haridasan & Fernando, 2018). Specifically, a consumer who wishes to extend his/her self-esteem (a terminal value) (Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Walker & Olson, 1991) through clothing is more likely to patronise a clothing store or brand that best portrays a particular, desired image (Shan et al., 2022). Subsequently, consumers patronise stores based on the perceived image of a store they comfortably associate with. The general assumption of the MEC theory is that all choices that one makes have consequences, and that over time, consumers learn that certain choices have certain consequences, either desirable or not (Bolzani, 2018; Gutman, 1982; Zins, 2000). This is supported by consumer socialisation literature (Chen et al., 2015; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2018). For example, based on lived experiences, someone may assume that clothing purchased from a discount store is less exclusive and less likely to evoke the admiration of others. Because store image, per se, is embedded as schemata in a consumer's mind, the perceived consequences—when considering a particular clothing retailer or brand—will differ from one consumer to the next (Lennon et al., 2017; Peter & Olson, 2005; Thompson & Chen, 1998). A consumer's judgement of whether a particular store choice can potentially facilitate a desired end-state, for example, 'pleasure', 'prestige', or 'status', will mostly unconsciously, be based on perceived/anticipated consequences derived from previous experiences—consumer socialisation (Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Peter & Olson, 2005). Due to consumer socialisation, millennials would, certainly, at their age, no longer make clothing and retail store decisions against 'a black canvas'.

2.2 | Clothing retailers' interest in millennial men

This study focused on adult men born between 1980 and 2000 per the established categorisation of the millennial age cohort (Ryke, 2019; Verdugo & Ponce, 2020; Weber, 2017). More descriptive titles based on typical characteristics assigned to this generational consumer cohort are Generation Y, Echo Boomers, Generation Tech, NextGen, the Internet Generation, and the Innovation Generation (Moreno et al., 2017; Solomon, 2011; Thompson et al., 2018; Van Heerden et al., 2016).

Studies conducted among the millennial subculture in diverse contexts agree that millennials possess very similar, specific characteristics that manifest in their lifestyles, including how they dress, what they purchase, and where they shop (Sung & Yan, 2020; Van Heerden et al., 2016). Researchers even consider them the most profitable retail generation presently (Cham et al., 2018; Moreno et al., 2017). Socialisation via the 'Information Superhighway' using cell phones, the internet, and social media spur their alternative shopping behaviour tendencies (Verdugo & Ponce, 2020; Weber, 2017), explaining why they differ vastly from previous generations (Duh & Struwig, 2015; Pentecost et al., 2019) in terms of why, how, and where they conduct clothing purchases (Plazibat et al., 2017).

Of particular interest in this study, is evidence that millennial men spend substantially more on clothing for themselves than older men (Cho, 2017; Ryke, 2019); therefore, retailers are particularly interested in this generational cohort. Some of the reasons reported why millennial men tend to splurge on clothing for themselves is because clothing is intentionally used to signify status. On the contrary, previous generations stereotypically prioritised functionality, as fashion and clothing interests were traditionally associated with femininity (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016; Sung & Yan, 2020). Millennial men have, therefore, emerged as a unique cohort that admits being metro-men, classy, fashion-conscious, interested in appearance management, and who like to be well-dressed (Cho, 2017; Leopeng & Langa, 2019; Sung & Yan, 2020).

The last two decades have revealed significant changes in men's social behaviour, indicating increased regard for the shopping environment, specifically preferring hedonic experiences in a fun-laden, energising atmosphere (Kim et al., 2019; Plazibat et al., 2017). Men have also become more openly honest about their gender identity, which inevitably influences their clothing shopping behaviour and store and merchandise preferences (Gibbs et al., 2018; Sung & Yan, 2020). In South Africa, for example, emerging black middle-class millennial men have developed a robust consumerist culture that prefers particular fashion brands and specific ways to adorn their bodies to signify success (Leopeng & Langa, 2019). By 2018, a significant shift in the South African clothing retail market occurred, when for the first time, menswear sales (42%) surpassed sales figures for women's wear (32.9%), hence emerging as the new market leader in clothing sales (MarketLine, 2021). Related research to explain this noteworthy change is still lacking.

2.3 | The relevance of personal values in consumers' choices

Personal values are the central drivers of consumer behaviour (Rokeach, 1973; Tanner et al., 2021; Vinson et al., 1977). To fulfil a specific principal terminal value, consumers choose a particular product, store, brand, or retailer attributes they anticipate would produce desirable consequences that link with the predominant underlying personal value (Gutman, 1982; Kim & Lee, 2016). This study was framed within Schwartz's (1992) established typology of human values that have been applied successfully in more than 200 samples in 60 countries (Cai & Shannon, 2012; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). In South Africa, Schwartz's theory of basic human values has been supported by various studies (Becker et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2011; Ungerer & Joubert, 2011), while multiple studies have applied personal values as the theoretical anchor in clothing research (Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Botschen & Thelen, 1998; Kasambala et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2002; Thompson & Chen, 1998; Wagner, 2007), which affirms the relevance of this value typology to this study.

Figure 1 illustrates the value typology of Schwartz (1992) in terms of 10 basic values—or motivational domains—organised in a circumplex model on a continuum. Although it is assumed that the values are ambivalent, every value is supported by underlying motivations (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004; Zabunov, 2019).

