

FEMALE CONSUMERS' FAMILIARITY WITH CLOTHING BRANDS AND THEIR TRUST IN BRAND NAMES AS AN INDICATION OF CERTAIN DESIRABLE PROPERTIES OF CLOTHING

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OPSOMMING

Talle gevestigde, bekende handelsmerke het hulle produksie in onlangse jare na Oosterse lande verskuif om arbeidskoste te sny. Die land van herkoms (LvH) en die land van produksie (LvP) van gewilde, gesogte kledinghandelsmerke mag dus verskil. Dis nie duidelik of verbruikers bekend is met die LvH van gewilde handelsmerke, of hulle aan die LvP aandag gee, of dit vir hulle 'n probleem is die LvO en die LvP verskil, en hoe dit hulle persepsie van sulke produkte beïnvloed nie. Hierdie studie het ondersoek ingestel na damesverbruikers se kennis van kledinghandelsname, hulle LvO asook die LvP, as deel van 'n ondersoek na die gebruik van handelsname as aanduiding van sekere gesogte eienskappe van kleding, byvoorbeeld die funksionele- en gedrageieenskappe, status en omgewingsvriendelikheid eerder as om kledingstukke deeglik te evalueer. 'n Opname is deur middel van 'n gestruktureerde vraelys in 'n groot stedelike gebied in Suid-Afrika onder werkende dames gedoen. Data is deur geriefsteekproefneming ingesamel, en 322 dames tussen die ouderdom van 25 en 60 jaar het die gestruktureerde vraelys self voltooi. Data-analise het beskrywende statistiek, verkennende faktoranalise en ontledings soos Anova and post hoc toetse ingesluit. Die studie het die belang van handelsname as 'n aanduiding van die funksionele- en gedrageieenskappe van kledingprodukte bevestig en aangetoon dat die belang van handelsname as aanduiding van die status of omgewingsvriendelikheid in hierdie produkategorie ondergeskik is aan die voorgenoemde ongeag 'n verbruiker se ouderdom, inkomste, opleidingspeil of populasiegroep.

In teenstelling met bestaande literatuur toon hierdie studie dat damesverbruikers handelsname gebruik as aanduiding van goeie pas, duursaamheid, gemak en goeie gehalte, eerder as 'n simbool van status. Hoewel die studie handelsname wat wyd geadverteer word en geredelik in winkels beskikbaar is ingesluit het was respondente nie baie vertrouwd daarmee nie. Die meerderheid respondente het wel verkies dat die LvH en die LvP van handelsname

ooreenstem. In die algemeen is Westerse lande as LvP verkies en is voorkeur gegee aan plaaslike- bo vervaardigers uit Oosterse lande. Verskille in die LvO en die LvP van handelsname, veral wanneer die LvP 'n Oosterse land is, mag verbruikers se persepsie van handelsname nadelig beïnvloed tensy verbruikers ingelig word waarom die praktyk deesdae algemeen voorkom.

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INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

From a consumer's perspective, the advantages associated with globalisation are indisputable, specifically with regard to the availability of a wider selection of brands and products across the world. In South Africa (SA), for example, imports of sought-after luxury international clothing brands have risen significantly after 1994 (Bisseker, 2012) while developed countries have more or less reached a saturation point (Kaynak & Kara, 2002; Bhardwaj *et al*, 2010). The clothing retail industry in some of the developing countries is incessantly expanding notwithstanding economic hardship worldwide (Cant *et al*, 2005:7; Nieftagodien & Van der Berg, 2007; Vlok, 2006:231; Üstüner & Holt, 2010). Consumers in SA therefore now have a wider range of products and brands to choose from than ever before. Understandingly then, it has become quite intricate for consumers to select clothing. At the same time female shoppers have become very important for the survival of clothing retailers in SA (Vlok, 2006:231; Hansen

& Jensen, 2009) as female clothing generates more than half of the revenue in the country's clothing sector (Data monitor, 2009:9).

Generally, consumers use a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic indicators to assess the quality and suitability of clothing products (Retief & De Klerk, 2003). Intrinsic characteristics refer to the actual integral part of the physical product such as the textiles and colour. Extrinsic characteristics are those that are not part of the physical products, such as the price, brand and country of brand origin (hence onwards referred to as CBO) (Thakor & Katsanis, 1997).

When consumers lack the knowledge and expertise to distinguish actual quality indicators, or when they do not have the time or interest to do so, they tend to use heuristic, mostly extrinsic, tangible indicators such as price or brand name to simplify their clothing purchase decisions (Veale & Quester, 2009). The brand name is one of the extrinsic characteristics, which has considerable potential communicative value in terms of the message that a brand name conveys to others about the product as well as the wearer (Kaiser *et al*, 1991; Yurchisin & Johnson, 2004). Inevitably some consumers are more brand-conscious and place more emphasis on brand names due to their acquired symbolic meaning and related messages that they convey to others who share the particular meaning, for example, status or quality (Keller, 1993; Clark *et al*, 2007). Consumers who value these symbols are mostly willing to pay premium prices for the brand's symbolic value (O'Cass & Choy, 2008) that exists in their minds (Yasin *et al*, 2007) in the form of cognitive structures that are derived from an organisation of prior experience and related knowledge structures (Fiske & Linville, 1980; Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Brand names often serve as a heuristic experience during consumer decision making and simultaneously serve as a substitute for multiple product characteristics such as quality, luxury, status (Han & Terpstra, 1988), and even ecofriendliness. Inevitably then, so-called luxury branded clothing is often purchased intentionally and worn to construct a consumer's image and identity to impress others and to indicate status (Kaiser *et al*, 1991; Kaiser, 1998:21; Phau & Leng, 2007). A sought-after brand also reduces consumers' risk perception during the prepurchase stage, because the brand is a heuristic indication that represents an established reputation which could be very comforting if a consumer is in doubt (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:202). Consumers may thus

purchase a brand based merely on its reputation without even bothering to investigate the actual quality of a product.

