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The influence of extrinsics on young urban consumers' choice of interior soft furnishings

by

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Abstract

THE INFLUENCE OF EXTRINSICS ON YOUNG URBAN CONSUMERS' CHOICE OF INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS

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The main objective of this study was aimed at determining whether young urban consumers' choice of interior soft furnishings is based on extrinsic characteristics with the intention of gaining social acceptance and conveying positive attributes to others. It is argued that, when consumers buy products, they in fact purchase the total product that includes everything that adds value to a seller's offering. As such, consumers may use extrinsic and/or intrinsic variables to conclude the most suitable purchase decision in terms of the outlet and brand of product. Intrinsic refer to the tangible, core characteristics of the product, such as the raw materials it consists of and are usually easy to imitate. Extrinsic on the other hand, are used and even manipulated to make products more appealing to a specific target group in a crowded market place and include differentiating features such as packaging.

Since the research was focused on describing and understanding, qualitative methods were used for data collection. Focus group discussions, projective techniques and product comparison tests were included for the purpose of triangulation. Participants were allowed to respond spontaneously to various tasks and intrinsic features were accommodated to objectively reflect on the collective influence of both intrinsic as well as extrinsic variables and whether extrinsic characteristics dominate choice or not.

Intrinsic characteristics were found to seldom form the basis of differentiation and extrinsic characteristics seem to play a determining role in young urban consumers' choice and use of soft furnishings such as towels and sheets. The evidence suggests that several retailers have succeeded in not only value engineering their product offerings to satisfy buyers' and users' minimum requirements for expected extrinsic attributes, but that they have also succeeded in augmenting their offerings through the addition of further extrinsic benefits. The findings strongly suggest the use of potential extrinsic attributes such as brand names, especially retail brands, to differentiate products. The evidence however also suggests that the outcome of past purchase decisions can alter perspectives of these attributes and that the acquisition of consumption related knowledge is a lifelong learning process. A conclusion drawn from the data collected, is that retailers have succeeded in creating store

images that reflect the relationship between consumers and reference groups to which they (want to) belong. These findings underpin the importance of social acceptance and the relevance of the social dimension of brands. The relevance of the mental dimension of brands is supported by evidence that suggests that a relationship between the young urban consumer's self-image and the image of a specific outlet of soft furnishings is likely to occur.

The findings coincide with the symbolic interactionist perspective that human society demands and depends on symbolic life. It appears as if interior products are purchased from certain outlets to serve as symbols to define/represent realities, initiate responses, provide cues and organize behaviour in terms of what is considered appropriate.

The study shed some light on young urban consumer's approach to the choice of interior soft furnishings, which could be extended to other product categories and consumer groups for use by the marketing sector in terms of consumer facilitation as well as the evaluation and development of marketing strategies.



Opsomming

DIE INVLOED VAN EKSTRINSIEKE OP JONG STEDELIKE VERBRUIKERS SE KEUSE VAN INTERIEUR TEKSTIELPRODUKTE

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Die hoofdoel van hierdie studie was om te bepaal of jong stedelike verbruikers se keuse van interieurartikels (tekstielprodukte) gegrond word op ekstrinsieke eienskappe met die voorneme om sosiale aanvaarding te verkry en positiewe eienskappe aan ander te kommunikeer. Wanneer verbruikers produkte koop, word dit aangevoer dat hulle die totale produk aanskaf wat alles insluit wat waarde toevoeg tot die eindproduk. As sulks, mag verbruikers ekstrinsieke en/of intrinsieke veranderlikes in ag neem in hul gevolgtrekking om die mees aanvaarbare keuse van afsetpunt en handelsnaam te koop. Intrinsieke eienskappe verwys na die tasbare kerneienskappe van 'n produk soos die rou materiale waaruit dit bestaan en is gewoonlik maklik om na te boots. Ekstrinsieke weer, word gebruik en selfs gemanupuleer om produkte meer aanvaarbaar te maak vir 'n spesifieke teikengroep in 'n kompeterende mark en sluit differensiërende elemente in soos verpakking.

Aangesien die navorsing daarop ingestel was om te beskryf en begrip te vorm, is kwalitatiewe data insamelingstegnieke gebruik. Veelvoudige data-insamelingstegnieke, insluitende fokusgroepbesprekings, projeksietegnieke en produkvergelykingstoetse is ingespan, ook ter wille van betroubaarheid en geldigheid van data insameling. Deelnemers was toegelaat om spontaan op verskeie opdragte te reageer en intrinsieke elemente is later geakkommodeer om die kollektiewe invloed van beide intrinsieke sowel as ekstrinsieke veranderlikes te weerspieël en om te bepaal of ekstrinsieke eienskappe die oorheersende invloed op keuse uitoefen of nie.

Bevindinge dui daarop dat intrinsieke eienskappe selde die basis van differensiasie verteenwoordig en dat ekstrinsieke eienskappe wel 'n bepalende invloed het op jong stedelike verbruikers se keuse en gebruik van interieurprodukte soos handdoeke en lakens. Dit wil voorkom of talle kleinhandelaars daarin geslaag het om nie alleenlik waarde toe te voeg tot hulle produkaanbiedinge om sodoende verbruikers se minimum vereistes vir



verwagte ekstrinsieke attribute te bevredig nie, maar dat hulle ook daarin geslaag het om hulle aanbiedinge aan te vul met verdere ekstrinsieke voordele. Die bevindinge lê klem op die gebruik van potensiële ekstrinsieke eienskappe soos handelsname van veral kleinhandelaars om produkte te differensieer. Dit blyk egter ook dat die uitkoms van vorige aankoopbesluite perspektiewe rondom hierdie eienskappe kan wysig en dat die verkryging van verbruiksverwante kennis 'n lewenslange proses is.

'n Gevolgtrekking wat gemaak is uit die data wat ingesamel is, is dat kleinhandelaars daarin geslaag het om winkelbeelde te skep wat die verband tussen verbruikers en verwysingsgroepe waarin hulle wil behoort te weerspieël. Hierdie bevindinge onderskraag die belang van sosiale aanvaarding en die relevantheid van die sosiale dimensie van kleinhandelsname. Die relevantheid van die verstandelike dimensie van handelsname word ook ondersteun deur resultate wat dui op die waarskynlikheid van 'n verband tussen die jong stedelike verbruiker se selfbeeld en die beeld van die spesifieke afsetpunt van interieur tekstielprodukte.

Hierdie bevindinge stem ooreen met die simboliese interaksionistiese perspektief dat die menslike samelewing sterk steun op simboliese lewe en dit selfs vereis. Dit wil voorkom asof interieur produkte aangekoop word van sekere afsetpunte om as simbole te dien wat realiteite definieer/ verteenwoordig, terugvoer inisieer, riglyne bied en gedrag organiseer in terme van wat as aanvaarbaar beskou word.

Hierdie studie het lig gewerp op jong stedelike verbruikers se benadering tot die keuse van tekstielprodukte en kan moontlik uitgebrei word na ander produkkategoriee en verbruikersgroepe vir gebruik deur bemarkingsektore in die evaluering en ontwikkeling van bemarkingstrategieë en verbruikersfasiliteringsaksies wat die behoeftes van verbruikers doelmatig aanspreek.



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Introduction and background to the study

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Judging from the number of interior retail outlets that have emerged over the past few years in the South African market, such as Mr Price Home, @ home, Home Etc and Boardmans, it could be assumed that there has been an increase in South African consumers' awareness of their interior surroundings and subsequently the use of products in these surroundings to define or represent their realities and lifestyles. Modern society is characterised by the fact that individuals are forced to spend an increasing amount of their lives indoors in built environments. As is the case in other westernized countries, South Africans, especially those living in urban areas, only spend a fraction of their time outdoors in comparison to the time they spend indoors, working, eating, sleeping and fulfilling other daily routines. It may therefore be concluded that interior spaces not only serve as shelters, but also have become increasingly important in contributing to a sense of well-being (Kilmer & Kilmer, 1992:2).

Driven by economic principles, the retail merchant has reacted and adapted to these changes in the given societal setting by providing the goods, services, ideas and knowledge to the consumer to fulfil the need for a more expressive interior environment. However, to consider the role of retail merchandising at this most basic level would oversimplify the matter. Several authors, such as Risch (1987:40) highlight the fact that as society becomes increasingly materialistic, demanding ever-higher standards of living and levels of personal comfort, the role of the merchant is proportionately enhanced. As the final link between producer and consumer, none of the material symbols that bear witness to these desired lifestyles are available to consumers unless retail merchants provide access to them, regardless of how much value the manufacturer has built into the product and how well this value is communicated to the consumer. Hence, according to Risch (1987:41), "retailers are the purveyors of expressive symbols, the manifestations of a material culture".

It is furthermore necessary to understand that the products a consumer uses in his or her interior surroundings may exist in physical form although these objects may also be pointed out, isolated, catalogued, interpreted and given meaning through social interaction. Interior products are visible objects and they are often used to create a specific impression. Once these products are used to represent whatever people agree they shall represent,

they become symbols. Consumers tend to present personal information to others through their interior surroundings and convey such messages as taste, philosophy of life, ideas about social conformity and the like. Thus, it could also be said that consumers do not merely *buy*, in a passive manner, what retailers offer them, but they *actively select* and *use* these products to shape their own realities and express themselves visually (Kaiser, 1985:41).

A phrase used by Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:276) to suggest that a product is much more than the sum of its physical attributes and the raw materials it consists of, is that of the **augmented product**. The authors explain that the core of the product, such as the raw materials it is made of, refers to the **intrinsic**s of this product. Yet, these intrinsic are covered by, for example, packaging, which forms the first **extrinsic** used to differentiate this product. The packaging is further imbued with intangible value, which has been created through the deployment of a marketing communication mix.

As the marketplace becomes more crowded, it is argued that extrinsic product attributes become increasingly significant due to so-called “intrinsic product parity across many categories” (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999:276). As a result many retailers have learnt to understand the value of extrinsic to differentiate products and to increase their appeal to a specific target market. A tailored augmented product is thus also referred to as the **brand**, which is further defined as “a unique set of associations attached to a name, trademark or logo”. It could therefore be concluded that products become brands when they are made to stand for something meaningful in the consumer’s mind.

The challenge to retailers, when considering all these facts has been to create store and/or brand images that will appeal to a particular segment of the population. The concept of “mass market” in reality does not exist, since the market is populated by consumers with different lifestyles and specific needs. Hawkins, Best and Coney (1992:325) refer to lifestyle as the way in which an individual lives. They explain that lifestyle is a function of inherent individual characteristics that have been shaped and formed through social interaction as an individual progresses through the life cycle. Several studies prove the influence of factors such as values, demographics, social class, reference groups, family and individual characteristics such as motives, emotions and personality on consumers’ lifestyles. The conclusion drawn is that modern society is characterised by heterogeneous consumer communities/ subgroups with divergent lifestyles and needs that manifest in their buying habits. Thus, consumers are often not satisfied with products that have mass appeal and prefer brands that are “tailored” to reflect their needs. It stands to reason then that retailers who target their products to receptive segments of the consumer population are more likely to be successful.

The above clearly illustrates the significance of market segmentation, which could be described as a practice employed by marketers, whereby the entire market is divided into subsets or segments of consumers who share common characteristics (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999:48). Several authors agree that social class is a crucial determinant in consumer behaviour, since attitudes, values and activities vary between social class segments. Simultaneously, the above suggest that the consumer’s perception of the social class orientation can be driven by retailers’ implementation of carefully tailored strategies. The extent to which retailers are successful in

implementing these strategies to convince consumers to base their purchase decisions on the extrinsic aspects of products rather than on the intrinsic qualities (with specific reference to cases where multiple brands exist in a product category such as interior soft furnishings), is debatable. This debate then also forms the background and rationale for this research.

1.2 CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING BEHAVIOUR

1.2.1 Consumer decision-making: the process

Hawkins *et al* (1992:23) explain that as a result of lifestyle and indirectly all factors that influence lifestyle, consumers react differently to the consumption of products in various situations. The combination of a particular lifestyle, attitudes and situational influences activate consumer's decision-making processes. This process begins with the recognition that a problem exists, which is based on the fact that differences occur between existing states and those desired. The consumer would, under these circumstances, undertake an information search which may be extensive, very brief or somewhere in between. Once information has been gathered to determine relevant and feasible alternatives, the decision can be made regarding the selection of a retail outlet and the actual purchase of the product. Post purchase processes, which occur after the product has been bought, could include a simple evaluation or an extensive performance evaluation, use and disposal. In reality, however, consumer decision-making can be much more complex in terms of the activities and considerations involved during certain stages of the decision-making process. In addition, as stated by Hawkins *et al* (1992:23), "...consumers are continually evolving and changing as they process new information related to their lifestyle and the outcome of past purchase decisions..." so that the decision to purchase does not necessarily follow the same route as a previous one. The conclusion drawn by these authors and many others is the fact that *information processing is a never ceasing activity.*

The above description of the consumer decision-making process confirms the symbolic interactionists' view that everything about the human being should be interpreted in terms of "being in process", rather than as stable and fixed. As pointed out by Charon (1979:29), "...the individual is not a consistent, structured personality as much as a dynamic, changing actor, never 'becoming' anything, but always 'in the state of becoming, unfolding, acting". The individual is not socialized but is always *in the process of socialization*; the individual is not set or fixed but constantly undergoing change in the process of interaction. Interaction is central to development and according to Charon (1979:25) interaction may be seen as "dynamic and changing guides to interpretation and then to action". Perspectives on aspects of life and being are thus learned, altered, transformed and replaced in interaction and consequently influence consumers' interpretation of products and guide behaviour accordingly.

1.2.2 Understanding consumer decision-making within symbolic interactionism

Products become brands when they are made to stand for something meaningful in the consumer's mind. A perspective that strongly links with this point of view, is that of the symbolic interactionism, where product "meaning" in interaction with others is a major focus (Kaiser, 1985:39). Within one of the basic assumptions of

this perspective, it could be stated that meanings associated with brands of interior products (such as soft furnishings) develop in the mind of consumers during the social interactions with others.

Stryker (1980:53) explains that from interaction with others, individuals learn to classify objects they come in contact with and simultaneously learn expected behaviour with reference to those objects. In other words we act towards objects and other people on the basis of meanings that are derived within a given social context. It could therefore also be said, that individuals act towards other people, in part, on the basis of meanings their interior surroundings and the products used within these surroundings hold for them. Although products such as soft furnishings may thus exist in physical form, they are interpreted and given meaning through social interaction and then they become social objects. Charon (1979:39) elaborates on this aspect by stating that when social objects (such as certain brands of soft furnishings) are used to represent whatever people agree they shall represent, they become symbols.

Symbols are central to the development of a sense of living in a social world that is shared with others. Stryker (1980:56) states that symbols provide cues to behaviour and permit the individual to organise his/her actions as appropriate within a given social context. Thus, when certain brands of soft furnishings are used as symbols they can evoke meaningful responses. Kaiser (1985:42) concludes that people use symbols to fit their lines of action together.

Meanings assigned to interior products and interior surroundings are, however, not static; they are manipulated and modified through interpretive processes. Charon (1979:38) explains that objects should not be viewed as fixed stimuli but is social in nature, constantly changing as they are defined and redefined in social interaction. Most physical objects therefore have a number of possible uses, with numerous social meanings. Each physical object constitutes, therefore, a multitude of social objects. As such, it should be taken into consideration that the perceived meaning of for example soft furnishings in certain contexts is always provisional and subject to revision and reinterpretation. As consumers are influenced by the images of others with whom they come into contact, they construct interpretations from which product meanings may evolve. According to Kaiser (1985:44), "the process orientation in the symbolic-interactionist perspective leads us to consider that when people come together with different interpretations some newer or modified joint interpretations are likely to emerge".

Yet, as explained by Charon (1979:22), symbolic interaction is not only centered on what occurs *between* people, but also *within* the individual. Human beings are thought to act in a world that they define, which involves conscious choices according to which actions are directed, assessed and redirected. Thus, even though consumers are influenced by others who they interact with, they also create their own realities, in part, by managing their interior surroundings. This perspective describes human beings as being active and that they do not merely buy in a passive manner what is manufactured, produced and sold, but that they actively and selectively purchase and use brands of interior products to express themselves visually and to present personal information to others.

1.2.3 Specific influences on consumer decision-making

1.2.3.1 Consumer socialization

In general terms, two kinds of socialization processes occur, namely primary and secondary socialization. Kaiser (1985:154) describes primary socialization as involving "...those processes through which we initially form our conceptions of self" Charon (1979:67) explains that the individual develops a self-concept through several stages involving interaction with others. During these stages, which include the so-called "preparatory", "play" and "game" stages, the individual also acquires an understanding of the meanings associated with social and physical objects. During the play stage, the child for example acts out roles through the manipulation of objects and assesses the responses of others, especially significant others such as parents and other family members. In the game stage, a child's sphere of influence expands to include the collective attitudes of many individuals, which represents the internalization of a generalised other. Even at these early stages in a child's life the meanings associated with interior environments are learnt through the simple example of building a tree house or decorating a doll's house. In a similar fashion, the child also acquires the knowledge to fulfil his role as consumer. Hawkins *et al* (1992:187) define consumer socialization as "...the processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace".

It has been emphasized that learning, including the acquisition of consumption-related knowledge is a lifelong process. Thus, it is argued that the socialization process is not finite. Instead, the self is emergent or continually in the process of becoming. Secondary socialization is described by Kaiser (1985:155), as involving "...the socialization processes that allow us to maintain and/or refine our self-concepts". Relevant for the purpose of this study is the fact that changes in a consumer's interior environment symbolizes this fluidity in self concept and the consumption of interior products, allowing the individual to experiment with the image he/she portrays, through this environment as well as to adapt to social changes. Symbolic interaction then also requires that the consumer shares the meanings that other persons associate with these interior products and as stated by Kaiser (1985:155) a person's developing conception cannot be separated from social interactions. In this regard, Shibutani, as referred to by Charon (1979:71), recognizes a fourth stage in the development of the self, namely the reference group stage. This stage seems especially characteristic in industrial urban "mass societies", where the individual interacts with many different groups. These groups represent reference groups (social worlds or societies) and the individual shares a perspective, including a perspective of the self, with each of them.

1.2.3.2 Social influences

De Klerk (1999:124) points out that consumers are constantly interacting with others, which may include significant others such as household and family members and generalized others, which are represented by the broader community as well as reference groups with whom they identify and socialize. These groups are often used by the individual as a reference for behaviour, since he/she identifies with them, receives feedback from them, accepts their perceptions as well as their interpretation of objects such as interior products. In the process of constructing images of self, individuals tend to rely on the feedback they receive from others. Charon (1979:82) explains that to grasp the meaning of the self, the person is able to see him or herself as an object. In other words, the individual imaginatively projects himself outside his person and looks back at the self as others do. Cooley termed the process through which an individual perceives himself through imagining other's impressions as the "looking-glass self" (Kaiser, 1985:165). This process depends to a high degree on taking the roles of others, both significant others and reference groups, to see the self from their perspective.

In this regard, the importance of roles should also be highlighted. Based on the symbolic interactionists' perspective, De Klerk (1995:45) emphasizes the fact that roles are central to the interpretation of situations in which persons interact. Roles are described by Hawkins *et al* (1992:139), "...as prescribed patterns of behaviour expected of a person in a given situation by virtue of the person's position in that situation". Since roles often require the consumption and use of certain products, such as interior furnishings, the consumer must learn which products are appropriate for the roles they need/wish to fulfil. It is assumed that from interaction with others, the consumer learns how to classify objects such as interior products, he or she comes in contact with and in that process also learns expected behaviour with regard to those products. Subsequently, the consumer also acquires an understanding of the type of attributes these products should have and which are considered important to properly fulfil a given role.

Roles are defined and enacted within groups. Since the groups with which the individual interacts may differ over time, the set of roles an individual fulfils is not static. Individuals acquire new roles and discard others that may no longer be valid at a certain point in time. Evidence also suggests that individuals are not influenced by reference groups to the same extent. According to Hawkins *et al* (1992:129) any marketing attempt to utilize group influence requires an understanding of the type of influences that are relevant. Group influence is thought to increase when the use of a product, such as interior products, are **visible** to the group. Reference group influence is also considered higher when a product is **less of a necessity**. (In general, the aesthetics of interior surroundings can be regarded "less of a necessity" having met basic functional needs.) Apparently, the more committed an individual is to a group, the more the individual would want to **conform** to group norms. In this regard, it would also be important to note that the more relevant a particular activity is to the group's functioning, the stronger the pressure would be to conform to the group's functioning. Thus, the more important the interior environment is viewed by members of a particular group (as would be the case in higher socio economic groupings), the more effort will be exercised by the individual, wanting to belong to this group, in the furnishing of his/her interior environment. Another factor that was found to affect the degree of reference group influence is

the consumer's confidence in the purchase decision.

Mention should also be made of aspiration reference groups. These groups (which represent non-membership groups) may influence consumers to the extent that they purchase products, such as interior furnishings, thought to be used by the desired groups in order to achieve actual or symbolic membership in these groups. Individuals belonging to such groups usually hold a specific social standing, related to denominators such as occupation and education. In reality, individuals with different social standings are likely to live their lives differently. In "living lives differently" the use of consumer products and appropriateness of consumer products in terms of the lifestyle that is followed, is anticipated, or needs to be maintained, come into play. This is characteristic of modern society.

1.2.3.3 Lifestyle

Over the years, many methods have been devised to use as basis to identify segments of the South African consumer population that exhibit similar characteristics, wants and needs that could offer the greatest potential return for a specific company. Perhaps, the most widely known and used measurement is that of the South African Advertising Research Foundation, namely the "Living Standards Measurement" (LSM). This multivariate segmentation tool measures social class, based on 29 individual variables and divides the South African consumer market into ten LSM groups, ranging from group 10 with the highest living standards to group 1 with the lowest (previously, only eight groups were identified using 13 variables; subsequently, more variables have been used and the former LSM 7 and LSM 8 classifications were further divided). This grading groups people according to their living standards using criteria such as degree of urbanisation and ownership of cars and major appliances (South African Advertising Research Foundation, <http://www.saarf.co.za/allabout-article.htm>).

Relevant to the content of this particular study is the fact that those individuals belonging to higher social strata would probably be more concerned with extrinsic properties and the symbolic meanings attached to the physical product. The possibility exists that consumers belonging to the higher LSM groups are more concerned with self-expression, achievement and fulfilment. This tendency becomes more apparent when considering a qualitative study undertaken by Rustica furnishings, a holding company of a retailing group specializing in furniture, appliances and consumer durables. The aim of this particular study was to investigate the motivations and behaviour that affect the purchase of home furnishings (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999:97). A total of 800 women from various population groups and belonging to various segments were interviewed. The study indicated that individuals belonging to LSM groups 6, 7 and 8 were concerned with self-expression, achievement and fulfilment. To them, home furnishings serve as showpieces that symbolize success. Aspects such as quality, style, beauty and appearance were indicated as being important considerations.

LSM segmentation is only one possible description of market grouping and should not be used in isolation (Haupt, <http://www.saarf.co.za/lsm-article.htm>). The Delphi classification, which could be described as a geodemographic segmentation model that classifies consumers into eight main clusters according to their residential postal code, is useful when differences in product consumption correspond closely with lifestyle

“types” that are grouped in certain areas or suburbs (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999:404). This classification should however not be used in isolation since not everyone living in the same area share the same lifestyles despite certain characteristics that typify and distinguish specific residential suburbs. A combination of these methods is thus advised and was employed in the identification of the units of analysis for this particular study.

1.2.3.4 Self-image

In consumer research, it is argued that consumers can be typified by the brands they use, by their attitudes towards different brands and meanings attached to certain brands (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1993:144). Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:245) support this view by stating that the psychological make-up of an individual represents an important influencing variable in consumer decision-making. Personality factors and lifestyle profiles provide marketers with a rich basis for understanding consumer behaviour. Consequently, several personality theories have been developed and applied to marketing, one of which is the so-called “self-concept” theory. This theory suggests that an individual’s self image or image of the ideal self determines behaviour. Relationships between self-image, product image and even store image are therefore likely to occur. The theory is based on the assumption that individuals have a concept of self, based on who they think they are and who they would like to be (ideal self). The belief is that consumers would perceive products that they own, would like to own or do not want to own, in terms of the symbolic meaning of the product to themselves and to others. Birdwell, as quoted by Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:245) used the semantic differential scale to test a hypothesis that car owners’ perceptions of their cars are essentially congruent with their perceptions of themselves. The hypothesis was confirmed with various degrees of strength, suggesting that after a product is purchased owners may perceive it as an extension of their own personalities.

Kaiser (1985:182) states that *appearance management* requires of a specific brand of product or for that matter the outlet from which it is purchased, to reflect visually, as closely as possible a customer’s ideal self to win the customer’s loyalty and support. A person may thus purchase and use objects, especially socially visible objects, that coincide with his or her perception of their ideal self. Chernatony and McDonald (1993:145) support this idea by stating that to aspire to the ideal self-concept, the person buys and owns brands, which he/she believes will contribute to and support the desired self-image. Ownership of certain brands will thus be decided in terms of whether they communicate the right sort of image about the person so that objects and brands are only bought if they are perceived to be in line with, or similar to the self image. This reasoning could also be applied to interior products because of their visibility.

1.2.3.5 Product attributes

It has been explained that a product is much more than the physical attributes and ingredients it consists of. The core product is purely the tangible features of the offering and usually easy to imitate. The added values augment the product and provide the basis of distinctive differences. De Chernatony and McDonald (1993:29) illustrate the power of these added values by reporting the results of a blind test (i.e. where the brand identity is concealed) in which Diet Pepsi was compared to Diet Coke by a panel of consumers: 51% preferred Pepsi, 44%

preferred Coke and 5% were equal or could not tell the difference. When the same drinks were given to a matched sample in an open test (i.e. the true identity of the brands were revealed) the results were: 23 % preferred Pepsi, 65% preferred Coke and 12% were undecided. The authors argue that these findings can only be explained in terms of the *added values* that are aroused in the minds of consumers when they see the familiar Coke logo and pack. Often these added values are emotional values which consumers might find difficult to articulate.

These values are given to a product quite simply through the marketing mix of product, packaging, promotion, price and distribution. All of these elements of the mix can be used to develop a distinctive position in the consumer's mental map of the market. Consequently, as pointed out by De Chernatony and McDonald (1993:8), the difference between a brand and commodity can be summed up in the phrase "added values". A brand is more than just the sum of its component parts. It embodies for the purchaser or user, additional attributes which whilst they might be considered by some to be "intangible" are still very real. With regard to textile products, these added values can take the form of functional features such as extra details in the making up of the article or improved performance/quality of the fibers and fabrics. However, textile strategy and marketing consultants have found that it is more usual in textile and clothing products for added value to take the form of a brand name which offers customer reassurance and has emotional appeal, an image created through design, promotion and packaging and a design handwriting which mark the product as unique. (Ashton & Rigby, 1996: <http://www.davidrigbyassociates.co.uk/articles/branding.htm>).

