

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES AMONGST AFRICAN GENERATION Y STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FASHION MARKETING ACTIVITIES**

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### **—Abstract —**

The purpose of this study was to determine whether gender differences exist amongst African Generation Y students' perceptions concerning selected marketing activities of their preferred clothing brand. The African Generation Y cohort (individuals born between 1986 and 2005) in South Africa, represents an important market segment in that it makes up 32 per cent of the country's population. As one of the largest contributors to the South African economy, the fashion retail industry is experiencing intense competition amongst fashion brands and retailers due to an increased amount of national and international brands available to consumers. Consequently, the need for effective differentiation, such as branding, is becoming more significant. In light of this, it is increasingly important for marketers and brand managers to define their target market clearly, which requires a sound understanding of their target market's needs and the contributors of consumer behaviour, of which gender is a key factor. This study used a self-administered questionnaire to collect data from a convenience sample of 750 students across three South African public higher education institution' campuses situated in the Gauteng province. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics and a two independent-samples t-test. The findings

suggest that while there is no statistically significant difference between male and female participants' perceptions concerning their preferred clothing brands' advertising and product activities, statistically significant differences were found concerning the store image and pricing activities of their preferred clothing brand.

**Key Words:** *fashion marketing, marketing activities, South Africa, African Generation Y students*

**JEL Classification:** M30, M31, M37

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry is one of the largest contributors to the global economy (Singer, 2015), with the apparel and textile industry in particular, being one of the largest industries (Fashion United, 2014). In South Africa, the clothing retail industry generates approximately R50 billion annually (Makholwa, 2011) and experienced an annual growth rate of six per cent in May 2016 (Stats SA, 2016). Although the growth in this industry is promising, fashion retailers in South Africa are experiencing intense competition as major international fashion retailers are expanding into this market, thus increasing the number of brands available to South African consumers (Fin24, 2013). In addition, the fashion retailers also face the challenges of changing consumers' lifestyles and shopping patterns (Kurtulus & Ertekin, 2015:1). As a result of these challenges, effective differentiation becomes more crucial (PRNewswire, 2015).

Branding, which involves linking a specific name or symbol to a product (Das, 2011:162), is an effective means of differentiating a product from competitors (Kotler & Keller, 2012:265). However, Lee *et al.* (2008:295) emphasise that creative and unique marketing strategies are fundamental for effectively differentiating a brand from competing brands. Marketing strategies delineate the marketing mix elements utilised to achieve marketing objectives (Venter & Jansen van Rensburg, 2009:8). The traditional marketing mix, as devised by McCarthy in 1960, is considered the most popular marketing mix used for product marketing (Easey, 2009:142; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995:5). This marketing mix includes elements namely, promotion, place, price and product (Easey, 2009:142; Lamb *et al.*, 2010:455), which are often referred to as marketing activities (Schindler, 2012:4). Although fashion marketers need to manage these tools to effectively market the fashion products (Easey, 2009:16,238; Lamb *et al.*, 2010:16), Oyelana and Nini (2015:360) warn that understanding the target consumers and the determinants of their behaviour are substantial for the survival of any business.

Gender as a demographic variable, has long been known to influence consumers' shopping behaviours (Hanzaee & Aghasibeig, 2008:533) particularly in the fashion industry (Sondhi & Singhvi, 2006:58). As a result of its profound role in consumers' clothing choices, gender is a valuable variable used to understand consumer behaviour (Pandian *et al.*, 2012:22) and a key segmentation variable in the fashion market (Kuruvilla *et al.*, 2009:715). In light of this, the literature has revealed that a relationship between gender and consumers' perceptions,

preferences, attitudes and purchase decisions exists (Pandian *et al.*, 2012:22). Although it is suggested that marketers should pay special attention to the female segment, due to their fashion consciousness and fashion knowledge (Ko *et al.*, 2007:630; Kurtulus & Ertekin, 2015:8), it is argued that male consumers are becoming increasingly more involved in shopping than in the past (Chen-Yu & Seock, 2002:51; Jackson *et al.*, 2011:1; Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009:713). Therefore, both the male and female segments are important market segments to target. By understanding the gender differences in fashion shopping behaviour and its effect on consumer decision making, fashion marketers and brand managers could create or adapt their fashion marketing strategies and activities accordingly, increasing the effectiveness of their marketing strategies (Pandian *et al.*, 2012:22; Theodoridis & Chatzipanagiotou, 2009:712).