Another symbol which is also an external characteristic that generally accompanies the brand, is country of brand origin (CBO) (Keller, 1993), even though a brand's country of origin is mostly indicated in a less visible way and is often indicated on a smaller label that might be out of sight on an inside seam of a garment. Consumers are inclined to associate brands with certain countries of origin, for example, Pringle of Scotland. Since consumers also have perceptions about various countries, their perceptions of the country transfer inescapably to the products (Keller, 1993; Ko *et al*, 2009). This tends to simplify their decision-making process and to save evaluation effort and time (Chakraborty *et al*, 1996; Tse, 1999; Del Vecchio, 2001). Country image is the stereotype, picture and reputation that consumers attach to a certain country (Pereira *et al*, 2005) and this affects their attitude towards products in either a positive or a negative way (Salciuviene *et al*, 2010). CBO research is product specific as well as country specific, since each country has its unique strengths, weaknesses and history, which construct the country image (Han & Terpstra, 1988; Roth & Romeo, 1992; Chao, 1998). Consumers inadvertently prefer products coming from developed countries to those from developing countries, based on the favourable reputation of developed countries (Lee *et al*, 2012). Products originating from developing countries such as China, India and South Africa are mostly associated with lower quality whereas the opposite is true for products from a developed country such as the United Kingdom (UK), Italy, France and the United States of America (USA) (Ahmed & d'Astous, 2007). The perception is that products originating from Western countries are more luxurious and technologically advanced (Lee *et al*, 2012), although this depends on what consumers think they know about a country, its production competence and sense of style (Roth & Romeo, 1992).

It also matters whether consumers' perceptions of a country and a product or brand coincide. France is, for example, associated with wine, but not with beer (Roth & Romeo, 1992). A perceived match between brands or products and countries augments the CBO effect (Usunier, 2011). Some brands therefore deliberately market themselves with a certain country or region in mind to tap from the

location's existing image in consumers' minds. As an example, the majority of the shoes in the stores of the South African retailer Europa Art Shoes are manufactured in China, with a small import from Brazil while hardly any styles originate in Europe. Consumers who patronise these stores therefore pay exceptionally high prices for shoes that are perceived to be manufactured in Europe, although it is not so.

At present, the definition of "country of origin" is very different from the definitions that applied in the 1960s and 1970s (Kaynak & Kara, 2002). Due to globalisation a product can now be manufactured in one country with parts, such as the fabrics and trims, manufactured in various other countries (Usunier, 2006; Samiee, 2010) mostly to save on labour costs (Jo *et al*, 2003). Many Western brands have thus moved the production of their goods to countries where labour costs are lower (e.g. Eastern countries) to maximise their profits (Jo *et al*, 2003). Binational products can have a country of manufacture that differs from the country where the brand originated (Han & Terpstra, 1988). Binational products may, however, cause confusion and/or brand incongruity, especially if the country of manufacturing (COM) conveys a less favourable image than the original CBO (Arnould *et al*, 2004:321; Jo *et al*, 2003).

The term *incongruence* is widely used within CBO studies. In marketing research Keller (1993) defined congruence as "the extent to which a brand association shares content and meaning with another brand association". Incongruence therefore refers to situations when brand associations differ (Salciuviene *et al*, 2010), for example, Pringle of Scotland of which several product lines are manufactured in China or South Africa. Research indicates that the effect of brand incongruence is intricate. A prestigious brand could enhance the image of a less prestigious store although at the expense of the brand image (Chao, 1998). Similarly, incongruence between a prestigious brand and a less prestigious COM may enhance the COM image at the expense of the brand image and brand equity. It is therefore important to gain a better understanding of the influence of brand incongruity to understand consumers' behaviour and to strengthen or protect brand equity.

According to brand origin recognition accuracy studies (BORA), consumers do not necessarily know where certain brands originated and/or where they are manufactured (Samiee *et al*, 2005; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008).

Ultimately, the country that consumers think is an item's place of manufacture or place of origin influences brand perceptions whether the perception is accurate or not (Magnusson *et al*, 2011). The magnitude of the CBO effect is apparently larger for fashion-orientated- and for expensive products (Chattalas *et al*, 2008), and clothing fall into both these categories. The assumption is therefore that the CBO will be significant when evaluating luxury branded clothes.