In this regard, Gad (2001:7) explains that in the twenty-first century, one-dimensional branding has given way to four-dimensional branding:

- The first of these four dimensions, namely the **functional dimension** describes the perceived benefit of the products or services connected with the brand. Gad (2001:94) says the following: "In the 1950s, the perceived benefit of the product was all that was communicated about the brand. The development from communicating the actual benefit to the benefit perceived by the customer was a great step in advertising". In modern marketing, the functional dimension, which involves everything that has to do with physical quality, taste, style *per se* and efficiency is still very important, especially during the earlier stage in the brand's lifecycle to define its justification, role and in some cases the physical or core benefit. Yet, all brand builders who depend heavily on the functional dimension sooner or later face the problem of diminishing differences due to intrinsic product parity.
- When the threat of being copied looms, brand builders tend to look for areas in which they can create something unique. Recognizing the importance of social life and social acceptance, brand builders turned to the **social dimension** to differentiate their products. The social dimension of a brand addresses the need to be socially accepted by a group and by its leading members. "In the social dimension the brand quite often creates a cult around itself, it becomes a social insignia, or a 'prop' in the lifestyle play of an individual...the trademark, or the logo, itself becomes the symbol of the cult society that a brand ideally creates..." (Gad, 2001:95). The owner of this symbol is easily identified and appreciated openly or silently by other members of this cult society. The social dimension to a

great extent reflects the relationship between consumers and groups of people to which they want to belong. The brand is used as a valuable tool of identification in the presence of others.

- At the other end of the same axis Gad (2001:96) identifies the **mental dimension**. The author explains that this dimension has little to do with what other people think of the consumer, but is more concerned with what the consumer thinks of himself. This dimension is by its very nature, a much more profound dimension and as indicated by Gad (2001:96), "...it really penetrates deep inside your personality" and is about personal transformation and getting new insights about the self. The mental dimension is based on the fact that all individuals need role models on which to model their lives and behaviour. The brand and its mental dimension is thought to serve this purpose in assisting consumers with for example a low self-esteem to reframe their mental pictures of themselves through ownership of these brands of products.
- The fourth dimension identified by Gad (2001:99) is the so-called **spiritual dimension**, which sounds somewhat religious, but in reality refers to a wider ethical view on environmental issues including a respect for communities in developing countries and also addresses the customer's personal well-being. Clearly, branding, which started out as a means to differentiate cattle of different tribes, entails much more and is today a powerful tool for marketers to ensure product leadership. The fact that consumers often remember brand names and have positive associations with those brands, makes product selection easier and enhances the value and satisfaction derived from the specific brand of products (Bano, <http://www.adtimes.com/nov24c-article.htm>).

1.3 A LIMITED UNDERSTANDING OF CONSUMERS' CHOICE OF INTERIOR PRODUCTS

Empirical findings concerning consumers' choice processes regarding interior soft furnishings (such as towels and linen), especially regarding the impact of extrinsic properties on the choice and use of these products, are limited. An improved understanding of consumption behaviour within this product category could be to the advantage of organisations that aim to educate consumers and any efforts directed at consumer facilitation as well as to retailers who aim at specific target markets by providing need-satisfying products. It would thus have practical significance to identify and understand problems in the buying environment. "Needs satisfying products" can evidently be interpreted differently in different contexts and any company that fails to understand its business in terms of customer benefits rather than physical product attributes is in danger of losing its competitive position in the market (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1993:4).

1.4 THE CHALLENGE FACED BY RETAIL

A brand of product may have different meanings to members of different social strata. This is mirrored in several studies conducted over the years by various researchers. An exploratory study conducted by Youn-Kyung and Seunghae (2000:58) for example provided tentative conclusions regarding the perceived image of social classes of selected retail stores and the brand attributes of selected clothing brands. Although their study was more

aimed at illustrating that store and brand-image perceptions differ according to ethnic group, the study clearly indicated that as the marketplace becomes more crowded, consumers tend to base purchase decisions on the image of a store or a brand rather than on its actual physical attributes. Risch (1987:84) accentuates that consumers do not simply patronize a retail store but that they patronize the image or their perception of that store: "The physical store itself exists simply as a percept, the object of perception, lacking personality and the corresponding ability to attract consumers; only when this percept stimulates the human psyche can the psyche translate it into a perception, and only then does the consumer exhibit any positive or negative feelings towards that retail store". Reaching and motivating consumers today is not an easy task because the market is highly competitive, with a wide range of stores and brands. The challenge to retailers has therefore been to create a store and/or brand image that will appeal to a particular segment of the population, because an individual's image of a store or brand can ultimately exert a major impact on shopping behaviour.

Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:277) appropriately explain that while products are made in factories, brands are shaped in people's minds. The term "positioning" refers to how a product, service and/or a retail outlet is positioned in the consumer's mind in terms of e.g. product image, store image and self-image. Research has shown that products, services and outlets that enjoy high awareness levels also usually enjoy dominant market penetration and share. However, awareness or a place in the mind is not enough. The product and the outlet from where it is sold, must be meaningfully positioned in the mind, and stand for something of value to the consumer. Du Plessis and Rousseau (1993:277) is further of the opinion that the marketing battle today is fought, not so much in the supermarket or in the showroom floor, but in the consumer's mind!

1.5 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Literature specifically addressing the impact of extrinsic properties on consumers' choice and consumption of interior products seem limited. In the light of all the emerging retail outlets for interior products (including soft furnishings), a study of consumers' decision-making behaviour could shed light on product needs and requirements and the extent in which retailers succeed in addressing consumer's needs. Based on this argument as well as the multitude of factors discussed above that may have an influence on consumers' choice of interior products, this research project was driven by the question whether *young urban consumers' choice of interior soft furnishings are based on extrinsic characteristics with the intention of gaining social acceptance and conveying positive attributes to others.*

Research Methodology

2

2.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Babbie and Mouton (2001:72) state that science is an enterprise dedicated to “finding out”. The main objective of this study was aimed at finding out if young urban consumers' choice and consumption of interior soft furnishings is based on extrinsic product characteristics. The following specific objectives were formulated:

Do young urban consumers, during their purchasing of interior soft furnishings (such as linen and towels):

- Use extrinsic attributes as meaningful determinants of their preference for, and selection of products?
- Find personal pleasure/satisfaction in choosing products with specific extrinsic characteristics?
- Base their selection and choice of interior soft furnishings on the social acceptance of certain product characteristics?
- Believe that their choice of products contribute to how they are portrayed to others?

2.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

2.2.1 Conceptual framework

Consumers (in this case, specific reference is made to young, urban consumers) are influenced by **internal/individual variables** (that include personal traits such as self image) as well as **external variables** (such as reference group, socio-economic status, marketing influences) during their **evaluation** (a consideration of reality versus specific needs and wants) in which functional attributes are not necessarily placed in the primary position within an internal frame of reference for **consumer goods** (interior soft furnishings). The summation of internal and external influencing factors represents **consumers' lifestyles** (Hawkins *et al*, 1992:14). Their eventual perception/interpretation of the **proposed needs satisfying product** will typically lead them to a specific retail outlet that could potentially provide the products that are required. When a consumer buys a product, he or she is purchasing the **total product**, which includes everything that adds value to the seller's offering. As such, consumers may use a combination of **extrinsic and intrinsic variables** to conclude the most suitable decision regarding the choice of retail outlet and brand of product.

In terms of consumer decision-making theory, the scenario and relevant conceptual framework for this study is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

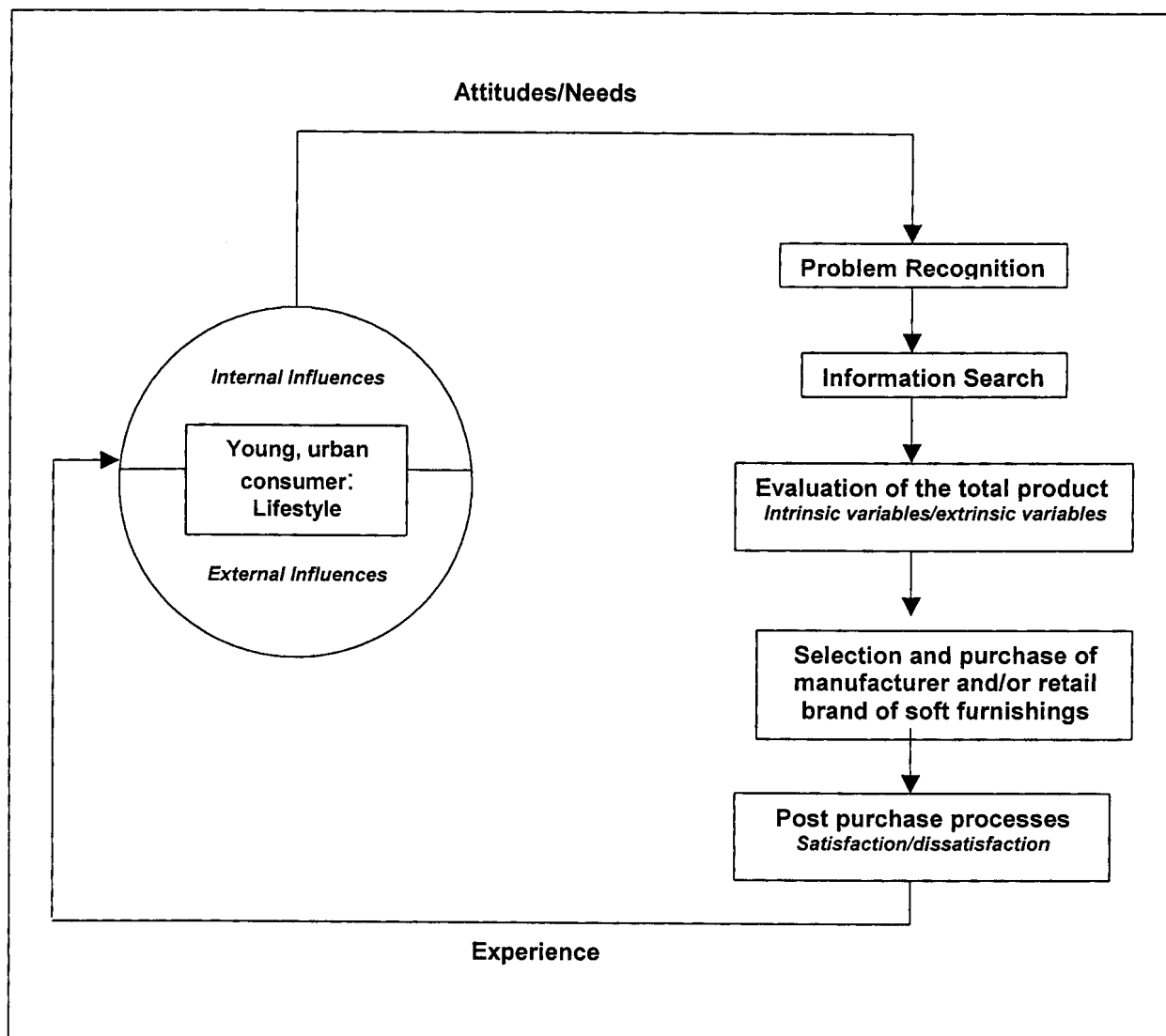


FIGURE 2.1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK BASED ON A MODEL OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR (Hawkins *et al*, 1992:14).

2.2.2 Definition and discussion of relevant concepts

The relevant concepts can be described as follows:

Hawkins *et al* (1992:14) view the **consumer** as a problem solver: "a decision-making unit (individual, family, household, or firm) that takes in information (consciously and unconsciously) in light of the existing situation, and takes action to achieve satisfaction and enhance lifestyle". This definition suggests that consumers are active in their worlds, perceiving and interpreting the present situation, making choices and directing their actions accordingly. Specific mention is made of the use of consumer products to enhance lifestyle and in view of the fact that it is a social activity, the implied importance of consumer goods come into play.

In this study, attention is focused on consumers who live in formal **urban** settlements. Morris (1992:64) outlines the fact that buying patterns and lifestyles differ between rural and urban areas. He describes formal urban settlements as predominantly planned and densely populated, inhabited by people among whom urban-

orientated activities and attitudes prevail and where agricultural activities are virtually non-existent.

Young consumers between the ages of 25 and 35, who earn their own income and live independently (married or single), would more than likely have faced purchase decisions involving soft furnishings such as bed linen and towels. Typically, this consumer group would be striving to attain a higher social status and to a certain extent still lead a fairly active, social life. Hawkins *et al* (1992:121) states that it is important to remember that members of social strata desire to emulate some aspects of the lifestyle of higher social strata at least some of the time and younger consumers are often more aspirational in this regard.

According to Hawkins *et al.* (1992:129) the term **group** refers to "...two or more individuals who share a set of norms, values, or beliefs and have certain implicitly or explicitly defined relationships to one another such that their behaviours are interdependent". The significance of **group influences** are evident, when considering that the meanings associated with brands and the other extrinsic elements discussed so far in actual fact develop during social interactions between the consumers and members of these groups. It has been pointed out that consumers constantly find themselves interacting with various groups of individuals. Particular attention should be drawn to the impact of reference groups on a consumer's behaviour. Hawkins *et al* (1992:132) define a **reference group** as "...a group whose presumed perspectives or values are being used by an individual as the basis for his or her current behaviour". Yet, the authors also explain that group influence varies across situations and may be categorized as informational, normative or identification influence. **Informational influence** occurs when an individual perceives the behaviours and opinions of reference group members as potentially informative. **Normative or utilitarian influence** occurs when an individual fulfils group expectations to gain approval or avoid disapproval. **Identification or value expressive influence** occurs when the individual uses the perceived group norms and values and identifies with them as a part of his or her self-concept and identity.

According to Hawkins *et al* (1992:14) the term "**consumer lifestyle**" refers to how a person lives: "It includes the products you buy, how you use them, what you think about them, and how you feel about them. It is the manifestation of your self-concept - the total image you have of yourself as a result of the culture you live in and the individual situations and experiences that compromise your daily existence. It is the sum of your past decisions and the future plans" (To be added to this scenario is the fact that consumers often find themselves in materialistically inclined societies where objects, symbols and the possession thereof are of major importance). Hawkins *et al* (1992:14) also state that maintaining or changing an individual lifestyle often requires the consumption of products, which would include those used in the consumer's interior environment since these items are socially visible.

According to De Chernatony and McDonald (1993:4) the clue to what constitutes a **product** is found in the fact that when a consumer purchases a product, he or she is buying a particular bundle of benefits which is perceived as satisfying particular needs and wants. **Interior products** or then more specifically **home furnishings**, could therefore be described as representative of a bundle of benefits, which the consumer perceives as satisfying particular needs and wants with regard to his or her interior environment. **Soft furnishings** could be considered as a subcategory of home furnishings and refers to items such as bed linen

and towelings for the purposes of this study. Soft furnishings fall within the durable consumer goods classification, since final consumers mostly buy them for personal use over an extended period of time. Furthermore, these items could be described as specialty shopping goods, since they are less frequently bought and are compared on suitability, quality, price, style as well as other aspects in addition to the fact that they may be differentiated as possessing unique characteristics or brand identification for a significant group of buyers (Allen, 1999:4).

In marketing terms there is no such thing as a product or service that exists by itself in space, independent of the consumer. Sengupta (1993:3) says "for a product to exist, it must find a place in an individual consumer's perception of the world of products around him or her. And this perception is subjective, governed by the individual consumer's values, beliefs, needs, experience and environment". In this regard it is necessary to distinguish between the various levels of a consumer's perception of a product.

A "product" thus is much more than the sum of its ingredients and features. Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:276) explain that the core of a product is these **intrinsic elements**. The intrinsic elements, are however covered by packaging, which forms the first **extrinsic**, through which a product is differentiated. The package, is furthermore, imbued with imagery or intangible value that has been created through the deployment of a communication mix to create the augmented product. It is argued that the augmented product concept has become increasingly significant due to intrinsic product parity across many categories. When using soft furnishings such as linen as an example, it could be stated that with regard to the product intrinsic, there are not many inconsistencies. Yet, extrinsic aspects, such as the particular outlet from which the linen is sold, could for example differentiate this product and make it more appealing to a specific target market. The work of Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:276) highlights the significance of the **augmented product concept** and how it differs from the core product in consumers' perceptions of products. Yet, authors such as Allen (1999:2), argue that a product may consist of three levels, namely, the **core product**, which he describes as "...the actual benefit the consumer is seeking from the purchase...", the **actual product**, which "...consists of product attributes such as quality level, design, brand name, and packaging..." and the **augmented product**, which "...consists of the additional services and benefits (such as installation, delivery and credit, warranty, and after-sale service) that come with the actual product to best satisfy consumers".

De Chernatony and McDonald (1993:8) on the other hand, adhere to a model that consists of four levels to describe the extent to which a product can be augmented to provide the added values perceived by the consumer:

- If the consumer perceives no differentiation between competing offerings in a particular product category, it is known as a commodity. At this **generic level**, only the most basic need is met, which would translate into a sheet being used to cover a bed and to sleep on. This is the core benefit that consumers seek when they buy a product and relate to the core product, as described by Allen (1999:2).
- When the commodity is "value engineered" to satisfy a specific target's minimum purchase conditions such as functional capabilities, availability and pricing, it evolves to the so-called "**expected level**" (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1993:20). The actual product, as defined by Allen (1999:3), consists of the



aspects perceived at the expected level.

- Buyers and users become more sophisticated with increased experience, which require the product to be "augmented" in more refined ways, with added values satisfying non-functional as well as functional needs (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1993:21), Product promotions might for example be directed to the user's peer group to reinforce his or her social standing through ownership of the product. It could be assumed that the augmented product as described by Allen (1999:3) is therefore situated at this **augmented level**.
- De Chernatony and McDonald (1993:163) however also distinguish a fourth level, their argument based on the idea that buyers and users eventually regard augmentation as a standard requirement for various products, resulting in new added values being developed to promote a product into the potential phase. Experienced consumers recognize that competing items are often similar in terms of product formulation and that marketers are no longer focusing only on rational functional issues. In addressing the **potential level**, more intangible, emotional factors are promoted.

As illustrated in Figure 2.2, De Chernatony and McDonald's model (1992:5) was adapted for this study to include all the relevant concepts. This model also includes the various dimensions of a product identified by authors such as Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:276) as well as Allen (1999:2-3).

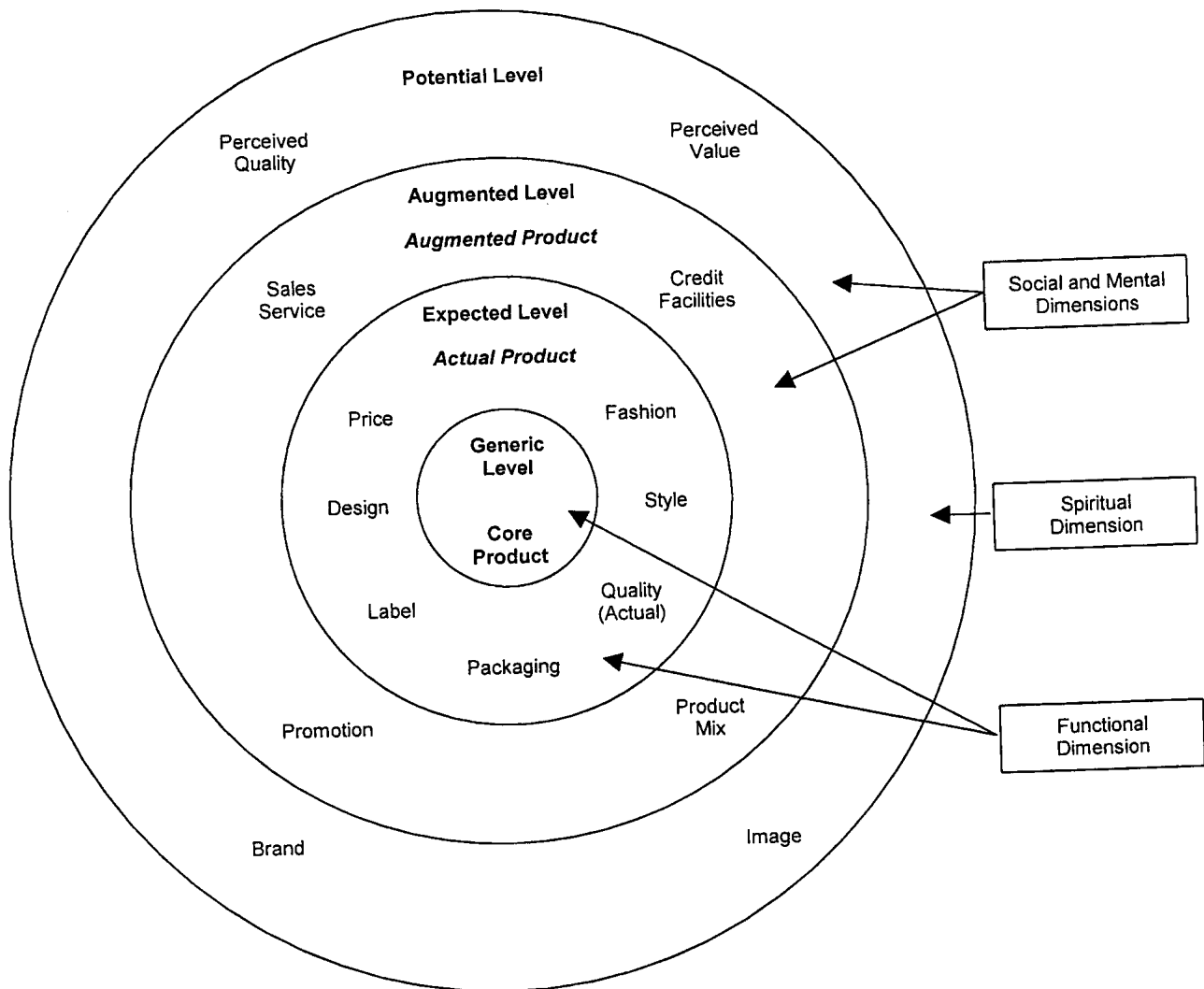


FIGURE 2.2: ADAPTED MODEL OF THE VARIOUS PERCEIVED LEVELS OF A PRODUCT (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1992:5).

According to Mouton and Marais (1992:143) a model only represents in broader terms the subject of which it is a model. In this case certain irrelevant characteristics have been omitted and only those elements, which are considered relevant to the product category of soft furnishings, were included. It is important to emphasize that for the purposes of this study, **intrinsic elements** refer to any raw materials/ component parts and features of the core product that contribute to the fulfilment of the core benefit, while **extrinsic elements** were interpreted as any features/attributes not fundamental or necessary in achieving the core benefit of the product. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, extrinsic elements fall within the various product dimensions. Extrinsic attributes are however not considered to be mutually exclusive within a given product level. Design features, indicated at the expected level, could for example differentiate the product offering to such a degree that it could be noted on the augmented level.

The four dimensions of branding, identified by Gad (2001:7) could to a certain extent also be incorporated in this

model. The **functional dimension** would entail the generic and expected level as indicated in Figure 2.2. The **social** and **mental dimension** would predominantly revolve around the augmented and potential levels, whereas the **spiritual dimension** would mostly involve certain aspects within the potential level such as the image/reputation of the firm who sells or produces the product. Fairly obvious, is the fact that within the generic and expected levels, the extrinsic elements are more “tangible” and closely related to the physical product. With regard to the augmented and potential levels, the focus shifts more towards the services offered by the manufacturer and/or retailer, who produces and/or sells the product and the “intangibles” associated with the brand of product.

2.2.3 Definition and discussion of extrinsic elements

Product design is defined by Allen (1999:3), as “...the arrangement of elements that collectively form a product”. Colour is for example an important aspect of design. Yet, with regard to interior products such as soft furnishings, two aspects that also seem to be of particular importance is that of style and fashion. A **style** is considered “...a distinctive manner of construction or presentation in any art, product, or endeavor” whereas **fashion** is viewed as “...any style that is popularly accepted and purchased by successive groups of people” (Allen, 1999:6). Fashion is described by Risch (1987:84) in the most simplistic sense as “...the perception of some style of human endeavor”. The author explains that when the perception of a style is endorsed by the majority of consumers in any given time and place, that style is said to be “fashionable”.

The **product mix** could be viewed as the set of all products offered for sale by the retailer. Breadth of the product mix would then refer to the number of product lines stocked and depth to the variety of sizes, colors and types offered within each product line. Product line is considered a broad group of products, indented for essentially similar uses or then core benefits, having similar physical characteristics (Allen, 1999:6).

Packaging as “...all the activities of designing and producing the container or wrapper for a product” (Allen, 1999:3). Traditionally the function of packaging was to protect goods (Hisrich & Peters, 1990:332). In some industries, this is still considered the primary function, yet several manufacturers and retailers have come to realize its potential as a promotional tool and image builder for products, enhancing its success in the market. Packaging, however does not apply to all product lines. Products such as towels are only left with **labels** to communicate information about the product, price and the seller.

Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:200) explain that consumers usually have their own **price** expectations which entails whether they perceive a price to be low, high or fair: this is known as the **standard/ reference price**. In most cases they would be willing to accept a range of prices they consider to be fair, which is known as the **acceptable price**. In this regard, it should also be noted that several of the larger retail outlets offer **credit facilities**, which obviously impact on how the consumer perceives the acceptable price. The authors state that pricing structure should take into consideration the expected price range consumers are hoping to find in the market place, since it is often linked to the quality of merchandise they expect for the money they are willing to pay.



The important relationship between **value, price and quality** must thus be kept in mind: in modern society almost anything with value can be assessed by a price, since financial price is the measure of value normally used in exchanges. Risch (1987:50) explains as follows: "The retail price may be generically defined as the **perceived value** of the retail merchandise or service translated into consumer dollars. It represents the intrinsic and functional value of a product, plus its attendant attributes of benefits, expectations, and anticipated satisfactions, as understood by the consumer, at any particular time or place". The author remind that the attributes that consumers associate with intrinsic/functional worth are perceptions, beliefs, or understandings and that the price of the merchandise does not necessarily represent its utilitarian worth. Several research studies support the consumer's belief in a positive correlation between price and a product's quality, therefore also the product's understood value (Risch, 1987:55).

Perceived quality can be defined as "...the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives" (Aaker, 1991:85). It is important to emphasize the fact that perceived quality is a perception by consumers and involves judgments by consumers of what is important. Consequently, it cannot necessarily be objectively determined and is considered an intangible, overall feeling about a brand of product. However, it usually will be based on underlying dimensions, which include characteristics of the products to which the brand is attached such as reliability and performance. Perceived quality differs from several related concepts, such as actual or objective quality, product-based quality and manufacturing quality. Aaker (1991:82) defines these concepts as follows:

- The **actual or objective quality** refers to "...the extent to which the product or service delivers superior service".
- **Product-based quality** refers to "...the nature and quantity of ingredients, features, or services included".
- **Manufacturing quality** refers to "...conformance to specification, the "zero defect" goal".

Although quality as a construct was traditionally defined in terms of products (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999:149), quality can also be defined in terms of service. **Service quality** is described as "...the consumer's overall impression of the relative inferiority/superiority of the firm and its services or as superiority or excellence". In effect it relates to a measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations. **Services** then refer to "...activities, benefits or satisfactions, which are offered for sale or are provided in connection with the sale of goods". Dotson and Patton, as quoted by MiYoung Lee and Johnson (1997:27) found the five highest ranked services connected with the sale of goods to be sales assistance, a liberal return policy, repair service, alteration service and check cashing. Several retailers use these services to differentiate their retail brand from other competitors in the market.

In this regard, advertising and promotion have evolved into a vital communication system for both consumers and businesses in today's complex society (Belch & Belch, 1989:4). They define **promotion** as "...the coordination of all seller-initiated efforts to set up channels of persuasion to sell goods and services or promote an idea". **Advertising** is defined as "...any paid form of nonpersonal communication about an organisation, product, service or idea by an identified sponsor". The function of **retail advertising** would then be to influence

both product and patronage decisions by creating favorable attitudes towards those brands of products and services, within a particular retail environment consisting of various groups of consumers (Risch, 1987:85).