The value typology of Schwartz (1992) assumes that all the adjacent values are congruent. Accordingly, 'achievement' and 'power'
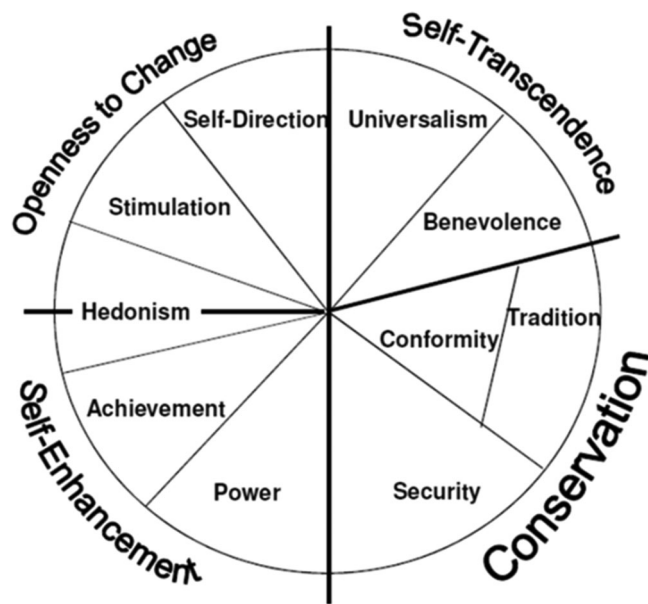
FIGURE 1 The value typology of Schwartz (2012a,b).

are related to 'self-enhancement'. Opposing values in the circle, on the other hand, are conflicting and represent competing goals. Accordingly, 'universalism' suggests self-transcendence, and 'power' suggests self-enhancement (Maio, 2017; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). Figure 1 specifies two sets of bipolar higher-order value types, namely 'openness to change' and 'conservation', as well as 'self-enhancement' and 'self-transcendence', capturing the inherent drive associated with the corresponding values (Maio, 2017; Zabunov, 2019). To clarify, the bigger the distance on the continuum between the different values, the more incompatible the related motivations are (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004).

2.4 | MEC theory: The theoretical anchor

Gutman (1982) introduced MEC analysis that is still widely used in scholarly research and was inspired by the seminal work of Rokeach (1973), who described the nature of personal values as an organised, hierarchical system. The latter holds that consumers base their product/store choices on the perceived contribution of specific preferred product/store attributes towards achieving a desirable outcome, or so-called end-state (Gutman, 1982). Accordingly, the MEC theoretical framework proposes and portrays so-called attribute-consequence-value (ACV) ladders that link people's underlying values with product and store attributes (on a basic level) that they prioritise/prefer to cognitively support their product decisions in terms of the desired/anticipated consequences. These cognitive links are accomplished as part of consumer learning through personal experience as part of consumer socialisation (Borgardt, 2019; Kim et al., 2022; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). Simply stated, the anticipated consequences are part of a consumer's learning experiences, and the links between the attributes and consequences indicate how the desired consequences (C) will

facilitate achieving a desired end-state aligned with an individual's underlying personal values (V), enhancing consumer satisfaction (Ratakam & Petison, 2022).

This (ACV) cognitive structure is always hierarchical and progresses at the abstraction level. The product/store attributes are always the least abstract and easier for a person to convey, whereas personal values are the most abstract (Ghaffari et al., 2022; Olson, 1995). The cognitive structure, for example, reflects how a consumer's store preference at the least abstract level, which is easier to communicate, relates to the person's self-knowledge at the most abstract level, which is more complex to express (Jhan et al., 2022; Olson, 1995). MEC, therefore, seemed an appropriate theoretical framework for this study that aimed to distinguish the predominant 'more difficult to express' personal values that direct the clothing store choices of a significant market segment so that clothing retailers could strategise more purposefully to meet this viable target market's needs.

3 | RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 | Methodology and data collection

This investigation implemented the APT as part of a mixed-method sequential exploratory research design depending on MEC to achieve the outcomes of the study. Data collection departed with an initial qualitative phase (see Section 3.2) designed to elicit concepts for incorporation in the subsequent quantitative phase (see Section 3.3). Phase 1 served to specify the preferred store characteristics/attributes and envisaged consequences from the point of view of the target population based on their real-life experiences (Lee et al., 2014; Sorakunnas & Konu, 2022; Ter Hofstede et al., 1998). Because phase 2, the quantitative phase, depended on phase 1 data, the first qualitative phase is reported in detail before introducing the methodology and results for phase 2.

3.2 | Phase 1: In-depth interviews

3.2.1 | The procedure

Before data collection, the researchers obtained ethical approval from the academic institution. Personal in-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher involving 25 willing millennial men. They were recruited through purposive sampling across Tshwane in the Gauteng province in South Africa. Participants were neither acquainted with nor had any contact with each other. Each face-to-face interview took approximately 55 min to complete. Interviews were conducted in convenient locations and were recorded with participants' permission, although the researcher also made notes. The conversations aimed to elicit the attributes and consequences considered most important by millennial men when purchasing semi-formal/smart workwear for themselves. This information was needed to

develop the measuring instrument for the APT to be used in the second phase of the study.

Soft laddering, specifically the 'preference-consumption differences' technique (Devlin et al., 2003; Thompson & Chen, 1998), was used in a stepwise process (Malhotra et al., 2017). Interviews commenced by thanking participants for their willingness to contribute, whereafter, the individual had to confirm that he generally purchased his own clothing. A participant was then prompted to name the store/s where he preferred to purchase semi-formal/smart workwear for himself, subsequently ranking them in order of preference. They then explained their choices in terms of store characteristics, using as many attributes they wished to share, as an attribute may lead to more than one consequence (Peter & Olson, 2010), and focusing on positive outcomes (or benefits). Negative aspects/disadvantages may be elicited in the same way, depending on the focus of the study. The researcher continually reflected on a participant's responses with repetitive 'why' prompts to elicit motivated explanations for each characteristic and continued with prompts until the reasons were exhausted, indicating data saturation. With this, the researcher uncovered more abstract reasons for the preferred attributes in the form of anticipated consequences (Malhotra et al., 2017). The short exit survey captured participants' demographic details. It is important to note that, generally speaking, consumers (participants) do not find it easy to verbalise a deep-rooted underlying personal value (e.g., self-enhancement) that ultimately drives their preference for certain attributes (e.g., preference for certain brand names) and consequences (to make a good impression). To circumvent this, most APT studies tend to incorporate existing value typologies in their CV matrices, arguing that values are, to a certain extent universal, which provides greater empirical support (Vriens & Ter Hofstede, 2000).

3.2.2 | Data analysis and results

Transcribed interview data were analysed using Atlas.ti. Dominant themes that emerged for both the attributes and consequences are presented in Table 1, including a few examples of participants' comments. The attributes and consequences derived from verbatim transcripts were used to structure the measuring instrument for phase 2.

Prominent attributes are distinguished into three themes: retailers' product-related attributes, retailer attributes, and price. Consequences are categorised into six themes: convenience, comfort, shopping enjoyment, durability, financial consequences, and personal image, supporting a previous study (Janse van Noordwyk et al., 2006), which was also conducted in the South African context.