It would be possible to manage CBO perceptions within retailers' marketing mix (Magnusson *et al*, 2011). International examples of brands that have used CBO indicators in this way are firstly Volkswagen, which incorporates their German heritage throughout their promotional campaigns by using the slogan "Das Auto". Secondly, the Swedish furniture brand Ikea, incorporates the colours yellow and blue of the Swedish flag in their stores and promotional campaigns to accentuate the brand origin and brand image (Magnusson *et al*, 2011). Apparel brands can also manage CBO indicators and benefit from them such as the use of well-known Italian landmarks in Carvella advertisements, which is possibly one of the success factors of the South African retailer Spitz. To maintain a luxury brand's status, the marketers of these luxury brands should be cognisant of the market's perceptions to enable them to manage the brand equity accordingly (Keller, 2008). Some powerful global brands have suffered dearly because of retailers' ignorance of the CBO effect. The American brand Nike experienced a flare of negative publicity as they outsourced their manufacturing operations to Asian countries that are associated with harsh labour conditions (DeTienne & Lewis, 2005). A better understanding of consumers' perceptions of the CBO and COM of brands, as well as their reactions to brand incongruence may therefore be beneficial for all stakeholders, including consumers who should be encouraged to make informed purchase decisions at all times.

Multiple studies confirm clothing brands' potential to enhance the image or status of the wearer (Kaiser *et al*, 1991; Yurchisin & Johnson, 2004; O' Cass & Choy, 2008). Literature therefore indicates that females often rely on brands to enhance their image in a social context, regardless of the price of the merchandise (O' Cass & Choy, 2008). In addition, a clothing brand can be used as a way in which to heuristically deduce certain characteristics about a garment without

objectively investigating it. In a country such as South Africa where female clothing generates the most revenue compared to other clothing products (Vlok, 2006:231; Hansen & Jensen, 2009; Data monitor, 2009:9) the CBO effect could be detrimental (Kaynak & Kara, 2002; Ahmed & d'Astous, 2007; Bisseker, 2012) if consumers' perceptions of brands are tarnished by the image of the COM. The trend for many international brands to move production to developing countries and to market bi-national products may therefore harm the brands and discourage interest in the brands (Jo *et al*, 2003; Samiee, 2010). According to the Consumer Protection Act (68) of 2008 of South Africa indicating the COM on all clothing products is compulsory. These labels are mostly, and for good reason, neither as prominent nor as visibly attached to garments as the brand label or the size label. Probably many consumers do not even bother to look for the inside label to see where a product is manufactured and might therefore have no idea of the product's actual COM. This may be beneficial for some brands where the COM has an unfavourable reputation, for instance there are people who associate China with abusive child labour. Unless consumers understand why so many clothing products come from countries other than the true CBO, and how consumers benefit from it, disclosure of the incongruence of CBO and COM may arouse negative perceptions of successful brands, which could have irreparable consequences for the brands.

Empirical evidence regarding the influence of incongruity between COM and CBO of branded apparel on a consumer's perception of clothing products is limited although the CBO effect has drawn interest in different product contexts in the past (Nagashima, 1977; Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Chao, 1993). In international marketing literature, CBO is one of the most researched and most debated topics and has become known as the "made-in paradox" (d'Astous & Ahmed, 1999; Bloemer *et al*, 2009; Magnusson *et al*, 2011; Usunier, 2011) because researchers keep contradicting each other. While some studies concluded that the CBO effect influences consumers' choices (Han & Terpstra, 1988; Piron, 2000; Ahmed *et al*, 2002; Koubaa, 2007), and that the CBO has an important influence on consumers' evaluation of products in food, electronic and automobile industries (Ozretic-Dosen *et al*, 2007; Veale & Quester, 2009), other studies disagree (Samiee *et al*, 2005; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2008). In

China, Ahmed and d'Astous (2004) did one of the very few studies on consumers' perceptions of the CBO effect in apparel. The purpose was to provide guidance for the local fashion industry concerning the marketing of their products in a competitive industry. It seemed that a similar study in South Africa would expose consumers' familiarity with luxury brands as well as their perceptions of bi-national branded clothing products in the context of an emerging economy. This would contribute to an existing gap in the literature and provide valuable, empirical evidence to keep consumers informed and to ensure that useful, relevant information supports their decision-making processes. It will also prevent unfounded negative perceptions about certain prominent brands, some of which are manufactured in South Africa. This article discusses a study that investigated working female consumers' familiarity with more sophisticated, luxury clothing brands that have become widely available in retail in South Africa, their knowledge of the origin of the brands (CBO), the brands' country of manufacture (COM), as well as consumers' trust in brand names as an indication of certain desirable properties of clothing.

AIM OF THE STUDY

This explorative study investigated:

1. females' familiarity with a selection of luxury female clothing brands that represent sought-after brands that are widely advertised and available in prominent clothing retailers in South Africa;
2. females' familiarity with the country of brand origin (CBO) and the country of manufacture (COM) of selected clothing brands;
3. females' preference for the COM and CBO of clothing;
4. the use of brand names as an indication of certain desirable properties of casual and career wear;
5. the influence of selected demographic characteristics on females' use of brand names as an indication of certain desirable properties of casual and career wear;
6. females' brand consciousness as a possible explanation of their familiarity with luxury female clothing brands.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The study adopted the assumptions of a cognitive perspective, focusing on how consumers' knowledge about, and perceptions of brands influence their clothing purchase deci-