A **brand name** in its most simplistic form consists of words, letters and/or numbers that can be vocalized and is intended to identify the product of one seller and differentiate the product from competing products. Yet, as pointed out by Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999: 276) the tailored augmented product is often referred to as the "**brand**", and is defined as "...a unique set of associations attached to a name, trademark or logo" (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999:276). A brand is then also considered as a guarantee of origin, which differentiates, adds value and provides a basis for consumer preference and loyalty. A successful brand is regarded as "...an identifiable product, service, person or place augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs most closely. Furthermore its success results from being able to sustain these added values in the face of competition" (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1993:18).

Retailers have developed a range of different strategies for attracting customers into their stores and for encouraging those customers to buy (and continue to buy) the goods and services available from them rather than from competitors. One such strategy is selling **manufacturers' branded products** that are also available elsewhere, but to differentiate the stores in some way. Methods of store differentiation are many and include extrinsic elements that are found in the various dimensions as illustrated in Figure 2 such as price, product mix, convenience and overall shopping experience offered to a customer. Then there are those retailers who more-or-less exclusively sell **own label products** – branded products, which are specially produced for them under their brand name and to their specification and which are not available from any other source. This strategy is based on the fact that the value which the store name acquires, can be transferred to a range of goods which themselves reinforce the image of the store (Murphy, 1990:61-62).

Image, according to Berman and Evans (1979:95) refers to "...how the firm is viewed by consumers and others. A firm may be viewed as progressive or conservative, ethical or unethical, kind to consumers or indifferent, economical or high-priced and so on". The authors explain that the key to a successful image is that the consumer views the retailer/ manufacturer in the manner intended. Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:200) state that consumers develop store and corporate images based on a variety of information which includes amongst other personal experiences, opinions of friends and relatives, but also the information communicated through the marketing tools of advertising and promotion.

The conceptual framework and elements discussed so far, guided the choice of methodology implemented in achieving the research objectives. The following section provides more background on the methods that were employed to gain access to the research subjects, as well as data-collection and analysis to further clarify the research approach.



2.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

2.3.1 Research techniques

This study was intended to be mainly descriptive, even though it may reflect certain elements of exploratory and explanatory studies. Since the research was mostly focused on describing and understanding rather than explaining human behaviour, the use of qualitative methods to gain access to research subjects, data-collection and analysis were considered to be more appropriate. Focus group discussions and the use of projective techniques as well as blind- and branded testing, were employed to obtain the type of answers required to the study problem. Although many authors agree that the research undertaken in the family and consumer sciences have in recent years been characterised by the increased use of qualitative methods (Garrison, Pierce, Monroe, Sasser, Shaffer & Blalock, 1999:428), the choice of research methods was based on the nature of the problem rather than in a tendency in the discipline.

The use of focus group discussions was chosen as particularly appropriate since group discussions encourage participants to comment on, debate and share experiences. The significance of using this technique was focused on creating a forum for discussion and interaction of limited yet very specific topics/themes. Morgan, as quoted by Babbie and Mouton (2001:292), says that "group discussion provide direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences as opposed to reaching such conclusions from post hoc analyses of separate statements from each interviewee". Babbie and Mouton (2001:292) further elaborate on this point by stating that focus group discussions tend to allow space in which people may get together and create meaning among themselves, rather than individually. In this particular case, aspects came up during the course of conversation, which certain participants did not think about individually and as such, the shaping and reshaping of opinions occurred.

A projective technique was employed to allow participants to react upon stimuli and to project their inner feelings in terms of the type of information that was required. Through the projective technique the "position of the product in the mind, in terms of its value to the consumer, can be detected" (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1993:277). The projective technique was based on a completion scenario. Participants were requested to complete a scenario in written form, which proved to be particularly useful for the purposes of triangulation. Blind- and branded product testing was also employed for the purposes of triangulation. Dillon, Madden and Firtle (1990:667) state that comparison product tests, such as blind and brand tests, generally attempt to answer one of the most basic questions relating to the ultimate market acceptance of a product. More specifically for the purposes of this study, these tests were used to identify which of many alternatives are most preferred and to establish the position of one product relative to other competing products in the mind of the consumer.

The projective technique and comparison product tests were completed during the focus group sessions. According to Garrison *et al* (1999:428-429) a focus group is "...a distinctive type of group in terms of purpose, size, composition, and procedures. Participants are selected because they possess certain characteristics in

common that relate to the topic or theme of the research". The following discussion will focus on the characteristics and other relevant aspects of the population from which the research participants were drawn, before progressing to an explanation of the methods of data-collection and analysis that were used.

2.3.2 Sample

The units of analysis constituted young urban consumers, between the ages of 24 and 33. Nine females and six males participated in the focus group discussions. Even though preference was given to females in the recruitment of suitable participants as they are traditionally considered to be more occupied in purchase decisions involving soft furnishings, the judgment was taken to include males who complied to the pre-condition for participation (their inclusion eventually did bring to light some interesting findings with regard to differences in genders' perceptions). The pre-condition was indicated as exposure to purchase decisions involving soft furnishings such as linen and towels. Individuals who were predominantly single, financially independent and managing their own households represented the sample. Participants were also selected from middle to higher income groups to ensure that they at least had an income that allowed them some choice during decision-making. Five married participants, who co-managed households with their spouses, were however also included. The participants' incomes ranged from R 72 000 to R240 000 per annum. Three participants were self-employed; the remainder employed as managers or professionals.

A combination of methods was applied in the identification of the units of analysis. The LSM segmentation was used as one possible description of market grouping. The rationale for selecting participants, who belonged to the higher LSM segments, was based on empirical findings that suggest that they tend to be more concerned with self-expression, achievement and fulfilment (Du Plessis *et al*, 1999:97). The Delphi classification that classifies consumers into one of eight clusters by reference to their residential postal code was also considered. This classification addresses the possibility that differences in product consumption correspond with lifestyle "types" who live in certain areas or suburbs.

The participants were categorized in either the B or C segments of the Delphi classification. They resided in what was known as more "up market" suburbs, that included the Menlyn, Montana and Garstfontein suburbs in Pretoria as well as the Bedfordview and Northcliff suburbs in Johannesburg. Group C or then "Young Suburbia" is described as newer housing developments on the periphery of cities with new modern homes. Group C is characterised by young couples with young families, middle income and upwardly mobile, many of who are first time homeowners. Group B or the so-called "Afrikaans Elite" consists of upper income categories, Afrikaans bias with strong family orientation. The group is characterised by managers and white-collar workers in private and public sectors. A large percentage of Afrikaans elite inhabitants are homeowners and large, modern houses are found in these areas.

2.3.2.1 *Sampling*

A non-probability sampling procedure, namely purposive or judgmental sampling was employed. This sampling technique is particularly useful in cases where the researcher wishes to study a small subset of a larger population in which many members of the subset are easily identified, but the enumeration of all of them would be nearly impossible (Babbie, 1989:204).

The management members of interior retail outlets, such as @home, Mr Price Homezone and Woolworths were approached to assist with the identification of a subset of the larger population relevant to this study. These outlets were located in more affluent areas and buying behaviour was observed to identify suitable participants. Possible candidates were approached and asked to fill in a short questionnaire to establish age, income group, occupation, gender, geographical location and contact details. The objective was to create a homogenous group, with regard to aspects pointed out under the previous discussion, who are unfamiliar with each other as well as the researcher because familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure and has the potential to bias responses (Garrison *et al*, 1999:431).

Certain ethical issues were taken into consideration. The participants' inclusion in this study was based on voluntary participation. They were assured that their identities would be protected and all personal information would not be made public. Participants were informed that the study was conducted as part of the requirements for completion of a master's degree. Limited details concerning the purpose of the research were provided prior to conducting the focus group discussions to improve the scientific quality of the study. Participants were however properly debriefed after the discussions.

2.3.3 *Data collection*

Multiple methods of data collection were used for the purpose of triangulation and to enhance the authenticity of the data.

2.3.3.1 *Focus group discussions*

Three detailed engagements with a selected number of between seven to ten participants were initially envisaged. Four group sessions were eventually facilitated to provide the required insights. The initial planning of these focus groups included contacting potential participants via telephone and sending personalised invitations two weeks prior to the first session. The rule of thumb as explained by Babbie and Mouton (2001:292) was applied, whereby over-recruitment by 20 per cent was done to compensate for members not showing up.

Keim, Swanson, and Cann (1999:455) emphasize the necessity of careful location selection to conduct focus groups, since it could contribute to the success or failure in recruiting enough members from the target

population. Taking these aspects into consideration, a coffee shop in the Menlyn shopping mall was identified as a setting for the discussions to take place since most of the participants' recruited for the study frequented this particular mall. The coffee shop environment was conducive to group interaction, since it represented a more informal location patroned by several individuals when socially interacting with fellow peer group members. Coffee and refreshments were offered free of charge as incentive and a more secluded area of the chosen institution was reserved with the co-operation of management for these purposes.

Saturday afternoons proved to be the most suitable time frame for most participants. Yet, the most difficult aspect encountered in planning the focus group sessions was finding a suitable time for the majority of participants. The difficulties encountered in this regard lead to the inclusion of a fourth focus group session to ensure that all of the participants could complete the projective technique as well as the product comparisons tests and attend as many focus group discussions as possible. Since no time constraints were placed on the fourth session, it allowed enough time for the projective technique as well as the product comparison tests to be completed by those participants who had not yet completed these in previous sessions and to repeat discussions surrounding these exercises.

In total, thirteen participants completed the projective technique during the course of the second, third and fourth focus group sessions; eleven participants completed the product comparison tests during the third and fourth sessions; three participants attended three focus group sessions, five participants attended two sessions and six participants attended one session.

During each of the sessions a general plan of inquiry was followed, yet the intention was to allow participants to speak freely with the least amount of interruption, thereby not distorting what they had to say. Garrison *et al* (1999:430) suggest that in developing a plan of inquiry, it is advisable to sequence questions from general to specific, to use open-ended questions and to focus participants on specific personal experiences. As such, opening questions were employed at the beginning of these focus groups to elicit only brief responses, thereby serving as "icebreakers" and to identify characteristics that the participants had in common. Introductory questions were then used to introduce the topic of discussion in a general manner and focused at promoting conversation and interaction among the participants. The inquiry progressed to transition questions, which shifted the conversation into the key questions and propelled the research toward its substantive domain as well as assist the participants in visualizing the topic in the larger scheme of things.

Each session took on a slightly different approach:

Session one: The first meeting was attended by seven participants and reflected a focus group discussion based on a phenomenological approach (Fern, 1983:18). This approach was preferred since it is best suited for consumer behaviour research where active discussions lead to consensus statements. Carefully pre-meditated questions were planned in advance and used to initiate discussions. The questions were based upon the study aims and themes that needed to be addressed (Macun & Posel, 1998; 114-120; Fern, 1983:123; Lautman, 1982:53).



Session two: The second session was attended by six participants and used for triangulation purposes. The session was based on a projective technique, whereby participants were asked to complete an “unfinished scenario” in written form. The resulting documentation was used to verify information obtained from the first focus group discussion. After completion of the technique, introductory questions were employed to initiate discussions, progressing to certain key questions, which were formulated based on participants’ responses in session one.

Session three: Five participants attended the third session, which involved product comparison tests. A so-called “blind test” was undertaken where no brand name, packaging or advertising was disclosed and reactions to the “pure” product, apart from image values were desired. A brand test was employed afterwards in which the brand names of the products were disclosed, to establish the effects of the brand name or brand image on reactions to the product. Upon completion of these tests, discussions were initiated and certain key questions were addressed based on participants’ responses in session one and two.

Session four: Seven participants attended the fourth focus group session. This session represented a repetition of the second and third focus group sessions. The inclusion of a fourth focus group discussion proved to be useful in achieving the objective of theoretical saturation. As stated by Garrison *et al* (1999:431), theoretical saturation occurs “...when no new or relevant themes emerge; that is, each concept under investigation has been saturated”.

During each of the sessions, concluding questions were employed to bring closure to the discussions and to enable participants to reflect on their previous comments for the purpose of ensuring authentic data. These questions encouraged participants to declare their final views and to clarify their positions. A very brief oral summary of the key questions and main ideas that emerged during the session was given and participants were asked if they viewed it as an adequate summary. Extensive notes and recordings (with participants’ permission to do so) were kept regarding the discussions that took place. Furthermore, analysed texts were taken back to the consequent focus group meetings to verify, where possible, with participants who participated in the previous discussions that what has been constructed from the data is corresponding to what had been said.

2.3.3.2 Product comparison tests

Eleven participants completed the product comparison tests during the course of the third and fourth focus group sessions. For the purpose of these tests, hand towels and flat sheets from Edgars, Woolworths and Mr Price were used, based on brand preferences outlined during the first and second focus group discussions. Certain basic principles were employed in the preparation of these sheets and towels for the tests. Two identical sets in each product category, consisting of the three above mentioned brands were compiled. Brand names, trademarks, packaging and any other form of extrinsic identification were removed from one set of each product category. The products used for the second set of each category, were left in shelf condition with brand names, trademarks, packaging and all other extrinsic elements left in tact. To minimise bias, the various brands of

towels and sheets were kept identical to the degree possible in terms of colour and size. White hand towels and white single flat sheets with plain designs were employed for the purposes of these tests.

The blind test involved participants' selection of one towel and one sheet from the sets shown to them without extrinsic identification. The second sets, consisting of the products with extrinsic features, were introduced afterwards. The brand test involved participants' selection of one towel and one sheet from these sets. Each participant was asked to indicate his/her reason for selection during the discussions that ensued after each test. The analysis of data included comparing the reasons for choice in the blind- and brand tests to establish the impact of extrinsic product attributes on participants' choice and selection of towels and sheets.

The use of this technique was beneficial in verifying conclusions drawn from the focus group discussions. Yet, the disadvantage of comparison product tests such as the blind and brand tests undertaken in this study is realism. As stated by Dillon *et al* (1990:667), under normal situations, a participant evaluates one product at a time and determines whether it is acceptable or unacceptable for purchase. The frame of reference under these circumstances will be the product the participant is currently using and all other products in the category that he or she is familiar with. Comparison tests, by their very nature, therefore concentrate on the differences between the products being tested.

2.3.3.3 Projective technique

A projective technique was employed for the purpose of triangulation, whereby participants were asked to complete "an unfinished scenario". A scenario was described in which the participant was faced with a situation where he/she had to handle an insurance claim having experienced an unfortunate situation where the household's linen and towels had been stolen from a washing line. Due to the conditions stipulated by the insurance company, they had to replace these items from a particular retail outlet (See Appendix A). Participants were asked to specify the retail outlet as well as the shopping mall that they preferred indicating reasons for their preference.

Thirteen participants completed this projective technique task during the course of the second, third and fourth focus group sessions. The use of this technique was beneficial in obtaining information on participants' feelings and beliefs indirectly (Dillon, Madden & Firtle, 1990:162).

TABLE 2.1 PARTICIPATION IN DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection session	Number of participants involved in focus group discussion	Number of participants involved in product comparison tests	Number of participants involved in projective technique
Session 1	7	0	0
Session 2	6	0	6
Session 3	5	5	0
Session 4	7	6	7

2.3.4 Data analysis

Each of the focus group discussions were recorded and data was transcribed to text. Content analysis was applied to organise the transcribed text. According to Roller, Mathes and Eckert (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:492) "on the most general level, content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages". Certain obvious concepts were determined beforehand after reviewing relevant literature and establishing the conceptual framework. Codes were assigned to these concepts. Initial analysis of data focused on reducing the text to these categories and coding for existence although allowance was made for the possibility of finding and incorporating additional concepts. During analysis the relationship between elements of the data emerged and the strength, sign and direction of these relationships were further explored. Both conceptual analysis as well as relational analysis were thus employed.

Conceptual analysis implied the colour coding of text that contained similar code in specific colours. During this process connections between the categories/codes were identified. After the initial coding, concepts were recoded within themes that emerged. This was done by cutting and pasting the segments of text to index cards that were created for each theme. These themes/codes were organised in tables, with the substantiating segments of text and included in the discussion of the research findings (Chapter 3). The projective technique and comparison product tests' data was analysed in the same manner.

Adjunctive procedures that were used, included memos or written notes of how the eventual findings were formulated. Authors such as Strauss and Corbin (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:501) emphasize that it is important to retain all notes or memos throughout the process of data analysis. In this study it included notes made during the coding process, theoretical notes that contained the products of inductive and deductive thinking as well as notes made during operationalisation.

The following chapter discloses the results of the research and includes a discussion to enhance an understanding of the themes that emerged and the extent to which each theme contributes in achieving a particular research objective.

Results

3

3.1 THE IMPACT OF EXTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES ON YOUNG URBAN CONSUMERS' PURCHASE DECISIONS INVOLVING INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS

In marketing terms there is no such thing as a product or service that exists by itself in space, independent of the consumer. Sengupta (1993:3) i.a. states that: "For a product to exist, it must find a place in an individual consumer's perception of the world of products around him or her. And this perception is subjective, governed by the individual consumer's values, beliefs, needs, experience and environment". In this regard it is necessary to distinguish between the various levels of a consumer's perception of a product. When a consumer purchases a product, he or she is purchasing the *total* product, which includes everything that adds value to the seller's offering. During consumers' evaluation (a consideration of reality versus specific needs and wants) of consumer goods, they are influenced by internal/individual as well as external variables. Functional attributes are however not necessarily of primary importance within an internal frame of reference when making a final purchase decision (Hawkins *et al*, 1992:14). De Chernatony and McDonald's model (1993:8) in fact exposes four levels, i.e the generic-, expected-, augmented- and potential levels of a product which distinguishes the extent to which a product can be augmented through specific product characteristics to provide added value during the evaluation of a product. Data was organised within this framework within the main objectives for the study.

In an attempt to choose the most suitable product and outlet to purchase the product from, consumers may use extrinsic/or intrinsic variables in their evaluation. For the purposes of this study, intrinsic properties are viewed as any raw materials/component parts and features of the core product that contribute to the fulfilment of the core benefit. Extrinsic properties are viewed as any features/attributes not fundamental or necessary in achieving the core benefit of the product. Even though the study is aimed at the impact of *extrinsic elements* in dictating young urban consumers' purchase decisions, the impact of intrinsic properties cannot be ignored because in a qualitative research approach, participants are allowed and encouraged to freely share their ideas. As a result, intrinsic properties also came to the fore, were discussed and were listed in the findings to reveal the whole picture. Information gathered in this regard is thus also included briefly.

The following section summarizes the information obtained during the various data collection sessions, organized under headings that coincide with the aims of the study. Data generated is also discussed in terms of existing theory.

3.1.1 Focus group discussions

The exact wording of participants (presented in italics) in either English or Afrikaans is summarized in the various tables.

3.1.1.1 Generic intrinsic attributes

At its most basic, there is the generic product functionality, which is related to the core benefit of the product. De Chernatony and McDonald (1993:4) use a drill as an example to clarify that what a consumer in essence wants, when he/she purchases a drill, is holes in a wall. Participant's statements indicate that when they purchase a towel, certain intrinsic properties are required. Table 3.1 thus illustrates the intrinsic elements recognized by the participants of this study as fundamental in achieving the intended core benefit of a towel.

TABLE 3.1: GENERIC INTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES OF TOWELS

Intrinsic attributes	Participants' statements
Absorbency:	<i>Ek dink enige mens wat 'n handdoek koop, soek iets wat ordentlik afdroog. Jy soek iets wat absorberend is, maar die ding moet nie pap nat wees as jy klam is nie. Jy wil nie jou rug afdroog and dan is jou hele handdoek nat nie. ...the absorbency of it. You got to get dry. You don't want something that you have to rub yourself a couple of times. It has to come clean off your body.</i>
Texture and tactile perception of fabric: (Used as indicator of actual quality)	<i>Vir my is dit ook hoe hy voel, hoe dik hy is, hoe wollerig hy is. Obviously you look at the towel and feel if it is fluffy. If the towel is dense, you get the feeling that it's fluffy. If it's a thin towel, it's not going to draw all the water and it's going to become thinner more quickly. You are going to be able to see the quality there.</i>
Strength of weave:	<i>As jy afdroog wil jy nie al hierdie wolle hê wat agterbly ten eerste nie...</i>
Size/ dimensions:	<i>I think the size of the towel also matters. I mean obviously you want a towel, that if you put it around your body, that covers you. You don't want one that comes up to your waist.</i>

Absorbency was highlighted as the most important attribute in achieving the intended core benefit of a towel. It was emphasized that absorbency should be of such a nature, that the towels do not feel wet after use. Since the absorbency of a towel is difficult to judge prior to use, participants clarified that they would observe the **texture and tactile properties** of the toweling fabric as a product based quality to evaluate the required actual/objective quality of the towel (product based quality was defined as the nature and quantity of ingredients and features of a product whereas actual or objective quality was defined as the extent to which the product delivers superior service). Two additional intrinsic properties, which seem to be of importance in achieving the intended core benefit is that of the **size of the towel** as well as the **strength of the weave** – specifically in terms of the pile woven into the base fabric of the towel.

The core benefits of sheets that were identified by participants of the focus group discussions, included that it should cover a mattress and that it should provide a soft, comfortable base to sleep on. It was established that to fulfil these most basic needs certain intrinsic elements are considered. These included the **tactile perception** of the fabric and the **size /dimensions** of the sheet.

TABLE 3.2 GENERIC INTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES OF SHEETS

Intrinsic attributes	Participants' statements
Tactile perception of fabric:	<i>Ek slaap ook by baie vyf ster hotelle in die werk waarin ek is en daar is 'n sekere materiaal wat ek voel op daardie bed wat ek nog nie gevoel het in 'n winkel of by ons huis nie. As ek dit in 'n winkel kry en al is hy drie maal die prys, sal ek dit koop.</i>
Size/Dimensions:	<i>'n Laken moet net pas oor die bed.</i>

Even though participants recognized certain intrinsic properties that towels should have in order to fulfil the intended core benefit, their responses did not reveal much differentiation among competing offerings at this generic level. During their evaluation of the total product, functional attributes are thus not necessarily placed in the primary position within their internal frame of reference (these intrinsic elements are fairly easy to emulate and therefore seldom form the basis of differentiation in the consumer's mind). The intrinsic attributes of sheets did however seem more influential during participants' purchase decisions. According to a participant's statement in Table 3.2, the tactile perception of a sheet could influence the perceived acceptable price. The availability of extra length sheets, which relates to the core benefit of covering a mattress, for example influenced certain participants' choice of retail outlet. In this case a generic attribute augmented the retailer's merchandise assortment:

- ▷ *Ek het regtig hard gesoek na lakens, want ek het 'n ekstra lang bed. Daar is bitter min plekke wat sulke goed aanhou. Jy het nie eintlik 'n keuse van winkels soos Edgars en Woolworths nie. Ek het dit by Loads of Linen gekry. Dit is die enigste plek wat ek kon kry wat dit aanhou.*

When a consumer perceives no differentiation between competing offerings in a particular product category, it is known as a commodity (Chernatony & McDonald, 1993:8). At this **generic level** only the most basic need of the consumer is met. However, the following section highlights the fact that towels and bed linen, offered by various retail outlets in the South African consumer market, have been "value engineered" to satisfy specific target segments' purchase conditions.

3.1.1.2 Expected extrinsic attributes

De Chernatony and McDonald (1993:20) explain that when a commodity is value engineered to satisfy a specific target's minimum purchase conditions (such as functional capabilities and pricing), it evolves to the so-called **expected level**. The authors explain that buyers and users have a perception about the minimum expected characteristics that differentiate competing products in the same product category. At the expected level, products and services are made to satisfy purchasers' minimum requirements for attributes such as label, packaging, design, price, actual quality and so on. The actual product then consists of these functional characteristics (Allen, 1999:3). Table 3.3 includes statements made by participants, which clarifies the influence of these expected extrinsic attributes in their choice and selection of interior soft furnishings such as towels and sheets.

TABLE 3.3 EXPECTED EXTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES OF INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS

Extrinsic attributes	Participants' statements
Style and fashion:	<i>I look at the "look" of the towel. I look at what it looks like.</i>
Product design; colour:	<i>Dit hang ook af van kleurskema. I try to put colour coding in my house.</i>
Packaging and label:	<i>Ek het ook gesê dat dit 'n bleek stuk handdoek is. Die label tref jou oog.</i>
Price:	<i>You have to look at your pocket. I don't think any of us can really afford - not middle class- to just buy. You've got to look at price and you have to consider either yourself or your family. So I think price is the most important aspect for me, then quality, then style.</i>
Quality:	<i>Ek dink vir die gewone man op die straat is die enigste manier hoe hy kan agterkom of dit swak kwaliteit is, is om dit te gebruik. Hy het nie die kennis om bloot na die ding te kyk en dan te oordeel. So hy gaan die goed koop, twee maal gebruik en dan besluit of dit goed of swak is.</i>

- **Style and fashion**

Allen (1999:6) describes style as "...a distinctive manner of construction or presentation in any art, product, or endeavor" and fashion as "...any style that is popularly accepted and purchased by successive groups of people" Risch (1987:84) considers fashion in the most simplistic sense as "...the perception of some style of human endeavor" and explains that when the perception of a style is endorsed by the majority of consumers in any given time and place, that style is said to be "fashionable". Style and fashion are considered important extrinsic elements in consumers' choice of interior soft furnishings, since these products are socially visible, and are often used to communicate information to others regarding the owner's taste. Risch (1987:91) describes taste as the individual's ability to make the most artistic use of a current fashion and emphasizes the fact that it is often subject to a great deal of criticism from others.

During the focus group discussions it became evident that the images associated with certain retail outlets in terms of style and fashion, permeated their product offerings. Even though the extrinsic elements of style and fashion are closely related to the actual product, participants' statements in Table 3.4 suggest that style and fashion are more often judged by the retailers' entire merchandise assortment and the associated brand image, than by the actual products.

- **Design**

Product design is defined by Allen (1999:3), as "...the arrangement of elements that collectively form a product". Risch (1987:92) explains that design is a unique version of a style and that it includes "...a particular arrangement of the discrete elements of line, shape (silhouette), color, and texture".

Colour was found to be an important consideration in the choice of interior soft furnishings. Robertson (2002:25) explains that "...ownership of colour in a broader cultural context allows us to express who we are in

the world and in our work. It reflects our moods and individual personality and has the ability to transform spaces into whatever we visualize or imagine". Along with advances in technology, the use of colour in modern interiors has been encouraged. An awareness of colour's ability to positively impact on individuals' lives has led to colour becoming an integral part of design within the world of interiors, which is characterized by the emergence of more personal/ individual styles. Participants for example stated and agreed that their grandparents might have been limited to white sheets, but that these circumstances have changed.

It seems that consumers are no longer being dictated to, but are searching for things that reflect their lifestyles and communicates to others aspects of their lifestyles, opinions, taste and the like. Colour has apparently become a powerful expressive tool in this regard. Participants however indicated that the importance of colour is subject to certain other considerations, inter alia the prices they are willing to pay; the intended use/ purpose and social visibility of the product. Statements included the following:

- ▷ *Ek dink dis anders nou as 50 jaar gelede. My ouma het net wit lakens gehad en nou is dit anderste.*
- ▷ *@ home had these dark, purple burgundy...it was the most beautiful towels. I would go there, look at the price and think not in my life would I buy these towels. Then I would go to Edgars and Mr Price and look for that colour somewhere else to suit my pocket, because I won't pay that price.*
- ▷ *Dis anders met lakens, ek meen who cares watter room dit is solank dit net room is, maar 'n handdoek is baie meer.*
- ▷ *As ek weet ek het 'n spesifieke kamer wat sê nou maar hierdie wit beachhouse look moet hê, sal ek die beste duurste lakens koop wat jy kan kry, omdat wit gouer snaaks gaan lyk as enige ander kleur, so ek sal dan nie omgee om R300 vir 'n fitted sheet uit te haal vir my beachhouse wit kamer nie.*

- **Packaging and labeling**

Packaging is regarded as "...all the activities of designing and producing the container or wrapper for a product" (Allen, 1999:3). Hisrich and Peters (1990:332) describe the traditional function of packaging to be a form of protection and that it is still considered the primary function in some industries. Several manufacturers and retailers have in the mean time come to realize packaging's potential as a promotional tool and image builder for products. Although certain products such as towels are not always packaged, the labels attract consumers' attention (Table 3.3). The impact of these extrinsic elements was prominent in the blind- and brand tests.

