

**THE IMPORTANCE OF STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS IN APPAREL
RETAIL: CUSTOMER AND MANAGEMENT PERCEPTIONS**

by

Janetta van der Vyver



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Supervisor: Prof R Du Preez

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that all sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged, and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university in order to obtain an academic qualification.



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Abstract

The apparel retail environment is highly competitive. Products and services that are easily replicated, together with informed and demanding consumer markets, add to the complexity of this dynamic, fast changing retail and manufacturing industry. One avenue that companies explore to differentiate themselves from the competition is by the development of their corporate identity. A fundamental element of marketing communication and corporate identity representation is store image, as it is a vehicle that affects the customers' perception of the store and the store's identity. To be able to invest in store image optimally, retailers should take cognisance of the need to manage store image in order to increase potential sales.

The purpose of the current study was to expand the existing body of knowledge on retail store image and the female apparel consumer in the Western Cape with special reference to the perceived importance of retail store image dimensions. The research question directing the current study was formulated as follows: *How do consumers perceive the various store image dimensions in apparel retail and how congruent are customers' and management's perceptions of these store image dimensions?*

The literature review focuses on the importance of store image for retail differentiation purposes as well as independent (demographics, lifestyle, shopping orientation) and dependent variables (patronage behaviour, store loyalty, customer satisfaction) in store image research. Congruity as well as gap analysis are also discussed as these are the focus of the research analysis.

The *Store Image Scale* (SIS) was used as measuring instrument. Management (n = 14) and customer (n = 200) samples from a leading apparel retailer were used to measure the importance of the various store image dimensions. The questionnaire was adapted for the purpose of reaching all the set empirical objectives. The customer questionnaire included five sections to measure the ideal and the actual store image and the management

questionnaire included two sections to measure management's perception of the importance of store image dimensions for customers.

Data was subjected to reliability analysis, descriptive statistics and analysis of variance. Results indicated that Atmosphere, Merchandise and Service were rated as most important dimensions according to customer perceptions of the ideal, while Atmosphere, Promotion and Service were the most important dimensions according to management. Atmosphere, Convenience and Merchandise were rated as most acceptable by customers. Due to the nature of the research design congruency analysis was used. The congruency analysis yielded 29 of the 55 attributes as congruent. The analysis of congruency between acceptability and importance ratings of customers indicated that the dimensions Convenience, Institutional and Sales Personnel showed no significant differences. It therefore was concluded that management's perception and customers' perceptions of the importance of ideal store image are closely related for these dimensions. However, closer consideration has to be given to the specific attribute design. Significant differences between management's and customers' perceptions were found for the Promotion, Merchandise and Service dimensions. Based on the results, recommendations were made to management from which they could infer possible adjustments to the strategic management of store image dimensions.

This is one of the first academic studies to attempt to provide management with feedback on the performance of their retail strategy and is therefore exploratory in nature. The recommendations from the current study could help retailers meet consumer needs, and thereby create a competitive advantage and unique market position for the store. This could contribute to building brand equity, store patronage and, consequently, sales, as well as support the possibility of benchmarking the importance of specific store image dimensions as retail practices in the chain store apparel sector. This could contribute to this retailer's ability to project a store image that meets customers' expectations while enforcing the strategic corporate identity.

Opsomming

Die klere kleinhandelsomgewing is hoogs kompetierend. Produkte en dienste word maklik nageboots en ingeligte en veeleisende verbruikers dra by tot die kompleksiteit van hierdie dinamiese en veranderende kleinhandel- en vervaardigingsbedryf. Een wyse waarop maatskappye poog om hulself van die kompetisie te onderskei, is die ontwikkeling van 'n korporatiewe identiteit. Winkelbeeld is 'n fundamentele bousteen van korporatiewe identiteit en 'n prominente deel van bemarkingskommunikasie. Winkelbeeld verpersoonlik die winkelidentiteit en beïnvloed die verbruiker se persepsie van 'n winkel. Om besteding op winkelbeeld optimaal te benut, moet kleinhandelaars kennis neem van die belangrikheid van die bestuur van winkelbeeld ten einde verkope te verhoog.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die bestaande kennis rondom kleinhandelaar-winkelbeeld en vroue-klereverbruikers in die Wes-Kaap uit te bou, met spesifieke verwysing na die belangrikheid van die dimensies van 'n winkelbeeld. Die navorsingsvraag wat die studie gerig het, is soos volg geformuleer: *Hoe word die verskillende dimensies van winkelbeeld deur verbruikers waargeneem en hoe kongruent is die verbruikers en bestuurders se persepsies van winkelbeelddimensies?*

Die literatuurstudie fokus op die belangrike rol van winkelbeeld in die proses van kleinhandelaardifferensiasie, sowel as die onafhanklike (demografie, lewenstyl, aankooporiëntasie) en afhanklike veranderlikes (aankoopgedrag, winkellojaliteit, verbruikerstevredenheid) in winkelbeeldnavorsing. Kongruensie en gapinganalise word ook bespreek omdat dit die fokus van die navorsingsanalise is.

Die Winkelbeeldskaal (*Store Image Scale - SIS*) is as meetinstrument gebruik. Twee steekproewe bestaande uit bestuurders ($n = 14$) en verbruikers ($n = 200$) van 'n modehandelaar is gebruik om die belangrikheid van winkelbeelddimensies te bepaal. Die vraelys is aangepas om die verskillende empiriese doelwitte te bereik. Die verbruikersvraelys wat gebruik is, bestaan uit vyf afdelings en meet die ideale en

werklike winkelbeeld. Die bestuursvraelys bestaan uit twee afdelings ten einde bestuur se persepsie van verbruikers se ideale belangrikheid van winkelbeeld dimensies, te meet.

Die data is met behulp van betroubaarheidanalise, beskrywende statistiek en analise van variansie ontleed. Volgens die kliënte se persepsie van die ideale winkelbeeld is Atmosfeer, Handelsware en Dienste die belangrikste dimensies, terwyl bestuurspersepsie Atmosfeer, Promosie en Dienste as die belangrikste dimensies aangedui het. Atmosfeer, Handelsware en Gerief is deur kliënte as die mees aanvaarbare dimensies geïdentifiseer. Die aard van die navorsingsontwerp het die gebruik van kongruensie-analise vereis en dit het kongruensie tussen bestuurders- en verbruikersresponse vir 29 uit 55 attribute getoon. Die kongruensie-analise dui verder aan dat geen statisties beduidende verskille tussen die dimensies Gerief, Institusionele en Verkoopspersoneel voorkom nie. Die gevolgtrekking kan dus gemaak word dat bestuurs- en verbruikerspersepsies ten opsigte van die belangrikheid van die winkelbeeld ooreenstem, maar dat verdere aandag aan spesifieke winkelbeeld-attribute geskenk moet word. Beduidende verskille tussen verbruikers- en bestuurspersepsies ten opsigte van belangrikheid is vir die Promosie-, Handelsware- en Dienstedimensies gevind. Verskeie aanbevelings is op grond van die resultate aan die bestuur voorgestel ten einde moontlike strategiese wysigings aan die bestuur van winkelbeeld te fasiliteer.

Hierdie is een van die eerste akademiese studies wat terugvoering gee rakende die effektiwiteit van 'n kleinhandelstrategie en is dus verkennend van aard. Die aanbevelings is daarop gemik om verbruikers se behoeftes aan te spreek, en 'n kompeterende voordeel en unieke markposisie vir die kleinhandelaar te skep, om tot die ontwikkeling en uitbouing van handelsmerkwaarde, winkelkeuse en, gevolglik, verkope by te dra. Verder behoort die resultate ondersteuning te bied vir die ontwikkeling van normstelling rakende die belangrikheid van winkelbeelddimensies in klere kettingwinkels. Dit kan hierdie handelaar in staat stel om 'n winkelbeeld te skep wat aan verbruikers se verwagtinge voldoen en gelyktydig ook die korporatiewe identiteit versterk.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introductory perspectives

The multi-million Rand apparel industry is one of the most profitable and largest industries in South Africa and is characterised by competitiveness, complexity and dynamism (Datamonitor, 2005). The industry's strength is signified by its continued growth through stringent economic circumstances. Between 1998 and 2003, the Rand depreciated significantly. Notwithstanding, a 27,8% increase in sales was recorded in the apparel industry and South Africa saw an increase in personal disposable income of 11,5% (South Africa: Market profile, 2005). Harpes-Logan (1997, p.16) emphasised the importance of research for various stakeholders in the apparel industry and stated, “apparel is a non-durable commodity that is purchased consistently by consumers regardless of the economy. Clothing consumption greatly interests manufacturers, retailers, marketers and educators”. Taking into account the character of the industry and the wide spectrum of stakeholders, one would expect an extensive body of knowledge concerning apparel consumers to be contributing to this industry’s profitability. However, limited published research on the South African apparel consumer may point to the need for more scientific knowledge regarding the variables that influence apparel shopping behaviour.

1.2 The South African apparel industry: market and retail challenges

In the late 1900s and in the early 2000s, store retailers struggled to maintain a viable position in a competitive retail market (Moye & Kincade, 2002). In South Africa, this could partly be attributed to tariff reductions that have been instated since 1995. The tariffs were instituted in accordance with World Trade Organisation commitments (South Africa: Market profile, 2005). This created an influx of cheaper textile and apparel products imported from Latin America and Asian Pacific countries (after the worldwide textile quota limits on cheap Asian imports expired on 1 January 2005) that put further pressure on South African apparel retailers (Curran, 2007).