sions (Kaiser, 1998:33; De Klerk, 1999; Rousseau, 2007:195; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:481). The assumptions were that clothing brands could be used to reduce a cognitive overload during decision making and that brand names could serve as cognitive shortcuts to deduce certain desirable properties of clothing products more easily (Reger & Huff, 1993; De Klerk, 1999; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:481). A cognitive perspective proposes that consumers categorise information to establish preferred product characteristics or perceptions about countries placing them in coherent groups (Shimp *et al.*, 1993). Certain brands and certain countries (for example Western or Asian countries) may represent desirable characteristics that would influence their purchase decisions (Shimp *et al.*, 1993). In CBO research, cognition is highly relevant (Sauer *et al.*, 1991; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) because cognitive structures in memory encompass individuals' beliefs and perceptions about a country and its products (brands) (Shimp *et al.*, 1993; Khan *et al.*, 2012). The representations formed in consumers' memory about different countries for example those that are respected or admired, vary in depth due to the amount of exposure to a particular country, its people and products (Shimp *et al.*, 1993). Numerous empirical studies (Sauer *et al.*, 1991; Peterson & Jolibert, 1995; Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999) have established that consumers' evaluation of foreign products is largely determined by the cognitive processing of CBO information.

METHODOLOGY

A survey was done in February 2013 in Tshwane, a major metropolitan area in the most affluent province in South Africa where major shopping malls with multiple retailers that stock prominent, luxury brands are situated in close proximity to, and within reach of most consumers.

Questionnaire development

A structured questionnaire consisting of four sections with sub sections was designed for the collection of quantifiable data. The questions were designed in accordance with specific objectives of the study.

1) To enable extrapolations in terms of demographic information (Objective 5), the introductory section included nominal scales to capture information about the gender and

population group of respondents, and ordinal scales to collect age, level of education, and household income data. Although the detail was not relevant in terms of data analysis, respondents' area of residence was requested in an open question to verify their residence in the target area.

2) For the self-developed section that investigated females' familiarity with a selection of luxury female clothing brands (Objective 1) as well as their knowledge of the clothing brands' CBO and COM (Objective 2), twenty clothing brand names were selected from advertisements in two popular female as well as one family magazine that were available in two official languages (English and Afrikaans). The brands were used in different combinations in different questions in this section to encourage respondents to thoughtfully consider their responses. Firstly, fifteen brands, which included four nonclothing brands, were presented requesting "Yes", "No", or "I don't know" responses to indicate which brands respondents correctly associated with ladies' smart casual career wear. Thereafter, fourteen clothing brands were listed, which included the remaining nine clothing brands that were not used in the previous question of which two were store brands. This time respondents had to complete CBO information for each brand, indicating: "I know this brand originates from..."; "I think this brand originates from..."; or marking the option "I don't know". Repeating the instructions with regard to the COM of a subsequent list that contained the same brands, respondents stated: "I know this brand is manufactured in..." or "I think this brand is manufactured in..." or "I don't know". A last open question in this section provided respondents the opportunity to specify other luxury brands names that they purchased from time to time that did not appear in any of the questions in this section.

3) Females' preference for the COM and CBO of clothing (Objective 3) was investigated by means of a visual presentation of three versions of each of three brand labels namely Levi, Country Road and Pringle. Each version of the three brand labels presented alternative COM information, namely a Western-, Eastern country or South Africa, as presented in Figure 1.

4) A subsequent section included two questions with twelve and five items respectively. The first question investigated females' use of

brands to deduce certain desirable properties of smart casual and career wear (Objective 4). Respondents indicated whether they used brand names as indication of certain properties of casual and career wear by selecting one of four increments ranging from “*Hardly ever*” to “*Almost always*”. The twelve items that were presented in random order included functional and performance related characteristics of clothing (6 Items), status factors (4 Items) as well as “green”/ eco-friendly characteristics (2 items). The next question involved the established five-item Status Consciousness Scale of Sproles and Kendall (1986) using four incremental assessments ranging from “Hardly ever” to “Almost always” (Objective 6).

After approval by a statistician, the questionnaire was pilot tested with 17 females who met the criteria for participation in the study in order to detect and correct possible shortcomings that would eliminate errors in the final database. The questionnaire was accepted after a slight revision of the instructions given in section B, the brand familiarity investigation, as some of the respondents only completed questions pertaining to brands they were familiar with.

Sample and sampling

Convenience and snowball sampling was used (Cant *et al*, 2003:49) to distribute 500 questionnaires with an explanatory cover letter to work-ing females between 25 and 60 years of age in businesses and office blocks across Tshwane, a major urban area in Gauteng, South Africa. The expectation was that working females would have some interest in formal and career wear, and that they would be more able to afford or to consider luxury brands. Due to the application of this non-probability sampling method, the findings cannot be generalised to the whole population of South Africa. In accord with common research practice, a substantive sample size was envisaged to allow for viable sub-sets of the sample that would produce meaningful findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:213). Twelve trained field workers were therefore assigned to distribute questionnaires on a drop-off-collect-later basis in specific middle and upper income suburbs across the city to ensure the inclusion of a broad spectrum of consumers. Willing respondents thereafter distributed additional questionnaires to acquaintances or colleagues to further assist in the distribution of questionnaires to others who

fitted the profile specified for the study. Self-completed questionnaires were collected by appointment within two weeks. Eventually information from 322 useful questionnaires, all completed anonymously and put into sealed envelopes, formed the final database. The respondents were not pressurised to return the questionnaires, and after one reminder, further contact was discontinued.