- **Price**

Table 3.3 illustrates the importance of price as a determining decision-making factor for products such as towels and sheets. Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:200) explain that consumers usually have their own price expectations that entail whether they perceive a price to be low, high or fair. This is known as the standard or reference price. In most cases they would be willing to accept a range of prices they consider to be fair, which is known as the acceptable price. Retailers manipulate these price perceptions to the greatest degree possible to encourage consumers to disregard their financial limitations in favour of acquiring the products that they have to offer. A typical example would include the extension of credit and offering the consumer the opportunity to pay over a prolonged period, such as six months with associated interest rates.



The prices that participants' are willing to pay (or the so-called acceptable price), appear to be influenced by certain aspects such as the individual's taste, which of course involves selecting products with certain styles and design features, which reflect that person's taste. Participants also seem to regard price differently from one product category to a next and their evaluation of an acceptable price is subject to the eventual use/ purpose of the item. The assumption that products, which are used in social settings are more likely to be judged by others, could account for the fact that participants would be willing to pay more for a duvet or towel than for a sheet.

The following statements illustrate participants' views:

- ▷ *Gaan dit nie eerder wees oor wat jy rêrig wil hê nie. Ek sal eerder iets kry wat ek rêrig wil hê wat my sak pas. Ek meen jy gaan nie jou geld spandeer op iets wat jy nie rêrig wil hê nie.*
- ▷ *As ek 'n mooi duvetcover sien vir R500 by Woolworths en een waarvan ek nie so baie hou by Mr Price, gaan ek R500 betaal vir die een by Woolworths.*
- ▷ *Ek sou sê prys is meer 'n determining factor met linne. Ek dink met handdoeke is dit 'n ander storie.*
- ▷ *Say now you want a beach towel and in the shops it costs R200. It depends if you are willing to pay the price if you know that you are going to use it only once or twice on the beach and its going to be thrown on the sand.*

Risch (1987:83) emphasizes the fact that retail price, per se, is meaningless to consumers until they perceive it in relation to some other price or standard, which serves as a reference point to define the consumer's immediate understanding of value. In modern materialistically inclined societies almost anything with value can be assessed by a price, since financial price is the measure of value used in most exchanges. The important relationship between value, price and quality is highlighted in the following section. The findings seem to support the arguments of authors such as Du Plessis and Rousseau's (1999:200), that pricing structure should take into consideration the expected price range consumers are hoping to find in the market place, since it is often linked to the quality of merchandise they expect for the money they are willing to pay.

• **Quality**

Various dimensions are related to the concept of quality (Aaker, 1991:82): *actual or objective quality* refers to the extent to which a product delivers superior functionality/service; *product-based quality* refers to the nature and quantity of ingredients, features or services included in the offering, whereas *manufacturing quality* refers to a conformance to specification or the so-called "zero defect" goal. Although quality was perhaps the most talked about extrinsic attribute during the focus group discussions, participants failed to define the concept in more objective terms. One of the conclusions drawn by participants in the focus group discussions is that most individuals do not have the required knowledge to assess quality of interior soft furnishings such as towels and linen prior to consumption (Table 3.3).

Most referrals to the concept of quality seem to represent intangible overall feelings associated with particular brands and were based on participants' judgments of what was considered important. As such the identification of quality by participants, was not determined objectively but rather a perception of the potential extrinsic attribute. Perceived quality can be defined as "...the customer's perception of the overall quality or superiority of a product or service with respect to its intended purpose, relative to alternatives" (Aaker, 1991:85).

What seemed to be of particular significance in participants' statements is the use of price as a surrogate indicator/symbol of the product's actual quality. The findings in this regard, emulate a considerable amount of empirical research results that established the consumer's belief in a positive correlation between price and quality and therefore also various products' understood value (Berman & Evans, 1979:483; Risch, 1987:55). According to Risch (1987:50), the perceived value represents the intrinsic and functional value of a product, plus its attendant attributes of benefits, expectations and anticipated satisfactions, as understood by the consumer at any particular time or place. The attributes that consumers attach to intrinsic/functional worth are perceptions, beliefs or understandings. The price of the merchandise does therefore not necessarily represent its utilitarian worth. Statements pertaining to the price, quality and value relationship included the following:

- ▷ *Ag ek dink dis heel menslik, 'n mens gaan eerste gaan waar dit jou sak pas. I mean obviously if that doesn't work for you, gaan jy eerder spaar en jy gaan bereid wees om bietjie ekstra te betaal to get a better quality.*
- ▷ *I didn't buy the cheapest because I thought maybe it wouldn't last as long. I didn't buy the most expensive because I can't afford it. I bought in between.*
- ▷ *Eerder kwaliteit koop as goedkoop koop.*
- ▷ *Goedkoop koop is duur koop - dis waarop dit neer kom.*
- ▷ *Jy gaan bereid wees om ekstra te betaal to get a better quality.*
- ▷ *Omdat dit goedkoper is, gaan die kwaliteit nie so goed wees nie*
- ▷ *Best quality that my pocket can afford.*

Research conducted by Sweeney, Soutar and Johnson (1999:77) established that not only do perceived product and service quality lead to perceived value for money in a service encounter but that these quality components also reduce perceived risk. Judging from participants' statements seems as if the risk that is associated with purchase decisions regarding interior soft furnishings could also be affected to a great extent by this price-, quality- and value relationship. Risch (1987:53) emphasizes that one of the most important benefits derived from this relationship, is that even though consumers may view the retail price as a negative factor and an obstacle in achieving their lifestyle aspirations, it is also believed that the value of the purchase exceeds the financial sacrifices.

Although the "quality" element was given a lot of attention during the focus group discussions some felt that the importance of quality depends on the interior soft furnishing category in question. This is demonstrated by the following statement:

- ▷ *By die lakens is daar 'n verskil in kwaliteit, maar ek dink nie ek sal 'n besluit neem vir 'n laken op grond van kwaliteit nie.*

The extrinsic features discussed so far represent the first of the four dimensions described by Gad (2001:94), namely the **functional dimension**. These generic and expected extrinsic elements are more "tangible" and closely related to the physical interior soft furnishing product. Gad (2001:94) explains that in modern marketing, the functional dimension is still very important, especially during the earlier stage in the brand's lifecycle when it



justifies its role and in some cases the physical or core benefit. Yet, all brand builders who depend heavily on the functional dimension sooner or later face the problem of diminishing difference due to intrinsic product parity (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1993:21). At the augmented and potential levels, which represent the social and mental dimensions of interior soft furnishings, the focus shifts more towards the retail outlet than the actual product.

3.1.1.3 Augmented extrinsic attributes

Buyers and users become more sophisticated with increased experience, which require the product to be "augmented" in more refined ways, with added values satisfying non-functional as well as functional needs (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1993:21). With more experience, consumers apparently become more confident and experiment with other brands of products as well as retail outlets, seeking the best value. They then begin to pay more attention to price. In order to maintain customer loyalty and price premiums, marketers thus need to augment their offerings through the addition of further benefits, i.e. additional services and benefits that come with the actual product to best satisfy consumers (Allen, 1999:2). Because generic and expected attributes associated with interior soft furnishing products may satisfy the same motivational needs, consumers tend to focus on discriminating factors such as the merchandise assortments and services offered by the interior retail outlets, the accessibility of such outlets as well as the promotions and advertising undertaken by them.

- **Merchandise assortment**

Merchandise assortment or product mix represents the set of all products offered for sale by the retailer. The breadth of a product mix is described as the number of product lines stocked and the depth as the variety of sizes, colours and types offered within each product line. Product line is considered a broad group of products, intended for essentially similar uses or core benefits, having similar physical characteristics (Allen, 1999:6). Table 3.4 indicates that the merchandise assortment/product mix offered by a particular interior retail outlet may have an impact on young urban consumers' purchase decisions involving soft furnishings. Participants considered the breadth and depth of the interior product assortments to be important factors, especially regarding their needs in terms of personal taste. The exclusivity of a particular interior outlet's assortment was also perceived to be a differentiating factor.

TABLE 3.4 THE MERCHANDISE ASSORTMENT OFFERED BY THE RETAIL MERCHANT

Assortment properties	Participants' statements
Breadth of product mix:	<i>Jy koop linne waar jy shop, waar dit vir jou convenient en accessible is en waar jy ander goed koop.</i>
Depth of product mix: Depth of product mix in terms of colour: Depth of product mix in terms of style and fashion trends:	<i>Ja wel, ek meen as jy kyk na smaak. Mr Price het 'n baie groter verskeidenheid as Edgars of Woolworths en meeste van die plekke. Ek meen jy kan enige iets van 'n classic lyn af vat na funky, helder kleure. Mr Price, soos wat sy gesê het, het meer detail. Jy kan motiewe op hê, waar Edgars het net plein items. Jy kan net'n plein pienk of 'n plein wit of 'n plein swart kies. Hulle het nie rêrig verskeidenheid nie. Sê nou maar daardie persoon se kleurskema is pienk en hulle verkoop dit net by Homezone, dan sal jy dit van Homezone kry. Soos Woolworths gaan meer vir die classic look. Wat jy hierdie seisoen by Woolworths kry is 'n goeie kans dat jy dit dalk weer die volgende seisoen daar gaan kry. Hulle gaan vir die classic look, waar Loads of Living die ultimate trendy fashion nagaan. Die goed wat daar is, is baie fashionable and trendy. Dit is die latest fashion. Woolworths follow ook trends- hulle het ook die zen, die incense houertjies en sulke goedjies en dis deel van trends en @home het ook baie trends. Ek dink @home kom miskien naby daaraan, maar Loads of Living volg heavy trends. Jy sal dit sien in die kleure van die kerse, die kombinasies van goeters, en spesifiek die colourblocking wat hulle daar het. Hulle gebruik die naturals en goed. Jy kan sien hulle is voorlopers in trends.</i>
Exclusivity of product mix:	<i>Hulle (Loads of Living) het iets te offer wat die ander retailers nie het nie.</i>

Risch (1987:69) mentions that up to 80% of all department stores may offer the same merchandise assortments. Since fashion trends dictate conformity to a particular style, this "sameness" of interior product offerings may be inescapable. However, the focus group discussions also revealed that interior retail merchants could establish a competitive edge by embellishing the interior product offering with nonessential services, thus enhancing the store image with a quality of uniqueness that sets it apart from the competition and may make it more acceptable.

- **Services offered by the interior retail merchant**

Services include the "...activities, benefits or satisfactions, which are offered for sale or are provided in connection with the sale of goods" (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999:149). Relevant to this particular study are those services provided in connection with the sale of interior soft furnishings. Dotson and Patton (MiYoung Lee & Johnson, 1997:27) found the five highest ranked services connected with the sale of goods to be sales assistance, a liberal return policy, repair service, alteration service and check cashing. Table 3.5 summarizes those services mentioned to be important considerations in young urban consumers' choice of particular interior outlets.

Some of the research findings of MiYoung and Johnson (1997:29), specifically those related to the fact that consumers have different expectations for the services they associate with different types of retail outlets, resemble conclusions drawn in the focus group discussions in this study. Table 3.5 shows that participants perceived the design of certain stores to be more conducive to the prospect of prompt service. Larger retail chains were thought to have more liberal return policies than smaller "unknown" merchants. Gift-wrapping was viewed as a differentiating factor, especially during the Christmas festive season. Retailers thus very obviously use these services to differentiate their offering from other competing offerings in the market.

TABLE 3.5 THE SERVICES OFFERED BY THE INTERIOR RETAIL MERCHANT

Service offering	Participants' statements
Promptness of service and store design:	<i>Kan dalk oor service ook gaan. Soos Mr Price, as jy kyk na die struktuur van die winkels. Jy het vinnige service, jy weet jy het nie baie tyd om te kyk nie of jy soek na 'n winkel waar jy vinnig kan koop en vinnig kan uit wees. Edgars is meer gerig op die feit dat jy langer ure kan spandeer. Jy kyk wat jy rêrig wil hê.</i>
Gift-wrapping:	<i>Ek hou van die gift packs van Edgars in handdoeke. Hulle het so 2 sheets, 2 handtowels en waslappies wat klaar mooi gepak en geselofaan is.</i>
Liberal return policy:	<i>Also if you buy the thing and it's torn or it has got something wrong, are they going to refund it at these little factory places? At least if you go to places like Woolworths or Mr Price you know if there is something wrong with that thing you go and refund it and they will do it because it is their problem. But a factory place is going to say you buy what you get here.</i>
In-store credit:	<i>Miskien is dit ook convenient. As jy weet jy het 'n Edgars kaart, kan jy op krediet koop. Jy kan dit af betaal. I will probably go to Edgars, because I have an account there. That would be the criteria.</i>

One aspect accentuated in the focus group discussions, is convenience. Risch (1987:49) explains that whatever is accessible or easy to reach and thus contributes to the consumer's personal comfort is considered convenient. From the consumer's perspective, convenience is the "...minimal level of the financial, physical and mental expenditures required for consumers to overcome the friction of time and space in shopping" Risch (1987:27) further elaborates that "...consumers will consummate a retail transaction only when the strength of a want exceeds the current level of perceived comfort". An interior retail merchant thus induces the consumer to buy interior soft furnishings by strengthening the awareness of wants in an atmosphere of convenience conducive to a purchase decision.

Credit granting facilities offered by the larger retail chains, seem to be an effective means of bridging the consumer's limitations, especially financial limitations. Consummation of a retail transaction is therefore encouraged by lowering the level of financial and mental expenditure required for the consumer to overcome the friction of time and space in shopping.

- **Accessibility of the interior retail outlet**

Participants indicated that the location and accessibility of a particular interior retail outlet influenced their purchase decisions. The concept of convenience also surfaced during discussions that revolved around the accessibility of interior retail outlets. Participants indicated that they would typically purchase soft furnishings such as linen, from outlets located in malls closest to their workplace or home, which reduces the amount of physical effort to acquire the product. Shopping malls consisting of a wide selection of stores seem to be preferred. Statements included the following:

- ▷ *Waar dit vir hulle convenient is, waar dit die maklikste is om te access, soos as dit op 'n busroete is, maybe naby die werk of naby die huis.*
- ▷ *As jy gewoonlik by Sandton koop en Woolworths en Loads of Living is bymekaar, sal jy daar gaan en dit daar koop, waar dit convenient is vir jou.*
- ▷ *Gaan ook seker oor die dorp of whatever. As daar net 'n Ackermans en Peps is, is dit al wat jy kan kies. Jy gaan nie 200 kilometer ry na 'n ander dorp toe om iets te koop nie.*

Though not applicable to most urban consumers, the focus groups reached a conclusion that geographical location could under certain circumstances also limit the options available to the consumer with regards to the choice of interior outlet.

- **Promotions and advertising**

Promotion is defined as "...the coordination of all seller-initiated efforts to set up channels of persuasion to sell goods and services or promote an idea" (Belch & Belch, 1989:4). The authors define advertising as "...any paid form of non personal communication about an organisation, product, service or idea by an identified sponsor". Risch (1987:85) emphasizes that the function of retail advertising and promotion is to influence both product and patronage decisions by creating favorable attitudes towards products and services within a particular retail environment consisting of various groups of consumers. The following statements made by participants indicate that various retailers achieve these objectives with varying degrees of success, but that it would also depend on the particular target market:

- ▷ *As jy dink aan goed soos linne en handdoeke, is jou eerste gedagte om na Woolworths of Edgars toe te gaan. Ek ken nie eintlik'n ander retailer behalwe Woolworths, Edgars of Mr Price nie. Ek het al gehoor van Stuttafords, maar hulle adverteer veels te min in my domain om my klientele te kry.*
- ▷ *Ackermans is glad nie in my verwysingsraamwerk nie. As ek dink aan klere, handdoeke of linne kom Ackermans nie een keer in my gedagtes op nie. Die ding is, ek weet ek gaan daar nie kry wat ek wil hê nie.*

The consumer's environment apparently is totally perceptual and has no absolute standards although retail advertising supplies certain standards and defines and determines the consumer's lifestyle. Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:200) state that: "Knowledge of buyer perception is vital in the many advertising decisions that have to be made. Decisions on marketing segmentation will be affected by knowledge of perception and knowledge of the way that consumers needs, attitudes, culture, personality, grouping stereotyping and other tendencies affect their perception and reaction to advertising campaigns".

3.1.1.4 **Potential extrinsic attributes**

In addressing the **potential level**, more intangible, emotional factors are involved. De Chernatony and McDonald's (1993:163) argument for this fourth level in the consumer's perception of a product, is based on the idea that buyers and users eventually regard augmentation as a standard requirement for various products, resulting in new added values being developed to promote a product into the potential phase. Experienced consumers recognize that competing items are often similar in terms of product formulation and that marketers are no longer focusing only on rational functional issues.

- **The brand name**

In its most simplistic form, a brand name consists of words, letters and/or numbers that can be vocalized and is intended to identify the product of one seller and differentiate it from competing products. Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999: 276) explain that the "brand" can be viewed as the tailored augmented product and that it represents a unique set of associations attached to a name, trademark or logo. De Chernatony & McDonald (1993:18) states that a successful brand "...is an identifiable product, service, person or place augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs most closely. Furthermore its success results from being able to sustain these added values in the face of competition". A brand is then also considered as a guarantee of origin, which differentiates, adds value and provides a basis for consumer preference and loyalty. It is considered by many as one of the most important assets of a firm and the term, "brand equity" is used in this regard. Aaker (1991:15) defines brand equity as the "...set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers".

An identifiable brand name is not only useful to the interior soft furnishing manufacturer/retailer. It also provides important benefits (added values) to the consumer. These were mentioned and discussed in the focus group sessions and are summarized in Table 3.6.

TABLE 3.6 BENEFITS/ADDED VALUE OF BRANDS

Benefits	Participants' statements
Product identification:	Colibri is 'n baie goeie naam. <i>X het nog gesê met handdoeke het haar ma geglo in Glodina en so aan. So sy sal basies kyk of dit dit is, want dit is wat sy ken en dit is wat sy van hou.</i>
Quality recognition and communication:	<i>Brands exist because they are known for quality. If you have a brand name customers will after a while directly price it, but they will keep with the brand names that do have quality. Everybody shopping at Woolies mentions quality. They think they are going to get quality and finished. It doesn't matter how much they pay. They buy because of the brand.</i>
Recognition of acceptable price:	<i>As 'n brand daaraan gekoppel word dan dink jy dit moet duurder wees. As jy in Edgars in stap dan verwag jy om duurder pryse te betaal. As jy in Mr Price in stap, verwag jy om goedkoper te betaal. I look at brand and price. Usually when I go buy, I look around and choose what is geared for me, what I think is the price in between and a decent quality.</i>
Value recognition and communication:	<i>Kom ons sê nou ek koop by Pep wat baie goedkoper is as byvoorbeeld Loads of Living of iets. Natuurlik omdat dit goedkoper is gaan kwaliteit nie so goed wees nie. If I think of Woolworths rejects, I think of Mr Price. So Mr Price rejects is a definite no. Instead of Woolworths rejects, I would rather buy at Mr Price – same price.</i>
Enhanced satisfaction and brand loyalty:	<i>If you do have a brand, you have to keep up the standards for the brand to be able to keep the customers happy, otherwise they won't come back to that brand.</i>
Identification and acceptance of other product offerings:	<i>Wat van ander produkte wat jy daar gekoop het. Jy weet dis beter kwaliteit as ander. Sê nou maar jy het al by Edgars gekoop en jy het al by Pep gekoop. Hulle (Edgars) kwaliteit is goed en die rede hoekom ek daar sal koop is omdat hulle sekere produkte aanhou soos Quicksilver. Ek is mal daaroor en ek sal daar koop.</i>

Product identification The mere existence of a brand name seems to help the consumer to determine which soft furnishing products are satisfactory. Brand name seems particularly important when the competitive products look similar or cannot be distinguished easily. Even in cases where product differentiation is difficult,

participants seem to develop loyalties and selected unique images of the alternative brands in these product categories. Statements in Table 3.6 reveal that participants seem to recognize particular brands of towels and have certain images of these brands that differentiate them.

Quality recognition and communication Apart from providing interior soft furnishing products with an identity, a brand name apparently assists consumers in recognizing quality and reliability. Participants' perceptions of quality seem based on intangible overall feelings, mostly associated with particular brands. Statements in Table 3.6 reveal that a brand is associated with overall quality, which is not necessarily based on product knowledge.

Recognition of acceptable price In many contexts the elements of brand equity serve to support premium pricing (Aaker, 1991:18). Remarks included in Table 3.6 confirm that certain interior retail outlets have succeeded in reaching such objectives. Price is thus considered an important quality cue and several interior retail outlets benefit in this regard from prestige high priced brands.

Value recognition and communication Statements in Table 3.6 further shows that the price, quality and value relationship is also associated with certain retail brands. Participants seem to have a certain quality or reliability perception when they patron a particular interior outlet and evaluate the acceptable price range of products on the shelf in terms of this perception.

Enhanced satisfaction and brand loyalty Consumers apparently shop with a particular brand of interior product/ outlet in mind. Focus group discussions revealed that participants recognize brand names and select those, which are believed to meet their needs and in so doing establish brand loyalty. Perceived quality, value perceptions and other brand associations seem to enhance customers' satisfaction with experience of use. Aaker (1991:16) states that brands can affect consumers' confidence in purchase decisions (due to either past-use experience or familiarity with the brand and its characteristics).

Identification and acceptance of other product offerings Responses in Table 3.6 indicate that brand names of product offerings with which consumers are more familiar, could be employed to evaluate other product offerings with which they have less experience. Consumers' acceptances of product offerings are thus accomplished as a result of existing brand reputation. Participants agreed that products sold under the same brand name are believed to be similar in quality. Such generalizations are however subjected to their experiences with the product offerings/ categories in question.

Focus group sessions revealed that participants place considerable emphasis on particular interior retail outlets and the associated retail brand images in their interpretation of the most suitable/preferred interior soft furnishing products. Leahy (Murphy, 1990:65) explains that: "Retailers have now recognized that a supermarket need not be just a place to buy a selection of brands. Instead, the shop itself, its location, its atmosphere, the service it offers, the range of goods and prices, can become the brand, and retailers can begin to extract the benefits which investment in branding can bring". Focus group discussions indicated that certain outlets have succeeded in accomplishing this goal.



Retailers have however developed a range of strategies for attracting customers into their stores and to encourage customers to buy (and continue to buy) goods such as interior soft furnishings from them rather than from their competitors. One such strategy is to sell manufacturers' branded products that may also be available elsewhere, but to differentiate the stores in some way to be more attractive to potential customers. These methods of store differentiation include the extrinsic elements discussed in the previous sections. Other retailers more-or-less exclusively sell their own label products: Woolworths is a typical example. This is often done by larger retailers and involves branded products that are specially produced for them under their brand name and to their specification and which are not available from any other source Murphy (1990:62). This strategy is based on the value of the existing store name that can be transferred to a range of goods such as interior soft furnishings. The impact of these strategies are reflected in the following statements:

- ▷ Die ding is Edgars verkoop brandnames en Woolworths verkoop hulle eie brand. So as jy by Woolworths koop, moet jy weet dis die Woolworths brand, dan is dit kwaliteit. Maar Edgars kan jy kyk na byvoorbeeld verskillende brands. Verskillende pryse gaan wees verskillende standaarde.
- ▷ *As jy kyk na "Free to be you" of "Kelso" dan weet jy dis miskien goedkoper maar die kwaliteit is rêrig sat. Maar dan kyk jy na jou labels soos "Guess" "Gotcha" "Roxy" en al daai goeters, dis goeie kwaliteit (Referring to various clothing manufacturers' brands sold by the Edgars retail outlets).*

Murphy (1990:67) warns that a major threat to manufacturers arises when the consumer starts to prefer own label brands and when own label brands are viewed superior to the manufacturer's brand. Although no manufacturer brands for bed linen were identified by participants, they were familiar with certain manufacturer brands in the toweling category, such as Glodina and Colibri. Most participants agreed that these were considered "good names". However, the discussions evolved round the fact that several retailers sell the Colibri and Glodina brands and that there are differences in the quality of these brands based on the specific retail outlet where it is sold and perceptions of these outlets. Participants further substantiated their claims based on past purchase decisions and experiences. The following statements illustrate the impact of the retailer's brand on that of the manufacturer:

- ▷ *Al is dit Colibri, wanneer jy 'n Colibri by Edgars koop gaan dit nie dieselfde kwaliteit wees as die Colibri wat jy by Mr Price koop nie. Mr Price kan dalk die rejects koop jy verstaan.*
- ▷ *Ons het al klaar gesê Mr Price verkoop, maar ook Edgars en Stuttafords. So 'n mens weet nie meer of die kwaliteit so goed is nie.*
- ▷ *Obviously its connected to price, I mean you are not going to get the same quality Glodina or Colibri towel at Mr Price than what you are going to get at Woolworths or Edgars.*
- ▷ *Dit gaan alles oor profits. Kyk dit is dieselfde brand, maar verstaan, Edgars is hierdie groot stores met 'n groter hoeveelheid mense se salarisse wat betaal moet word. By Mr Price is die goed in rye op rakke gepak. So ek is ernstig gewees oor die overheads.*

The manufacturer's brand, which has traditionally been viewed favorably, may thus be negatively affected by its distribution via interior outlets with lower quality images.

- **Brand image and associations**

Image is defined as "...how the firm is viewed by consumers and others. A firm, which sells or distributes interior soft furnishings, may be viewed as progressive or conservative, ethical or unethical, kind to consumers or indifferent, economical or high-priced and so on" (Berman & Evans, 1979:95). In this study, no evidence was found that suggest the relevance of the spiritual dimension, which refers to a firm's wider ethical view on environmental issues including a respect for communities in developing countries as well as the customer's personal well being. Yet, consumers do not buy interior soft furnishing products solely on the merits of a firm's wider ethical views and as explained by Berman and Evans (1979:395) an image involves a complex of meaning and relationships serving to characterise the firm for consumers. With regard to store image, the authors consider it a combination of factual and emotional material, since customers generally react to store characteristics in an emotional way.

According to Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:200), consumers develop store and corporate images based on a variety of information which includes amongst other personal experiences, opinions of friends and relatives, but also the information communicated through the marketing tools of advertising and promotion. Table 3.7 offers several examples of well-crystallized images of interior retail outlets in participants' frames of reference. The image of a retail brand seems to evoke a certain meaning (its positioning) in the mind of a consumer that is probably more important to its ultimate success than its intrinsic characteristics.