3.3 | Phase 2: Quantitative survey

3.3.1 | MEC approach and application

Laddering, a probing technique used in MEC studies, uncovers sequential thought, which is useful in explaining people's underlying

motivations for their behaviour (Park et al., 2019). Qualitative studies refer to this process as soft laddering. Quantitative studies—as applied in this study—apply hard laddering (Botschen & Thelen, 1998; Sorakunnas & Konu, 2022). Traditionally, MEC studies were associated with qualitative personal interviews that pose pertinent limitations such as being time-consuming and costly to execute whilst restricting data collection to smaller samples, limiting the generalisation of the findings to larger populations (Escobar & Gil, 2016; Ghaffari et al., 2022). Ter Hofstede et al. (1998) subsequently developed the APT (Association Pattern Technique) as a quantitative measuring instrument to conduct MEC studies as a hard laddering technique, allowing larger samples to be involved at a lower cost.

The APT employs a series of matrices as part of an electronic survey to uncover cognitive links between one level of abstraction and the next. The matrices are tailored for the specific study, carefully considering the selection of attributes, consequences, and personal values for the various matrices (Ter Hofstede et al., 1998). Although elements (attributes and consequences) could be retrieved from literature (Barrena et al., 2017), the most reliable approach is to conduct a sequential, exploratory, mixed-method study where the first qualitative phase is designed to develop the measuring instrument for the second quantitative phase. Therefore, this study conducted an initial qualitative phase, using in-depth interviews with probing to elicit the selected population's preferred attributes and desired consequences first-hand (Vriens & Ter Hofstede, 2000). Due to the abstract nature of personal values, which people find difficult to express, scholars recommend using an established personal value typology rather than extracting the relevant values qualitatively from the first phase (Sorakunnas & Konu, 2022). This study relied on the 10 basic personal values of Schwartz (1992).

3.3.2 | Considerations for preparation

The quantitative phase formed part of the APT hard laddering technique (Ter Hofstede et al., 1998), which entailed respondents' completion of a series of matrices designed to reveal their prioritisation of store attributes before linking them with sought-after consequences to be aligned with personal values that are difficult to express outright (Ter Hofstede et al., 1998). Essentially, therefore, MEC analysis examines ACV links. Previous APT studies have mostly only relied on two matrices, restricting the APT's levels of abstraction to an attribute-consequence (AC) matrix and a subsequent consequence-value (CV) matrix to conclude an ACV outcome (Phillips & Reynolds, 2009). APT's limitation, accordingly, is being limited in terms of levels of abstraction without uncovering intra-level links (Hsiao et al., 2012; Schauerte, 2009). Following Schauerte (2009) and Kwon et al. (2015), phase 2 of this study included a third matrix as an interlevel link, starting with the step 1 AC level of extraction, adding the step 2 interlevel CC link, and concluding with the step 3 CV matrix. The attributes and consequences, uniquely generated from the phase 1 interviews, were

TABLE 1 Attributes and consequences elicited from phase 1.

Attributes		Examples of participants' (P) comments	
Code	Variable	P code	Examples of comments
A1	Match my personal style (Oladele & Ogundipe, 2016)	P21	'… the looks of [store X] is different from others in the market'
A2	Fashionable clothing (Oladele & Ogundipe, 2016)	P10	'I just love the design of the clothes …'
A3	Quality (Bennur & Jin, 2012)	P8	'Although [Store J] is a bit more expensive, it's good quality'
		P17	'I buy shirts from [Store C], because I know it is quality'
A4	Fit (Oladele & Ogundipe, 2016; Wu & Delong, 2006; Zhang et al., 2002)	P3	'(Store J) fits me … it's the only place that has designs that fit my body';
		P20	'… whenever I go there [Store B & Store P] I find my size …'
		P13	'I am very comfortable in [Store L], since their clothing just fits me well'
A5	Well-known brand name (Amatulli & Guido, 2011)	P13	'I am a person that likes brand names a lot'
		P19	'I like the labels'
		P21	'If I want to buy a quality jean, I want my favourite brand'
A6	Wide range of clothing (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2006)	P1	'I prefer [Store A], they stock everything I need, they never disappoint me'
		P2	'[Store C] just has a good range, so it makes it convenient';
		P22	'If I need anything formal, smart casual, you need assortment'
A7	Variety of sizes (Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2006)	P20	'… whenever I go there [Store B & Store P] I find my size …'
		P13	'I am very comfortable in [Store L], since their clothing just fits me well'
A8	Product categories apart from male clothing (Thompson & Chen, 1998)	P1	'I prefer [Store A], because they stock everything I need'
		P2	'I don't want to enter 100 stores to buy what I need'
A9	Store layout (Retief et al., 2018)	P13	'The manner in which goods in [Store L] are arranged, makes it easy to see everything at a glance'
		P22	'[Store C] is nice, it's always organised'
		P15	'I get to Store B and I just get disorientated'
A10	Service (Thompson & Chen, 1998)	P11	'They [in-store personnel] also play a part … sometimes they ignore you… for me, that is a turnoff'
		P22	'With bad service, I'll tell my friends don't go to that place'
		P11	'The attitude of the shop assistants, it either makes me stay longer in the shop or makes me leave'
A11	In-store atmosphere (Retief et al., 2018; Wagner, 2007)		Three elements, namely music, lighting and scent emerged:
			• Music:
		P1	'When you enter that shop, the music attracts people to come into the shop'
		P2	'I don't enter (shop Z) in Menlyn, because they play this rap music, even though they have nice clothes'
			• Lighting was both encouraging and a concern for some:
		P3	'I just get the vibe with fluorescent lighting, it's cheap, that's the vibe that I get from such stores';
		P11	'Yes, I still go in, but sometimes that look [subdued lighting] makes me think that everything is quite expensive';
			• Scent was also noted, for example:
		P2	'[Store F]… you can smell the store a mile away…the smell is too strong for me'
		P24	'[Store C] is better for me, it's clean and not smelling like China'
A12	Store location (Maziriri & Mokoena, 2016; Prashar, 2013; Suresh & Ramanathan, 2019)	P4	'[Store A] is convenient …you can find it anywhere, that's what I like'
		P6	'Although I don't mind traveling, it's always convenient if my favourite store is closer'
A13	Store familiarity (Thompson & Chen, 1998)	P11	'That store … you know it is there'
		P17	'I will get a shirt from [Store C], because I know what it offers'
		P7	'It is easy for me to go to [Store A], I know the people, and know what to expect'