Data analysis

A qualified statistician supported the methods used to capture, check and process the data. Descriptive and inferential statistics (i.e. percentages, means, standard deviations as well as factor analysis, t-tests and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse the data. Heuristic modes led to the identification of certain desirable properties of clothing. Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each of the 12 self-developed items of the scale were first calculated to determine the internal consistency of the responses, expecting values >0,70 for items to be retained for the exploratory factor analysis procedure. This involved an unrestricted Promax rotation method (Eigen values >1). After factor analysis, the Cronbach Alpha coefficients, means, standard deviations as well as the explained variance were calculated for each factor which contained more than three items. A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to confirm statistical significant consistency between the items in the factor which only contained two items.

Within a model that acknowledged all four demographic variables simultaneously, calculation of the means for the three factors per subset of each demographic category took place. These inferences disclosed possible differences in the use of brand names by different demographic groups. ANOVA was thus applied to the classification variables of age, level of education, population group and income in a model under the condition that $Mean_{F1}, Mean_{F2}, Mean_{F3} = LS_{Mean}_{Age}, LS_{Mean}_{Level\ of\ educ}, LS_{Mean}_{Pop\ group}, LS_{Mean}_{Inc}$.

Error elimination in the study was attended to through thorough scrutiny of extant literature; by regular consultation with a qualified statistician; the execution of a pre-test; and verification of the questionnaire by experts in Consumer Science to enhance face and construct validity.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Age

The sample (N = 313; missing = 9) comprised three age categories: namely young females between 25 and 29 years (n = 129/ 41%); young females >29 to 39 years (n = 93/ 30%) who were considered more established in terms of their work and personal lives as well as middle aged females >39 years of age (n = 91/29%).

Level of education

To enable comparisons within demographic groups, three levels of education categories were distinguished namely females with a secondary school qualification (n = 88 /27,5%; an additional diploma or degree: n = 145/ 45,3%; a post graduate diploma / degree: n = 87/ 27,2% (missing: n = 2).

Household income

Three monthly household income categories were distinguished based on established figures used by media organisations in Tshwane, i.e.: a lower middle-income group (<R10 000: n = 72/ 22,6%); an upper middle-income group (>R10 000 to <R25 000: n = 138/ 43,4%); a high income group (>R25 000: n = 108/ 34,0%) (missing:n=2). These income categories coincide with the Tshwane Metropolitan's household income distinction categories (City of Tshwane Municipality Household Survey, 2008).

Population group

The three broad population categories were: Whites (n = 247/ 76,7%); Blacks (n = 43/ 13,4%) and "Other", which included Coloureds and Asians (n = 32/ 9,9%).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Consumers' familiarity with selected clothing brands and their origin

Consumers' familiarity with the selected clothing brand names and their country of origin was investigated by introducing a list of fifteen brands that included eleven female clothing brands that are widely advertised and available in retail stores: namely, Aca Joe, Cellini, Charter Club, Country Road, Donna Claire, Forever New, French Connection, Hilton Weiner, Jenni Button, Jo Borkett, Pringle, as well as four

nonclothing brands, namely Busby, Montblanc, Maserati and Tumi. Respondents had to identify the listed brands as clothing brands (or not) and indicated which brands they were not familiar with at all. Only five respondents (1,55%) were familiar with all fifteen brands; six of the eleven brands were correctly identified as clothing brands by only 48,9% of the sample; 73 respondents (22,67%) indicated that between three to five of the widely advertised clothing brands were unfamiliar to them; and 30 respondents (9,31%) were not familiar with more than six of the brands. When asked to indicate which brands they purchase, in an open question, six additional brand names appeared among the responses, although every respondent included at least one of the brand names listed in the questionnaire.

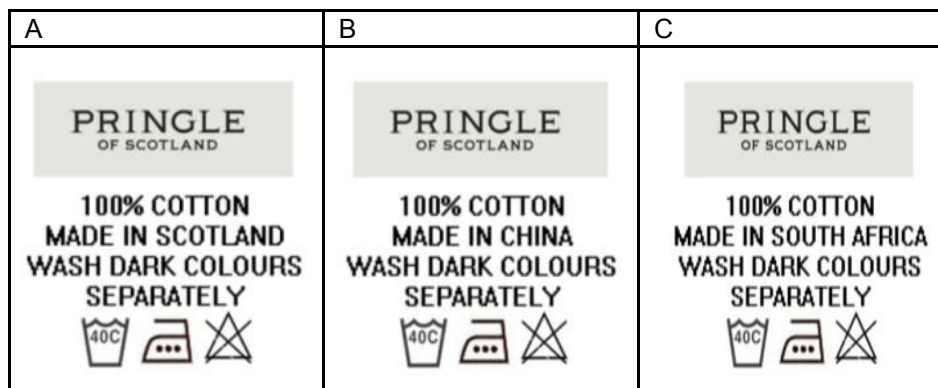
Respondents' familiarity with the CBO and the COM of selected clothing brands