Promotion as a marketing mix element encompasses various methods, such as advertising and sales promotion, used to communicate product information to a market (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011:66) in order to encourage product acceptance and to create a positive brand image (Hult *et al.*, 2014:534). Advertising, which is defined as any paid form of communication through an identified source (Grewal & Levy, 2008:488), is one of the key tools used to promote the image of apparel brands (Oh & Jasper, 2006:15), particularly to the Generation Y market (Fernandez, 2009:93). Although advertising is effective, Jobber (2010:469) accentuates that the success of an advertising campaign largely depends on accurately identifying and understanding the target audience. Literature suggests that in general, male and female consumers have significant different attitudes towards advertisements, with the attitudes of female consumers being more unfavourable than male consumers (Ferdous & Towfique, 2008:488). In terms of specific advertising mediums, male consumers have more positive attitudes towards Internet advertising compared to female consumers (Haque *et al.*, 2007:11). Furthermore, male consumers are more easily influenced by television advertisements, while female consumers are more likely to be influenced by magazine advertisements (Chen-Yu & Seock, 2002:55).

Another essential marketing mix activity is the distribution place, such as the retail outlet (Jackson & Shaw, 2009:204), given that consumers can only purchase a product once it is physically made available to them (Rosenau & Wilson, 2006:84). While the product, price and promotion activities are controlled by the manufacturer, the distribution place activities are delegated to the intermediaries, such as retailers. Consequently, retailers are responsible for the tasks pertaining to

the people, processes and physical evidence, which relate to service marketing (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995:8). Notably, the consumers' perceptions of the distribution place, namely store image, plays a vital role in their store preference (Gundala , 2010:67-68) and ultimately their intention to purchase from the store (Jackson & Shaw, 2009:228). In light of this, one of the key marketing tasks of the manufacturer is to select and manage the retailers through which its product are distributed, which requires the consideration of the store's image, hence consumers' perceptions of stores (Yoo *et al.*, 200:199). According to Imran *et al.* (2013:82), male and female consumers have different store image perceptions. In view of this, Rajput and Khanna (2014:97) reported that the image of stores are substantially more important to female consumers than male consumers, especially, the store's physical facilities. In accordance with these findings, product variety and availability, store displays (Chen-Yu & Seock, 2002:66), convenience, physical appearance and the customer service of the store are more important to female consumers compared to their male counterparts (Seock & Sauls, 2008:478).

The price of a product or service indicates the amount of money that needs to be paid in exchange for the product or service (Strydom, 2011:159). Given that price influences consumers' product selection (Grewal & Levy, 2008:357), fashion marketers should consider the value consumers attach to the benefits of the products, the products' physical attributes and quality, and the brand image when making pricing decisions (Kincade & Gibson, 2010:124; Kotler & Armstrong, 2011:305). Literature on gender differences regarding price perceptions discusses various distinctive outcomes. Rajput and Khanna (2014:95) report that no significant differences were found in the importance ratings of clothing prices between male and female consumers. While literature also implies that female consumers are more aware and sensitive to prices of apparel products (Goi, 2011:96; Borges *et al.*, 2013:502), Algie and Korlimbinis (2005:6) and Jegethesan *et al.* (2012:279) reason that price is one of the most important variables to be taken into consideration by male consumers when purchasing clothing items.

The product element of the marketing mix refers to physical products, services or ideas (Hult *et al.*, 2014:324) that can be used, consumed, or acquired (Kotler & Armstrong, 2011:234) in order to satisfy a need or want (Perreault & McCarthy, 2008:275). Owing to the product itself being the main reason for a consumer's purchase (Jackson & Shaw, 2009:87), the creation of desirable clothing is essential (Rosenau & Wilson, 2006:84) for satisfying consumers' needs (Hult *et*

*al.*, 2014:324) and will determine whether a product will be accepted in the market (Goi, 2011:95). Goi (2011:96) advocates that the product element is more important to female consumers than male consumers. Correspondingly, Rocha *et al.* (2005:387) stated that female consumers in the United Kingdom and Brazil are significantly more aware of the physical product attributes of clothing than the male consumers. Conversely, for Chinese consumers, the physical product attributes are equally important to male and female consumers. Moreover, literature on particular product attributes reads that product fit (Jegethesan *et al.*, 2012:279) and durability are also important to both male and female consumers, however, product style is significantly more important to female consumers than male consumers (Rajput & Khanna, 2014:95).

The Generation Y cohort – consumers born between 1986 and 2005 (Markert, 2004:21) – is recognised as the largest consumer segment in the world (Foscht *et al.*, 2009:223). In South Africa, this cohort accounts for 38 per cent of the total South African population, where the African segment of this cohort accounts for 84 per cent of the total Generation Y cohort and 32 per cent of the total South African population (Stats SA, 2015). Generation Y individuals that pursue a tertiary qualification are of specific interest to marketers, given that they are associated with a high future earning potential (Bevan-Dye *et al.*, 2009:174) and are likely to have more disposable income and aggregate spending (Bevan-Dye, 2015:10). These university students are typically between the ages of 18 and 24 years (Tan *et al.*, 2013:737). The South African student population, comprising 938 000 students, spend more than the average South African consumer (Student Village, 2015:15). In addition, premium clothing is the product category that accounts for most of Generation Y consumers' high value expenditure (Student Village, 2015:30). Furthermore, it is estimated that two-thirds of their future income will be spent on fashion apparel (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003:96). This is not a surprise as Generation Y consumers' have a passion for fashion apparel (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010:50).