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Attributes		Examples of participants' (P) comments	
Code	Variable	P code	Examples of comments
A14	Store reputation (Thompson & Chen, 1998)	P5	'With the reputation of [Store N], you know the quality is good'
		P11	'That store has quality you can depend on…you know it is there'
		P17	'I will get a shirt from [Store C], because I know it is quality'
A15	Store cards/credit facilities	P4	'Price always matters; I need to look at my pocket …and ways to pay'
		P15	'I know the prices at (store M) are higher, but you know when you are going to spoil yourself, and then you use your credit facility'
A16	Good price (Thompson & Chen, 1998)	P4	'Price always matters…'
		P2	'Some retailers want to milk you with their prices …'
		P7	'Usually I link the price with the quality'
		P15	'I know the prices at (store M) are higher, but you know when you are going to spoil yourself'

Consequences		Examples of participants' (P) comments	
Code	Variable		
C1	Saving time (Thompson & Chen, 1998)	P5	'I know I can go there, get something quickly and then go home after work'
		P6	'I don't mind travelling, but sometimes I don't have time to shop around in a big mall'
		P13	'..the way their [Store L] merchandise is displayed, is easy to view'
C2	Shopping ease (Ryke, 2019)	P14	'[Store G] is too over crowded, I hate to wait in the queue to get to the till point'
		P2	'[Store C] just has a good range, I don't want to go to 100 stores, so it's convenient to shop there'
		P13	'..the way their [Store L] merchandise is displayed, is easy to view'
C3	Shopping enjoyment (Amatulli & Guido, 2011)	P14	'I hate to wait in the queue to get to the till point'
		P2	'I don't want to go to 100 stores, so it's convenient to shop there'
C4	Clothing durability (Thompson & Chen, 1998)	P22	'I no longer buy my clothes at [Store G], because their clothes wear out very quickly'
		P8	'I would rather purchase [something] more expensive clothing, knowing the shirt or pair of pants will last'
C5	Looking good (Amatulli & Guido, 2011; Thompson & Chen, 1998)	P1	'I wanna look good, that's number one'
		P24	'I am getting older now, so I have changed stores'
		P7	"I want my friends to compliment me and say 'you are looking good'"
C6	Expressing myself (Amatulli & Guido, 2011)	P8	'For me with my business, I feel the image that I portray should look right'
		P4	'I think because of my age, I need to wear clothes that are more into my age and you know, the lifestyle that I live'
		P24	The clothing from [Store K] got too shiny for me…. it just changes with time … 'I am getting older now, so I have changed stores'
C7	Comfort (Janse van Noordwyk et al., 2006),	P16	'I go to [Store J] for style: Their clothes fit me well fits me well'
		P4	'I think because of my age, I need to wear clothes that are more into my age and you know, the lifestyle that I live'
C8	Approval of others (Amatulli & Guido, 2011)	P7	'I want my friends to compliment me and say 'you are looking good, where did you get this?''
C9	Limiting shopping risk (Maziriri & Mokoena, 2016)	P11	'It is quality you can depend on, it is something you know is there. It is from my experiences, you know'
C10	Value for money (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2018)	P1	'I don't want to waste my money by buying something that doesn't fit me well'
		P5	'I don't want to spend more than I should'
C11	Convenience (Thompson & Chen, 1998)	P14	'[Store G] is too over crowded, I hate to wait in the queue to get to the till point'
		P2	'[Store C] just has a good range, I don't want to go to 100 stores, so it's convenient to shop there'
		P13	'..the way their [Store L] merchandise is displayed, is easy to view'

TABLE 2 Value items presented in this study.

Motivational value types of Schwartz (2004, 2012a) and Schwartz and Boehnke (2004)	Value items used in this study
Power	Being recognised by others, status, prestige
Achievement	Success
Hedonism	Pleasure
Stimulation	Novelty and excitement
Self-direction	Freedom, creativity
Universalism	Protection of the environment
Benevolence	Loyalty, kindness
Tradition	Respect for culture and traditions
Conformity	Following social expectations
Security	Sense of belonging

used to design the AC and CC matrices, while the 10 basic personal values of Schwartz (1992) formed part of the CV matrix. Similar to Lee et al. (2014), and to enhance the reliability of the findings, the wording of the theoretical values derived from the Schwartz value typology (1992), was slightly adapted to layman's terms to enhance the clarity of the constructs (see Table 2).

Scholars from diverse disciplines have reported valuable insights after employing the APT as a hard laddering technique (Diedericks et al., 2020). Despite appreciating it as a useful research tool, scholars' concerns have limited the more extensive use of the APT in scholarly research. The authors of this study, therefore, conducted a rigorous systematic review of previous APT studies (Diedericks et al., 2020) to identify the concerns which posed possible methodological threats to this study. Two issues were evident. First, some argued that hard laddering may produce superficial results because responses are based on predetermined options, which differs from spontaneous soft laddering that may produce up to six levels of abstraction (Gengler et al., 1995; Phillips & Reynolds, 2009; Valli et al., 2000). Because hard laddering entails the identification of associations (e.g., attributes and consequences) from predetermined options, Phillips and Reynolds (2009) cautioned that the reduced cognitive effort may result in boredom, jeopardising the quality of responses. Other concerns were that predetermined concepts might not fully cover the scope of the topic, and concerns were raised about sample uniformity (Gengler & Reynolds, 1995).

To overcome scholars' concerns, this study included an additional CC matrix as part of the interactive task, which enabled respondents to reflect on the attributes and anticipated consequences identified in previous rounds, personalising the task, whilst limiting boredom and possible exhaustion (Sorakunnas & Konu, 2022). The researchers used specialised Qualtrics software to host the survey, which allowed customisation of the questionnaire, presenting variable piping functions and display logic, as Babin and Zikmund (2015) recommended.