Respondents indicated the CBO as well as the COM of a list of fourteen brands in two separate questions, choosing from the three given options, "I know"; "I guess", or "I don't know". For the first two options they also had to specify the CBO and the COM in an adjacent column. Near 30% of the sample admitted that they did not know the brands' CBO or the COM. It was therefore not surprising that only between 10,2% and 58,7% of the respondents correctly specified the listed brands' country of origin. Although this study only reflected on twenty female brands, the findings suggest that female consumers are not well acquainted with the CBO and the COM of clothing brands, which is a concern if consumers' perceptions of brands are influenced by negative stereotypes. The tabulated results (Table 1) indicate the percentage of the sample that correctly specified the CBO and the COM of the listed brands, as well as how many did not know. The coding process was intricate as the CBO of a specific brand was limited to one country only while the COM could have been different countries, for example Pringle of Scotland being manufactured in Scotland, South Africa as well as Swaziland. This information therefore had to be checked meticulously beforehand.

Generally the respondents seemed poorly acquainted with brands' CBO as well as their COM. This topic deserves further investigation as indications are that consumers' perceptions of countries affect their views of products that are produced and distributed by them (Keller, 1993; Ko *et al*, 2009).

TABLE 1: CONSUMERS' RESPONSES CONCERNING BRANDS' CBO AND COM

Brand	CBO: % Correct	CBO: % Don't know	COM: % Correct	COM: Don't know (%)
Country Road	21,7	23,9	10,2	20,2
Daniel Hechter	14,6	23,0	31,1	20,5
Diesel	10,2	20,2	23,6	15,8
Donna Claire	56,2	20,8	67,1	16,5
Guess	58,7	21,7	13,4	15,5
Jenni Button	32,9	25,8	41,9	21,4
Jo Borkett	23,0	29,2	10,9	30,7
Mango	14,0	25,8	14,9	22,4
Marion and Lindie	36,0	31,1	45,7	29,2
Pringle	46,6	23,3	14,9	22,7
Queenspark	46,9	21,7	60,6	19,3
Trenery	13,0	31,7	14,3	27,0
WW Collection	53,1	18,6	71,1	12,1
Zara	18,3	28,3	43,8	26,7

**FIGURE 1: EXAMPLE OF LABELS SPECIFYING ALTERNATIVE COM**

Consumers' preference of the COM and CBO of clothing

Respondents also chose the one clothing label they preferred from each of three sets of labels (Country Road, Levi, and Pringle) where the COM of the labels were altered to include a Western country, an Asian country and South Africa in every label set, while the rest of the information was kept the same as depicted in Figure 1.

The majority of respondents (55,6%) preferred the labels of which the COM and the CBO matched (as in example A, Figure 1). Irrespective of the brand name, a Western country was the preferred COM (55,6%), while 36,5% preferred South Africa and only 8,9% of the respondents preferred China as the COM.

Females' use of brand names as an indication of the properties of casual and career wear

Cronbach Alpha coefficients for the 12 items of the scale varied between 0,85 and 0,87. All the items were therefore retained for the exploratory factor analysis procedure, which produced three factors. All the scale items were retained because no cross loadings occurred. The items within the three factors were all coherent in terms of evidence from the literature reviewed and the factors were subsequently labelled according to their related attributes: Factor 1, Functional/ Performance Factor 2, Status; and Factor 3, Eco-friendliness.

Cronbach Alpha coefficients for factors 1 and 2 (> 0,8) confirm the internal consistency of the content of these factors. The Pearson correlation coefficient calculated for the two items contained in factor 3 (R^2 =of 0,72),

TABLE 2: FACTORS THAT EMERGED DURING FACTOR ANALYSIS

Statement:	Factor 1: Functional/ Performance	Factor 2: Status	Factor 3: Eco- friendliness
When buying smart casual- and career wear, brand names are used as an indication of.....			
Comfort	0,82	-0,09	0,04
The fit of the garment	0,82	0,11	-0,03
The durability of the garment	0,76	0,03	0,02
The suitability of the outfit for the occasion	0,71	0,25	-0,08
Ease of care of the garment	0,70	-0,22	0,37
Price	0,43	0,09	-0,03
The fashionability of the garment	0,04	0,88	-0,02
The prestige of the garment	-0,01	0,86	0,05
What your friends' admiration of the outfit could be	-0,13	0,68	0,34
The quality of the garment	0,32	0,62	-0,14
Care about the environment	0,00	0,03	0,92
Manufacturers' regard for the human dignity during manufacture	0,03	0,11	0,86
Mean (Maximum = 4)	3,22	2,37	2,18
Std error of the mean (SEM)	0,036	0,040	0,50
% Variance explained	48,5	31,2	3,5
Cronbach Alpha	0,84	0,81	x

confirms a statistical significant consistency between the items.

Based on the means calculated for the three factors, females apparently use brand names more to deduce the functional and performance characteristics of clothing (factor 1: M = 3,22) than to elicit status (factor 2: M = 2,37) or to infer the garment's eco-friendliness (factor 3: M = 2,18).

Differences within different demographic groups with regard to consumers' use of brand names when buying clothing were evident as illustrated by the means for the three factors (Table 3).