TABLE 3.7 IMAGES OF VARIOUS RETAIL BRANDS

Retail brand	Participants' statements
Mr Price:	<i>It is cheap. Dis swakker kwaliteit ook. Dis goedkoper, maar nie so goeie kwaliteit nie. As Edgars nie het wat ek wil hê nie, sal ek na Mr Price toe gaan, veral met klere.</i>
@home:	<i>Ja ek sou @home verkies want hulle is nuut en hulle probeer 'n baie hoë standaard handhaaf, maar hulle sal hul prys nog steeds laer hou, waar Woolworths alreeds established is. Hulle weet hulle het al klaar hulle mark. So ek sal eerder vir iemand nut of wat nuwer is gaan, maar nie soos Mr Price wat vir die heel goedkoopste gaan en nie so vreeslik omgee oor kwaliteit nie. So ek sal eerder @home probeer.</i>
Woolworths:	<i>We all can see that Woolworths' stores definitely spend more money presenting the stores as quality stores whereas Mr Price you walk in and you can look at the floors and their shelves or whatever optical elements. Compared to Woolworths or Edgars for instance it becomes clear that Woolworths or Edgars have to pay for all of that as well, so they have to bring up their prices to the quality of the product they have.</i>
Ackermans:	<i>Ek stem saammet X dat die persepsie van Ackermans is dat dit goedkoop is. Goed, as jy nou rêrig gaan kyk na die kwaliteit – dit is nie Woolworths kwaliteit nie. Maar ek dink dit is te minste gelykstaande aan Mr Price kwaliteit en dit is goed genoeg vir my. Maar dit hang ook af wat jy koop. Soos ek gesê het, as dit kinderklere is maak dit nie saak wat hulle persepsie is nie, want hulle gaan dit net 'n paar keer dra. So dit maak nie saak of dit lank gaan hou nie, want dit is nie nodig nie.</i>
Metro:	<i>To me Metro is like Checkers. That is my impression – discount, discount! "Made in Taiwan"</i>

Aaker (1991:114) emphasizes the fact that the underlying value of a brand name often is its **set of associations** and that in many product classes such as interior soft furnishings, different brands will be associated with different attributes. Therefore, important decisions need to be taken by management regarding company logos,

prices, design, colours, packaging and the like. These issues can gain a selective advantage for an interior retail store in the minds of consumers (Du Plessis & Rousseau, 1999:200).

Another aspect which also seem to warrant attention is the fact that participants seem to associate the brand with a particular use or application - several examples were noted in the previous discussions whereby the use or purpose/application of the product was considered by participants in their evaluation of interior soft furnishings and interior retail outlet characteristics. Though pertaining to clothing, the statement included in Table 3.7 regarding the suitability of one specific store for children's clothing illustrates the point. It became clear that participants use past experience to select suitable brands for particular applications/ uses.

The evidence suggests that not only do brand names have a high predictive value, but participants also seem to be more confident from experience if the brand name is visible. When the brand is used as a clue, it is isolated, catalogued, interpreted and given meaning. Following one of the basic assumptions of the symbolic interactionist perspective, the meanings associated with the brands of interior products develop in the mind of the consumer during their social interactions with others. Closely related to this aspect is the significance of the social- and mental dimensions of branding identified by Gad (2001:7), which predominantly revolve around the "intangibles" associated with the augmented and potential extrinsic interior soft furnishing attributes discussed so far (these aspects are discussed in further detail in sections to follow). Potentially important though is the fact that retailers seem to have succeeded in developing brand images that are associated with specific consumer segments and would therefore appeal to interior product users in specific social strata.

It could therefore be stated that brands (especially interior retail brands) seem to be key extrinsic influences in participants' decision-making pertaining to interior soft furnishings. This confirms the findings of numerous other studies that have shown that, when faced with purchase decisions in a crowded marketplace, consumers place considerable emphasis on the presence or absence of brand names and store names. The blind- and brand tests as well as the projective technique, discussed in the following sections, were used to substantiate these conclusions.

3.1.2 Blind- and brand tests

Comparison product tests, such as blind- and brand testing are ideal to determine market acceptance of a product (Dillon *et al*, 1990:667). In this study, these tests were used to identify consumers' preference for certain products and to establish the position of one brand of product relative to competing brands of products, specifying attributes that contributed to preference. Comparison tests, by their very nature, concentrate on the differences between the products being tested. As such, the disadvantage of the reality compared to comparison product tests such as the blind- and branded testing undertaken in this study, is highlighted.

Blind testing was undertaken where no brand name, packaging or advertising was disclosed and reactions to the "pure" product, apart from image values were desired. **Brand testing** was employed afterwards, during which the brand names of the products were disclosed to establish the effects of the brand name or brand image

on reactions to the product. For the purposes of these tests, hand towels and flat sheets from Edgars, Woolworths and Mr Price were used, based on brand preferences outlined during the first and second focus group discussions. Certain basic principles were employed in the preparation of these products for the tests, outlined in the description of data collection methods (Chapter 2).

Eleven participants completed these tests during the course of the third and fourth focus group sessions. Each participant was asked to indicate his/her choice of product and to provide reasons for preference. The following section provides insight into participants' choice of towels and sheets.

3.1.2.1 Selection of flat sheets during the blind test

- **Flat sheet A**

Flat sheet A was a single white poly-cotton sheet obtained from Woolworths. This sheet appeared almost identical to those obtained from Mr Price and Edgars, but had a higher thread count than the others. Four participants selected this sheet during the blind test. Their choice, as illustrated in Table 3.8, was influenced by a combination of the core benefit, intrinsic features as well as some extrinsic characteristics closely related to the physical product.

One participant highlighted the core benefit of the product by explaining that he felt that flat sheet A was the only one he would have slept on, whereas another chose this sheet simply because it felt good. It is interesting to note that one participant selected this flat sheet because he perceived it to crease less, whereas another participant chose the same sheet based on the fact that it creased more, thereby deducing higher cotton content. Another participant simply chose this sheet based on the presentation, stating that it was folded neater.

TABLE 3.8 CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF SHEET A DURING THE BLIND TEST

Criteria used	Participants' statements
Core benefit:	<i>Dis die enigste een waarop ek voel ek kon slaap.</i>
Intrinsic: Tactile perception	<i>Ek weet nie, dit het net vir my nice gevoel.</i>
Intrinsic/ Extrinsic: Design features related to fabric content	<i>Dis meer suiwer materiaal, dis meer katoenerig want dit kreukel meer. Hy het weer vir my die minste gekreukel.</i>
Intrinsic/ Extrinsic: Presentation	<i>It just looked folded neater. B was creased and C felt hard to me.</i>

Only one of the four participants, who initially selected the Woolworths flat sheet during the blind test, later selected the same sheet during the brand test. The majority of participants did mention that their reason for not selecting the Woolworths flat sheet during the brand test was as a result of price. They felt that the price difference between the Woolworths flat sheet and the other two brands was too significant. Based on their comments, they did not distinguish any intrinsic attributes (such as the higher thread count) that verified this price difference.

- **Flat sheet B**

Three participants chose flat sheet B. Most participants commented on the fact that they found the choice between flat sheet B (Mr Price single white poly-cotton sheet) and C (Edgars single white poly-cotton sheet) difficult. One participant stated that something put her off flat sheet B, which was confirmed by another participant and the eventual reason that surfaced is that B was creased (these products were simply taken out of the packaging and kept folded as purchased from the retail outlet). The other reasons stated for not selecting B, revolved around the texture and tactual perception, as it was perceived as being too hard. Table 3.9 provides a summary of the criteria used by participants, who did select this particular sheet.

TABLE 3.9 CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF SHEET B DURING THE BLIND TEST

Criteria used	Participants' statements
Core benefit:	<i>Dit het vir my gevoel asof ek die beste op B sal kan slaap.</i>
Intrinsic: tactile perception/ thickness	<i>...want dit het vir my die beste gevoel...die ander linne het vir my hard gevoel. ..tussen B en C kon ek nie kies nie, het maar B gevat want dit was vir my dikker.</i>
Extrinsic: quality	<i>(perception)...net beter kwaliteit gelyk.</i>

One participant reflected on the core benefit of the product and stated that the other sheets felt too hard. Another participant stated that she found it difficult to choose between B and C, and eventually decided on B, since it appeared to be thicker and of better quality. This perception of quality of course involves a judgment of overall superiority of the sheet relative to alternatives by the participant and represents an extrinsic element. The third participant indicated that she chose flat sheet B, because it felt better than the others. Two of these participants selected the same sheet during the brand test, but based their decisions on price and not any of the reasons summarized in Table 3.9. The third participant, who initially chose the Mr Price sheet during the blind test, selected the Woolworths sheet in the brand test based on the packaging.

- **Flat sheet C**

Four participants selected flat sheet C (Edgars single white poly-cotton flat sheet). Their criteria for choice, (Table 3.10), were mainly focused on the intended core benefit and intrinsic attributes, though some extrinsic elements also surfaced.

TABLE 3.10 CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF SHEET C DURING THE BLIND TEST

Criteria used	Participants' statements
Core benefit:	<i>I think I would have slept better on that.</i>
Intrinsic: tactile perception:	<i>...because it felt softer. Could not distinguish between last two (B&C), but the last one is the one I thought felt better; ...it felt better. C het vir my dikker gevoel, maar beter.</i>
Intrinsic: texture and weave:	<i>If you look at the texture it is not as see through as the other two. It has a more firm, closer weave.</i>
Extrinsic: colour	<i>It was whiter to start off, or then a bit brighter...</i>
Extrinsic: durability	<i>(perception)...it looks more durable than the others...</i>

One participant included the core benefit in his criteria for choosing this sheet. Tactile perception was highlighted as the most important criterion and three of the four participants who selected this sheet stated that it felt "better" or "softer". Another participant mentioned that the sheet had a firmer weave and indicated that it was not as transparent as the other sheets. The sheet was perceived to be more durable and even though not stated as the main reason for choice, one participant did comment on the colour. All four participants who selected this sheet during the blind test also selected it during the brand test. Except for one participant, their choices were mainly based on price during the brand test. One participant indicated that he chose the Edgars flat sheet during the brand test, since it appeared to be the same sheet as the one he chose during the blind test.

3.1.2.2. Selection of flat sheets during the brand test

- **Woolworths flat sheet**

Two participants selected the Woolworths flat sheet in the brand test. Their choice, as illustrated in Table 3.11 was predominantly influenced by extrinsic features related to the expected levels of the product:

TABLE 3.11 CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF THE WOOLWORTHS SHEET DURING THE BRAND TEST

Criteria used	Participants' statements
Intrinsic: fabric weave	<i>Die stitching lyk of hy baie nader aan mekaar is.</i>
Extrinsic: packaging	<i>Their packaging was more presentable and upmarket than Mr Price.</i>
Extrinsic: labeling	<i>... with the details of cotton and precautions and details how to wash it.</i>
Extrinsic: presentation (contributing to quality perception)	<i>Jy sien die naat waar die ander nie die naat wys nie en vir my die rede hoekom die naat sou wys is omdat hulle weet hulle naat se kwaliteit is goed, hulle hoef dit nie weg te steek nie...</i>
Extrinsic: quality perception	<i>Dit het vir my gelyk of hy net 'n beter kwaliteit is. I don't think there is any substitute for quality.</i>

One participant used packaging and labeling as a criterion for choice of this sheet, based on its visual impact and the information provided on it. This confirms Hisrich and Peters' (1990:332) view that packaging has become a promotional tool, which could be utilized as an image builder. As would be applicable to sheets, where the consumer chooses from several alternatives on a shelf, the packaging becomes a point of sale display. In this particular case it also provided the participants with an easy identification of the corporate name and was informative, indicating clearly what type of sheet it was, size and textile content as well as care instructions. Interestingly, the way in which the particular sheet was packaged also lead to one participants' perception of quality. This participant placed particular emphasis on quality as an important consideration, and stated that seams that are left visible would indicate that the retailer is not "hiding" anything. Another participant mentioned that he did not select the specific sheet due to the fact that he had noticed that the seam was not stitched straight.

It was previously mentioned that only one of the four participants, who initially selected the Woolworths flat sheet during the blind test, selected the same sheet during the branded test. This participant did notice the higher

thread count of the sheet by explaining that the "stitching" (referring to the fabric weave) was closer together. However, he only noticed this aspect during the brand test and emphasized his belief that there is no substitute for quality. His perception of quality associated with the Woolworths brand lead him to examine the Woolworths sheet in more depth for any functional attributes that could be linked to this perception.

Several participants commented on the fact that they did not perceive any intrinsic differences between the sheets. As such, they felt that the price difference between the Woolworths flat sheet and the other two brands was too significant. Their reason for not selecting the Woolworths flat sheet during the brand test could therefore be attributed to the reference price and perceived value.

• **Mr Price flat sheet**

Four participants selected the Mr Price flat sheet during the brand test. Reasons summarized in Table 3.12, mostly involved expected extrinsic elements:

TABLE 3.12: CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF THE MR PRICE FLAT SHEET DURING THE BRAND TEST

Criteria used	Participants' statements
Extrinsic: price	<i>...oor die prys, dit was die groot ding. ...want dit was presies helfde van die prys gewees van Woolworths se produk. ...want obviously prys en dit lyk vir my presies dieselfde. So bloot net op prys.</i>
Extrinsic: Packaging and design parity contributing to choice based on price	<i>...want dit is die goedkoopste en as jy by die winkel is gaan jy nie jou hand by die pakkie indruk nie. Daardie pakkie is toegeplak, so jy gaan op looks en almal lyk dieselfde vir my...</i>
Extrinsic: quality	<i>Ek het regtig nie 'n probleem met hulle kwaliteit nie.</i>
Experience: contributing to quality perception	<i>Ek koop al my goed, al my linne by Mr Price en ons het dit nou al vir twee jaar en dis goeie kwaliteit.</i>

Everyone who selected the Mr Price sheet, mentioned price as the determining factor and agreed that they could not distinguish any design feature that differentiated the sheets used for the purposes of this test. As such they selected the Mr Price sheet since it was the cheapest (priced at R59.99 it was R70 cheaper than the Woolworths sheet and R20 cheaper than the Edgars sheet). One participant mentioned her perception of quality based on previous experience. Clearly, participants seem to have some pre-conceived ideas regarding the extrinsics they expect to find related to the image of a particular retail brand. The impact of packaging and brand image were noted through the following statements:

- ▷ *I agree. That pink "single" sticker that they (Mr Price) have makes it look a bit lower grade.*
- ▷ *Just remember, once you go into a store, you already have a brand name connected to the product. So once you go into Mr Price you don't expect the packaging to look like a million dollars.*
- ▷ *I think packaging influences me less than price. I look at packaging, but then I look at price.*
- ▷ *It (packaging) is one of the contributing factors when you make a decision in the store – based on one specific brand of product.*

Two participants thus selected the Mr Price sheet during the blind- and brand test, even though their reasons for selection differed in each test. The other two participants who selected the Mr Price sheet during the brand test, both selected the Woolworths sheet during the blind test based on tactile perception. It may be possible that the absence of price influences and even forces consumers to examine discriminating factors such as quality more intensely.

- **Edgars flat sheet**

Five participants selected the Edgars flat sheet in the brand test. As the most preferred product, those who selected this sheet indicated various attributes as illustrated in Table 3.13, as reason for their preference. Attributes mostly involved extrinsic features at the expected, augmented and potential levels of the product.

One participant commented on the packaging and another mentioned the fact that she liked the "look"/presentation of the product. Most of the participants agreed that the price of the item was reasonable by implying the concept of reference price. One participant's perception of quality was enhanced by previous experience. It seemed that certain participants, in their evaluation of the most suitable product also used the price, quality and value relationship. The Edgars sheet was cheaper than the Woolworths sheet, but more expensive than the Mr Price sheet. It was therefore perceived as better quality for a little more money than the Mr Price option, but considerably less expensive than the Woolworths option. The in-store credit services offered by Edgars convinced another participant that she would have purchased this sheet under normal circumstances. The social dimension of the Edgars brand was also highlighted as a deciding factor.

TABLE 3.13 CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF THE EDGARS SHEET DURING THE BRAND TEST

Criteria used	Participants' statements
Blind test influence:	...it looked like the same one (as chosen in blind test)
Intrinsic: tactile	...felt relatively good...
Extrinsic: packaging	The packaging was very nice, nicely done...
Extrinsic: presentation	I like the look of it .It looks good.
Extrinsic: price	...because the prices are relative; ...reasonable price... ...because of price, because it is ridiculous, a R139 at Woolworths for sheeting.
Extrinsic: price, quality and value relationship	...want dit was baie goedkoper gewees as Woolworths, maar dit was net 'n klein bietjie duurder as Mr Price en dit was vir my beter kwaliteit vir net 'n klein bietjie duurder.
Experience: contributing to quality perception	I have bought from Edgars before and quality was not a problem.
Extrinsic: in-store credit	I have an account with Edgars, so that is where I would have bought it anyway.
Extrinsic: retail image	...but I felt proud that I would have bought that, it was Edgars...

It was pointed out previously that all of the participants who selected this sheet during the blind test also selected it during the brand test. Except for one participant, their reasons for selection did however differ from those stated during the blind test. One participant indicated that he chose the Edgars flat sheet during the brand test, because he thought it to be the same sheet as the one he chose during the blind test.

3.1.2.3 Selection of towels during the blind test

- **Towel A**

Seven participants indicated towel A (Edgars' Private Label white hand towel) as their preferred choice of towel during the blind test. From their statements summarized in Table 3.14, their choice was mostly based on intrinsic properties (categorized as the generic level of the product).

Six participants agreed that towel A was softer than the rest and that it was the main reason for their choice. One participant pointed out that the thickness of the towel was very important to her as a result of her past experience in which she found that thinner towels don't seem to last as long and they tend to become even thinner after washing. Two other participants also mentioned thickness as a factor contributing to their choice. One participant stated that the towel was "fluffier", thus implying a combination of softness and thickness. Another participant added to his preference for softness, his perception that the towel seemed more absorbent and his view that the fabric it consisted of, as being stronger.

TABLE 3.14 CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF TOWEL A DURING THE BLIND TEST

Criteria used:	Participants' statements:
Intrinsic: absorbency	(perception that it is)... <i>more absorbent...</i>
Intrinsic: tactile perception Softness	...it was softer; ...nice and soft, doesn't feel scratchy. ... <i>want dit het vir my die sagste gevoel.</i>
Thickness	... <i>it was fluffier, fluffier than the rest</i> ... <i>was bit thicker as well; ...it is a much thicker towel;</i> ... <i>want dit was vir my die dikste, ek hou van dik towels.</i>
Experience: contributing to preference for thickness	<i>Ek hou nie daarvan as dit so dun is, want dan hou dit nie so lank nie. Jy kan sien na 'n paar wasse dan gaan dit so, dit word net dunner.</i>
Intrinsic: fabric strength	... <i>strength was there in the material.</i>

Interestingly, one of the participants who said in the focus group discussion that she only purchases Edgars' "Private Label" towels, did not select this towel during the blind test when identification of the brand was absent. She did however select this towel during the brand test when the label was exposed. Only four of the seven participants, who initially selected this towel during the blind test, selected the same towel during the brand test. The other three selected the Woolworths towel during the brand test, stating their reason for choice as quality. The four participants who did select the same Edgars towel during the brand test, mentioned factors other than those indicated in Table 3.14.

- **Towel B**

Only one participant selected towel B (Mr Price white hand towel) during the blind test, based on the tactual perception of the product. The same participant selected the Woolworths towel during the brand test, based on an acceptable price range.

- **Towel C**

Three participants preferred towel C (Woolworths own label white hand towel) and all of them based their decision on tactual perception, stating that the towel was softer and smoother than the others. One participant added that the finishing of the towel was more acceptable than others'. Their preference was therefore entirely based on intrinsic properties of the product as indicated in Table 3.15. Only one of the three participants selected this towel during the brand test, based on perception of quality.

TABLE 3.15 CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF TOWEL C DURING THE BLIND TEST

Criteria employed	Participants' statements
Intrinsic: tactile perception	<i>...ook net nice gevoel; ...hy was vir my sagter... ...dit het vir my meer egalig gevoel as die ander.</i>
Extrinsic: design feature:	<i>...ook die afwerking is vir my meer aanvaarbaar, die mooiste gelyk.</i>

3.1.2.4 Selection of towels during the brand test

- **Woolworths towel**

Five participants preferred the Woolworths towel during the brand test, mostly based on extrinsic properties as illustrated in Table 3.16. These properties are related to the expected and augmented product levels. The influence of Woolworths' quality image that forms part of the potential level is however noticeable.

TABLE 3.16 CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF THE WOOLWORTHS TOWEL DURING THE BRAND TEST

Criteria used	Participants' statements
Intrinsic: tactile	<i>...just felt better to all the others, even Edgars.</i>
Extrinsic: price	<i>The price difference is so small that I could choose exactly what I wanted</i>
Extrinsic: price, quality & value perception:	<i>Soos X gesê het, die prys was nie soveel duurder nie. Jy kan dit justify want dit was bietjie beter kwaliteit.</i>
Extrinsic: quality:	<i>...want ek vertrou Woolworths se towel quality; ...ek het gevoel dis kwaliteit.</i>
Experience: contributing to quality perception	<i>I have bought from Edgars before and I have bought from Woolworths and the ones from Woolworths is definitely better quality.</i>

One participant included the intrinsic tactile perception of the towel as a reason for selection. However, most of the participants who preferred the Woolworths towel mentioned quality as a determining factor. One participant's previous experience contributed to the perception of quality. Participants used the price-, quality and value relationship in their evaluation and the quality image associated with the Woolworths brand contributed in this regard. The price was perceived to be acceptable (as opposed to the sheet brand test in which the Woolworths option was found to be too expensive) and participants felt that due to the insignificant price difference they could select the towel brand they preferred most.

As mentioned previously, only one of the participants selected the Woolworths towel in both the blind- and brand tests. Tactile perception was given as reason during the blind test while extrinsic quality perception was mentioned during the brand test.

- **Mr Price towel**

None of the participants selected the Mr Price towel during the brand test. Some commented on the pattern woven into the edges of the towel - they disliked this design feature. Most participants agreed that the difference in price among the three brands were not significant (the Mr Price towel was priced at R29.99, the Woolworths towel at R35.99 and the Edgars towel at R39.99). They selected the more expensive brands because they felt that they were choosing better quality for a limited increase of financial expenditure. This confirms the importance of value perception as a potential extrinsic feature.

Several participants stated during the focus group discussions that they would purchase from Mr Price, even though they perceive the quality to be of a lower standard, since their products are more affordable. Regular patrons of Mr Price admitted that under normal purchase situations their choice might have been different, since they evaluate one product at a time. The frame of reference under these circumstances will be the product that is currently being used and all other products in the category that he or she is familiar with. This is reflected in the following statement:

- ▷ *If I think of my knowledge of towels from Mr Price, I will buy my towels there any day, because I bought a towel there and I am still using it. When I looked at the towel from Mr Price it looked good to me. I was a bit cautious of the rim, but I would buy that towel. It would be hard choice for me, thinking I have just been to Edgars a couple minutes ago and now I am standing in Mr Price, remembering Edgars had a nice looking towel. Now what I have is the actual price and what I have in front of me and I think I would have probably ended up buying the Mr Price towel because it was cheaper, because it feels the same and I know Mr Price towels are good.*

- **Edgars towel**

Six participants selected the Edgars hand towel, mentioning expected extrinsic features (illustrated in Table 3.17) as reason for choice. Participants agreed that the intrinsic tactile perception of the towel was a reason for choice and one participant added that the "look" of the towel appealed to her. Some participants commented on the pattern woven into the edges of the towel, which represents an extrinsic design feature. Even though the Edgars towel was the most expensive of the three options, the price of the towel was still acceptable. One participant acknowledged the fact that he did not recognize the price of the towel until another participant drew his attention to it. It seems as if the potential extrinsic image value associated with the Edgars brand also contributed to preference.

Only four of the initial seven participants, who selected this towel during the blind test, selected the same towel during the brand test. The four participants' reasons for choice during the blind test, were mainly based on intrinsic tactile perception.

TABLE 3.17 CRITERIA USED IN THE SELECTION OF THE EDGARS TOWEL DURING THE BRAND TEST

Criteria used	Participants' statements
Intrinsic: tactile	<i>...die sagste gevoel; ...softer towel; ...it felt nice; ...felt relatively good.</i>
Extrinsic: design	<i>I like the look of it.</i>
Extrinsic: design feature: edging	<i>I preferred the neutral, formal rim than the wiggly thing; ... ek het gehou van die afwerking; ...soos X gesê het, die afwerking was mooi.</i>
Extrinsic: price	<i>...prices are relative; ... het nie eers na prys gekyk tot X na die prys gekyk het.</i>
Extrinsic: image	<i>Edgars, because it is of course Edgars.</i>

3.1.2.4 Conclusions drawn from the blind-and brand tests

Participants' selection of towels and sheets in the blind tests seemed to be predominantly based on generic intrinsic attributes related to the intended core benefits of the products in question. The intrinsic criteria employed by participants in their selection of particular towels during the blind test mostly revolved around the tactile perception of the toweling fabric. The intrinsic criteria used by participants in their selection of sheets during the blind test also involved the tactile perception and texture of the sheeting fabric. These intrinsic attributes resemble those identified during the focus group discussions. The intrinsic size/ dimensions of the towels and sheets (identified in the focus group discussions) were however not found to be discriminating features. Absorbency was also not highlighted to the same extent in these tests, as was the case in the focus group discussions. It could be argued that these criteria cannot be objectively evaluated prior to use. Some participants added to their selection criteria in the blind test, the perception of quality but failed to justify this aspect in specific terms.

During the selection of towels and sheets in the brand test, criteria differed considerably from those used in the blind tests - even in cases where the same item was selected in both tests. During the brand tests, participants mostly based their selection on extrinsic features. The impact of packaging and labeling on participants' selection of particular soft furnishing products was defined in more apparent terms during the brand test than in the focus group sessions. Price also seemed to be a major contributing factor in the selection of particular sheets and several participants used the association between price, quality and value to select the most feasible alternative.

Quality was mentioned as important criterion during all the brand tests. Some participants based their perception of quality on previous purchase experiences and an overall judgment of quality or superiority of the retail brand selected. Certain individuals used surrogate attributes such as the presentation of the product to justify their perception of quality. It seemed as if image associated with a particular retail brand also influenced participants' choice (e.g. the Woolworths product was selected based on the criterion of quality, which was derived from the Woolworths quality image).

The Edgars brand was preferred during the brand tests and amongst other criteria, the augmented extrinsic features such as in-store credit, as well as potential extrinsic attributes such as brand image seemed to influence choice. Even in cases where product differentiation is difficult, it seems as if consumers develop loyalties and

select unique images of the alternative brands, rather than to base their decisions on the intrinsic attributes at hand.

The conclusions drawn from these tests coincide with those derived from the focus group discussions. It would appear that the mere existence of a brand name assists the consumer in determining the most satisfactory interior soft furnishing product. Participants seem to recognize the brands and associate certain images with these brands to differentiate them from other brands. This aspect seems to be particularly important when the competitive products are very similar. In addition to providing a product with an identity, the brand name seems to assist the participant in recognizing product quality. It seems as if brand names that are recognized by participants and are believed to meet their needs, are selected before alternative brands. De Chernatony and McDonald (1993:72) concluded that consumers look for clues that they believe will give an indication of product performances rather than engaging in a detailed search for information when choosing between competing brands. The blind- and brand tests illustrated the importance of interior retail brands as clues/symbols.

Even though the intention of this study is more directed at *describing and understanding*, explanatory charts have been included (Figure 3.3 and 3.4) to illustrate visually the significance of extrinsic properties in the choice of interior soft furnishings. It could be argued that if extrinsic attributes had no impact on participants' selection of a particular sheet or towel, the number of participants selecting a particular option during the brand- and blind tests would show agreement. Of the 11 participants who participated in these tests, only 5 selected the same towel in the blind- and brand tests. As far as the sheets are concerned, 7 participants selected the same option in the blind test and brand test (even though their reasons for choice differed in each test). These findings can only be explained in terms of the added values that are aroused in the minds of consumers upon recognizing familiar retail brands.