3.3.3 | The measuring instrument and pre-tests

In step 1, on the first screen, this study's adapted APT presented a list of 16 attributes derived from phase 1 (see Table 1). Respondents were tasked to select three to five 'most important' attributes to signify what they regarded most important when choosing a clothing retail store. Accordingly, in step 2, each respondent received a customised question in a matrix format on a new screen (see Figure 2) to complete the AC (Attributes-Consequences) matrix. This screen presented a respondent's custom set of attributes—carried over from step 1. The chosen attributes were listed vertically on the left and had to be linked with a selection of the a priori-defined consequences derived from phase 1 (see Table 1). These were displayed horizontally as headings of columns at the top of the screen. To waive researchers' concerns that respondents might feel forced into a decision, an additional column, 'none of these', was included at the end of the consequences options list (Phillips & Reynolds, 2009; Veludo-de-Oliveira et al., 2006).

In step 3, the uniquely generated AC matrix completed in step 2, which produced an individual's anticipated consequences, was used to generate his unique CC matrix. Therefore, the anticipated consequences were listed vertically on the left-hand side and repeated horizontally at the top. Respondents were requested not to link identical constructs, such as 'convenience' with 'convenience'. As with the previous screen, a 'none of these' option ensured that nobody was forced to decide if nothing seemed relevant. Respondents only received the indicators they chose in the previous AC screen and never received the entire list of consequences. Because of the individuality of the CC and CV screens that integrated a respondent's unique selections, examples of the CC and CV screens are not presented.

In step 4, the final screen presented the unique list of consequences carried over from step 3. They were aligned vertically on the left, with all values translated into layman's terms, shown horizontally at the top. A progress indicator kept respondents informed about their progress through the various steps to prevent them from becoming despondent while going through the multiple steps. A respondent only received the consequence indicators he had selected in the previous CC screen, not the entire list.

Two pre-tests were conducted before the formal launch of the quantitative phase. The first large-scale pre-test ($N = 112$) increased the user-friendliness of the instructions and resulted in adding a progress bar. A second small-scale pre-test ($N = 30$) confirmed that the measurement instrument was suitable for launch.

3.4 | Empirical context and sampling

An invitation for willing, anonymous participation that included the link to the online questionnaire was distributed via WhatsApp, email, Facebook and LinkedIn, targeting men, per their biological classification, irrespective of gender identity, born between 1980 and 2000. Participation was open, regardless of geographic location within South Africa. Willing respondents volunteered additional names for

FIGURE 2 AC matrix presented in phase 2.

inclusion in the sample. Two screening questions (gender and age) ensured that only eligible respondents could proceed with the questionnaire. A suitable sample of 408 millennial men was recruited for the quantitative phase, comprising 46.81% ($n = 191$) born between 1980 and 1989 and 53.19% ($n = 217$) born between 1990 and 2000.

4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phase 1 interviews, which had to be analysed before proceeding to Phase 2, are presented in Table 1. Phase 2 results are reported in Section 4, below.

4.1 | MEC analysis: Initial calculations

In line with the presentation format of previous qualitative studies (Bolzani, 2018; Chandrruangphen et al., 2021), implication matrices drafted to generate a specific hierarchical value map (HVM) initially indicated the respective frequencies of the paired links between attributes and consequences in this study. Following the procedure of previous APT studies (Barrena et al., 2017; Hastreiter & Marchetti, 2016; Weissnar & Du Rand, 2012), percentages rather than frequencies were used to draw the final HVMs.

When drafting an HVM, the number of links determines the complexity of the structure (Kasambala et al., 2016). Leppard et al.'s (2004) top-down ranking method recommends selecting the links in the implication matrices with the highest percentages based on a chosen cut-off point to reduce the complexity of the HVMs. After repetitive redrafting and analysis of the HVM structures, and guided by experience gained in previous studies (Barrena et al., 2015; López-Mosquera & Sánchez, 2011) Leppard et al.'s (2004) top-down ranking method was used to identify the most pertinent links that distinguished the respondents' predominant personal values. A 6-level cut-off point was implemented to retain the most prevalent links, reducing the structure's complexity. Accordingly, only one decimal figure was captured in the HVMs to enhance the readability of the diagrams. Guided by previous studies (Kim & Kim, 2019; Lopez-Mosquera & Sanchez, 2012; Zins, 2000), the top six links were differentiated by the strength of association, distinguishing the strongest, notably strong, and fairly strong links. The strength of association was calculated based on the difference between the highest and lowest links within the top six links, divided by three to determine the intervals. Three colours (blue, green, and yellow) visually distinguished the three abstraction levels (the strongest, notably strong, and fairly strong links) within the implication matrices. Because only the strongest links were of interest in this study, the weaker links were omitted from the HVMs. Traditional MEC studies extract a dominant chain after

TABLE 3 AC implication matrix for (N = 408).

	1. Saving time	2. Shopping ease	3. Shopping enjoyment	4. Clothing durability	5. Looking good	6. Expressing myself	7. Wearing comfort	8. Approval of others	9. Limiting shopping risk	10. Value for money	11. Convenience	Total
1. That offers clothing that match my personal style	58	58	33	18	117	69	78	7	4	44	41	527
2. That offers fashionable clothing	11	16	19	17	95	39	32	19	2	17	11	278
3. That offers clothing of high quality	17	16	12	147	32	9	65	7	17	100	13	435
4. That offers clothing that fits me well	34	40	24	21	74	26	93	11	5	25	26	379
5. That offers well-known brand names	7	11	11	12	10	10	11	5	3	10	6	96
6. That I'm familiar with	28	36	6	8	3	3	9	1	9	10	19	132
7. That has a good reputation	6	6	6	10	3	5	4	3	17	9	6	75
8. That has a wide range of clothing	25	37	21	6	11	9	15	0	4	10	33	171
9. That offers good service	11	14	13	2	4	1	0	0	3	5	4	57
10. That has a pleasant in-store atmosphere	0	17	18	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	7	44
11. That has a well organised layout	20	30	22	3	2	1	0	0	4	2	13	97
12. That has a good location	35	28	11	2	0	1	0	0	5	1	20	103
13. That offers good prices	20	37	27	16	12	5	13	2	11	133	28	304
14. That offers a variety of sizes	16	18	6	3	8	2	12	2	5	5	16	93
15. That offers store cards/credit facilities	6	15	2	0	2	1	2	0	4	5	14	51
16. That offers different product categories apart from male clothing	5	3	6	0	0	1	0	1	0	2	13	31
Total	299	382	237	265	374	182	334	58	94	378	270	

Note: Blue: the strongest links; Green: notably strong links; Yellow: fairly strong links.