Functional and performance characteristics

In terms of females' use of brand names to infer the functional and performance characteristics of apparel (Factor 1), significant differences were only prevalent among the three population groups ($R^2 = ,013$; $p = 0,118$). Black females' use of brand names to distinguish functional and performance related properties was statistically more significant (M = 3,22) than the use of brand names by Whites (M = 3,01), or the other population groups (Coloured and Asian) (M = 3,12). Neither income nor education levels or age groups differed significantly in terms of their use of brand names to signify functional and performance characteristics of apparel ($p \Rightarrow 0,05$). In summary, findings suggest that females mostly or always (M = >3) use brand names as an indication of the functional and

performance characteristics of apparel, which include aspects such as the fit, comfort as well as the textile and construction quality of clothes. In the case of Black females this trend is significantly more prevalent.

Indication of status

In terms of females' use of apparel brands as an indication of status (Factor 2), significant differences appeared across the different age groups ($p = 0,014$) as well as within the population categories ($p = 0,0001$). Although it is clear from the results that all the female respondents do use brand names as a matter of status (M = 2,37), doing this is less prevalent than them looking for the garments' functional and performance characteristics. From relevant extant literature, younger females appear to be generally more aspiring (Du Preez & Visser, 2003; Lachance *et al*, 2003) and also more concerned about their social self (Kaiser, 1998:131), being particularly inclined to be more status conscious in terms of their apparel. This study confirms that females younger than 40 years of age are significantly ($p = <0,05$) more inclined to use brand names as a symbol of status ($M_{25-29\text{yrs}} = 2,48$; $M_{>29-39\text{yrs}} = 2,41$) than their older counterparts ($M_{>39\text{yrs}} = 2,19$). People in the latter group probably have more established self-concepts and do not necessarily have to depend on apparel as an extension of the self to the same extent that younger females do. Significant differences ($p = <0,05$) were also evident among the different population categories: the whites' use of brand names as a sign of status was significantly less prevalent compared to the other two population

TABLE 3: A COMPARISON OF THE MEANS FOR THE VARIOUS DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES (N = 322)

Means for the three factors per demographic category		Factor 1 Mean (SEM*)	Factor 2 Mean (SEM)	Factor 3 Mean(SEM)
Age: 25 – 29yrs	n = 129	3,01 ^a (0,050)	2,48 ^a (0,060)	2,10 ^a (0,076)
30 - 39 yrs	n = 93	3,07 ^a (0,069)	2,41 ^{ab} (0,067)	2,28 ^a (0,091)
40 yrs +	n = 91	3,09 ^a (0,076)	2,19 ^{bc} (0,087)	2,24 ^a (0,102)
r ²		0,002	0,027	0,007
p-value		0,694	0,014	0,317
Income: <R10K	n = 72	3,07 ^a (0,079)	2,47 ^a (0,073)	2,35 ^a (0,106)
R10K - R25K	n = 138	3,03 ^a (0,060)	2,30 ^a (0,063)	2,12 ^a (0,077)
>R25K	n = 108	3,07 ^a (0,053)	2,38 ^a (0,071)	2,18 ^a (0,085)
r ²		0,001	0,009	0,010
p-value		0,886	0,259	0,195
Education level: Gr 12 and lower	n = 88	3,04 ^a (0,072)	2,40 ^a (0,075)	2,34 ^a (0,097)
Gr 12 + degree or diploma	n = 145	3,10 ^a (0,054)	2,45 ^{ac} (0,062)	2,23 ^a (0,077)
Post graduate qualification	n = 87	3,02 ^a (0,061)	2,24 ^b (0,072)	1,98 ^b (0,084)
r ²		0,003	0,015	0,023
p-value		0,604	0,094	0,025
Population group: White	n = 247	3,01 ^a (0,041)	2,28 ^a (0,045)	2,10 ^a (0,054)
Black	n = 43	3,22 ^b (0,092)	2,73 ^b (0,093)	2,38 ^b (0,166)
Other	n = 32	3,12 ^{ab} (0,110)	2,60 ^b (0,139)	2,63 ^b (0,147)
r ²		0,013	0,056	0,038
p-value		0,118	0,0001	0,0023

*SEM: Standard error of the mean

groups who did not differ significantly from each other ($M_{\text{White}} = 2,28$; $M_{\text{Blacks}} = 2,73$; $M_{\text{Other}} = 2,60$). For females in population groups other than the whites, brand names are significantly more important as an indicator of status compared to their white counterparts.

Eco-friendliness In terms of females' use of brand names to infer desirable ecofriendliness of apparel products, significant differences ($p = <0,05$) were confirmed between females with a post graduate qualification ($M_{\text{Post grad}} = 1,98$) and lower educated respondents ($M_{\text{Gr12 & dipl/ degr}} = 2,23$; $M_{\leq \text{Gr12}} = 2,34$). For the lower educated females, brand names seemed statistically more significant implying an appreciation of eco-friendly properties. Significant differences ($p = <0,05$) were again evident between white females and the other two population groups ($M_{\text{White}} = 2,10$; $M_{\text{Blacks}} = 2,38$; $M_{\text{Other}} = 2,63$). Findings therefore indicate that population groups other than Whites rely more strongly on brand names to signify the properties of apparel, whether functional and performance related, for status value or for ecofriendliness.