The industry is still developing and large amounts of imports, predominantly from Malaysia, Indonesia, China, India, Taiwan and Thailand, account for some 20% of domestic sales

(South Africa: Market profile, 2005). The African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) agreed upon in May 2000 offered some protection to sub-Saharan Africa exports to the US (McCormick, 2006). However, recent restrictions on the import of textiles from Eastern countries, specifically China, have put the retail market under further pressure and higher local production costs will soon seep through to consumers. This will result in a heightened urgency to be competitive, to provide a superior customer experience and to retain customers in this highly lucrative market that reached a value of \$6.1 billion in 2004, and is predicted to grow even further to a staggering \$7.4 billion in 2009 (Datamonitor, 2005).

The general business environment is plagued by constant change and challenges to stay ahead of the competition. The marketplace is saturated with similar products and imitations. Furthermore, the market has become highly complex and consumers are more sophisticated and informed than ever before. For a number of years, the fashion retail industry has tried to please all consumer segments simultaneously, with varying degrees of success, mainly because retailers did not concentrate on a specific strategy with regard to consumer demands (Lewis & Hawksley, 1990). This approach proved only moderately successful. To excel in a competitive environment, the fashion industry will have to cater for their consumers' specific needs (North, De Vos & Kotzé, 2003). More than thirty years ago, James, Durand and Dreves (1976) stated that store image studies undertaken without consideration of a specific market segment contaminate results because they include non-target market customers. Other methods should be identified and applied to differentiate among retailers and etch out a position in the perception of the consumer. Differentiation must be established through focusing resources and attention on establishing retailer brands and aligning all the activities of a company with the needs and wants of the specific market (Lewis & Hawksley, 1990).

A number of companies differentiate themselves on the basis of their corporate identity (Lewis & Hawksley, 1990; Markwick & Fill, 1997). Projecting a corporate identity through the total corporate communication mix results in the formation of the corporate image defined as the perception of the corporation by its stakeholders. Corporate image is the sum total of symbols and artefacts designed and managed to communicate the ideal perception of the organisation to its various audiences, which recognises the influence that consumers' interpretation have in constructing a store image (Christensen & Askegaard, 2001). A number of components make up corporate image, namely corporate identity, reputation, personality, strategy and culture and linkages among them (Markwick & Fill, 1997). Corporate image focuses on the image in the perceiver's mind, therefore companies focus on controllable

signals in order to influence the perceptions of consumers (Stern, Zinkhan & Jaju, 2001). The definitions of corporate identity converge around the idea that it is a set of symbolic representations including graphic designs and, sometimes, organisational behaviour. Thus, corporate identity is an assembly of cues and is conceptualised as the total impression it makes on the perceiver (Abratt, 1989; Christensen & Askegaard, 2001; Gray & Smeltzer, 1985). The definitions, however, describe corporate identity as the perception of an organisation in its surroundings. These definitions focus on external perspectives. Some scholars prefer the internal perspective which emphasises what the members of the organisation believe the central characteristics to be. Markwick and Fill (1997) and Morin (2006) view corporate identity as how an organisation presents itself to its various stakeholders and the means by which it distinguishes itself from all other companies. Gray and Smeltzer (1985) argue that a strong corporate identity is needed to secure trust with stakeholders.

This image is enhanced by the variety of cues and deliberately planned messages that interplay and support one another to form the corporate identity. Of particular importance is the communication of retail strategies through which a company is presented to its stakeholders. The retail strategy should be emphasised, as it is imperative to deliver a consistent, coherent and satisfying brand experience (Graeff, 1996; Janse van Noordwyk, 2002; Schlegelmilch & Pollach, 2005). The corporate identity should be an assembly of unique cues, by which an audience can recognise the company and distinguish it from others and which can be used to represent or symbolise the company (Abratt, 1989). Co-ordination and consistency among the different vehicles that communicate the organisation's unique image ensures differentiation from the competition (Abratt, 1989; Bernstein, 1984; Olins, 1978; Stern *et al.*, 2001). Any variable affecting stakeholders' experience of the corporate identity acts as a potential vehicle (Janse van Noordwyk, in press). A vital part of marketing communication and corporate identity representation is store image, as it is a vehicle affecting customers' perception of the store and the store's identity. Store image is measured through the customers' attitudes and perceptions. Assael (1992, p. 633) states that, "Measurement of store image assists retailers in determining their competitive strengths and weaknesses". Strict management and measuring of store image could avoid a trial and error approach, which is very costly and can alienate customers. Thus, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of a retailers' store image can ensure that the store image best suited to the market and efficient for the influence of consumer behaviour is developed.

It is therefore in retail establishments' best interest to improve their understanding of shopping behaviour in their market. This empowers them with the knowledge to design the shopping experience according to their customers' expectations (Yavas, 2001). This approach could increase the ability to maintain and gain market share in a competitive market environment (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2003). Consumers have specific expectations of what stores should offer them. Target segments with comparable shopping orientations, lifestyles and needs tend to entertain similar expectations and therefore stores must concentrate on a viable segment's expectations. By doing gap or feedback analyses, management can ascertain whether what they are offering corresponds with the target segment's expectations. Fulfilling the expectations of customers attracts them to the store and keeps them from seeking fulfilment elsewhere. If a company has a superior understanding of their target market it enables a more accurate retail strategy and the possibility to develop a unique and compatible store image.

Store image enhances the customers' positive shopping experience and essentially provides superior value to the retailer's targeted market (Hawkins, Best & Coney, 2004). This added value is based on the needs that management presumes their customers to have. By differentiating its corporate identity according to a consumer-centric strategy and fulfilling needs, an organisation positions itself separately from other stores in consumers' minds (Chowdary, 1999).

Marketing communication should portray how a company will satisfy consumer needs and fulfil expectations. A store's identity, presented in the store image, communicates this information to consumers, which they, in turn, use during pre-purchase decision-making (North *et al.*, 2003). According to Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal and Voss (2002), as well as Erdem, Oumlil and Tuncalp (1999), store image [dimensions] as a specific communication tool, is evaluated in terms of consumer values and store choice criteria. Successful evaluation could lead to store patronage, store loyalty and customer satisfaction. Jacoby and Mazursky (1984) suggested that consumers form a set of beliefs about a store, on the basis of which they decide whether it is the type of shopping environment that appeals to them, creating store patronage intention. The precise mix includes, and is dependent on, the retail sector, the target market, and the motivation of the consumer (Birtwistle & Shearer, 2001).

Consumer behaviour remains a very complex phenomenon. Researchers face a multitude of factors that impact one another and consequently determine consumer behaviour. To mention

a few of an extensive list, demographics, lifestyle, usage situations, mood, store layout, store attributes, fashion, shopping orientation, type of product, and type of store can all influence consumption behaviour. Unfortunately, one single study cannot account for all of these factors. Since store image seems to be pivotal in influencing various consumer behaviours; the focus of the current study will be customers', as well as management's perception of store image. The following section will therefore focus on the role of store image within the field of consumer behaviour.

1.3 The role of store image in influencing consumer behaviour

The concept of retail store image first became of interest when Martineau (1958, p. 55) described the "...personality of the retail store". Porter and Claycomb, (1997) state that consumers' thoughts formed over time and the feelings which they associate with stores, including their overall impression, impacts their shopping and patronage behaviour. This affirms the influence of image considerations on purchase choices (Stern *et al.*, 2001; Visser, Du Preez & Janse Van Noordwyk, 2006). A store's identity, presented in the store image, communicates useful information to consumers that they utilise during pre-purchase decision-making (North *et al.*, 2003). Defining a strong identity that differentiates them from opposition enables retailers to optimise consumer responses, satisfaction, loyalty and store patronage and, by doing so, become the retailer of choice in the marketplace and hold a sustainable competitive advantage. According to Kim and Jin (2001), shopping satisfaction and the intention to repurchase result from the shopper's emotional experience during the purchase stage and hence from the appraisal of the store's dimensions. Customers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction and intention to repurchase therefore serve as indicators of customers' perception of a particular store and this perception is created by store image.

Many scholars (e.g. Birtwistle & Shearer, 2001; Birtwistle & Siddiqui, 1995; Chowdhary, 1999; Kim & Han, 2000; Lee, Hwang & Kang, 1996; Lindquist, 1974-1975) have published research on store image and have reported a wide variety of store attributes. However, no consensus has been reached on the attributes that retailers should be focused on to maintain customer satisfaction by using a retailer's store image. This complicates store image research further. Retailers need to determine which store image attributes are important for success. In order to facilitate a logical study of store image, a description of the dimensions and attributes which create the store image in total is needed.

Martineau's (1958, p. 47) original study on store image first defined this construct as "...the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes". Further to this, Lindquist (1974-1975, p. 31) concluded that store image is "...complex by nature and consists of a combination of tangible or functional factors and intangible or psychological factors that a consumer perceives to be present". Store image is defined as an overall perception built from countless separate bits of information that are combined in such a manner that the end result of the integration amounts to more than the sum of its constituent parts (Chowdhary, 1999). Most definitions stress that store image is the consumer's perception of a store, based on a set of salient attributes (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; James, Durand & Dreves, 1976; Jin & Kim, 2003; Osman, 1993). The eight store image dimensions that have been identified as the underlying structure of store image by Janse van Noordwyk (in press) are: Atmosphere, Convenience, Facilities, Institutional, Merchandise, Promotion, Sales Personnel and Service.

Even when a definition and structure are decided upon, uncertainty remains as to whether any given marketing communication strategy is exactly what that market requires. Management needs to ensure that what they perceive to be important is what their clients perceive as important. Uncertainty about customers' perceptions leads to further speculation regarding the accuracy of the marketing and communication strategy.