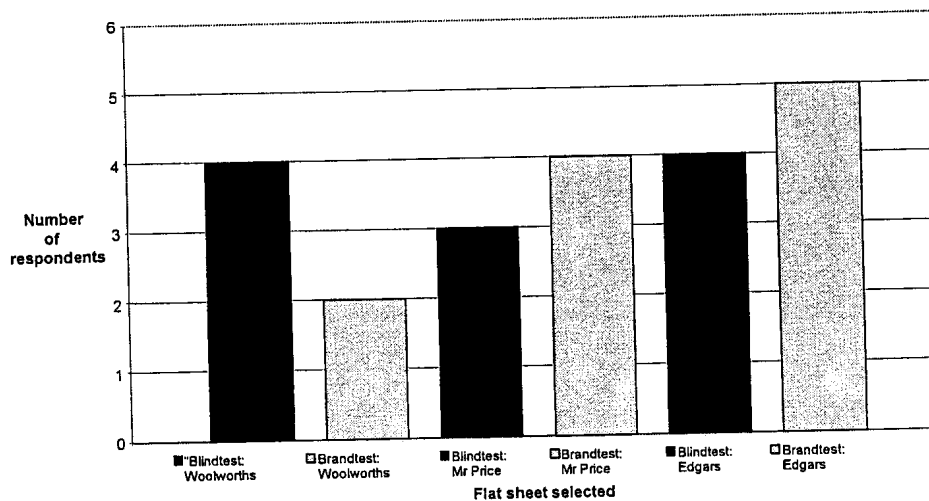


FIGURE 3.1: A COMPARISON OF RESPONDENTS' CHOICE OF SHEET IN BLIND-AND BRAND TESTS

The presence of extrinsics can either encourage or discourage consumers to choose a product. Fewer participants chose the branded Woolworths sheets; price was mentioned as the negative variable. Increase in the choice of the Edgars sheet was ascribed to positive previous experience, perception of quality and account facilities.

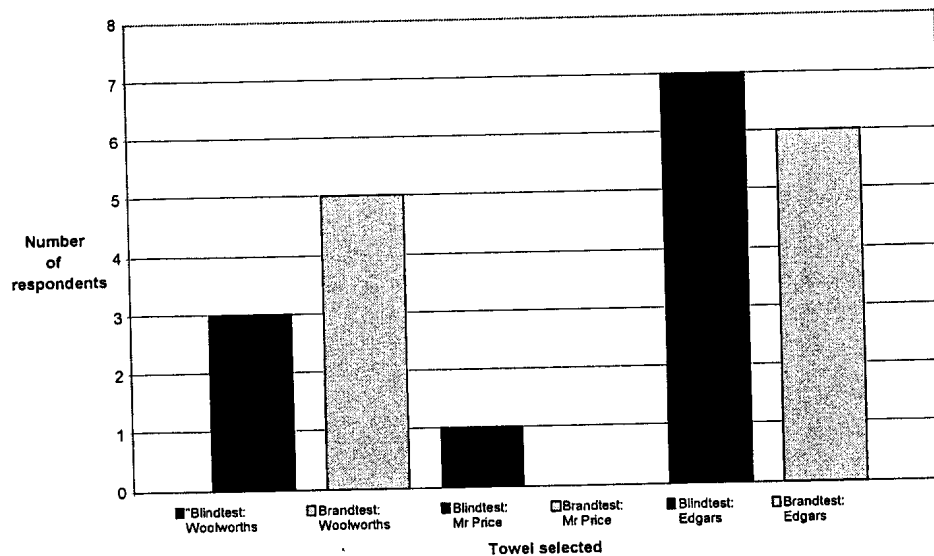


FIGURE 3.2: A COMPARISON OF RESPONDENTS' CHOICE OF TOWEL IN BLIND-AND BRAND TESTS

Reasons given for not choosing Mr Price towels during the brand test reflected the impact of extrinsics. Although some participants chose these towels during the blind test, it was felt (during the brand test) that small price differences merit the choice of the "better" brands that have a reputation of quality.

The use of this technique was beneficial in verifying conclusions drawn from the focus group discussions. It would seem that interior soft furnishing products (such as towels and sheets) are interpreted or viewed as much more than the sum of their ingredients and features. The findings of the blind- and brand tests illustrate the importance of the expected, augmented and potential extrinsic product attributes, when there is a high level of intrinsic product parity. Retailers seem to have been successful in using extrinsic elements to imbue products with imagery or intangible value that influence young urban consumers' purchase decisions. It is therefore argued that extrinsic aspects, such as the particular outlet from which the soft furnishings are sold, are powerful means of differentiation and enhances the product's appeal to a specific target market. The projective technique was consequently used to substantiate these arguments.

3.1.3 Projective technique

Focus group discussions as well as the blind- and brand tests, suggested the important impact of extrinsic properties associated with retail brand/image during the choice of interior soft furnishings. A projective technique was used for the purpose of triangulation: participants were asked to complete "an unfinished scenario" which described a situation where their linen and towels had been stolen from a washing line and where conditions of an insurance claim stipulated that they had to replace these items from a particular outlet (Appendix A). They were asked to indicate their choice of shopping mall and outlet, as well as reasons for their choice in written format. The use of this technique was meant to obtain information on participants' feelings and beliefs indirectly. Thirteen participants, who also participated in focus group discussions, blind- and brand tests, completed this task.

3.1.3.1 *Participants' selection of particular retail outlets*

Preferred shopping malls included Menlyn, Sandton, Fourways and Eastgate, based on the geographic location of these malls in close proximity of participants' homes (this indicates the augmented extrinsic attribute of accessibility). These malls are located in areas resembling the B and C clusters of the Delphi classification, which are typically inhabited by individuals belonging to higher social strata. Other reasons were that these malls contained stores with the widest assortment of products. Ambiance, spaciousness and the perception of style were also mentioned as influencing factors.

Outlets selected by the participants included Woolworths, @home, Mr Price Home, Sheet Street, Stuttafords and Loads of Living. Edgars was not included. The focus group discussions revealed that a major contributing factor to participants' patronage of the Edgars chain of outlets resulted from the convenience of having an Edgars account. The projective technique scenario excluded the additional value of this augmented extrinsic element and could therefore have contributed to none of the participants selecting Edgars as their preferred outlet. The following section provides a summary of the criteria used in participants' selection of particular outlets.

- **Woolworths**

The six participants who indicated Woolworths as their preferred retail outlet to replace their linen and towels from, provided the following reasons:

- ▷ **Availability of extra length sheets:** One participant included this feature as a criterion for preference, which underpins the intended **core benefit** of a sheet to cover a mattress. As such, a **generic intrinsic attribute** (size/ dimensions of a sheet), which also came to the fore in the focus group discussions, served as a differentiating element.
- ▷ **Product mix:** Five participants' statements included descriptions of Woolworths' wide variety of styles, perceived as modern and up to date. Colour as well as mix and match features were mentioned as differentiating aspects (**extrinsic, expected level**).



- ▷ **Service:** This store's refund policy (**extrinsic, augmented level**) was viewed as an added value in case of product defects or if the product does not meet the buyer's needs, which reduces perceived risk.
- ▷ **Quality perception:** All participants indicated Woolworths' quality as being of a high standard and the consequent assurance of quality products (**extrinsic, potential level**).
- ▷ **Value perception:** Even though Woolworths' prices were higher, the quality of their products was regarded/ believed to be higher. Satisfaction with past purchases from Mr Price was acknowledged and persuaded a participant to be less concerned with the lower quality image associated with the Mr Price brand. This was however not strong enough to reduce risk perception involved in her replacement of sheets, with which she did not have much previous experience to rely on. For this, Woolworths was chosen due to the quality image of the store (**extrinsic, potential level**).

- **Loads of Living**

Interestingly, all the participants who chose Loads of Living, were male. Their reasons included the following:

- ▷ **Availability of extra length sheets:** A core benefit on the **generic level** (one participant).
- ▷ **Price:** Affordable price range (**extrinsic, expected level**).
- ▷ **Product mix/variety:** All participants mentioned Loads of Living's merchandise assortment as a criterion for choice. It was described as stylish and fashionable with appealing colours (**extrinsic, augmented level**).
- ▷ **Service:** Customer service (**extrinsic, augmented level**).
- ▷ **Quality perception:** Superior quality (**extrinsic, potential level**).
- ▷ **Past purchase decisions:** Participants' previous experiences contributed to their preference.

- **@home**

Reasons for selecting this store included the following:

- ▷ **Price:** Describing the store as reasonably priced (**extrinsic, expected level**).
- ▷ **Quality perception:** High standard and quality (**extrinsic, potential level**).

- **Stuttafords**

The individual who chose this store, presented the following reasons:

- ▷ **Product design:** Plain designs were found appealing (**extrinsic, expected level**).
- ▷ **Quality perception:** Superior quality (**extrinsic, potential level**).

- **Mr Price Home**

Reasons given by the three participants who chose this store, included the following:

- ▷ **Price:** The principle of getting more for less money (**extrinsic, expected level**).
- ▷ **Product mix:** Appealing range in terms of colour and variety (**extrinsic, augmented level**).
- ▷ **Quality perception:** Acceptable quality (**extrinsic, potential level**).
- ▷ **Past purchase decisions:** Past experiences that reduced risk perception and encouraged repeat purchases.

• **Sheet Street**

The participant who preferred this retail outlet gave the following reasons:

- ▷ **Price:** Reasonably priced (**extrinsic, expected level**).
- ▷ **Product mix:** Modern/ fashionable merchandise assortment (**extrinsic, augmented level**).

3.1.3.2 Conclusions drawn from the projective technique

Table 3.18 provides an analysis of participants' written statements in terms of the model of De Chernatony and McDonald (1993:8) that describe the extent to which a product can be augmented. The projective technique data produced results that resembled those of the focus group discussions as well as the product comparison tests with the exception of a few elements that could be attributed to the nature of the specific data collection method.

TABLE 3.18 ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS' WRITTEN STATEMENTS OBTAINED FROM THE PROJECTIVE TECHNIQUE

Attributes	Participants' written statements
Intrinsics; generic level: Size/dimensions:	<i>XL for sheets etc; ...stock king size extra length, extra deep.</i>
Extrinsics; expected level: Product design: Acceptable price:	<i>...with plain design (linen). It is more or less affordable within the given price range above; It is a reasonably priced shop; Their prices are very reasonable; Good price; ...can buy one or two of everything.</i>
Extrinsics; augmented level Product mix (variety): Depth of mix: Colour Depth of mix: style and fashion trends Service: Return policy	<i>...has a wide variety to choose from; Great variety; Nice variety. They have the colours which I like; ...with the colour scheme of my house; ...most probably find colours that need; different /variety of colours. These stores carry full ranges of all styles; ...might not find what I am looking for in smaller outlet; Mix and match; I like the styles; The selection is usually up to date; Modern; Their stock is modern; ...fashion available there. Customer service. Their return policy is excellent in case of defect or even if you've changed your mind.</i>
Extrinsics; potential level: Quality perception: Value perception:	<i>Quality assured; ...it has the best quality; Good quality; ...believe in quality of products; You know you get quality products; I know it will be quality products; Quality; ...where the quality is of fair to high standard; Quality linen; ...with a high standard and high quality based on previous products which I bought there. Woolworths -High quality, but a bit higher price range (Sheeting). Towels at Mr Price – Bit lower quality but accessible price range.</i>
Past purchase experience:	<i>Have bought from Mr Price and happy with towels.</i>



Extrinsic factors on the augmented and potential levels seem to play an important role in participants' selection of a retail outlet. **Quality** (or more specifically perception of overall quality associated with the particular retail brand) was mentioned as being important by 11 of the 13 participants. Emphasis was placed on this aspect in the focus group discussions as well as during product comparison tests. **Product mix/ merchandise assortment** offered by the retail merchant was another extrinsic feature, which also seem to be quite influential. (Nine participants specified this augmented extrinsic element in their evaluation of the most suitable retail outlet). The **depth of the product range** in terms of style, fashion trends and colours seem to be important - this coincides with the focus group findings.

Services offered by retail outlets featured less in the projective technique exercise than in the focus group discussions (with the exception of returns policies). The price, quality and value relationship, which featured prominently in the focus group sessions as well as the product comparison tests, was confirmed in the projective technique task. The projective technique was beneficial in clarifying the influence of past purchase experiences in forming such an association. In some instances participants preferred different outlets to replace different product categories based on previous experience. Focus group discussions as well as the projective technique highlighted the fact that participants tend to purchase towels more regularly than linen, resulting in increased experience with this particular product category. The significance of post purchase processes is addressed in further detail in the next section. Projective technique findings revealed that with repeated trial participants gain confidence in a "retail brand" and that consistent reliability reduces risk perception.

The impact of extrinsic attributes on young urban consumers purchase decisions involving interior soft furnishings can best be understood according to Murphy's statement (1990:4): "As consumer choice has grown, as marketplaces have become more crowded, and as new products have been aimed at increasingly tightly targeted sectors, intangible factors have come to play an increasingly important role in brand selection". Although quality is essential to interior soft furnishing products' success and despite the fact that no successful brand can exist without satisfying the needs of consumers, additional extrinsic intangible elements of interior soft furnishings are often critical in persuading the consumer to choose a product, because more than one option can potentially satisfy consumer's requirements.

3.2 SATISFACTION IN CHOOSING INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS WITH SPECIFIC EXTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES

The consumer decision-making process, driven by a combination of lifestyle, attitudes and situational influences, begins with the recognition that a problem/ need exists (difference between existing state and desired state). Under these circumstances consumers generally undertake a search for information to identify relevant and feasible alternatives. Once this information has been gathered, decisions can be made regarding the selection of a retail outlet and the actual purchase of a product. The post purchase processes, which follow these decisions, could include a simple evaluation or an extensive performance evaluation, use and disposal (Hawkins *et al*, 1992:23).



Swan and Combs (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998:40) highlight the fact that products have an instrumental as well as an expressive (symbolic) performance dimension that influence the compilation of consumers' evaluation criteria. The instrumental dimension represents the physical functioning of a product, which relates to the **functional dimension** of a product as identified by Gad (2001:93). The expressive or symbolic dimension refers to the influence of the product on the consumer's emotions, which is addressed by the product's **social and mental dimensions**. In some cases the consumer's satisfaction is largely related to one of these performance dimensions, whereas other products might be subject to both the instrumental and expressive performance dimensions (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998:40).

The focus group discussions, blind and brand tests as well as the projective technique revealed extrinsic attributes (representing the expected, augmented and potential product levels which are closely related to the social and mental dimensions) to be important determinants in young urban consumers' purchase decisions regarding interior soft furnishings. This section will highlight those attributes of interior soft furnishing that were indicated by the focus groups as performance elements that contributed to their eventual satisfaction or dissatisfaction in post purchase experiences.

3.2.1 The impact of product attributes on young urban consumers' post purchase evaluation of interior soft furnishings

Even though this study remains focused on extrinsic characteristics, intrinsic properties related to the core benefits of towels and sheets mentioned during data collection are included to reflect on the collective influence of both. These intrinsic attributes form an integral part of the instrumental performance dimension of the product and is discussed in the following section.

3.2.1.1 *The impact of generic intrinsic attributes in the post purchase evaluation of interior soft furnishings*

Table 3.19 summarizes intrinsic properties identified by participants as important in terms of influencing their satisfaction with soft furnishings. These coincide with the data generated in terms of choice criteria for soft furnishings (Table 3.1). Some of these intrinsic attributes such as absorbency are difficult to judge prior to use and would therefore be more relevant in consumers' post purchase evaluations.

TABLE 3.19 GENERIC INTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES OF TOWELS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO SATISFACTION/ DISSATISFACTION

Intrinsic attributes	Participants' statements
Absorbency: -Related to fabric texture:	<i>Die handdoek moet droog word. Baie handdoeke word nie droog nie. Hy is redelik dik, so ek droog nie net my rug af en dan is hy sopnat nie.</i>
Texture and tactile perception of fabric: -Related to pile:	<i>Ek dink vir my met 'n handdoek is tevredenheid dat hy dik en wollerig bly vir 'n lang tyd. As hy vir lank so kan bly dan is ek happy. 'n Handdoek wat my tevrede maak is een wat verseker nie hard is nie, want my hele lewe lank het ek harde handdoeke en die paar kere wat ek 'n sagte handdoek gehad het is dit so wonderlik dat ek rêrig die ekstra prys sal uithaal vir 'n goeie handdoek. ...maar dink aan al daardie ou handdoeke in jou huis, hulle word so dun. Daardie bolletjies word plat en dit is vir my sleg.</i>
Strength of weave:	<i>Ek is tevrede met my handdoeke, want ek het dit nou amper twee jaar en dit het niks gate of so iets nie. Maar buiten dit, trek dit nie los nie, die lussetjies trek nie uit nie.</i>
Size/dimensions:	<i>(with regard to satisfaction)...die handdoek moet groot genoeg wees.</i>

Even though these intrinsic attributes were considered important decisive factors in participants' satisfaction with certain towels, these attributes were usually linked to/ associated with specific extrinsic variables such as the particular retailer brand. The following statements confirm this association:

- ▷ *Ek het al handdoeke by Mr Price gekoop and I will buy there again en ek meen daardie van @home is vir my goed inmekaar geweef.*
- ▷ *...the one's from @home, because what he said, when you get out of a shower you need a towel that takes all the moisture off. You don't want to wipe yourself once and then this thing is dripping with water.*

The generic intrinsic attributes, which were identified by participants as contributing to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with sheets, also coincide with those (Table 3.2) that influenced evaluation and selection in their purchase decisions. These included the tactile perception of the sheeting fabric as well as the size/ dimensions of the sheet. Perhaps more so than in the case of towels, these intrinsic attributes were associated with a particular retail brand as illustrated in the followings statements:

- ▷ *Ek het nou al gesien met Edgars se linne, so half asof dit van harde materiaal gemaak is en dan is dit nou 'n duur ding. Ek hou nie van die keuse van materiaal nie. Dit is hoekom ek verkies om nie daar te koop nie, veral nie daar nie, omdat ek nie van die materiaal hou nie. Dis te hard, maar dit is duur.*
- ▷ *Dis asof Woolworths se goed bietjie meer katoenerig en sagter is, daardie katoen gevoel het.*
- ▷ *Ek dink weer as jy kyk na die kwaliteit van Mr Price, gaan jy sulke bolletjies kry. As jy op 'n Mr Price outjie slaap, gaan hy bolletjies maak na 'n paar weke.*
- ▷ *Wel, ek sal nie weer lakens by Mr Price koop nie. Ek het al lakens by hulle gekoop en hulle sit nie so lekker aan die matras nie. Dis asof die goed nie behoorlik pas nie en ek dink hulle queen size doen nie eintlik die ding nie.*
- ▷ *Dit klink my ek is geforseer om weer daar (Loads of Linen) te koop. Dis die enigste een wat ekstra lengte aanhou.*



Participants did acknowledge the fact that interior soft furnishings' ability to retain intrinsic characteristics such as those mentioned, would depend to a large extent on the owner's diligence in following care instructions:

- ▷ *Dit hang natuurlik ook af hoe jy hom was, maar hy moet nie hard wees as hy uit die was uitkom nie.*
- ▷ *Dan moet jy dit reg was. As jy dit tumble dry, dan maak dit dit sag. As jy dit in die son droog maak, dan maak dit dit hard. Twee, drie handdoeke sal verskil afhangende van hoe jy hulle versorg.*

Focus group discussions revealed that generic intrinsic attributes are key instrumental performance criteria during the post purchase evaluation of interior soft furnishings. Maddox (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998:40) however accentuates that the positive evaluation of the instrumental dimension would in itself not ensure customer satisfaction in the absence of the minimum requirements of the expressive dimension. In this regard, the intrinsic attributes are associated with a specific brand of product that addresses the more expressive dimension.

3.2.1.2 *The impact of expected extrinsic attributes in the post purchase evaluation of interior soft furnishings.*

At the expected level, products are made to satisfy purchasers' minimum requirements for attributes such as label, design, price and quality. Participants' statements in Table 3.20, illustrate the significance of these features in their post purchase evaluation of interior soft furnishings.

Style is considered the distinctive manner of construction or presentation in a product such as a towel. One participant pointed out that the initial purchase decision might, to a large extent focus on this aspect in association with other extrinsic variables such as the particular brand. In an extensive post purchase performance evaluation, this aspect however remains a significant extrinsic feature contributing to the owner's satisfaction or dissatisfaction, while other extrinsic variables such as the retail brand that seemed very important initially, may fade or become less important over a prolonged period of time.

Design represents a unique version of a style. Colour, which forms an integral part of this design, was identified as an important consideration in participants' choice of interior soft furnishings. This expected extrinsic design feature is closely related to the physical product and it probably also represents an important instrumental performance criterion used by participants in their post purchase evaluation of interior soft furnishings: Statements in Table 3.20 show that colour fastness was an extrinsic characteristic contributing to participants' eventual satisfaction. Some participants accentuated that the importance of this feature is subject to the intended purpose/ use of the product as well as the frequency with which it is replaced:

- *Ek dink 'n mens verander ook lakens, wel ek doen. Ek koop elke drie maande nuwe lakens en goed. Maybe is dit net omdat ek bored raak, maar dis vir my lekker om 'n nuwe duvet te kry. Ek slaap nie op dieselfde duvet en selfde lakens vir lank nie. Ek verander van kleur en sulke goed. So hy hoef net ses maande te hou.*

TABLE 3.20: EXPECTED EXTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES OF INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO SATISFACTION/ DISSATISFACTION

Extrinsic attributes:	Participants' statements:
Style:	<i>Ek dink ons koop 'n handdoek partykeer op sy looks en so, maar na twee jaar weet jy in elkgeval nie meer waar jy dit gekoop het nie en wat se handdoek dit is nie, jy weet net of jy van hom hou of nie.</i>
Design colour:	<i>Vir my is kleurvastheid ook 'n lekker eienskap. Ek is tevrede met my handdoek want sy kleur was nie uit nie.</i>
Label:	<i>Ja wel, ek sal erken. Weet jy hoe lekker is dit vir my om af te droog en 'n @home label op my handdoek te hê.</i>
Price:	<i>If I would buy cash, I would buy at Sheet Street. The pricing is reasonable there. I bought towels there, its fine so that would be my criteria. Daarna het ek oorgeslaan na Mr Price want dit is goedkoper.</i>
Quality and perceived value:	<i>Mr Price matjies en sulke goed het ek nou al 'n paar keer gekoop. Dit is pathetic kwaliteit. Na drie maande is daardie matjie so gerafel, maar dan koop ek sommer nog een, want dit is so goedkoop. Ek gee nie om as ek nou weer een moet gaan koop nie.</i>

Focus group discussions identified other extrinsic design features, which are not necessary / fundamental in achieving the intended core benefit of the product, but nevertheless contribute to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a particular retailer's brand of product. One such feature is the binding on the edges of towels, which was also mentioned in the blind- and brand tests as a criterion for evaluation. The following statements confirm this:

- ▷ *Wat ook nogal belangrik is, is dat die randjie van die handdoek nie moet los skeur nie.*
- ▷ *Maar dit is die lae kwaliteit handdoeke wat se randjie eerste begin gaan.*
- ▷ *Wel ek het een keer handdoeke gekoop by Ackermans. Na die eerste keer wat ek dit gewas het, waar jy daardie plat gedeelte het, trek dit in soos 'n bloomer, wat met 'n duurder handdoek nie gebeur nie.*
- ▷ *Ek het van Mr Price (duvet)stelle gekoop en ek moet sê daardie goed het ek al baie gewas. Baiemaal by Woolworths en Edgars het hulle hierdie plastiek knipsels wat vasheg en ek was en stryk dit een keer en dit is stukkend, waar hulle goed het metal clips and I haven't had a problem with it.*

Price was also mentioned as an indicator of quality performance. Of particular significance however, is the impact of post purchase evaluations on some participants' perceptions of the price, quality and value relationship. It was revealed that with repeated trial and increased experience, participants gained confidence in selecting certain brands of interior soft furnishings. If satisfaction was attained as a result of these past purchase decisions, the perceived risk associated with subsequent purchase decisions was reduced and reliance on price as an indicator of quality became less pronounced. Under these circumstances brand loyalty was accomplished even though, as was found through the projective technique, such loyalty might be limited to certain product categories such as towels. It thus seems that when experience increases, "cheap" is not necessarily associated with lower quality. The following statement indicates this tendency:

- ▷ *Dis die ding van 'n handdoek. Dit maak dit eintlik baie eenvoudig waar jy dit koop. Hy gaan in elkgeval vier jaar hou. Dis rêrig die "odd" handdoekie wat sulke lang drade trek. Die handdoeke hou anyway.*

Even though the price, quality and value association might represent an important extrinsic attribute influencing participants' choice of interior soft furnishings, it is also subject to experience and the impact of post purchase evaluations. These findings emphasize that the acquisition of consumption-related knowledge is a lifelong process and that the consumer socialization process is not finite. Table 3.20 also includes a statement that illustrates that the concept of value can take on a whole different notion within a post purchase scenario.

Participants differed in their opinions regarding the importance of quality in their choice of linen and towels, but eventually agreed that the importance of quality depends on the application or use, which also relates to specific situational influences. Another aspect, which initiated an active debate in the focus group discussions, was that of the labels attached to the products. Table 3.20 includes a statement that exemplifies satisfaction experienced as a result of this expected extrinsic attribute. It was argued that this attribute does not serve much purpose as an instrumental performance evaluation criterion, but that it could serve as an expressive/ symbolic performance criterion, since it reflects a particular brand image. The following was said:

- ▷ *Jy haal nie daardie label af nie. Die label bly aan. Maar ek dink net op daardie punt, ek sal sê as ek 'n Ackermans handdoek present kry, ek sal hom gebruik, geen twyfel daaraan nie. Ek sal hom definitief gebruik. Ek sal die Ackermans een miskien vir my man gee om sy vuil hande daarmee af te droog en nie my wit "Oprah" handdoeke nie!*

Swan and Combs (in Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998:40) explain that the symbolic or expressive dimension of consumer satisfaction is represented by the congruence between product image and the consumer's self-concept. Certain extrinsic product attributes often serve as symbols that make the consumer feel proud of his or her purchase and is acquired to command admiration from important others. The following section provides insight into the augmented and potential extrinsic attributes that were found to contribute to participants' satisfaction and which seem to predominantly address the symbolic or expressive dimension.

3.2.1.3 The impact of augmented extrinsic attributes in the post purchase evaluation of interior soft furnishings

Buyers and users of interior soft furnishings become more sophisticated in their decision-making with increased experience. This necessitates augmenting product offerings in more refined ways to enable retail merchants to gain dominant market penetration and share. The use of extrinsic elements by interior retail merchants to augment their product offerings has already been discussed. Focus group discussions also revealed that with the exception of accessibility, these augmented extrinsic elements also seem to contribute to participants' satisfaction in their post purchase evaluations. Table 3.21 reflects statements that verify the contribution of these elements to participants' satisfaction in their post purchase evaluations.