The size of the African Generation Y market along with their future earning potential and spending on fashion apparel makes them a lucrative market to target. Therefore, it is imperative for fashion marketers and brand managers to understand this market and in particular, their perceptions regarding the importance of marketing activities. By understanding this market and their differences in perceptions, more effective marketing strategies could be developed and implemented, which enable marketers to more effectively attract their target

market. As such, the primary objective of this study was to determine whether African Generation Y male and female students differ in their perceptions regarding fashion marketing activities in the South African clothing market.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The target population of this study was defined as full-time undergraduate African Generation Y students aged between 18 and 24. Non-probability judgement sampling was applied to select three higher education institution campuses, one traditional university, one university of technology and one comprehensive university, situated in the Gauteng province. The Gauteng province was selected due to this province comprising the largest share of the South African student population (DHET, 2016:29). A non-probability convenience sample of 750 students were selected for the main study. In order to determine the male and female African Generation Y students' perceptions of four fashion marketing activities, a scale in accordance with the literature on the various marketing activities was developed. The required data for this study were collected by means of a self-administered structured questionnaire that included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. In Section A the participants' demographical information were requested. Section B comprised 12 items that requested the participants' perceptions of the fashion marketing activities. These items were divided into four constructs, namely advertising activities (four items), store image activities (three items), pricing activities (two items) and product activities (three items). The participants' responses were measured on a six-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6).

The questionnaire was piloted on a convenience sample of 41 participants to examine the internal consistency reliability of the scale items. The Cronbach alpha value for the marketing activities scale was 0.834, which exceeded the recommended level of 0.600 (Wiid & Diggins, 2013:238). Furthermore, the average inter-item correlation of the entire scale resulted in a value of 0.288, which fell within the recommended range of 0.15 and 0.50 (Clark & Watson, 1995:316), suggesting internal consistency reliability. Subsequent to the pilot study, the questionnaire was administered to the sample of the main study. Ethical clearance (Ethics Clearance Number: ECONIT-ECON-2014-017) was obtained from the Ethical Committee of the North-West University (Vaal Campus). Lecturers at each of the three higher education institution campuses were contacted and asked whether they would allow the questionnaire to be distributed

to their students during class time. Participating lecturers were shown the ethics clearance certificate and a copy of the questionnaire. Once permission was solicited, the questionnaire was distributed for voluntary completion during a single class period. The data were analysed by making use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 23.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the 750 questionnaires that were distributed, 625 usable questionnaires were returned, which translates into a response rate of 83 per cent. The sample of this study included more female than male participants. Regarding the participants' age, the majority were 20 years of age, followed by those who were 21 years of age. The majority of the participants indicated that they were first year students, followed by those who indicated being second year students. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the sample of this study.

**Table 1: Sample description**

Gender	Per cent (%)	Age	Per cent (%)	Year of study	Per cent (%)
Male	47%	18	17%	1 <sup>st</sup> year	42%
Female	53%	19	17%	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	27%
		20	25%	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	26%
		21	20%	4 <sup>th</sup> year	4%
		22	11%		
		23	8%		
		24	3%		

In order to assess the internal-consistency reliability of the measurement instrument, the Cronbach alpha and the average inter-item correlation coefficients were computed for each construct. The Cronbach alpha values for the individual constructs ranged between 0.614 and 0.868, exceeding the acceptable level of 0.60 (Wiid & Diggines, 2013:238), indicating acceptable internal-consistency reliability. Furthermore, the average inter-item correlation coefficients for each of the four constructs ranged between 0.345 and 0.622. As such, the average inter-item correlation values of the constructs fell within the recommended range of 0.15 and 0.50 for the majority of constructs (Clark & Watson, 1995:316), except for advertising activities, which exceeded the 0.50 level by a marginal amount. This suggests that the scale items do measure the students' perceptions of the fashion marketing activities. Means above 3.5 were calculated for all four

marketing activities, indicating that the combined sample of male and female African Generation Y students agreed that all these marketing activities are important when purchasing their preferred clothing brand. The product activities construct obtained the highest mean value, followed by pricing activities, store image activities and advertising activities. Table 2 presents the results of this analysis.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Total Sample**