Thang and Tan (2003) argue the role of consumer perceptions of store image dimensions in store preferences. They found that store image influences store preference. This underscores store image dimensions regarding ability to attract customers. The ability to attract customers is only realised if store image expectations are met and no gap is perceived by customers. It then is the responsibility of retailers to focus on the dimensions of store image in order to become retailers of choice and differentiate themselves from other stores (Visser *et al.*, 2006). Markwick and Fill (1995) emphasise that, if image studies are designed to expose stakeholders' perceptions of key attributes of the company, the company can feed this information into their strategy management. This type of information enables the company to align the perceptions held by its stakeholders with the strategy that is designed to communicate the image.

Store image should consequently be viewed from both the customers' and the retailer's perspective. Customers' perceptions of stores are a compilation of the messages and cues they receive from the store, as well as the importance they place on store image dimensions.

The retailers' perception of their store's image is based on the strategic management and representation of the corporate identity and, consequently, of those attributes they perceive as important to their customers. These attributes should be managed in their marketing strategy to build and maintain patronage (Osman, 1993). Retailers can therefore control the identity they portray by managing the store image attributes. All the vehicles that represent corporate identity must portray a consistent image; similarly, management has to ensure that the store image forms a strong whole by concentrating on the dimensions which customers view as important.

Management's perception of the image that their store should portray is based on those attributes that they perceive as important to their customers. Management manipulates the variables they consider important in the strategy with the aim to expand and maintain their patrons (Osman, 1993). Thompson and Chen (1998) pointed out that the attributes perceived as promised by management must endure and be reinforced by the experience in the store. Management cannot afford to merely assume and hope that the store image dimensions they view as important for customers are in fact important to the selected target market. The fit between management's perceptions and customers' perceptions of store image is therefore critical for success and warrants research. Customers' expectation of a store is developed from an ideal perception of what they want to experience in a store. Similar to this, the congruence between management's and customers' perceptions of store image must be based on the ideal. Management must strive to create a store image that is congruent with the customers' ideal.

The current study attempts to establish the areas of incongruity between what management believe customers' ideal importance of store image dimensions are and what customers' ideal importance of store image dimensions actually is. Matching correspondence mechanisms should exist between management's perception of what customers want, what customers' ideals are and what customers actually experience. When these different perceptions show congruity, a store can positively influence consumer behaviour (Samli, Kelly & Hunt, 1998).

Store image is a powerful instrument when there is congruency between customer needs and market offering as it serves to direct consumer buying behaviour. The relevance of image congruity research revolves around the feedback it provides regarding the effectiveness of management's retailing strategy. Image congruity tests the accuracy of management's prediction of the customers' perception of the importance of the store image dimensions

(Osman, 1993). If the customers experience and perception is as intended by management, then this congruity will lead to greater store patronage and store loyalty. This statement relies on the assumption that the marketing communication strategy is based on the target market's needs.

The importance of the current study is grounded in the congruity between management's and customers' perceptions of store image dimensions. Consumers' expectations are changing constantly. Retailers are expected to deliver consistently on consumer demands, whilst still differentiating and creating value for consumers through offering a satisfactory experience and thereby building brand equity (Janse van Noordwyk, in press; Miranda, Konya & Havrila, 2005). Building brand equity parallels building customer store-based equity. Equity entails that customers have an approving, unique and strong association; a primary association is the store's image (Hartman & Spiro, 2005). Retailers need to assess consumers' perceived importance of store image dimensions and attributes as they contribute to the customers' experience and knowledge. Although private market research on store image has been conducted, store image research is usually not scrutinised according to scientific standards, and is not shared in the public domain. This limits the use of information and hampers further research, as well as any significant conclusions and recommendations that could be made regarding the topic. The current study does not focus on the aggregate of perceptions of store image only, but also includes perceptions of individual store image dimensions and of the importance and impact of each dimension of store image. The results offer feedback on customer and management perceptions of the importance of store image dimensions, to ensure that expenditure is targeted towards those store image dimensions that customers regard as important, eliminating the need for assumptions on the part of management.

Knowledge of customer perceptions is a strategic tool to attain and retain clientele in the increasingly competitive environment. The current study attempts to expand on and broaden the work of Janse van Noordwyk (in press) through the utilisation of her *Conceptual theoretical model of store image and related consumer behaviour variables* definition and her *Model of store image*, as well as through the implementation of the *Store Image Scale (SIS)*. The rationale for building on Janse van Noordwyk's research was that her research was based on South African consumers and that her work had a strong qualitative, quantitative and methodological base. Her research investigated an extensive collection of past literature on store image. The current study can therefore be viewed as an attempt to further broaden the store image research domain and knowledge base. This should allow extension of the existing

body of knowledge with regard to customers' perceptions of store image, which could influence female apparel shopping behaviour in the Western Cape. This extension will be guided by the problem statement formulated in the following section.

1.4 Statement of the problem and objectives

The research question that directed the current study was: *How do consumers perceive the various store image dimensions in apparel retail and how congruent are customers' and management's perceptions of these store image dimensions?*

The broad research objective of this exploratory study was to expand the existing body of knowledge with regard to customers' perceptions of store image that could influence female apparel shopping behaviour.

In order to obtain answers to the research problem, specific objectives were formulated. These included the following literature-related objectives:

1. To identify the role of store image in positioning a retailer
2. To identify and describe the related variables in store image research
3. To identify and describe the various dimensions of store image
4. To investigate the relevance of gap analysis in store image research

Once these objectives were met, the empirical study focused on the following objectives:

5. To investigate the reliability of the SIS
6. To measure the ideal importance of store image dimensions for customers
7. To measure management's perception of what their customers view as the ideal store image
8. To determine how customers perceive the actual store image of an apparel retailer
9. To determine congruency between customers' ideal concerning the importance of store image dimensions and what management perceives it to be
10. To classify congruence/incongruence according to six store image type combinations

11. To make recommendations regarding the strategic rectification of a possible poor fit between management and customers' perceptions of store image dimensions
12. To make recommendations regarding store image dimensions according to current acceptability
13. To make recommendations for future research

1.5 Defining of key concepts

The following key concepts are used for the purpose and relevance of the current study:

Apparel shopping behaviour: This is the manifestation of browsing for apparel as well as the decision to buy a specific clothing item (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007).

Consumer Behaviour: Activities consumers undertake when searching for, purchasing, evaluating, as well as disposing of clothing products and services (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2006; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007)

Consumers and Customers: Within consumer behaviour there are two closely related terms namely consumer and customer. These terms may be used interchangeably but will be differentiated for the purpose of this study. Retail establishments have many stakeholders, employees, management, customers, former customers and competitors' customers to name but a few. However the two most important stakeholders are the store's customers and management, these customers are important for the reason that they generate sales while management has the ability to keep these customers satisfied (Samli, Kelly & Hunt, 1998). Therefore in the current study consumers entail all possible clients, including former customers and competitors' customers. Customers are the specific consumers or clients that purchased at the specific retailer in question. As the current study focuses on the outcome of feedback for a specific store and possible corrective actions to increase sales, the research is specifically done on customers.

Retailers / Stores: These terms could be used interchangeably. They refer to any activity that involves sales of products (apparel) to any consumer. Clothing retailers are the channel between the clothing industry and consumers (Kleinhans, 2003). Clothing stores can be classified as single-unit or multiple operations, however, emphasis will be placed on a leading

apparel chain store. This group of stores will be referred to as the leading apparel retailer, while the single stores that form part of this group will be referred to as the store.

Store image and store image dimensions: Consumers rely on their perceptions when choosing a store (Blackwell *et al.*, 2006). For the purposes of the current study, the following definition by Janse van Noordwyk (in press) is supported and will serve as point of departure.

Store image is a complex, multidimensional construct based on the perception of tangible and intangible store attributes associated with eight dimensions, namely Atmosphere, Convenience, Facilities, Institutional, Merchandise, Promotion, Sales personnel and Service. These dimensions are further delineated into sub-dimensions which are underpinned by specific store attributes. Store image has a gestalt nature that is represented by the interaction between the salient tangible and intangible store attributes. The formation of store image relies on the perception of a store which varies by retailer, product and target market. By implication, store image is influenced by (1) the consumer's perception of a set of salient store attributes, (2) the importance the consumer places on the various store image dimensions, sub-dimensions and the associated store attributes, as well as (3) the retailer's manipulation of these store attributes through strategic management.

Store image attributes and sub-dimensions: Store image attributes refer to specific attributes grouped under each specific store image dimension (Janse van Noordwyk, in press), including:

- ❖ *Atmosphere* (décor, smell, sound, store atmosphere)
- ❖ *Convenience* (check-out, travel, location, parking, shopping ease, store hours, transportation)
- ❖ *Facilities* (store layout, store appearance, facility convenience, fitting rooms, fixtures)
- ❖ *Institutional* (clientele, overall impression, store reputation, store association)
- ❖ *Merchandise* (merchandise assortment, merchandise style, merchandise price, merchandise quality)
- ❖ *Promotion* (advertising, displays, sales incentives)
- ❖ *Sales personnel* (sales personnel interaction, sales personnel appearance)
- ❖ *Service* (after-sales service, payment options, in-store service, delivery options)

Perception: Perception is “...the process by which an individual selects, organises, and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world” (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007, p. 158). In the current study, the perception of a clothing store encompassing both customer and management perceptions and will be the focus.

Congruity: Congruity refers to a matching paradigm, thus the match or mismatch between two objects. If an individual has two related thoughts or perceptions, but they are somehow inconsistent with each other, psychological tension arises to restore consistency/congruity (Jacoby & Mazursky, 1984). In terms of store image, what a customer expects and wants in a store must be consistent with what is experienced. If not, the customer will attempt to find consistency elsewhere. Incongruity negates the impression of store image (Osman, 1993).