TABLE 3.21: THE IMPACT OF AUGMENTED EXTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES IN THE POST PURCHASE EVALUATION OF INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS

Extrinsic properties	Participants' statements
Product mix offered by retail merchant:	<i>Ek dink dit het te doen met ervaring ook, of smaak. Sê nou maar jy hou van katoenerige goed en jy weet Woolworths hou dit aan, obviously die eerste plek waar jy gaan kyk is Woolworths. So as jy daar sien eerste waarvan jy hou gaan jy dit koop sonder om verder te gaan kyk. Partykeer wat gebeur is ook die verskillende retailers het spesifieke goed waarvan jy hou.</i>
Services offered by retail merchant: • Liberal return policy: • Gift wrapping: • In-store credit:	<i>Ek dink wat oulik is as jy dit in die pakkie los, Woolworths sal enige tyd iets terugvat wat jy gekoop het. Jy kan dit gaan omruil vir enige iets anders of 'n ander kleur of so iets.</i> <i>Ek koop by Edgars want hulle wrap goed verskriklik mooi, veral oor Kersfees. Hulle het sulke mooi rooi bossies...</i> <i>Ek het 'n rekening by Edgars, so ek sal by Edgars koop. Ek sal by Woolworths koop, want ek het 'n rekening by hulle.</i>
Promotional: • Cash discount cards:	<i>Ek koop by Edgars want ek het 'n pers kaart.</i>

Post purchase evaluations seem to contribute to participants' knowledge/understanding of which retail outlets provide products most suited to their needs. Participants preferred certain interior retail outlets for certain product categories due to the depth of the product mix offered by the retail merchant. The following statements were made:

- ▷ *Sheet Street...want hulle het die kleur gehad wat ek gesoek het.*
- ▷ *Sy sal haar handdoeke by Mr Price koop en sy sal haar linne by Woolworths koop.*
- ▷ *Ek dink dit hang vir my af, sou ek sê, as jy die woord " Loads of Living" noem watter produk kategorie ter sprake is, want flat sheets gaan ek nie daar koop nie, maar ek sal 'n duvetcover daar koop.*
- ▷ *Maar ek dink dit gaan weer oor waarmee jy gelukkig is. Sy kan vir haar 'n oortreksel en kussingslope koop waarvoor sy dieselfde betaal by Edgars en Woolworths, maar sy hou nie van Edgars se tipe materiaal nie. So dis ook waarmee jy gelukkig is.*
- ▷ *Maar daar is ook verskille tussen duvetstelle en lakens. Jy hou miskien van Woolworths se kwaliteit, maar van MrPrice se duvetstelle.*

According to data collected, consumers' patronage increases if the product mix coincides with the buyer's personal taste. Consumers tend to present personal information such as taste to others through their interior surroundings and the products used within these surroundings (Kaiser, 1985:41). The retail outlet's product mix is therefore considered an important expressive or symbolic performance dimension in consumer's satisfaction. The significance of patronage behaviour is discussed in a section to follow. Important though, is the argument that as a result of a consumer's perception of self image and attendant lifestyle, which manifests in the need to shop for and acquire merchandise which is representative and supportive of that self image, the consumer as an

opinion seeker, examines merchandise assortments in retail stores in order to learn about fashion trends, new styles and product innovations that support a desired self image (Risch, 1987:84).

The liberal return policies of some retail chains, were considered by some participants as an element, which not only contributed to their patronage decisions, but also enhanced their sense of satisfaction in knowing that if the product did not match their expectations they could return it and have it replaced or be reimbursed. The risk associated with the purchase of products such as interior soft furnishings is thereby reduced. Consumers are always faced with the threat that the consequences of their decisions must be lived with (Risch, 1987:65) - liberal return policies reduce this threat.

The gift-wrapping services offered by particular retail chains were found to contribute to certain participants' patronage motives. It was also said (Table 3.22) that such a service enhances satisfaction. Service quality is described by Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:149) as the consumer's overall impression of the relative inferiority or superiority of a firm and its services. Gift-wrapping is a method whereby the retailer manages to exceed the participant's expectations by adding additional features. Since gifts are bought with the intention of giving it to others, it may be subjected to a great deal of symbolic or expressive performance criteria.

Efforts are often made by interior retail merchants to enhance consumers' shopping experiences through improving/adding convenience. Credit facilities offered by several of the larger retail chains were mentioned as examples. Table 3.22 reveals that patronage behaviour is affected by the retail merchant's ability to offer in-store credit or cash discount cards. This increases customer loyalty.

Even though the above extrinsic elements seem to contribute to participants' satisfaction, experienced buyers and users often view these efforts as "standard" requirements. To sustain customer loyalty and to remain competitive, retail merchants thus need to constantly monitor the functional and social dimensions of their offerings and adapt these offerings by delivering more refined and enhanced extrinsic features.

3.2.1.4 The impact of potential extrinsic attributes in the post purchase evaluation of interior soft furnishings

Several references were made in previous sections regarding participants' satisfaction with specific intrinsic as well extrinsic variables, which were often linked to a particular brand (noticeably more so in the case of retailers than in the case of manufacturers). Table 3.22 provides examples of participants' comments pertaining to their satisfaction with particular retail brands and manufacturer brands.

TABLE 3.22 POTENTIAL EXTRINSIC ATTRIBUTES OF INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO SATISFACTION/ DISSATISFACTION

Extrinsic attributes:	Participants' statements:
Retail brand:	<i>Dit maak nie 'n verskil aan my, sag of hard. Daar is net vir my een handdoek. Ek weet nie, ek is glad nie 'n Edgars voorstaander nie. Ek koop nie daar nie, maar vir een of ander rede staan hulle Private Collection uit. Ek gaan net na Edgars vir hulle Private Collection handdoeke. Dis die enigste ding wat ek daar koop.</i>
Manufacturer brand:	<i>Ek glo nog steeds in daardie (Glodina) label handdoeke. Ek het swemhanddoeke en swemhanddoeke vat die meeste punch, want hulle lê in die son en jy gaan baie rond met hulle en dit is soutwater en die branded handdoeke hou in die son. Ek weet nie of die nie-brand handdoeke hou nie, maar die branded handdoeke hou in die son.</i>

Although a brand is considered a guarantee of origin, which differentiates, adds value and provides a basis for preference and loyalty, it was also agreed in the focus group discussions that brand perceptions and associations could be altered as a result of post purchase evaluations. Erasmus and Donoghue (1998:38) state that in a dynamic model of consumer decision-making, consumer satisfaction leads to the feedback of information that influences subsequent decisions. The following statement reflects the impact of dissatisfaction on a particular participants' subsequent purchase behaviour:

- ▷ *Op die stadium is Jet se kwaliteit 100% beter as Edgars. So ek weier om daar te koop. Dis nie vir my die geld werd ook nie.*

Data revealed that retailer brands seem to be dominating the interior soft furnishing market, with the exception of well-established brands such as Glodina and Colibri. It did however also become apparent that such brand names are under threat of being associated with lower quality due to their distribution through certain lower quality image stores. The following statement reveals the impact of experience and satisfaction on this association:

- ▷ *Ek het 'n badstelletjie wat die toilet, die voetmatjie en alles het, daardie goedjies. Ek het dit gekoop toe ek Johannesburg toe getrek het, twee en 'n half jaar terug en dis nog fine en is in 'n goeie werkende toestand. So dit was vir my goeie kwaliteit. Selfde as hulle handdoeke. Hulle handdoeke het ek 4 jaar terug gekoop en dis nog steeds dik en wollerig. Maar dit is omdat dit nie Mr Price brand is nie. Hulle gebruik die Colibri brand.*

La Barbera and Mazurski (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998:37) accentuate that if consumers are satisfied with a product, they would in future purchase that particular product more confidently and they might even develop loyalty to the brand as a result. Post purchase evaluation also seem to contribute to participants' knowledge or understanding of which brands would be more suitable for a particular use or application as illustrated in the following statement:

- ▷ *You get presentable towels, then you get quality, you have your own personal towels whether they are of highest quality, Woolworths or whatever branded name. In terms of using around the pool, you could possibly look for something in between, its good absorbency but when it gets cut or damaged, you are not too fased about it. You know it cost you a R100 for that towel. It's in the sun anyway.*

Before concluding the findings related to extrinsic attributes, which contributed to young urban consumers' satisfaction with interior soft furnishings, a brief overview of the impact of consumer socialization is provided.

3.2.2 The effect of consumer socialization on the selection, purchase and use of specific brands

Consumer socialization involves the processes whereby young people acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace. Learning, including the acquisition of consumption-related knowledge, is a lifelong process (Hawkins *et al*, 1992:187).. Responses obtained from the focus group discussions confirmed this aspect and Table 3.23 includes an example of the impact of primary as well as secondary socialization on participants' perspectives of a particular manufacturer brand of towels.

Judging from the one participant's statement in Table 3.23, preference for the Glodina brand was established during primary socialization in childhood years within the basic framework of the household unit. Significant other, represented by the participant's mother, exhibited purchase behaviour and responses to the particular brand of towel, which was internalized by the participant, affecting perspectives on this brand during adulthood.

The Association of Marketers (1998:105) describes the Glodina brand as a leading name in towels in South Africa and states that it is well supported by a powerful communications strategy, which is targeted at women aged 17 and upwards, economically astute and who tend to make the purchase decision. The advertising focuses on the relationship between Glodina and its customers from youth through to adulthood and is designed to elicit fond memories associated with Glodina's inherent quality and durability. The female participant's statement in Table 3.23 clearly illustrates the success of this campaign.

TABLE 3.23: THE IMPACT OF CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION ON YOUNG URBAN CONSUMERS' PERSPECTIVES OF A MANUFACTURER'S BRAND OF TOWEL

Consumer socialization	Participants' statements
Primary socialization:	<i>Toe ek grootgeword het was dit die beste kwaliteit handdoek wat jy kon koop. Vergeet van Colibri, dit was Glodina en ek onthou my ma het handdoeke gekoop wat ons letterlik vyftien jaar gehou het wat in die badkamer gehang het. Dit word bietjie valer en leliker, maar daardie handdoeke het gehou en dit is vir my baie moeilik om uit daardie mindset te kom. Ek glo nog steeds in daardie label handdoeke.</i>
Secondary socialization:	<i>Maybe het ek net 'n slegte batch gekry, maar ek weet ook van kleins af my ma sê altyd, "O dis 'n Glodina handdoek" Maar deesdae is Glodina goedkoop. Dit kan wees dat groot brands nou 'n laer kwaliteit maak as 20 jaar terug.</i> <i>I have a terrible quality Glodina and I have a brilliant quality Glodina. I don't know if it comes from the same factory. I don't know if they stole the labels and put them on a terrible towel but I definitely have a very bad towel from Glodina. It's my floor towel now. You know my really...what I use to get out of the shower with. But on the other hand my other Glodina towel is my favourite towel.</i>

Other participants' statements however illustrate that the outcome of past purchase decisions can alter perspectives of a brand established during primary socialization, which confirms the symbolic interactionist view that perspectives are dynamic and changing rather than stable and fixed. The consumer's interpretation of the product is in other words constantly subject to change, based on factors such as experience.

Murphy (1990:11) emphasizes that it is essential for brand owners to constantly monitor the functional and symbolic values of their brands in the context of a changing environment in which they operate and, where necessary and appropriate, to adapt brands to meet the new requirements of the market or the threats of competitors. Different markets demand different strategies for brands to survive and succeed.

3.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE IN THE SELECTION, PURCHASE AND USE OF INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS

Whenever focus group discussions were directed at which products are preferred or considered acceptable, retailers and specific interior retail outlets were mentioned. Data collected indicates that extrinsic properties of interior soft furnishings such as linen and towels are meaningful in terms of dictating young urban consumers' purchase decisions. It also became apparent that retailer brands seem particularly important as an extrinsic property. Gad (2001:95) explains that in recognizing the importance of social life and social acceptance, brand builders depend on the social dimension to differentiate their products. The following section provides more insight into the importance of the social dimension of brands (more specifically those of retailers), and focuses attention on data that suggests the impact of social life and social acceptance during young urban consumers' expressive performance evaluation of interior soft furnishings.

3.3.1 The relevance of the social dimension of interior retail brands in the evaluation and selection of interior soft furnishings

The social dimension of a brand addresses the need to be socially accepted by a group and its leading members. "In the social dimension the brand quite often creates a cult around itself, it becomes a social insignia, or a "prop" in the lifestyle play of an individual...the trademark, or the logo, itself becomes the symbol of the cult society that a brand ideally creates..." (Gad, 2001:95). Thus, the social dimension to a large extent reflects the relationship between consumers and groups of people to which they want to belong. The brand is then used as a valuable tool of identification in the presence of others.

Table 3.24 includes examples of participants' responses to a question revolving around their choice of outlet when wanting to purchase a wedding gift such as towels or linen. Their comments illustrate the importance of the social dimension with regards to various retail outlets that sell interior soft furnishings. Even though the retail outlet and their products exist in physical form, the retail brands, appearing on the labels/packaging of these products, are interpreted and given meaning through social interaction and then become social objects. It was emphasized that when social objects are used to represent whatever people agree they represent, they become symbols. These symbols provide cues to behaviour and permit the individual to organise his/her actions as appropriate within a given social context. In this particular case, the meanings associated with the retail brand guided the individual's purchase behaviour in terms of selecting an appropriate outlet to purchase a wedding gift from.

TABLE 3.24 THE SOCIAL DIMENSION ILLUSTRATED IN YOUNG URBAN CONSUMERS' CHOICE OF RETAIL OUTLET FOR PURCHASING A WEDDING GIFT

Retail outlet	Participants' statements
Woolworths:	<i>Ek sal ook Woolworths toe gaan, omdat hulle 'n naam het, 'n brand is en as jy 'n trougeskenk koop, soos wat X gesê het, jy weet, jy wil iets kwaliteit hê, iets wat iets sê. Mr Price sê ongelukkig iets anders in daardie opsig. Hulle brandname is maar goed. Mense sien Woolworths dan dink hulle dis goed. As hulle 'n Mr Price label sien, dan dink hulle "cheapskate".</i>
@home:	<i>Ek sal nie noodwendig net by Woolworths gaan kyk vir so geskenk nie. Ek sal nie na Mr Price toe gaan nie, vir spesifiek die naam, al het hulle 'n goeie ding. Ek sal persoonlik miskien @home probeer, want dit is iets nuut en fresh en niemand ken dit. Dis nie gelabel as 'n slegte standaard of 'n cheap plek nie, maar dit gaan nie die prys kos nie. Jy gaan nie soveel meer moet uithaal nie.</i>
Loads of Living:	<i>Ek hou daarvan om gifts van Loads of Living te koop. Gifts is vir my stunning daar. Ek dink hulle is highly overpriced, maar as ek by Loads of Living koop, dan weet ek daar is 90% kans dat daardie persoon dit nie gaan hê nie. Ek kan nie my kans vat op Mr Price Home of dit.</i>
Edgars:	<i>Ek het 'n rekening by Edgars, so ek sal by Edgars koop. Ek sal nie skaam wees om 'n Edgars label daarop te hê nie, as wat dit is by Mr Price. Ek weet nie so lekker of ek 'n Mr Price ding vir iemand sal gee nie.</i>
Mr Price:	<i>Ek dink almal koop daar. Jy sou nie noodwendig vir almal sê nie, maar ek dink almal koop daar. Sels ryk mense koop daar en daar is funky goed daar. Dit is miskien goedkoop, maar jy weet daar is mooi goed daar en dit is trendy, wat nice is om na te kyk. As iemand vir my as 'n trougeskenk Mr Price goed sou gee, I won't take offence, glad nie, maar 'n troue is ook 'n baie close ding. So jou vriende behoort te weet. Maar ek dink dit gaan meer oor die ou wat die present gee as die ou wat dit ontvang, want hy wil voel hy gee 'n ordentlike geskenk.</i>
Ackermans:	<i>Ek was daar in gewees en het rondgekyk. Daar was nice fotoraampies, maar die linne en die kleure is te heavy vir my. Ek het die fotorame gekoop en ek moet erken ek het die packaging afgehaal, sodat sy nie kon sien ek het dit by Ackermans gekoop nie, okay! Dit lyk asof jy dit iewers anders gekoop het.</i>

Statements in Table 3.24 should be interpreted against the background of Charles Cooley's "looking-glass self", which states that an individual perceives himself through imagining other's impressions. Kaiser (1985:165) states that these impressions are largely based on reflected appraisals. The impact of reflected appraisals on product choice with regard to the retail brand was evident and spontaneously surfaced during group discussions.

3.3.2 The effect of social influences on the purchase and use of interior soft furnishings

The data presented in Table 3.24 suggests that the social dimension of retailer brands does have an impact on participants' purchase behaviour. Retailers have thus apparently been successful in creating store and brand images that are meaningful and appeal to certain segments of the consumer population. It is also clear that the meanings associated with these retail stores and brands develop in the minds of consumers during their social interactions with others, that include significant others (such as household- and family members), generalized others (the broader community) and reference groups. Hawkins *et al* (1992:132) define reference groups as those groups whose presumed perspectives or values are used by an individual as the basis for his or her current behaviour. Charon (1979:71) emphasizes the fact that the individual interacts with many different groups and thus has several reference groups (social worlds or societies) and consequently shares a perspective with each of them. In this regard Hawkins *et al* (1992:129) state that any marketing attempt to utilize reference group influence requires an understanding of the type of group influences. Findings of the focus group discussions therefore include a discussion of these aspects.

3.3.2.1 Various group influences

Hawkins *et al* (1992:129) distinguish three types of group influences, namely informational-, normative- and identification influences. This was confirmed in the data gathered from the focus group discussions. The following section provides a brief overview of group influences, reflected in Table 3.25.

- **Informational influence**

Informational influence occurs when an individual perceives the behaviour and opinions of group members as potentially informative (Hawkins *et al*, 1992:132). Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:307) refer to this type of influence as "expert power" and explain that it stems from experience and knowledge of a group or particular member of the group. An example of expert/ informational influence is revealed in Table 3.25 where a participant recalled that a set of towels, which made an impression on her and which she perceived to be unique, was given to her and her husband as a wedding gift. She indicated that, faced with a similar task of purchasing a gift, she would do the same. Also included in Table 3.25 is an example of a participant's recollection of a friend asking her advice in purchasing a duvet set from a particular outlet. These examples of informational influence confirm the process orientation of symbolic interactionism that relates to the fact that interpretations of products such as towels are learned, altered, transformed and replaced in interaction and consequently guide the consumer's behaviour accordingly.

TABLE 3.25 DIFFERENT GROUP INFLUENCES RELEVANT TO CONSUMERS' CHOICE AND USE OF SOFT FURNISHINGS

Type of influence	Participants' statements
Informational influence:	<p><i>Ek het vir my troue handdoeke gekry, met my en my man se name op gegraveer. Dit was van die Bubble Shop. Dit het my baie ge-impress en ek het nog nooit van te vore so iets gekry nie. As ek vir iemand wat ek graag 'n duur geskenk sou wou gee, as ek 'n keuse sou moet maak sal ek so iets doen. Ek sal duur linne koop, completely out of the ordinary en definitief nie die Edgars goete nie.</i></p> <p><i>X was looking at buying a duvet for her boyfriend and she saw this nice one at Mr Price. She actually asked me should I buy it, is it good quality or should she look somewhere else for some nice prints and everything.</i></p>
Normative/Utilitarian influence:	<p><i>I put out my best towels for my guests, friends and other people. I will use other towels for myself. I think if it is good towels and clean linen, especially put out for you, it is going to make an impression. If it is like thick, fluffy brand new towels you are going to think great, you know. But if it is old, like washed out towels, obviously it's going to make another impression.</i></p> <p><i>I think it is human nature to try and put your best forward. You want to make them feel you have gone to an effort to make them feel welcome, not just old mother-in-law is here, there we go sort of thing.</i></p> <p><i>Ja maar ek sal nie daar.. (Pep) koop nie. So nou koop eek eerder by Mr Price en sê vir hulle..(friends).</i></p>
Identification/ Value expressive influence:	<p><i>Ek sal by Stuttafords gaan koop... (referring to linen for a guest bedroom), want hulle het net vir my, hulle het iets wat die ander nie het nie. Ek het half in 'n boerehuis grootgeword, waar jy doillies in die koppie sit, so gaste kry die mint op die bed en dit is alles omtrent soos in'n hotel gedoen. Ek meen dis net hoe ek grootgeword het, so maybe it rubbed off. Dit is dalk van familie tot familie, maar dit is net hoe ek dinge doen.</i></p>

- **Normative influence**

Normative influence (also referred to as utilitarian influence) occurs when an individual fulfils group expectations to gain direct reward or to avoid a sanction (Hawkins *et al*, 1992:132). Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:307) refer to this type of influence as reward power and explain that it is based on a group's ability to reward the individual for his or her behaviour. Most participants agreed that they would make an effort to create a good impression on their guests, especially family and friends, in providing them with clean and presentable towels and linen during their stay (Table 3.25). Participants thus seek these guests' approval and do so, in part, by managing their interior surroundings. Normative influence could also extend to the acquisition of specific brands of products, thought to be used/ approved/ admired by a particular group to achieve or sustain membership in that specific group. A typical example would include a participants' acknowledgment of purchasing interior soft furnishings from a particular retail outlet and not another, thereby enabling her to admit store patronage to fellow peer group members.

- **Identification**

Identification or the value-expressive influence occurs when individuals use the perceived group norms and values to guide their own attitudes or values (Hawkins *et al*, 1992:133). Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:307) describe this influence as referent power and explain that it refers to an individual's identification with members of a group, based on similarity of beliefs and attitudes. The example of identification influence included in Table 3.25 illustrates the impact of household- and family members' norms and values on an individuals' attitudes, beliefs and values: the participant identified with her family members' behaviour in terms of entertaining guests and their interpretation of interior soft furnishings, such as linen, in preparing a guest bedroom. As such, she used her significant others as a reference for choice behaviour, since she identified with them and accepted their perceptions as well as their interpretations of products such as interior soft furnishings.

Individuals interact with many others and thus take on many perspectives in their interpretation of products such as interior soft furnishings. The symbolic interactionist perspective strongly links with these findings and as explained by Charon (1979:71), "...we play many "roles," each role having another perspective, and each role placing us around certain others". A perspective is thus taken on for the purpose of interaction with various groups with which the individual identifies. Objects such as linen and towels may therefore also be defined in a number of ways depending on the context/ situation and on the type and level of interaction. Focus group discussions revealed that individuals differ in their tendency to be influenced by others, which consequently affects their interpretation of products such as interior soft furnishings.

3.3.2.1 Determinants of the degree of reference group influence

According to Hawkins *et al* (1992:130) certain consumption situation characteristics influence the degree of reference group influence likely to apply in a specific situation. These came to the fore during focus group discussions and are included in Table 3.26.

TABLE 3.26 DETERMINANTS OF THE DEGREE OF REFERENCE GROUP INFLUENCE

Determinants	Participants statements
Social visibility of product:	<i>Ek dink as ek iets verander in my kamer, my lakens bly dieselfde kleur, maar ek sal duvets verander en die kussings verander en so. Vergeet van die lakens, dis daar ver onder waar niemand dit kan sien nie. Ek gaan koop nie nog 'n laken voordat daar nie nog een nodig is nie. Maar 'n handdoek sal ek makliker koop, want dis half, jy weet, of dit makliker is om die look en feel van jou badkamer te verander. 'n Handdoek gooi jy ook gouer uit as wat jy 'n laken uitgooi.</i>
Necessity of the item:	<i>I have a pair of towels that I keep for guests you know that I don't use, or all that often at least. So I save it for guests and don't wash it all that often. It's not all that expensive, but it is proper. ... (Stuttafords) plein wit linne, daardie regte antique, wat ek persoonlik vir gaste hou, soos wat jy nou jou Noritaki eetstel gaan hê, waaruit jy nou nie elke dag gaan eet nie.</i>
Commitment to group	<i>(In buying towels as a wedding gift) Dit hang af hoe goed ek die persoon ken. As dit vir iemand is wat ek nie baie goed ken nie, I wouldn't think twice about buying at Mr Price, maar as dit vir iemand is wat 'n close vriend is, dan sal ek gaan vir kwaliteit. I wouldn't care then how much I pay. Dan sal ek either by @home koop, want ek meen ek het handdoeke van hulle of by Woolworths, want ek het 'n rekening by hulle. (In preparing linen and towels for guests who stay over) But I mean people that you are having over to sleep at your house - it's not way out situations. They are your friends. They know you anyway. But I am definitely not going to put out my worst towels. Ons het baie mense wat hier slaap en dis baie moeilik om daardie hoë kwaliteit lakens goed te maintain. As jy die "odd" persoon het wat een keer in ses maande oorbly vir een nag kan jy vir hom 'n heeltemal ander level voorberei. As jy baie mense het wat baie lang tye oorslaap moet hulle half in die roetine van die huis inval. Die punt is die lakens moet skoon wees, dit moet heel wees en die kleur moet darem 'n vaste kleur wees.</i>
Relevance of the behaviour to the group:	<i>It's presentation as well, a good impression, especially with family as well. You want them to feel welcome in your home. It says how much that person means to you. I think in these days it's a whole different culture. People take their own towels.</i>
Confidence in the purchase decision	<i>Ja maar dan moet jy ook in gedagte hou, dat jy verander vinniger van handdoeke as van linne. Ek dink linne is iets wat jy baie minder koop as wat jy handdoeke koop. Handdoeke gee ek vir mense geskenk, maar definitief nie linne nie. Jy sien jy kan nie 'n duvet vir iemand koop - dis 'n persoonlike smaak. En dis bietjie boring om lakens vir iemand te gee vir 'n geskenk. Based on previous experience, with doing something like that, I went to Woolworths. I think the stigma of brands goes with people as well. The way I rated it, I don't know that person very well, I don't know their class, their choice of fabrics, their choice of brands and their sort of style set up that they have planned for the future. So I would go with something like Woolworths because its quality, it's got the brand with it and its safe.</i>

- **Social visibility of the product**

Group influence is thought to increase when the use of the product is visible to the group. Apart from performing satisfactory, the images of certain products are also relevant because they are consumed or used in social

settings (Haynes & Helms, 1991:26). Towels seem to be more prone to having the right image than sheets. Towels are considered more “socially visible” because visiting guests might not necessarily stay over, while the possibility of them using the bathroom facilities even during a short visit does exist. In Table 3.26, participants admit that those items that are visible enjoy more attention than those less visible (such as sheets). Sheets are apparently only purchased when required while towels are bought more often since they visually contribute to changes made in bathroom interiors. The focus group also agreed that towels are replaced more often than sheets, due to the visual appearance aspect.

- ***Necessity of the item***

Reference group influence apparently increases, when the item is less of a necessity (Hawkins *et al*, 1992:134). Most participants agreed that they keep a set of linen and towels aside, specifically for guests (Table 3.26). These items were not used for daily purposes and therefore considered less of a necessity than those used on a daily basis. As such, the choice of these guest towels and sheets is more subject to group influence.

- ***Commitment to the group***

In general, the more committed an individual is to a group, the more he will conform to group norms. Participants for example argued that they would be more selective in their choice of retail outlet and also prepared to spend more, if they were purchasing a gift for a person with whom they shared a closer relation than for a stranger. Similarly, they were more likely to consider group expectations when preparing a guest bedroom for members of a group they would like to belong to, than for others who were considered less important or, (as can be gathered from participants' statements in Table 3.26) if membership has already been established for a prolonged period of time. In such cases, pressure to conform to group norms and expectations becomes less pronounced.

- ***Relevance of the behaviour to the group***

The more relevant a particular activity is to the group's functioning, the stronger the pressure to conform to the group's functioning. In general, the more important the interior environment is viewed by members of a particular group, the more effort will be exercised by the individual who wants to belong to this group when furnishing his/her interior environment. The relevance of behaviour is illustrated in a debate (Table 3.26) that ensued among focus group participants, involving the practice of setting out towels for guests. Some were of the opinion that it was no longer expected, whereas others believed it made people feel welcome and gave an indication of one's concern for guests. Their opinions and beliefs in this regard were shaped and influenced by various reference groups, which did not necessarily coincide with those of other participants.