TABLE 4 CC implication matrix (N = 408).

	1. Saving time	2. Shopping ease	3. Shopping enjoyment	4. Clothing durability	5. Looking good	6. Expressing myself	7. Wearing comfort	8. Approval of others	9. Limiting shopping risk	10. Value for money	11. Convenience	Total
1. That saves me time	36	84	41	4	7	3	6	3	12	7	79	282
2. That offers me shopping ease	113	20	74	6	7	8	11	2	15	13	83	352
3. That makes shopping enjoyable	38	55	25	7	18	25	18	8	15	16	34	259
4. That offers durable clothing	17	10	12	30	28	16	56	6	30	92	10	307
5. That offers clothes that make me look good	18	16	51	12	46	96	59	44	9	26	17	394
6. That expresses who I am	9	10	25	7	75	24	30	17	8	13	10	228
7. That offers clothes that is comfortable	16	20	26	30	62	34	49	13	19	51	41	361
8. That carries the approval of others	4	6	6	3	21	13	7	4	8	10	8	90
9. Where risks related to shopping is limited	17	25	13	5	3	2	3	4	9	24	17	122
10. That offers me value for money	41	44	38	51	25	14	28	6	39	33	65	384
11. That offers me convenience	88	69	36	4	13	6	16	8	13	24	20	297
Total	397	359	347	159	305	241	283	115	177	309	384	

Note: Blue: the strongest links; Green: notably strong links; Yellow: fairly strong links.

TABLE 5 CV implication matrix (N = 408).

	1. Pleasure	2. Freedom, creativity	3. Success	4. Sense of belonging	5. Being recognised by others, status, prestige	6. Following social expectations	7. Respect for culture and traditions	8. Novelty and excitement	9. Loyalty	10. Protection of the environment	Total
1. That saves me time	139	39	41	11	4	6	6	7	22	5	280
2. That offers me shopping ease	127	74	42	26	3	10	6	10	35	4	337
3. That makes shopping enjoyable	106	55	44	40	9	12	9	42	31	10	358
4. That offers durable clothing	52	29	47	15	22	11	12	18	58	20	284
5. That offers clothes that make me look good	76	63	67	51	79	53	16	33	20	3	461
6. That expresses who I am	65	89	59	46	23	24	19	29	22	7	383
7. That offers clothes that is comfortable	124	79	40	27	15	12	17	32	29	8	383
8. That carries the approval of others	14	7	13	28	29	34	11	7	10	5	158
9. Where risks related to shopping is limited	30	24	21	10	6	9	9	8	26	12	155
10. That offers me value for money	84	34	81	20	15	13	17	32	80	15	391
11. That offers me convenience	110	42	43	16	11	11	7	14	44	9	307
Total	927	535	498	290	216	195	129	232	377	98	

Note: Blue: the strongest links; Green: notably strong links; Yellow: fairly strong links.
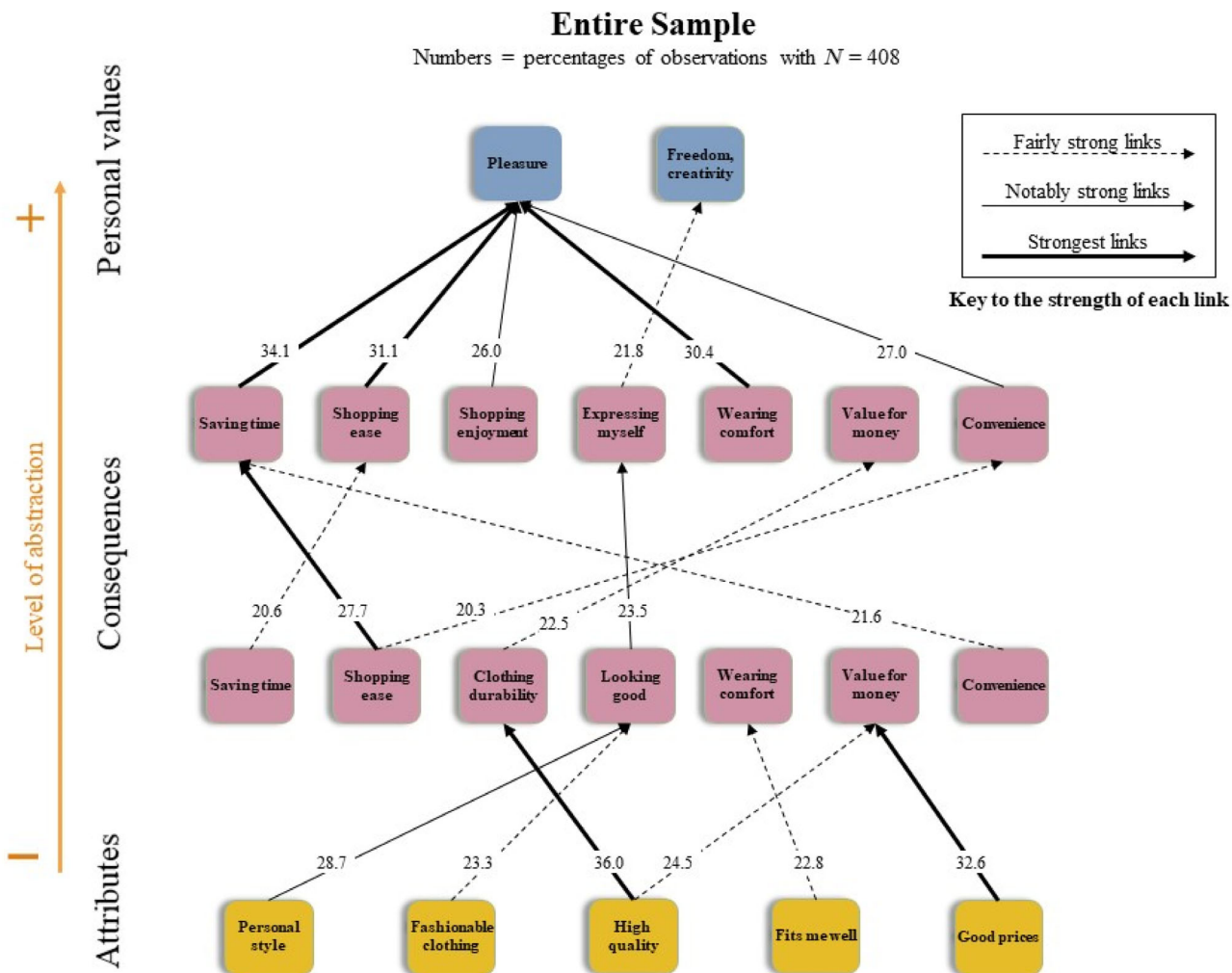
FIGURE 3 Hierarchical value map (HVM) of millennial men's clothing store choice.