1.6 Research Methodology

The problem statement and research objectives led to the choice of a survey as the most appropriate research design. The store-intercept method of data collection is a research strategy that has many unique features and deals with phenomena as they exist. This method was viewed as the most appropriate for the current study and was therefore selected to gather the data to reach the empirical objectives. Questionnaires are most frequently used as measuring means for the store-intercept method (Blakenship & Breen, 1993). The *Store Image Scale* developed by Janse van Noordwyk (in press) was employed. This questionnaire was deemed appropriate as its development included quantitative and qualitative phases. It was also specifically developed for the South African context. Respondents (according to a quota system) were to be intercepted within the retailer’s stores. The questionnaire was administered by means of an in-store interview undertaken by trained fieldworkers. The data were subjected to various statistical analyses, including reliability analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA). Six types of perception congruity/incongruity between management and customers served as diagnostic guidelines. The store image dimensions will from here on be classified according to these types of perception. This research methodology provided the framework within which data were gathered and analysed. This is elaborated on in Chapter 3.

1.7 Structuring of the thesis

The contents of the current thesis are in accordance with the set objectives of the study and are structured as follows:

Chapter 1 presents the introductory perspectives and the role of store image in the South African apparel industry. The chapter includes an introduction to the research problem, the research objectives and a definition of key concepts. Chapter 2 establishes the domain of the study. The conceptual framework and the objectives determined the selection of literature discussed in this chapter. The relevant literature is discussed to show the importance of store image in differentiating a corporate image and influencing female consumer behaviour. The last section in this chapter deals with store image congruity (analysing the gap between management's and customers' perceptions).

The research methodology for the empirical study is described in Chapter 3. The research design is discussed in terms of the method of sampling, the data gathering process, the measurement instrument and statistical analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results and discussion of the findings. Chapter 5 presents the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study, as well as recommendations, implications and proposals for future research.

1.8 Conclusion to Chapter 1

This chapter has laid the foundation for this thesis. The broad field within which the study was conducted was outlined and motivation for the study was provided. The research problem and research objectives of this exploratory study were stated and the key concepts defined, while the broad methodology and outline of the thesis were mapped. From these foundations, Chapter 2 proceeds with a review of relevant literature on store image and congruity.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review that was undertaken served to provide a theoretical base in order to develop and justify the research initiative. The following objectives were addressed through the review:

1. To identify the role of store image in positioning a retailer
2. To identify and describe the related variables in store image research
3. To identify and describe the various dimensions of store image
4. To investigate the relevance of gap analysis in store image research

An overview of literature highlighting the importance of store image in consumer behaviour that was studied to address these objectives, follows. The relationship between corporate identity and brand positioning (and the role of store image therein as communication tool) is discussed and related independent and dependent variables in store image research are examined. This is followed by a review of the dimensions of store image and store image congruity.

2.2 Theoretical framework

Clothing researchers are urged to strive towards cumulative knowledge and to assist in theory building (Nagasawa, Kaiser & Hutton, 1989). Theory-building is important since it provides a framework for analysis, facilitates the efficient development of the field, and it is needed for the applicability to practical real world problems. Two existing models dealing with store image have been integrated to develop the conceptual framework for the current study, namely Osman's (1993) *Model of retail image influences on loyalty patronage behaviour* and the *Paradigm of perceived image conflicts diagnostics* by Samli and Lincoln (1989). The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 2.1.

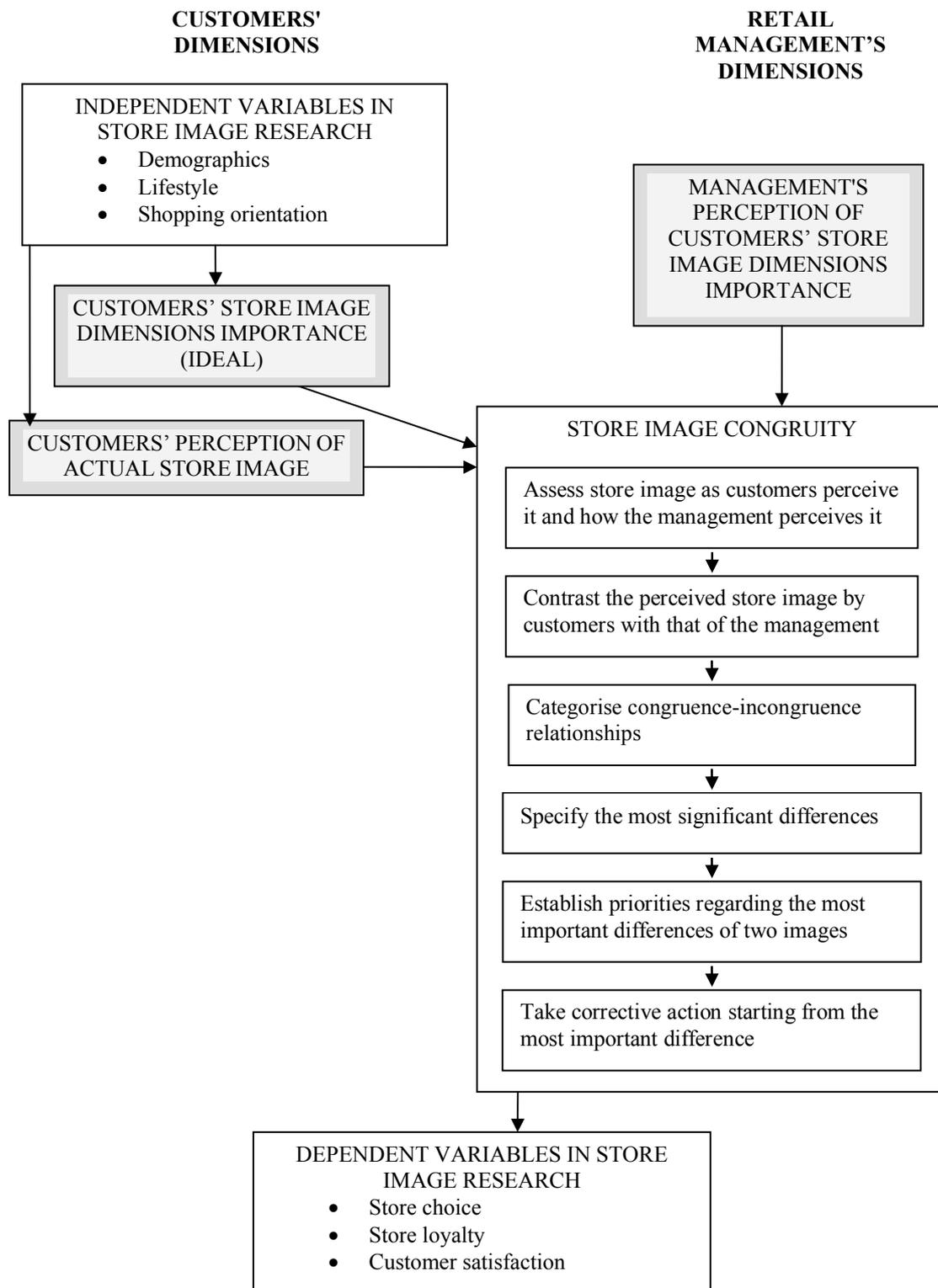


Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

(Adapted from Osman, 1993, p. 136; Samli *et al.*, 1998, p.30; Samli & Lincoln, 1989, p.199)

The above framework indicates the relationship between store image variables and customers' and management's perceptions of store image. Consumer characteristics such as demographics, lifestyle and shopping orientation lead to the development of particular

shopping needs. These needs establish particular priorities in consumers' evaluation of store attributes. The image of a particular store is developed in accordance with the consumers' needs and the retailing strategy. However, this is predominantly decided according to management's perceptions. The degree to which management perceptions and customer perceptions correspond can impact on whether the consumers' needs are fulfilled. An analysis of store image perception congruity is essential, as it contributes to meeting customers' needs and expectations. This could influence patronage behaviour, store loyalty, and customer satisfaction.

In the following section the role and the importance of store image as part of corporate image and retailing strategy will be discussed. This provides the background for the study and is followed by a discussion of the related variables of store image and store image congruity.

2.3 The significance of store image for business

Few retail stores can be all things to all people...

(James *et al.*, 1976, p. 25)

As early as the fifties, Martineau (1958, p. 50) stressed the importance of competitive advantage in retailing. He emphasised the development of a "... sharp character" for a store and noted that, in the absence thereof, the store/retailer will not be the consumers' first choice, and will end up being a mere alternative choice. Corporations build a sharp character by defining themselves in the minds of consumers and differentiating themselves from the competition. This goal is achieved through strong image building, with a corporate image/identity, brand image and brand positioning, as well as market segmentation.

Corporate identity is part of the wider aspect of corporate branding. A corporate brand is formed through interplay between corporate strategy, corporate culture and corporate identity (Visser *et al.*, 2006). Corporate strategy comprises the core values of the brand, philosophy and mission, which are driven by top management. Corporate culture manifests through the meanings and values that the employees of the organisation hold and use (Stuart, 1999). Corporate image results from the corporate strategy and culture that are communicated to the stakeholders. The corporate communication mix projects the corporate identity, through this the corporate image is created. The perception of this image of the corporation by different stakeholders is what defines it (Janse van Noordwyk, in press). Van Riel and Balmer (1997,

p. 340) explain that the identity is made public through "...behaviour, communications, as well as symbolism to the internal and external audiences", which incorporate the identity mix.

Corporate identity is a mix of characteristics that organisations possess as an entity (Gylling & Lindberg-Repo, 2005). Corporate image is the presentation of this identity and is intentionally constructed to elicit certain specific responses and reactions. Morin (2006, p. 8) stated that "Executives recognize the importance and value of defining their business position and corporate identity to reinforce their strategic goals that build and maintain their brands and guide their businesses in today's global marketplace". A critical finding is that managing corporate identity is the key to a company's success (Gylling & Lindberg-Repo, 2005). Corporate image must provide a sense of coherence and support various parts of the organisation with the strength of the entire organisation's distinguishing attributes. Consistency and congruency between the different vehicles that communicate the unique organisation's image is crucial to the successful communication of a corporate image (Abratt, 1989; Bernstein, 1984; Olins, 1978). This ensures clear differentiation from the competition. The various vehicles of outward communication of the corporate identity is therefore of particular importance (Markwick & Fill, 1997; Stuart, 1999).