Interestingly, income level does not seem to be a significant predictor of consumers' use of brand names as a heuristic method to infer specific or desirable properties of apparel. However, in the context of this study, population group does appear to be a significant predictor. In future studies it is advocated that more effort should be made to increase the number of Black, Coloured and other respondents to gain more insight into their use of brand names as an important consideration within the decision-making process.

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Consumers' brand consciousness

Any investigation into consumers' brand perceptions requires some indication of consumers' brand consciousness. The Sproles and Kendall brand consciousness scale (1986) was slightly adapted to contextualise the scale in terms of clothing products before its inclusion in the questionnaire. The individual Cronbach Alphas for the eight items varied between 0,85 and 0,88, which confirmed the internal consistency of the scale in this application. The internal consistency of the responses to this question was high (Cronbach Alphas $>0,85$). The means for the individual items indicated that the respondents were not highly brand consciousness (Means varied between 0,82 and 2,51; $M_{\text{max}} = 4$). An overall mean of 2,16 (Max = 4; Cronbach Alpha = 0,88) suggests that the respondents in this study were not highly brand conscious, which inevitably has consequences for consumers' attention to brand names and explains consumers' limited awareness of the CBO and COM of clothing brands as found in this study. If consumers are not very brand conscious, they would likely not be very familiar with the CBO and the COM of brands.

Interpretation of individual items of the scale provided valuable insights. Consumers' belief that *superior brands are sold in nice speciality stores* ($M = 2,51$) confirm the relevance and importance of the retail outlet and marketing in terms of the image of brands and their brand equity. Consumers furthermore perceived *famous brands to be of a higher quality* ($M = 2,24$) and they apparently *mostly purchase what they believe are the best-selling brands* ($M = 2,20$). It was encouraging to conclude that the

females participating in this study mostly *had confidence in local brands* ($M = 2,30$) when purchasing smart casual and career wear, a situation in which the social significance of a purchase is highly relevant. This probably explains why they seldom *regarded imported brands as very good choices* ($M = 2,11$). As consumers, however, the respondents seemed to be quite selective in terms of preferred brands because the results indicate that they seldom *regard the most advertised brands as good choices* ($M = 2,08$); *seldom focus on well-known brands* ($M = 2,00$), or *more expensive brands* ($M = 1,88$). The overall mean across the scale ($M = 2,16$), suggests that females, in this instance, are not particularly brand conscious, which confirms the findings presented in Table 2.

CONCLUSIONS

In the context of this study, it was found that female consumers are not particularly brand conscious and that they are not very familiar with luxury clothing brands either, even though the brands are widely advertised and readily available in retail. Information overload may partly explain consumers' unawareness but other reasons for example that certain brands are very expensive and even unaffordable could be investigated. An important contribution of this study is that it sanctions the value of brand names as an indicator of certain desirable properties of clothing, particularly consumers' trust in brand names as an indication of the functional and performance characteristics of clothing such as garments' comfort and fit. This issue deserves further research attention to fully understand the phenomenon. Although this study does not contest the relevance of brand names as a status symbol, findings of this investigation unequivocally show that the potential status value of brand names is secondary to consumers' use of brand names to infer the functional and performance attributes of a garment and its eco-friendly qualities. This was true for all female respondents, irrespective of their age, income and education level or population category. Population groups other than Whites, however, were significantly more reliant on brand names to convey status. Higher aspiration levels of certain population groups could serve as an explanation (Nieftagodien & Van der Berg, 2007), but this should be explored in follow-up studies.

Inevitably, when consumers are not familiar with brands, as was concluded in this investigation, the CBO and COM of brands would not be

something with which they would be acquainted. Confusion about the true CBO and the COM as well as reasons for discrepancies between the two, could tarnish the image of brand names and negatively influence consumers' brand perceptions considering that this study confirms consumers' use of brand names as a heuristic device to deduce certain desirable properties of clothing. It is concerning that in times when many luxury clothing brands have already diverted their production processes to Asian countries to reduce labour costs, which is to the advantage of consumers in terms of the affordability of luxury branded clothing, only 8,9% of the re-spondents preferred China as COM. It might come as a shock to consumers that most of the apparel sold in South Africa is imported from Asia, with China manufacturing 74% of the country's apparel (Wolmarans, 2011). Findings of this study show that the majority of re-spondents preferred the CBO and COM to match, which may be detrimental in terms of the CBO effect. The majority of the participating females preferred Western countries as the COM, while a noteworthy percentage preferred locally manufactured goods, which is a fortunate sign of confidence in the local clothing and textiles industry. Clarity about the COM of apparel brands and an explanation of discrepancies between the CBO and COM would enhance informed consumer decisions and prevent confusion or bias.

In terms of future research, it is recommended that at least two more items should be added to the scale that investigates consumers' use of brand names as an indication of the desirable properties of clothing to allow proper factorisation. The quality of the findings could also be enhanced by implementing a mixed method approach that includes focus group discussions beforehand to verify the list of brand names included in the study, as well as concluding focus group discussions to explain consumers' awareness and familiarity with luxury brand names. For example, this study was done during trying economic times when limited attention to luxury brand names - especially because they are widely advertised - could also have been part of consumers' defence mechanism to cope. Supporting evidence to this regard, is unfortunately lacking. With an increase in male consumers' interest in fashion, the study could also be replicated amongst male consumers in the future.

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