Marketing activities	Mean	Standard deviation	Ranked order
Product activities	4.96	0.81	1
Pricing activities	4.92	0.97	2
Store image activities	4.85	0.78	3
Advertising activities	4.52	1.07	4

A two-independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether male and female African Generation Y students differ in their perceptions of their preferred clothing brand's product, pricing, store image and advertising activities. The significance level was set at the conventional five per cent level. The means, standard deviations, t-values and p-values between male and female African Generation Y students' perceptions are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Gender differences**

Marketing activities	Male		Female		t-values	p-values
	Mean n=292	Standard deviation	Mean n=333	Standard deviation		
Product activities	4.932	0.848	4.994	0.783	-0.957	0.339
Pricing activities	5.005	0.953	4.842	0.986	2.092	<b>0.037*</b>
Store image activities	4.785	0.798	4.910	0.753	-2.006	<b>0.045*</b>
Advertising activities	4.508	1.043	4.536	1.096	-0.330	0.742

**\*Statistically significant at the 0.05 level**

As evident from Table 3, no statistical significant differences were found between African Generation Y male and female students' perceptions of their preferred clothing brand's advertising and product activities. This suggests that African Generation Y male and female students have similar perceptions regarding the advertising and product activities of their preferred clothing brand and that advertising and product activities are equally important to both groups. While the findings pertaining to product activities are in accordance with Chinese male and female consumers perceptions, it contradict with the perceptions of consumers in the United Kingdom and Brazil, where female consumers are more aware of the

physical attributes of clothing products than male consumers (Rocha *et al.* 2005:387). Furthermore, the findings concerning advertising activities are inconsistent with the findings of the study conducted by Ferdous and Towfique (2008:488), who reported gender differences in attitude towards advertising.

Statistical significant differences were found between African Generation Y male and female students' perceptions of the store image and pricing activities of their preferred clothing brand. As such, African Generation Y male and female students have statistically significant different perceptions concerning their preferred clothing brand's store image and pricing activities. In view of the gender differences in the perceptions of the pricing activities of clothing brands, it may be suggested that African Generation Y male students consider pricing activities of clothing brands significantly more important than female students do. Conversely, when taking into consideration the gender differences in the perceptions of the store image activities of clothing brands, African Generation Y female students regard the store image activities of clothing brands significantly more important than male students. These findings correspond with the findings of the study conducted by Rajput and Khanna (2014:97), indicating that store image activities are more important to female consumers and Algie and Korlimbinis (2005:6) and Jegethesan *et al.* (2012:279) report that price is a very important consideration variable to male consumers.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

Unique marketing strategies that effectively attract the target market are fundamental for effective differentiation and even more significant in the intensifying competitive environment that fashion brands and retailers find themselves today. For this reason, it is essential that fashion marketers and brand managers define and understand their target markets clearly, especially the contributors of consumer behaviour, of which gender is a key factor. By understanding the gender differences, fashion marketers and brand managers could create and tailor marketing strategies to attract target markets more effectively. The findings of the study reported on in this paper indicate that no statistical differences were found between male and female African Generation Y students' perceptions regarding the product and advertising activities of their preferred clothing brand. This suggests that product and advertising activities are equally important to African Generation Y male and female students. Conversely, male and female African Generation Y students have statistically significant

different perceptions regarding the store image and pricing activities of their preferred clothing brand. As such, store image activities are significantly more important to the African Generation Y female students, whereas pricing activities are significantly more important to the male students.

The significant importance of store image activities to female African Generation Y students could be attributable to the fact that female consumers tend to enjoy shopping more than male consumers and that male consumers are more likely to be focussed on getting the task done as quickly as possible (Kurtulus & Ertekin, 2015:7). Therefore, it is recommended that fashion brand managers that target female consumers should ensure that their brands are distributed through fashion retailers that offer an attractive shopping environment with creative store layouts, appropriate lighting, trained and helpful store personnel, and a variety of merchandise, in order to attract more female consumers. While price is a key consideration factor for African Generation Y male students, it does not necessarily mean that these consumers will not pay a high price for a clothing item. In view of that, it is recommended that fashion marketers and brand managers targeting male consumers, should merely ensure that the prices of their products are competitive and in accordance with the consumers' value judgement of the products and the brand.

As with most studies, this study has certain limitations, which provide opportunities for future research. The study reported on in this paper revealed the gender differences amongst African Generation Y students' perceptions concerning selected marketing activities of their preferred clothing brand and did not uncover the reasons for these differences. Therefore, the opportunity exist to determine the reasons for such gender differences. Furthermore, this study was limited to the African Generation Y cohort in Gauteng. Consequently, the opportunity exist to conduct a comparative study across the nine provinces and between the different ethnic groups and generations in South Africa.

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