In communicating its corporate identity, an organisation must be positioned in the mind of the consumer market as the retailer that fulfils consumer needs unlike other retailers. Design, branding and identity are the expressions of an effective positioning strategy (Abratt, 1989; Morin, 2006). Newman and Patel (2004) report that poor levels of performance could result from ineffective positioning and indicate failure with regard to the positioning strategy. To maintain the positioning strategy, the communication strategy has to be controlled by management. This allows the organisation to define how it wants to be perceived by the stakeholders. It encompasses distinguishing characteristics and unifying attributes (Morin, 2006). There are two main positioning concerns. The first is consumer positioning, which concentrates on portraying how the product fulfils the consumers' needs and values. The second is competitive positioning; this is the way in which the company differentiates its corporate image from that of the competition (Assael, 1992). Thus, a retailer seeks to position itself as a separate entity from the other retailers, but also to fulfil the specific needs of customers. Retailers should strive to achieve both simultaneously.

Corporate image is a result of all the combined exposure that people have to a company, including experiences, beliefs, feelings, knowledge and impressions (Stern *et al.*, 2001). The corporate image is therefore a sum of all the corporation's cues by which people recognise and differentiate it from the competition (Abratt, 1989; Bernstein, 1984). Schladermundt (1960) noted that all the elements of an identity should be instantly recognisable. Recognition needs to be assured by consistency of cues, which should support each other (Abratt, 1989). Recognition brings familiarity, and familiarity breeds favourability, according to Bernstein (1984). Favourability is the disposition that an organisation strives to attain among stakeholders. All variables affecting stakeholders' experience of the corporate identity act as a potential vehicle to portray image and affect the stakeholders' view of the organisation (Van Riel & Balmer, 1997). The subtle interplay of the integrated communication and corporate culture is one way to create a strong corporate image that establishes a unique position among other retailers. Only if the identity permeates the whole organisation, can communication conveying corporate identity be successful (Schlegelmilch & Pollach, 2005). This is achieved by taking a holistic approach through the integration of what is internal to the organisation (strategy and culture) and an external focus on the needs of the market. Communication strategies should attempt to create a favourable attitude towards an organisation from its various stakeholders. Corporate communication strategies therefore serve as a way to steer stakeholders, but specifically consumer buying behaviour.

In order to fulfil consumer needs and steer consumers' behaviour, a company has to understand its market. According to Birtwistle, Clarke and Freathy, (1999, p. 246) "It is believed that the understanding of group characteristics is essential for marketing communication". Market segmentation is the process of dividing the market into subsets with common characteristics. These groups show similar needs and homogenous consumer preferences that create individuals' world-view and form their motivations (Green & Krieger, 1991; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007; Wright, 1996). The Market is divided into smaller portions with similar characteristics and needs and this is a market segment (Hawkins *et al.*, 2004). The most prevalent consumer variables used to divide the market into significant segments are demographics, psychographics, lifestyle, shopping orientation, economic characteristics and personality. Thus, by segmenting the market, a homogeneous target market can be the focus when communicating the corporate image. The basic premise is that the more marketers understand about their target market, the more effectively they can communicate to them and serve them (Kucukemiroglu, 1997).

Consumers can choose from an enormous amount of outlets with similar products in the retail environment. Quality products and services are easily copied or seen as a given, therefore other methods should be identified to differentiate them from the competition and gain supremacy in the mind of the consumer. The particular image that a store conveys might therefore be the key determining factor when a consumer chooses a store (Varley, 2005). Differentiation should be established through focusing resources and attention on establishing retailer brands, and by aligning all the activities of the company with the values of a specific market (Lewis & Hawksley, 1990; Varley, 2005). Differentiation has become the main approach to brand positioning due to strong competition and a saturated market. The various factors leading to the development of differentiation strategies based on image and identity are described by Markwick and Fill (1995, p. 396) as:

- *Need differentiation because of increased activity and rivalry*
- *Shortening of product life-cycles*
- *(De)merger and diversification/consolidation activities*
- *High rates of media cost inflation*
- *Redefinition of marketing in terms of developing/ maintaining relationships*
- *Increasing recognition of the value of integrated marketing communications*
- *Finer approaches to segmentation*
- *Increased incidence of crisis situations impacting on organizations.*

James *et al.* (1976) found that different segments of the consumer market behave differently toward the same store image dimension. This was confirmed in a study by Turley and Milliman (2000). It is therefore important that a specific market segment be kept in mind when developing a store image. However, with the growth in speciality retailing, researchers suggest that retailers need to fully understand the role of store image to satisfy a homogenous market and create a differential advantage (Simpson & Thorpe, 1995). “Competitive brands will generally not be bought by notably different kinds of consumers...” (Hammond, Ehrenberg & Goodhardt, 1996, p. 40). No strong evidence of market segmentation between competitive brands exist, implying that consumers of one brand are likely to buy the same product type in a different brand (Hammond *et al.*, 1996; Wright, 1996). Sullivan, Savitt, Zheng and Cui (2002) found that matters were complicated further by similar consumers shopping at different retail store formats. A company should therefore not only know its market but differentiate its image to be able to sell successfully to the same target market as its competition (Wright, 1996).

Kucukemiroglu (1997, p.472) notes that “The success of a marketing model inherently lies in researchers' ability to come up with variables that really distinguish [retailers'] performance in

the marketplace”. Consumers' store choice is based on their attitude toward the marketing mix, as well as their internal motivations, needs and values (Kim & Jin, 2001). Birtwistle and Shearer (2001) state that store image is retailers' most important communication tool when communicating the corporate image. This is supported by Burt and Carralero-Encinas (2000), who argued that many retailers find their competitive advantage in developing a strong store image. Store image, a combination of dimensions and their attributes found to be important to consumers, should be matched internally to the corporate identity and externally to the target market to achieve satisfaction (Kim & Jin, 2001). The store image imitates and enforces the positioning and branding of a company, as decided in the market strategy, and is often the key to gaining market share (Burt & Carralero-Encinas, 2000). Store image therefore is a vital part of marketing communication and corporate identity representation.

In this section, the role of store image within the communication of the corporate identity was looked at according to objective one. It was evident that store image is a vital communication tool in building the corporate image and differentiating retailers from competition. The target market is affected by consumer variables which affect store image and store image, in turn, affects consumer buying behaviour. Thus, the following section will focus on the related consumer variables.

2.4 Store image and related consumer behaviour variables

The independent variables (demographics, lifestyle and shopping orientation) and dependent variables (store choice, store loyalty and consumer satisfaction) will be discussed in this section.

Figure 2.2 presents the proposed conceptual theoretical model of the relationship between store image and the related consumer behaviour variables (Janse van Noordwyk, in press). Central to this proposed model is the interaction between store attributes and store image, where store image formation is based on the consumer's perception of all the attributes associated with a store. The model outlines the influence of consumer behaviour variables on store image. In addition, the influence of store image on various related consumer behaviour variables is presented. Relationships supported by research findings are indicated with a solid line. Where results from the literature reported contradictory findings, the relationship is represented by a broken line. Only the most prevalent consumer variables for the current study will be investigated in the following sections.