generating the HVM, which supported this study's aim to identify the most prevalent underlying value.

4.2 | Implication matrices

The data collection procedure produced three implication matrices (AC, CC, and CV matrix), each distinguishing the strength of the links in terms of three levels of abstraction, as explained before. Laddering generally starts at the least abstract level (attributes), laddering upwards towards the more abstract forms of reasoning (values) (Bolzani, 2018; Botschen & Thelen, 1998; Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). The results are presented accordingly.

First, the AC implication matrix is based on the AC questionnaire matrix that presented 16 attributes vertically and 11 consequences horizontally at the top of the screen, as generated from phase 1. The additional column, 'none of these', on the right-hand side, allowed respondents to indicate that they could not draw an association with the options at hand, addressing caution raised in previous APT studies and preventing forced responses when respondents regard the

available options as insufficient (Diedericks et al., 2020). Because the qualitative phase was comprehensive, the researchers anticipated that this column would not draw many responses. It, however, gave respondents some assurance that their responses were not forced. Table 3 presents the AC implication matrix for the entire sample, specifying the frequencies of paired links.

Second, the CC implication matrix indicated the six strongest links derived from the CC matrix per the cut-off points. Although respondents were instructed not to pair similar consequences, for instance, that 'convenience' means 'convenience', some nevertheless did so. The CC implication matrix in Table 4 distinguishes, in light grey, the links that were excluded when the strongest links were identified.

Third, the CV implication matrix presented in Table 5 summarises the data generated from the relevant CV matrix in the questionnaire, where respondents linked the desired consequences with underlying motivations (depicting the personal values) for their clothing store preferences. The six strongest links were distinguished. Contrary to the previous matrices, there were more of the 'strongest' links with the 'notably strong' and 'fairly strong' links.

4.3 | Hierarchical value map

HVMs are interpreted from the least abstract level (attributes) upwards, concluding with the most abstract concepts (personal values) at the top (Bolzani, 2018; Thompson & Chen, 1998). The HVM presented in Figure 3 indicates the most prominent links distinguished per strength of abstraction, visually depicted with lines that differ in weight. Two predominant values are evident.

At the AC level, which is the lowest level of abstraction, the link between the attribute 'high quality' and the consequence 'clothing durability' is the strongest, indicated by 36.0% of the respondents. The second strongest link was between the attribute 'good prices' and the consequence 'value for money', indicated by 32.6% of the sample. This finding concurs with the conclusions of the MEC study of Botschen and Thelen (1998) and the literature suggesting that it is essential for consumers that the price of merchandise matches the perceived value potentially derived from the purchase (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2018). Near one in three respondents (28.7%) linked the attribute 'personal style' and the consequence 'looking good', hence a relatively strong link. The three remaining AC links were slightly weaker, although notably strong, associating 'high quality' with 'value for money' (24.5%); 'fashionable clothing' with 'looking good' (23.3%); and 'fits me well' with 'wearing comfort' (22.8%).

At the CC level, which is more abstract, the link departing from 'shopping ease' to 'saving time', indicated by 27.7% of the sample, represents the strongest link. These two consequences are reciprocally linked, meaning the two links have the same consequences. In reality, some respondents perceived the one consequence as less abstract (serving as a departing point for the link), while others perceived it the other way round, thus that 'saving time' leads to 'shopping ease' (20.6%). The second most dominant and notably strong link emerged between 'looking good' and 'expressing myself' (23.5%), which, together with the AC link between 'personal style' and 'looking good', confirms literature that indicates that millennials intentionally choose brands that match their personality to communicate who they are (Moreno et al., 2017). The remaining links were only fairly strong. Respondents indicated that 'clothing durability' would facilitate obtaining 'value for money' (22.5%), that 'convenience' results in 'saving time' (21.6%), and that 'shopping ease' is related to 'convenience' (20.3%). Interestingly, the consequence 'wearing comfort' was contained in both the AC and the CV links, although no link extended to the CC level.

On the CV level, hence the most abstract level, the noteworthy finding is that the personal value 'pleasure' is part of five of the six most prominent links, with the three strongest links departing from 'saving time' (34.1%), 'shopping ease' (31.1%) and 'wearing comfort' (30.4%), respectively. The most dominant link that departs from 'saving time' concurs with the fast-paced lifestyle typical of millennials (Moreno et al., 2017; Ryke, 2019). Two notably strong links with 'pleasure' are 'convenience' (27.0%) and 'shopping enjoyment' (26.0%). The only other personal value captured among the top six, and indicated by 21.8% of the sample, thus representing a fairly strong link, was 'freedom, creativity', which departs from the consequence 'expressing myself' that is associated with the value of 'self-direction' (Schwartz, 2012a,b).

The findings undeniably reveal that pleasure (coined 'hedonism' in literature) strongly drives millennial men's retail store choices, which supports the findings of Thompson and Chen (1998) concerning fashion retail store image, namely that 'enjoyment, happiness' is the end-state that motivates consumers' behaviour.