- ***Confidence in the purchase situation***

Another factor that also affects the degree of reference group influence is the consumer's confidence in the purchase decision. It was established that participants' would much rather purchase towels as a gift than sheets. It was agreed during the focus group discussions that towels are replaced more often than sheets. It could therefore be argued that individuals tend to have more exposure to purchase decisions involving towels, enhancing their confidence in this regard. Participants were also of the opinion that items such as duvets are

subject to personal taste, which increases the complexity of purchasing such an item for someone else. As far as brands are concerned, one participant summed up the situation (Table 3.26) stating that when faced with a situation of having to purchase a gift for individuals of whom he was unsure regarding taste, preferences and the like, he would opt for popular brands that are well known and accepted by a wider variety of consumer segments.

3.3.2.3 Genders' perspectives

Although not part of the initial research objectives, the study revealed possible differences in males and females' opinions regarding the importance of social acceptance in young urban consumers' choice and use of interior soft furnishings. Kaiser (1985:170) explains that males and females may frame their social experiences differently, because the concept of self, in the process of becoming through a sense of connection with other people, was reflected more so in females' discussions than in males'. Kaiser (1985:170) ascribes this to the greater likelihood that females receive more social feedback on appearance, (or in this case, their interior surroundings) than males. It is further said that females are socialized to emphasize cooperation with others, as well as interpersonal attraction. Males on the other hand, are socialized to focus on competition and independence while relating to others on a more abstract level. Males thus tend to view items such as clothes and interior furnishings as personal possessions that signify what they have done or accomplished and interpret the importance of these items in relation to personal considerations. In contrast females are more likely to emphasize their home's appearance, how others respond to it and how they feel about their interior furnishings. Table 3.27 illustrates the differences in genders' perceptions regarding the choice of linen for a guest bedroom.

TABLE 3.27 DIFFERENCES IN GENDERS' PERCEPTION OF THE CHOICE OF LINEN FOR A GUEST BEDROOM

Gender perception	Participants' statements
Males' perception:	<i>As die gaste bed gemaklik is en die linne slaap lekker, met 'n lekker duvet, is dit fine. Actually, dieselfde wat ek in my eie kamer wil hê, gemaklikheid. Ek sal dieselfde standaard apply as wat ek vir myself gun. Ek sal nie die persoon hoër ag as myself nie. Ek sou sê dat dit dieselfde kwaliteit is as dit waarop ek slaap. Obviously gaan dit nie so baie gebruik word nie, want daar is nie so baie mense wat daarop slaap nie, so dit gaan in elkgeval nuut wees. Ek sal nie sê dit moet hoër kwaliteit wees as wat op ons eie bed is nie. Dit moet dieselfde kwaliteit wees as wat op ons bed is, maak nie saak wie dit is nie. So met ander woorde dwarsoor die huis moet dit goeie kwaliteit wees.</i>
Females' perception:	<i>Is dit nie maar 'n mans persepsie nie. Vrouens is gewoonlik die een wat die bed gaan opmaak en wat wil hê. "because the house is the reflection of the wife" gewoonlik, is dit nie. So vir hulle is dit nie so belangrik nie, maar vir my is dit belangrik. It's a special occasion when you get guests. You go out and buy nice food for a nice dinner. You want to make a nice impression. Same with bedding. You take out you best cutlery, your best crockery or whatever. It's not just what you use everyday.</i>

Differences in perception were much more pronounced among the married participants than those that were single. Apparently, when the participants co-manage households with their spouses, the gender roles seem to become more significant or then "specialized". Hawkins *et al* (1992:139) defined roles as the prescribed patterns of behaviour expected of a person in a given situation by virtue of the person's position in that situation. The authors explain that with regard to co-managing households, each spouse develops, over time, more specialized



roles as a part of their household lifestyle and household responsibilities. According to Du Plessis and Rousseau (1999:310), instrumental roles such as performing tasks have traditionally been associated with husbands, while expressive roles such as maintenance of group norms as well as social and emotional support have been associated with wives.

The scope of the research undertaken did not intend an in-depth investigation into the gender differences and household roles that may exist regarding the importance of social acceptance in young urban consumers' choice and use of interior soft furnishings. The impact of socialization became evident when comparing males and females' opinions, even more so, when considering their roles as wives and husbands. Future research is proposed in this regard to further investigate these differences. The following section, which focuses on the belief among young urban consumers that their choice of interior furnishings may influence how others portray them, also highlights some data to substantiate the above. Gad (2001:90) explains that consumers use brands in the same way as actors use theatrical props to augment and clarify their role and personality. People associate with several roles and for each role a set of appropriate brands help the consumer to reflect desired belonging.

3.4 THE INFLUENCE OF YOUNG URBAN CONSUMERS' CHOICE OF INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS ON HOW THEY ARE PORTRAYED BY OTHERS

Human beings act in a world that they define, which involves conscious choices according to which actions are directed, assessed and redirected. The conclusion drawn from this basic assumption of symbolic interactionism is that even though consumers are influenced by others who they interact with, they also create their own realities, in part by managing their interior surroundings. As such, they do not merely buy in a passive manner what is manufactured, produced and sold, but actively and selectively purchase and use brands of interior products to express themselves visually and present personal information to others. In this regard, it is argued that consumers can be typified from the brands they use, from their attitudes towards different brands and meanings attached to certain brands (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1993:144). Gad (2001:96) explains that whereas the social dimension of a brand addresses the consumer's need to be socially accepted by a group and by its leading members, the mental dimension revolves around the consumer's mental picture of himself. The following section provides more insight into the above-mentioned aspects and the importance of the mental dimension of retail brands in young urban consumers' choice of interior soft furnishings.

3.4.1 The impact of self-image on young urban consumers' choice and selection of interior soft furnishings

Several personality theories have been developed and applied in marketing in the past, one of which is the "self-concept" theory. This theory is based on the assumption that individuals have a concept of self, based on who they think they are and who they would like to be (ideal self). It is believed that consumers perceive products that they own, would like to own or do not want to own, in terms of the symbolic meaning of the product to themselves and to others. It is therefore argued that individuals may purchase and use objects such as interior

soft furnishings (especially if they are used in social settings) that coincide with their perceptions of the ideal self.

Table 3.28 includes statements made by participants during the focus group discussions, which suggest that interior soft furnishings may be selected and used to coincide with perceptions of self. It would seem that individuals' choice of interior soft furnishings with specific extrinsic attributes, convey information to others regarding their taste, style, cleanliness, socio-economic status, brand orientation and even aspects such as sexual orientation. These aspects also reflect the owner's lifestyle. Hawkins *et al* (1992:14) explain that consumers' lifestyles are the manifestation of their self-concepts. It also includes the products that they buy, how they use them, what they think about them and how they feel about them.

TABLE 3.28 INFORMATION CONVEYED BY CONSUMERS' SELECTION, PURCHASE AND USE OF SPECIFIC INTERIOR SOFT FURNISHINGS.

Information conveyed	Participants' statements
Taste:	<i>I mean your choice of colours, design, pattern...it reflects whether you have good taste or bad taste.</i>
Style:	<i>Style. It should stand out. It's a bit of yourself in your bathroom, especially when you aren't at home.</i>
Cleanliness and tidiness:	<i>Wit is gewoonlik moeiliker om skoon te hou. So jy kan sien hulle level of tidiness and cleanliness.</i>
Socio-economic status:	<i>Duurder kwaliteit, natuurlike stowwe soos katoen vir mense wat dit kan bekostig. Veral mense in Menlyn en Brooklyn. Hulle gee nie om om R200 te betaal vir 'n paslaken en they can afford to pay R200 if they choose.</i>
Brand orientation:	<i>I think it says a lot about you, if you only buy Colibri towels and that is all you have in your house. It says something about you, that you are focused on that type of thing.</i>
Sexual orientation:	<i>Baie gay persone shop so. Ek ken baie gay mense en hulle is totally concerned about where you shop and what you buy.</i>

As a result of the consumer's perception of self-image and lifestyle, which manifests in the need to shop for, and acquire merchandise which is representative and supportive of that self image, the consumer, as an opinion seeker, examines merchandise assortments in retail stores in order to learn about fashion trends, new styles, and product innovations that support the desired self image (Risch, 1987:84). Previous discussions provided insight into the impact of retail merchants' product assortments as an extrinsic augmented characteristic. It was also highlighted that these assortments are often linked to the images of the retail outlets that sell it.

Judging from participants' statements in Table 3.29, it appears as if aspects such as taste, style and fashion orientation, trend consciousness, socio-economic status and the like are conveyed by an individual's patronage of certain interior retail outlets. It is not a question of simply patronizing a retail store, but patronizing the image or then perception of that store. Risch (1987:84) explains that the physical store exists simply as an object of perception, lacking personality and the corresponding ability to attract consumers. However when the store is catalogued, interpreted and given meaning, it becomes a symbol of whatever people shall agree it represents. Under these circumstances the associated retail brand is imbued with value as illustrated in Table 3.29 and only then does the consumer exhibit positive or negative feelings towards that retail store. The resulting attitudes define the consumer's patronage motives.

TABLE 3.29 IMAGE PORTRAYED BY PATRONAGE OF SELECTED RETAIL OUTLETS

Images portrayed	Participants' statements
<p>Ackermans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic status: • Lifestyle of household: • Taste: 	<p><i>Laer inkomste persoon, bargain hunters. (Typical Ackermans' patron)</i> <i>Mense soos my sussie; kinders, lae inkomste. Kinders het nogal hoë demands op linne. So jy gee nie so baie om nie, gooi hom.. (linen) elke tweede dag in die was en as hy vol gate is koop jy net nuwe Ackermans linne. Ek persoonlik het nie 'n probleem met Ackermans vir kinders nie. Ek sal nou self persoonlik nie vir my linne daar koop nie, maar nie omdat ek dink dis slegte kwaliteit nie. Dis net 'n persepsie. Ek is nou maar net lojaal aan waar ek shop.</i> <i>As ek dink Ackermans, net van inkyk, lyk dit net vir my so bright en dis so helder en dis te besig. Dit was baie helder kleure. Dit is asof dit vir 'n sekere tipe persoon is wat sulke bright kleure in hulle huis het, ek weet nie wie dit is nie, maar my persepsie is, dis soos Peps. Dis te! En dis cluttered.</i></p>
<p>Woolworths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality conscious: • Style orientation: 	<p><i>I would say Woolworths is more expensive, because they have the image of quality and if you out to buy quality, you don't care about price. If you go to Woolworths, you would buy it anyway, because the perception is you are buying quality. So you will pay R130 or whatever price for quality.</i> <i>Soos Woolworths gaan meer vir die classic look. Wat jy hierdie seisoen by Woolworths kry is 'n goeie kans dat jy dit dalk weer die volgende seisoen daar gaan kry. Veral by manskleren en hulle dekor ook. Hulle gaan vir die classic look waar Loads of Living die ultimate trendy fashion nagaan</i></p>
<p>Loads of Living:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Image conscious: • Trend conscious: • Socio-economic status: • Lifestyle: 	<p><i>Yuppies. Dit is moderne mense. Dis vir hulle belangrik om goed met die regte beeld te kry. (Person that patrons Loads of Living)</i> <i>Die persoon wat by Loads of Living koop is iemand wat baie besorg is oor trends. Jy kan sien hulle is voorlopers in trends.</i> <i>...en dit is mense wat trendy is, mense wat kan bekostig om 'n huis te hê wat dit afwys en al die versierings het. Kyk net mense met geld kan so leefstyl hê en dit is hoekom dit so baie kos, want dit kos baie geld om baie trendy te wees.</i> <i>Ek ken een mens wat by Loads of Living shop as 'n shopper en dit is 'n male bachelor, 34 years old, middel hoë klas inkomste, straight, available en hy koop eintlik al sy goed daar. Maar hy lewe eintlik 'n minimalistiese lewe. So hy spandeer nie. Hy mors nie heeltyd geld op al hierdie klein Pep store kersies wat ons heeltyd koop nie. So hy doen "big shops", groot shopping op 'n slag, jy weet R5000 shop. So dis hoe hy lyk.</i></p>
<p>Edgars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: • Race: • Socio-economic status: 	<p><i>Ek dink Edgars het 'n jong mark. Jy dink swart mark, jonk, as jy kyk na hulle kleren. Dis baie trendy, maar soos ek sê dis baie swart, maar wel-af mense, middelklas. Ek dink verskillende mense koop by Edgars, verskillende mense koop by Mr Price. Mense by Edgars kan op kredietbasis koop, het meer status...</i></p>
<p>Mr Price:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic status: 	<p><i>Mense by Mr Price koop kontant, is broke.</i></p>

The statement in Table 3.29 regarding the "typical Loads of Living patron" includes several interesting aspects. First of all, it describes a lifestyle and the associated role of the patron. Secondly it illustrates that some gender differences may exist as discussed in the previous section. In one particular study the perceptions and realities of male shopping behaviour were examined, using qualitative research techniques. A theory of male shopping that consists of two elements was offered. First, the concept of gender role transcendence argues that men who are not tied to traditional notions of masculinity are able to become willing shoppers and deliberately and pragmatically pursue this activity (this aspect is reflected in a participant's comment regarding "gay shoppers" in

Table 3.28). Yet, it is argued that even if this first step toward shopping is fulfilled, men who profess to enjoy shopping still typically do so in order to fulfil one entrenched tenet of the masculine code, namely achievement, which may very well apply to the "typical Loads of Living patron" as described in Table 3.29. It is argued that women shop to express, whereas men shop to win (Otnes & McGrath, <http://www2.babson.edu/babson/BabsonHPp.nsf/Public/jorexecsum5>).

It is also interesting to note, that statements included in Table 3.29 regarding Loads of Living patrons confirm the so-called "upper class leadership" theory of fashion. This theory suggests that new styles and designs are initially conceived at the highest socio-economic levels and gradually trickle down through a process of imitation and dilution to the lowest socio-economic levels. The theory is based on socio-economic class structure and the idea that the lower classes always view the higher classes as models to be imitated (Risch, 1987:105).

3.4.2 The importance of the mental dimension of interior retail brands in young urban consumers' patronage behaviour

Patronage motives and behaviour, as described in the previous section, are influenced by the mental dimension of the retail brand. The mental dimension of a brand is considered a much more profound dimension by its very nature and is thought to penetrate an individuals' personality. Gad (2001:96) explains that all individuals need to have role models on which to model their life and behaviour – the brand and its mental dimension serve that purpose by helping individuals in framing or re-framing mental pictures of themselves. The author elaborates by stating that brands have become powerful tools for individuals to mentally role model or handle the feeling of loneliness and alienation so common among urban citizens. To be added to this scenario is the fact that consumers often find themselves in materialistically inclined societies where the possession of objects such as interior soft furnishing products, which is often used as symbols are of major importance in acquiring social acceptance.

To conclude this chapter, Risch's statement (1987:44) seem particularly appropriate: "

"By directly and purposefully influencing the innovative decisions of manufacturers and consumers, retail merchandising, in effect, defines the parameters of our social existence. For the most part, the cultural symbols through which we express our self-image, and perceptually define our individuality, are symbols accepted by all members of society. The retail merchant defines, provides, and encourages the acquisition of these symbols".

Conclusions

4

4.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Although the study primarily focused on the impact of extrinsics on consumers' purchase decisions, the use of qualitative research techniques inevitably resulted in participants also mentioning certain intrinsic features (such as absorbency, texture, weave and tactile perception of fabrics) during their evaluation of relevant and feasible product alternatives. Rather than to ignore these comments, intrinsic features were eventually included briefly in the findings: responses confirmed that, at this generic level, only the most basic needs of consumers are met and, since these features are fairly easy to emulate, they seldom form the basis for product differentiation. This thus also confirmed consumers' use and reliance upon extrinsics during product evaluation.

4.1.1 The use of extrinsic attributes in the selection of interior soft furnishings

From the focus group discussions it could be concluded that many interior retail outlets have apparently succeeded in "value engineering" their product offerings to satisfy buyers' and users' minimum expectations for stylish, fashionable and colourful merchandise at acceptable prices that convey their tastes and other aspects of their lifestyles. Style, fashion, acceptable price and design features (such as colour) as well as quality were identified as important expected extrinsic attributes. Participants' expectations regarding the concept of "quality" mostly represented intangible overall feelings associated with particular brands and were based on participants' perceptions of what they considered to be important, rather than being representative of comprehensive product knowledge. Participants' belief that there is a positive correlation between price and quality was evident. These expected extrinsic attributes in addition to the generic intrinsic elements represent Gad's (2001:94) *functional dimension*.

Focus group discussions also revealed that retail brands and certain established manufacturer brands (as a potential extrinsic characteristics) have a high predictive value that is trusted and respected. These brands are isolated, catalogued, interpreted and given meaning to, which confirms Gad's (2001:94) *social and mental dimensions*. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, these brands are therefore considered as social objects that become symbols depending on consumers' interpretation (e.g. quality, status, stylish) (Charon, 1979:39). In order to maintain customer loyalty and price premiums, retail merchants augment their offerings through the addition of further extrinsic benefits, such as uniquely positioned retail outlets that stock wide product assortments with styles and design features to cater for a heterogeneous consumer community. Divergent

lifestyles and needs eventually manifest in their buying behaviour. As a contribution to "convenience", retailers limit consumers' financial, physical and mental expenditures through additional services such as gift-wrapping, liberal return policies and in-store credit facilities. Retailers also seem to influence patronage decisions within particular social environments by creating favourable images and associations with their brands via marketing tools such as advertising and promotion. This was confirmed through the blind- and brand tests, as well as the projective technique (used for the purposes of triangulation).

4.1.2 Finding personal pleasure/satisfaction in choosing interior soft furnishings with specific extrinsic attributes

The intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes identified by participants as important in terms of influencing their satisfaction with products, mostly coincided with the choice criteria for soft furnishings. Evidence suggests that interior soft furnishings are not only subject to instrumental performance criteria but also to symbolic or expressive performance criteria in post purchase evaluations and in terms of satisfaction with purchases. The findings emphasize the potential effect of consumer socialization on consumers' perception and evaluation of products and brands and that previous experience can alter perspectives of a brand. The meanings associated with brands of interior soft furnishing products should thus be considered dynamic and changing, rather than stable and fixed.

Although intrinsic attributes form an integral part of the instrumental performance dimension of interior soft furnishings such as towels and sheets, these characteristics were more often associated with particular extrinsic variables such as retail outlets and associated brands, rather than actual product attributes. The data further revealed that participants' attitude towards "value" may depend on their experience: cheaper products were not necessarily considered to be of lower quality. Participants in actual fact relied heavily on brand names rather than price to indicate their potential satisfaction with a product. Participants thus indicated that quality products (interior soft furnishings) are available at all levels of the market. It is probably therefore is no longer sufficient for manufacturers and retailers to offer good quality: brands are expected to offer something more in terms of perceived added value to gain and retain consumer loyalty.

4.1.3 The importance of social acceptance in the selection, purchase and use of interior soft furnishings

The data collected suggests that individuals select interior soft furnishings with specific extrinsic attributes to convey information to others regarding aspects such as their taste, style and socio-economic status. These aspects reflect the owner's lifestyle. The importance of social acceptance and the influence of the social dimension of certain brands of interior products were debated comprehensively in terms of product choice. Participants differed in terms of the influence of reference groups on their choice of interior soft furnishings. Determinants of the degree of reference group influence identified by Hawkins *et al* (1992:130) came to the fore in the data that was collected: social visibility of the interior soft furnishing product, necessity of the item, a consumer's commitment to the group, the relevance of the consumer's behaviour to the group and his/her



confidence in the purchase situation were mentioned as influencing variables. Various types of group influence came to the fore during discussions, including informational-, normative- and identification influences. It seems difficult to predict how an individual will define and react to objects such as interior soft furnishings: males and female participants *inter alia* differed in their interpretation of interior soft furnishings and the use of these items within a social context. It was however concluded that interior soft furnishings bought from certain retail outlets are often used as symbols to define or represent realities, initiate responses and provide cues in social situations (e.g. as being appropriate). In recognition of the importance of social life and social acceptance, retailers create store and brand images that reflect the relationship between consumers and reference groups. Participants admitted to patronage specific stores based on their desirable images while others were rejected as less desirable or even unacceptable. The impression made by product ranges and store layout as well as client images were mentioned as contributing to their acceptance or rejection of stores.

4.1.4 The influence of young urban consumers' choice of interior soft furnishings on how they are portrayed by others

The mental dimension of product choice was revealed through participants' belief that their choice of interior products and more specifically retail outlets will influence how others portray them. A probable relationship between the young urban consumers' self image and the image of the retail outlet that is patronaged to purchase soft furnishings from was noticeable. These findings coincide with the symbolic interactionist perspective that complex human society demands and depends on human symbolic life. The significance of market segmentation is therefore accentuated in terms of creating store and/or brand images that will appeal to particular segments of the consumer population.

4.2 COMMENTS ON THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE

The assistance of the management of interior retail outlets contributed to the successful identification and recruitment of suitable participants for this study. Although it was not initially intended, the eventual inclusion of male participants proved to be beneficial in terms of identifying possible differences in genders' perspectives that could be attended to in further research projects.

Finding a suitable time for the majority of participants to attend the focus group sessions was perhaps the most difficult aspect encountered in the planning of this research. Over-recruitment and the inclusion of an additional session alleviated the dilemma to some extent, even though the initial intention of having all of the participants attend all of the sessions did not realize. A three-week prior notification period with weekly telephonic reminders and careful location selection contributed to a good attendance rate for those who committed them for specific sessions.

The focus group discussions were successful in encouraging participants to comment on, debate and share experiences. It was clear that participants were at times confronted with ideas and opinions during these discussions that were unfamiliar, new or simply not thought of before. As such, the shaping and reshaping of

opinions occurred that proved valuable for the research project.

Though the product comparison tests and projective technique were beneficial in terms of triangulation, these data collection methods revealed certain disadvantages. The disadvantage of the reality compared to the comparison brand tests was illustrated in some participants' acknowledgement that they may under "normal circumstances" have selected a different brand based on previous experiences.

Considerable effort was put into the preparation of products for the blind tests to minimize bias. Although the objective was to achieve complete intrinsic product parity between the various options made available to participants (to accurately establish reactions to the "pure" product apart from image values), a certain degree of intrinsic differentiation could not be eliminated (such as thread count between different brands of sheets). As far as the projective technique was concerned, the nature of the unfinished scenario completion may have excluded certain important extrinsic elements, which may in reality contribute to participants' preference for particular outlets. These shortcomings were highlighted and discussed in the various sections pertaining to the data collection methods.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Hawkins *et al* (1992:14) explain that consumers' lifestyles are the manifestation of their self-concepts and that it includes the products that they buy, how they use them, what they think about them and how they feel about them. A conclusion drawn by many is that due to a materialistic value system, consumers are often willing to go to extremes to attain or once achieved, sustain a certain standard of living by consuming products such as interior soft furnishings that reflect specific lifestyles. As a result consumers might find themselves in a situation, characterised by the fact that their wants and needs exceed their level of resources. Future research is proposed in which the occurrence of behaviour is investigated, that reflects consumers' willingness to disregard their financial limitations in favour of acquiring interior products that convey certain meanings regarding their realities and lifestyles.

Differences in males and females' perspectives regarding the choice of interior soft furnishings, especially regarding the social impact of product choices surfaced. It is therefore advised that future research should address and clarify these distinctions.

4.4 RELEVANCE OF THIS STUDY FOR RETAIL AND INDUSTRY

The findings of this study have noteworthy consequences for retail and industry. Consumers' apparent emphasis on extrinsic product characteristics and limited attention to intrinsics revealed limited product knowledge and limited understanding of quality indicators (properties at the generic level). This shifts consumers' emphasis during the evaluation of interior soft furnishings to indicators characteristic of the functional, social and even mental dimensions of products, which necessitates a review of how product information is introduced and communicated to consumers in general. This should also contribute to an



improved understanding of consumers' buying behaviour in the market place and be of value in terms of understanding consumer dissatisfaction or consumers' disapproval of products when a more logical explanation such as quality does not provide solutions to problems that are experienced in practice. This should further contribute to consumer facilitation in the retail environment and be of value in terms of promotions and other marketing actions. From retail's point of view the suggestion that extrinsics are highly influential in terms of product decisions accentuates an emphasis on product offerings such as packaging, labels and guarantees that may persuade and impress consumers who do not necessarily have the relevant product knowledge in terms of intrinsic product characteristics to make well motivated product decisions.

A further benefit for retail is the findings that suggest the use of brand names, trade names and logos (especially those of the retailers) to differentiate products. Consumers seem to base their purchase decisions on extrinsic aspects (such as store image) rather than on the intrinsic properties of interior products although they do seem to be aware of the importance of certain intrinsic product characteristics. This was found to be especially true for products such as sheets that are subject to an increased amount of perceived intrinsic product parity. The focus group discussions did however also reveal that consumers become more sophisticated in their decision-making with increased experience. This emphasizes the necessity for interior retail merchants to augment product offerings in more refined ways to impress and retain existing customers and to gain further market penetration and share. Retailers who target their products to receptive segments of the consumer population would thus probably more likely be successful.

The dilemma of the manufacturer is however evident. According to Ashton and Rigby (1996:5), manufacturer brands in the textile and clothing pipeline as well as other industries are facing a difficult future in developed markets. The authors conclude that they are increasingly under threat, as retailer brands seem to be achieving the same status as manufacturer brands. It seems as if, regarding interior soft furnishings, customers' perceptions are predominantly affected by retailer brands and that the influence of manufacturer brands are progressively weakened. The findings underpin the necessity of constant monitoring by manufacturers of the functional and symbolic values associated with their products in the context of an ever-changing consumer environment and the careful selection of distribution channels through which their products are made available to the consumer. While it will be difficult to change consumers' trust in specific retail merchants, it might be worth the while for industry to reconsider the distribution of well known, reputable brand names through any retail outlet of which the store image could negatively impact on the brand image.

In terms of the discipline of Consumer Science that is concerned with the well being of consumers and that strives to facilitate, educate and inform consumers, an emphasis on extrinsics (especially the social and mental dimensions of product offerings) during the decision-making process and neglect of intrinsics (generic level of product attributes) is disturbing. It reveals the use of surrogate indicators (e.g. brand names, store images) rather than well-deliberated product features (e.g. fibre content) and quality indicators (e.g. construction) during the evaluation of product alternatives. Apart from proposing recommendations for retail and industry whereby they could improve their competitive edge in the market place, based on the findings of the study, it is further recommended that all join hands to inform and educate consumers towards informed, responsible decision-



making behaviour. It is believed that this will not have any negative effect on consumers' appreciation for beautifully wrapped products (especially now that our consumers have to deal with new packaging legislation) and impressive displays or product ranges and that retail and industry could very well proceed with their efforts to serve and address the needs of loyal customers as best they can in this regard. The advantage of assisting consumers to formulate and have realistic product expectations and an appreciation for quality should eventually pay off in terms of lower product returns and fewer complaints that cost the industry millions of rands annually.

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APPENDIX A:

UNFINISHED SCENARIO COMPLETION

Scenario:

Two months ago all your linen and towels were stolen from the washing line.

- You are faced with the task of replacing four sets of double bed fitted sheets and flat sheets and matching pillowcases. You also lost four sets of towels, consisting of a bath sheet, a bath towel and a hand towel.
- An assessor established that the replacement value of these items amounted to R2000-00. Your insurance company agreed to pay out a claim of R2000-00, but they are requesting you to select an outlet from which you choose to purchase these items, since they need to make the cheque payable to the company in question.

Request:

Please indicate which outlet you will select, based on your current knowledge of these outlets, as well as the shopping mall in which it is situated, and briefly state reasons for your choice.