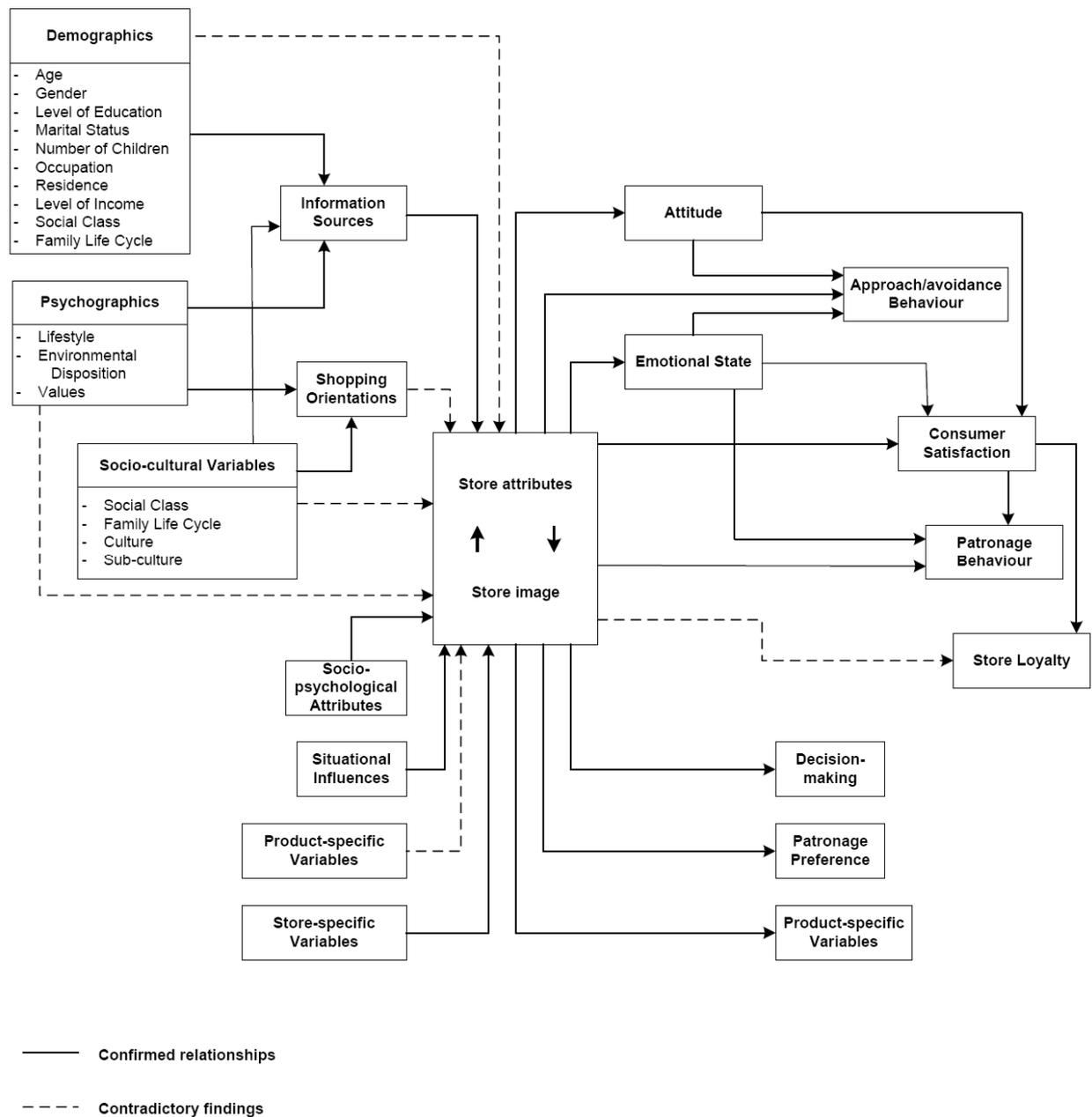


Figure 2.2: Proposed conceptual theoretical model of store image and related consumer behaviour variables

(Janse van Noordwyk, in press)

2.4.1 Consumer behaviour variables as independent variables in store image research

Birtwistle *et al.* (1999) state that defining market segments through behavioural aspects supply a more concrete foundation for a marketing strategy. By understanding the characteristics of the segments, effective communication can be developed. Du Preez (2001) chose demographics, family life cycle, lifestyle, cultural consciousness, patronage behaviour,

shopping orientation, and place of distribution to form clusters of female apparel shoppers. Some variables chosen by other researchers to investigate shopping behaviour were information sources, situational influences, shopping orientation, product-specific variables, media usage, store-specific variables, socio-psychological attributes, clothing involvement, demographics, socio-cultural, clothing store dimensions, clothing orientation, psychographics, personal characteristics and self-concept (Gutman & Mills, 1982, Visser *et al.*, 1996, Shim & Bickle, 1994; Visser & Du Preez, 1996; Janse van Noordwyk, in press). Three broad groups of variables most often included in store image research, namely demographics, lifestyle and shopping orientation, will be discussed briefly.

2.4.1.1 Demographics

Demographics include characteristics such as language, educational level, occupation, income, age, geographic location, family structure, ethnic background, marital status and gender (Hawkins *et al.*, 2004; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007). Demographics are objective and measurable characteristics and are therefore likely to be used in consumer descriptions. It is vital that researchers studying consumers in South Africa should be aware of the South African context when taking international studies into account. South Africa has a very high unemployment rate and low educational levels, which impacts directly on consumers' buying power and behaviour. Demographics influence consumer behaviour by directly influencing consumer attributes, for example values and decision-making styles (Hyllegard, Eckman, Descals & Borja, 2005). Furthermore, education influences people's occupations and their occupations greatly determine their income. Bellenger, Robertson and Greenberg (1977) found that the consumers' level of education also influences shopping centre patronage factors as it relates to store image. Consumers' occupation and education influence preferences in products, media and activities, while income provides the necessary means for consumption behaviour (Choi & Park, 2006; Hawkins *et al.*, 2007; Vakratsas, 1998). Paulins and Geistfeld (2003) focused on identifying attributes that affect store image preference. They found that consumers are more critical of store image attributes when they have a higher education, but that consumers from different income levels tend to perceive store image similarly.

The influence of age on store image perception is frequently investigated. Lumpkin (1985) and Visser and Du Preez (1996) studied the needs of elderly or mature consumers and their findings concluded that age groups within the elderly market differed regarding their

preference for store image attributes. This, however, was contradicted by Moye and Giddings (2002) and Oates, Shufeldt and Vaugt (1996) who indicated that elderly consumers' perceptions of store image do not differ significantly. Furthermore, a qualitative study of large-size female apparel consumers by Janse van Noordwyk (2002) indicated that the perceived importance of store attributes differs by age. Therefore it is apparent that age influences customers' perception of store image.

Demographic variables in isolation cannot provide a complete picture of the consumer. Studied in isolation, demographics hamper the segmentation process, while demographical characteristics such as age, income and employment status can be misleading. A person's biological age is of less consequence than his/her psychological age, according to Joyce and Lambert (1996). Furthermore, even though income can be tied to spending behaviour, it reveals very little about consumer's personal interest, health or discretionary time (Oates *et al.*, 1996). Consumers' lifestyle is therefore a necessary variable when attempting to understand consumer behaviour.

2.4.1.2 Lifestyle

The term psychographics is sometimes used interchangeably with lifestyle (Shim & Bickle, 1994). This could be misleading, depending on how researchers prefer to structure their focus. Psychographics is "...closely aligned with psychological research, especially personality and attitude measurement", according to Schiffman and Kanuk (2007, p. 60). Psychographic measurement is a composite of a person's interests, activities and opinions, while lifestyle entails this and more, according to Schiffman and Kanuk (2007) and Hawkins *et al.* (2004). "Lifestyle tends to focus on broad cultural trends in society or on needs and values thought to be associated with consumer behaviour (culture, social class, reference group, social performance, family and household life cycle and time utilisation)" (Kleinhans, 2003, p.14). Visser *et al.* (1996) state that psychographics and demographics alone are unable to sufficiently explore consumers' characteristics, and are therefore inadequate to typify consumers when applied in isolation; thus lifestyle should be included.

Lifestyle focuses on actions within a social context. Fox (1989) states that lifestyle is a combination of perceptible (activities, interests, demographics, social class and family orientation) and non-perceptible (needs and motives, values, personality, attitude and opinion) variables. Huddleston, Ford and Mahoney (1990) define lifestyle as a way of living shaped by

values and experiences. Lifestyle is a large part of self-image. Crask and Reynolds (1978) included lifestyle in their study on self-image and store image congruency. Self-image therefore indirectly affects store image preference (Mills, 1985). Osman (1993) confirmed this in stating that customers' perception of store image dimensions depends on their lifestyle. According to Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2006), consumers' lifestyle influence their needs and attitudes, thus it simultaneously affects purchase behaviour. Through understanding lifestyle, retailers can also understand consumer preferences (Kleinhans, 2003).

2.4.1.3 Shopping orientation

Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1992, p. 50) define shopping orientation as, "...a shopping-specific lifestyle, which encompasses shopping activities, interests, and opinions, [regarding clothing] and reflects a view of shopping as a complex social, recreational, economic phenomenon". Another study to research shopping orientation was conducted by Gutman and Mills (1982), who felt that it best leads to understanding consumers. Personal characteristics, namely social class, lifestyle and family life cycle, play an important role in predicting shopping orientation (Shim & Kotsiopoulos, 1992).

Shopping orientation is viewed as a good indicator of consumers' choice of store (Shim & Bickle, 1994). Osman (1993) considered shopping orientation groups according to those identified by Stone (1954) (economic shoppers, personalising shoppers, the ethical shopper and apathetic shoppers), and found the differences according to shopping orientation crucial to store image preference. Moye and Giddings (2002) also identified three groups according to shopping orientation and concluded that shopping orientation not only influences preference, but also the importance placed on store image attributes. Furthermore, Moye and Kincade (2002) confirmed previous studies and reported that, according to their study, all the clusters placed more importance on lay-out than on aesthetic dimensions.

Moye and Giddings (2002) found an indirect relationship between store image and demographics, finding shopping orientation to be the mediator. Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1992) tested a patronage model that included both the variables shopping orientation and store image; the results of their study once again indicated the crucial role that shopping orientation plays in predicting the importance of store image attributes. Therefore it can be concluded that shopping orientation is an important variable in store image research.

The following section will concentrate on selected dependent variables in store image research, namely store patronage, store loyalty and consumer satisfaction.

2.4.2 Consumer behaviour variables as dependent variables in store image research

Consumers' decisions regarding store choice, store loyalty and satisfaction are partly based on their attitude toward a store's image dimensions as well as their own internal orientations (Kim & Jin, 2001). These three variables will now be discussed briefly.

2.4.2.1 Store choice

Store image is considered an important factor influencing store choice and patronage behaviour and has received increased attention from practitioners and academics (Berry, 1969). Store image influences the way in which consumers evaluate and choose a store (Kleinhans, 2003). Patronage behaviour is associated with acts a consumer performs for the purpose of making a purchase from a store.

The identity of a store, presented in the store image, communicates useful information to consumers that they utilise during pre-purchase decision-making (North *et al.*, 2003). Store image cues therefore influence consumers' decision-making processes, which result in store choice (Baker *et al.*, 2002). Store image and store positioning also greatly predict store choice and, ultimately, retail success (Baker *et al.*, 2002). Knowledge about the influence of store image perception on patronage behaviour may empower retailers to design their stores according to the desired store image that could lead to consequent store choice (Kleinhans, 2003). The relationship between store image and patronage behaviour has been examined by numerous researchers. Results indicate that a customer's perception of a store influences store patronage. Moye and Giddings (2002), as well as Moye and Kincade (2002), investigated the effect of shopping orientation on consumers' perception of store image and the resulting patronage behaviour. Both studies confirmed that shopping orientation indirectly influenced store choice through store image.