5 | DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Particular store attributes distinguish one clothing retail store from the rest when a consumer opts to enter a specific store among many that are adjacent or within proximity. In phase 1 of this study, which was conducted in an emerging market context, 16 attributes that may influence millennial men's clothing retail store choices were identified through personal interviews and subsequent rigorous analysis of participants' spontaneous disclosure and discussion of the topic. Participants shared their opinions without constraint and were not limited in the details they wished to share. In phase 2, respondents prioritised up to five attributes they would use to evaluate a clothing retail store from a list derived from the phase 1 analysis. A subsequent level of extraction of the APT procedure provided more insight concerning millennial men's chosen attributes, disclosing the anticipated consequences they expected to derive from them. For retailers, this evidence is not explanatory enough. For example, when analysing the attributes summarised in Table 1, the item 'Choosing a store for the sake of durability' could reflect an individual's need to purchase good quality garments to support a simple lifestyle without pretence, which is vastly different for someone prioritising durability to acquire exclusively manufactured merchandise to gain others' admiration. Similarly, preferring a store with 'good prices' may reflect a need to avoid extravagance or may relate to affordability. In 1928, Spranger suggested that individual behaviour is motivated by a central, personal value (Morgado, 1995), which inspired the research of scholars like Rokeach (1968), Vinson et al. (1977) and Schwartz and Bilsky (1990). All concurred that personal values serve as an internal driving force that motivates an individual to act in a certain way to accomplish an envisaged goal or end-state. On their own, although insightful, preferred attributes and desired consequences do not provide the answers that retailers need to strategise well. MEC provided an ideal opportunity to steer millennial men through the clothing store decision process, from spontaneously listing preferred store attributes, prioritising them, linking them with anticipated consequences, to finally identifying the underlying personal values that drive their clothing store preferences.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

The sequential research concludes that the personal value 'pleasure/ hedonism' is dominant in driving millennial men's clothing store choices. This outcome is strongly linked to the consequences of 'saving time', 'shopping ease' and 'wearing comfort', proposing a sense of intolerance and impatience among millennials when contemplating

shopping excursions. The conclusion that hedonic motives drive millennial men's clothing store choices when purchasing semi-formal/workwear for themselves supports evidence that millennial men's clothing purchase behaviour vastly differs from that of previous male generational cohorts who are reportedly less interested in fashion and shopping (Cho, 2017; Plazibat et al., 2017; Ryke, 2019). Clothing retailers who position themselves accordingly will most likely be favoured and ultimately attract lucrative and loyal customers. The findings of this study concur with Ryke (2019), who found that millennial men's online clothing shopping buyer behaviour is associated with 'shopping ease' and 'pleasure', while Wagner (2007) highlighted consumers' regard for 'enjoying life' while shopping, and Kim et al. (2002) emphasised consumers' prioritisation of 'fun and enjoyment'. Although not limited to millennials, the recent study by Cuesta-Valiño et al. (2022) reported that consumer happiness is a determining factor in securing loyalty and brand patronage in fashion retailing.

Scholars' explanation that 'you wear your cultural/personal values' (Keali'inohomoku, in Cordwell & Schwarz, 2011, p. 77), explicitly underlines the relevance of personal values in directing consumers' choices. Rather than limiting discussions to the importance of well-established marketing principles and concrete attributes when doing market segmentation (Bennur & Jin, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2016), this study envisaged a deeper understanding of why tangible marketing measures used to target selected market segments, are not necessarily on point. Millennial men's desire for pleasurable shopping experiences and self-indulgence may have taken a back seat in recent years with solid drives to be more environmentally conscious and to demonstrate respect for others and the environment. These drives are associated with opposing personal values, namely conformity/conservation on Schwartz's value continuum (2012), while this study found that millennial men are neither traditional nor openhearted (inherently kind) and do not prioritise conservation over self-enhancement. This study concludes that millennials are rather pedantic about their time and enjoy undisturbed shopping experiences. Crucial measures to win this viable target market's support entail limiting frustration, such as attracting attention through excellent store design, well-contemplated visual merchandising, availability of good product assortment, excellent customer service to impress rather than frustrate, and preventing procrastination. To a large extent, millennial men typically base their clothing store choices on self-centred motivations that might influence store loyalty, which is crucial for retailers and word-of-mouth communication (Budiman, 2021). With social media, negative consumer experiences may have detrimental consequences for clothing retailers (Sharma et al., 2021), emphasising why retailers must consider the values that drive millennial men's clothing store choices when they design their marketing strategies.

An important theoretical contribution of this study was utilising an exploratory mixed-method approach in a MEC study, which is not necessarily the norm. This study was conducted in the context of an emerging economy. Still, it provided insights that are probably equally relevant in developed markets with sophisticated consumers who are spoilt for choice regarding retail stores.

7 | RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although it is essential to understand why consumers choose to shop at specific stores, it is necessary to know why they intentionally avoid others, as 'persistent exit' behaviour associated with customer dissatisfaction is detrimental to retailers (Kasambala et al., 2016). The laddering technique used in this study uses a series of probes to uncover consumers' reasons for specific choices, which could also be applied to explore consumers' store avoidance. The study could also be replicated with other generational cohorts and consumers in other emerging economies or developed countries, attending to different clothing categories, such as sportswear, or alternative commodities, such as household technologies, the beauty industry, or holiday destinations. Apart from applying traditional marketing principles that strongly rely on tangible evidence, clothing retailers should elevate millennials' shopping experiences by crafting store atmospheres to ensure an inviting, pleasurable experience. Therefore, experiential retailing, which entails interaction and fun, is an approach worth considering (Retief et al., 2018).

8 | LIMITATIONS

This study contributed to the existing literature on the relevance of personal values in consumers' behaviour in the marketplace, particularly concerning millennial men's clothing retail store choices. The findings support Thompson and Chen (1998) concerning the need to focus on a specific market segment that is considered important to retailers in terms of their market size, interest in clothing and potential spending power, which is essential to planning existing and future retail offerings. In this study, respondents' choices were made at the individual level, and aggregate data was summarised to present the predominant values driving millennial men's clothing store choices in a South African context. The questionnaire was developed for a specific research context, considering the qualitative phase. Therefore, the measuring instrument cannot be merely replicated in other market segments, such as females, or when focusing on product categories, including luxury products, cosmetics, technology, food and tourism. To apply the study's methodology to other research contexts, the qualitative and quantitative phases should be context-specific.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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