Several researchers also found that the importance that consumers place on store image attributes influenced patronage behaviour (Shim & Bickle, 1994; Shim & Kotsiopoulos, 1992; Baker *et al.*, 2002).

Donovan and Rossiter (1982) suggested that consumer behaviour is mostly due to emotional response brought about by the store environment. In this scenario, it is then astute to not only assume, but to know that the consumer's affective state (mood) affects judgement or information processing (Bakamitsos & Siomkos, 2005). A person's mood can act as an object or as a tool. When affective state is an object, it acts as a heuristic cue and therefore bases judgement on heuristic cues and not on information. A consumer's mood therefore affects how the consumer evaluates, and a positive mood is more likely to lead to a positive evaluation and thus store choice (De Ruyter & Bloemer, 1999).

The probability that a consumer will shop at a given store increases as the individual's perceptions of the store become more positive. In general, consumers patronize stores whose image is congruent with their self-perceptions and unconscious needs. Thus, store specific attitudes (e.g. store image) and general attitudes toward the type of store influence shopping behaviour (e.g. shopping frequency)

(Darley & Lim, 1999, p.312)

Birtwistle and Shearer (2001) propose five reasons why consumers choose a particular store, namely stock held, price ranges, quality of products, fashionability of goods and style of clothing. Four of these fall directly under the dimension of merchandise, which contributes to the forming of a store image (Lindquist, 1974-1975). Janse van Noordwyk (in press) also shows that these attributes fall under the store image dimensions of merchandise (assortment, style, price, quality). Therefore it indicates that store image attributes influence patronage behaviour.

Satisfied consumers, however, do not necessarily remain satisfied customers, let alone loyal. Managing a store's image requires constant feedback to ensure that its marketing strategy is addressing customer needs and leads to continuous customer satisfaction (Hellier, Geursen, Carr & Rickard, 2003).

2.4.2.2 Store Loyalty

Store loyalty refers to repeat purchase behaviour. Repeat purchase behaviour is evidenced by purchases made at the same retailer for similar products (Osman, 1993). Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) developed a more specific definition namely, "The biased (non random) behavioural response (revisit), expressed over time, by some decision-making unit with

respect to one store out of a set of stores, which is a function of psychological (decision-making and evaluative) processes resulting in [store] commitment". The two critical elements in this definition are (1) that store choice is biased and (2) the importance of store commitment. A person becomes committed to a store and therefore becomes loyal; store commitment is thus a necessary condition for store loyalty (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998).

Managers face the challenge to build store loyalty and commitment, it is critical in a marketplace where there is a choice between numerous stores with similar products (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Miranda *et al.*, 2005; Osman, 1993). The ideal is to have a long-term loyal customer who is reluctant to change stores due to an emotional bond with the store. A short-term loyal customer feels less of a bond and will change stores when a seemingly better option is available (Chang & Tu, 2005). Therefore, if store loyalty is more an indication of repeat visiting possibility than the wanting of a specific product from a specific retailer, as pointed out by Bowen and Shoemaker (1998), it is still a crucial customer characteristic in the competitive environment of apparel retail. It is important for retailers to seek information on the shopping experience when planning to build store loyalty with augmented services (Miranda *et al.*, 2005). If retailers manage the perception of store image, they can isolate consumers from their competitors by building store loyalty (Osman, 1993).

In Kunkel and Berry's (1968) broad definition of store image as "...the total conceptualised or expected reinforcement that a person associates with shopping at a particular store", the word *reinforcement* is especially significant. The learning process occurs through reinforcement and motivates repeat behaviour, primarily through positive feedback. The desired store image can therefore serve as a positive feedback mechanism (reinforcement) which makes consumers return for repeat purchases (Hawkins *et al.*, 2004). It is significant because it is the key to a loyal customer and ensures repeat purchase behaviour.

Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) investigated the relationship between store image, customer satisfaction and store loyalty. They found that store image perception is directly related to store loyalty, but rather an indirect positive effect on store loyalty through consumer satisfaction. However, research results concerning the influence of store image attributes on consumer satisfaction and store loyalty indicate that different attributes affected the two dependent variables; store loyalty was influenced by frequent buyer reward, travel distance, size of average bill and store signage while level of assistance influences both (Miranda *et al.*, 2005).

2.4.2.3 Customer satisfaction

One of the aims of establishing a particular store image is to meet customers' needs and to create a positive customer experience. Creating customer satisfaction may lead to the long-term goal of future profits and sustained business viability. Customer satisfaction increases repeat purchase behaviour and the purchase of other products at the same store (Chang & Tu, 2005). According to Chen-Yu and Hong (2002), consumers spend their funds in such a way as to maximise satisfaction, which is also the desired outcome of a marketing strategy. Satisfaction not only reinforces the resolution or intent to repurchase, but also store loyalty (Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Bloemer, Kasper, & Lemmink, 1990; Kincade, Redwine & Hancock, 1992).

The definition of customer satisfaction is based on the disconfirmation paradigm; satisfaction is derived through the matching of expectations. The chosen alternative meets or exceeds (emotive or cognitive) expectations (Blackwell *et al.*, 2006). Customer satisfaction is a response to expectation, product performance after purchase, product experience, or the shopping experience. The response is a reaction from the evaluation of standards; between pre-purchase expectations, wants or ideals and the actually shopping- and/ or product experience (Bloemer & De Ruyter, 1998; Grace, 2005; Howard & Sheth, 1969). Therefore customer satisfaction depends on whether the expectations entertained prior to a shopping experience are met.

Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) postulated a relationship between store image, store choice, customer satisfaction and store loyalty and found that satisfaction is the result of a conscious evaluation of store image. The positive evaluation of store image leads to store commitment, which, in turn, leads to store loyalty. There is, however, some form of latent satisfaction which occurs unconsciously, and this is the result of implicit store choice. Thus, store image has a direct, positive effect on store loyalty, as well as an indirect positive effect on store loyalty through satisfaction. Bloemer and De Ruyter (1998) found a positive relationship between the three factors and that the effect of store image is mediated by satisfaction. Chang and Tu (2005) also found a significant direct and indirect relationship between store image and store loyalty, mediated by customer satisfaction.

According to Kim and Jin (2001), customers' satisfaction and the intention to repurchase result from the customers' emotional experience during the purchase stage and, hence, from

the appraisal of the store's image. Atmospheric variables influence customers' satisfaction regardless of shopping orientation; some variables do, however, contribute to satisfaction for specific consumer segments (McKinney, 2004). Customers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction and intention to repurchase are therefore indicators of the customers' perception of the store, which, in turn, is created by store image. Customers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction is prevalent not only in the consumption stage but also while purchasing, thus emphasising the importance of store image. The greater the satisfaction of the customer during purchasing, the greater the intention to repeat purchase (Chen-Yu & Hong, 2002). Baker *et al.* (2002) affirmed that consumers evaluate store image dimensions as reliable information cues about product attributes, price, quality, value and overall shopping experience. Bitner (1992) reported that consumers concentrate on design and ambient environment cues when evaluating a store. According to Jacoby and Mazursky (1984), consumers depend heavily on pictures of store interiors for information during the shopping experience. Customer satisfaction is therefore reached through a positive evaluation of the desired store image. It can therefore be deduced that needs satisfaction and shopping satisfaction lead to store choice, which underscores why stores strive toward the needs and goal satisfaction of consumers (Baker *et al.*, 2002).

In the previous sections, the significance of store image in corporate identity and the importance thereof to retailers was pointed out. Dependent and independent variables in store image research were highlighted to substantiate the significance of a store's image in successful retailing. This attained objective two. In the next section, the focus will turn to the store image construct.

2.5 Store image

“Clearly defining the underlying structure of the construct enables the researcher to delineate what is included and excluded from the consequent operationalisation of the store image construct in empirical research” (Janse van Noordwyk, in press). The store image definition and underlying structure will therefore be discussed in the following sections.

2.5.1 Defining store image

Assael (1992, p. 633) states that the "... measurement of store image assists retailers in determining their competitive strengths and weaknesses." Despite the important role of store image in predicting retailer success, the complex process through which an image is cultivated poses special managerial problems. Numerous attempts have been made to define and measure store image. In order to measure store image, it is necessary to examine the literature to define the construct.

Images presented through logos, displays, a presence or even manner can constitute the soul or personality behind a company. "We are left wondering whether the term means everything to everybody – that is, nothing to all", observed Stern *et al.* (2001, p. 202). The absence of a clear definition of the term image also influences the definition of store image, and hampers the construction of statements or generalisations (Stern *et al.*, 2001). Characteristically 'image' has been treated in the literature as an intangible 'something', a vague, untouchable, forbidden and virtually immeasurable phenomenon (Berry, 1969). Burns (1992) consequently points out that no universal definition of store image has been accepted. With the abovementioned difficulties, it is understandable that research on store image has sometimes resulted in more questions than answers.

Martineau (1958, p.47) first defined store image as "...the way in which the store is defined in the shopper's mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes". Lindquist (1974-1975, p.31) concluded that store image is "...complex by nature and consists of a combination of tangible or functional factors and intangible or psychological factors that a consumer perceives to be present". Functional attributes can be seen as tangible elements, such as merchandise selection, price range, and store layout, while psychological qualities determine how a store makes someone feel. James *et al.* (1976, p.25) simply defined store image as "... a set of attitudes based upon evaluation of those store attributes deemed important by consumers". The perceptual process is therefore important to store image studies.

Minshall (1994) acknowledged that store image constitutes cognitive and affective components. Kunkel and Berry (1968) investigated store image through the perspective of learning theory, which led to the results that the action (shopping behaviour) in a specific environment (store image) can be learned. Most behaviour is learned. The positive learned

behaviour for a retail environment could possibly be browsing or purchasing. Store image is therefore the discriminative stimulus that creates an expectation for reinforcement after buying behaviour has been exercised (Kunkel & Berry, 1968). A discriminative stimulus comprises elements that reinforce an action. Berry (1969) further explained that the effect of a specific stimulus is determined by the individual's personal variables. James *et al.* (1976) took the aforementioned definitions into consideration and stated that store image is a set of attitudes in evaluation of those store image dimensions that customers view as important. Bearing in mind that attitude is a specific phenomenon created through experience, store image is influenced by purchase experience, friends' experience, exchange and advertisements (Chang & Tu, 2005; James *et al.*, 1976).

Dichter (1985, p.75) argued that “[an image]...describes not individual traits or qualities, but the total impression an entity makes on the minds of others”. The view that consumers form impressions about the whole store, therefore gaining an overall impression, was shared by Darley and Lim (1999). The nature of store image viewed as a whole can be explained through Gestalt theory. Gestalt theory explains that certain consumers cannot discriminate between the variables that form the whole. Another aspect is the “halo-effect”, which occurs when the perception of one factor influences the evaluation of the whole, which could lead to constant over- or under-evaluation. This is the reason for focusing research on the congruity of communication, which ensures a correct and positive evaluation of the whole (Stern & Schroeder, 1994). Joyce and Lambert (1996, p. 24) reported store image to be “...the way the store is defined in the shopper's mind”. According to Stern *et al.* (2001), an image is thus more than the sum of its parts. “If store image is to be seen as a consumer's perceptions of store attributes, it will form as a result of experience with the store” (Kleinhaus, 2003, p. 42).

Over the years, different authors have agreed that store image does, however, comprise of distinct dimensions (Lindquist, 1974/75; Martineau, 1958; Moye & Giddings, 2002; Thang & Tan, 2003; Visser *et al.*, 2006). These dimensions include both tangible/functional and intangible/psychological factors perceived in store image (Lindquist, 1974-1975). It was further indicated that these dimensions can be sub-divided into attributes. It is imperative to take cognisance of these findings to enhance the accuracy and comprehension of the store image construct and to clarify it for operational purposes. Janse van Noordwyk's (in press) definition of store image is supported in the current study (refer to section 1.5). In the following section, these dimensions will be discussed according to this definition.

2.5.2 Store image structure

Various authors proposed an array of dimensions and attributes that form store image. Martineau (1958) indicated that store image consists of layout and architecture, symbols and colour, advertising and sales personnel. Lindquist (1974-1975) derived nine store image attribute dimensions, after his summary of the literature and through reviewing 19 studies: (1) merchandise (including the sub-dimensions of quality, selection or assortment, styling or fashion, guarantees and pricing), (2) service (including the sub-dimensions of service-general, salesclerk service, self-service, ease of return, credit, delivery and phone orders), (3) clientele (including the sub-dimensions of social class appeal, self-image congruency and store personnel), (4) physical facilities (including the sub-dimensions of physical facilities, store layout, shopping ease and architecture), (5) convenience (including the sub-dimensions of convenience, locational convenience and parking), (6) promotion (including the sub-dimensions of sales promotion, advertising or display, advertising, trading stamps and symbols and colours), (7) store atmosphere (including the sub-dimensions of atmosphere or congeniality), (8) institutional (including the sub-dimensions of conservative/modern, reputation and reliability), and (9) post-transaction satisfaction. James *et al.* (1976) reduced these to only six dimensions, namely, assortment, personnel, atmosphere, service, quality and price. Other examples of dimensions that have been used in previous research are: convenience, service, advertising, private store brands, sales personnel, and store music perception. (Baker *et al.*, 2002; Moye & Kincade, 2002; Paulins & Geistfield, 2003; Richardson, Jain & Dick, 1996). From the above, it is evident that not only is there no clear definition for the construct but there is inconsistency regarding the terminology and groupings considered for store image attributes and/ or dimensions.

After an extensive review of the literature, Janse van Noordwyk (in press) amalgamated the existing body of knowledge into a model of the underlying structure of store image. This model is submitted to a pilot study and expert review and culminated in the *Model of Store Image*, presented in Figure 2.3. The model includes eight store image dimensions, namely (1) Atmosphere (store interior, store atmosphere), (2) Convenience (transportation, location, parking, shopping ease, store hours), (3) Facilities (store layout, store appearance, convenience of facilities, fitting rooms, fixtures), (4) Institutional (clientele, store reputation), (5) Merchandise (assortment, style, price, quality), (6) Promotion (advertising, displays, sales

incentives), (7) Sales Personnel (interaction, appearance) and (8) Service (after-sales service, payment options, in-store service, delivery options).

In Janse van Noordwyk's model the circle adjacent to the core construct presents the eight store image dimensions. These eight store image dimensions build the foundation of the store image construct. The next concentric circle represents the sub-dimensions which form the dimensions. The final circle portrays specific store attributes. The way in which these store attributes are perceived by stakeholders creates the store image. The importance of the sub-dimensions and dimensions are not related to the depicted circle construction. The following section will provide further details regarding these dimensions.

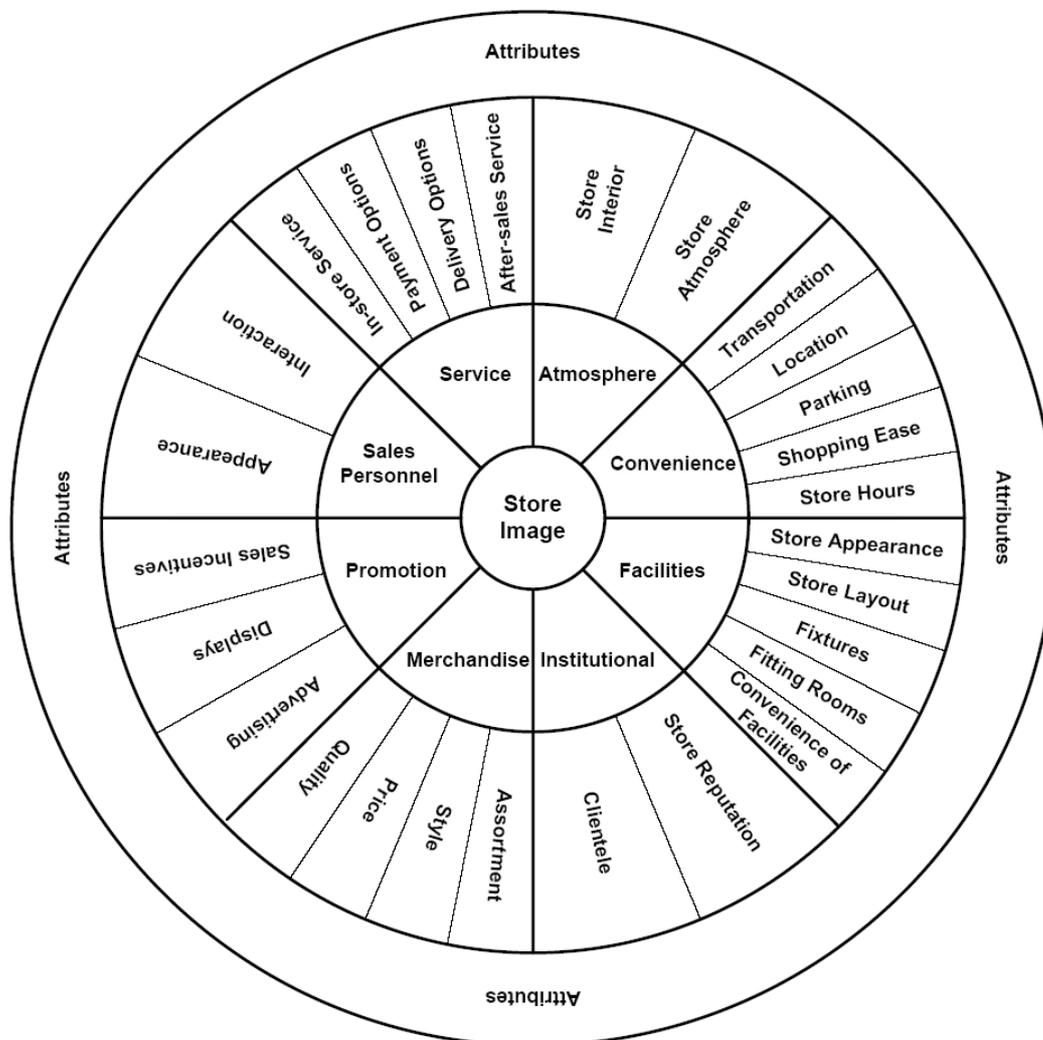


Figure 2.3: Model of store image

(Janse van Noordwyk, in press)

2.5.3 Store image dimensions

Buyers respond to the total product...

(Kotler, 1973-1974, p. 48)

Visser *et al.* (1996) found that store dimensions are key factors in determining shopping behaviour. By developing and maintaining store image dimensions that are attractive to the target market, a sustainable competitive advantage can be developed (Birtwistle & Shearer, 2001). For the purpose of the current research, the store image dimensions to be studied have been chosen in accordance with Janse van Noordwyk's (in press) definition of store image (refer to section 1.5) and the resultant *Store Image Scale* (refer to section 3.5).

2.5.3.1 Atmosphere

Store atmosphere plays a vital role in the consumer's experience. Atmospheric factors involve a conscious designing of space to affect customers' sensory experience. It mostly has to do with the "spatial aesthetic" features of the store and serves as a "silent language" in communication to consumers (Kotler, 1973-1974, p. 48 & 50). These sensory experiences affect a person's emotional state and therefore the way in which product information will be evaluated. A positive store experience enhances satisfaction and will lead to increased shopping frequency, and therefore lead to increased sales (Koo, 2003). Store atmosphere, specifically in reference to design and ambient factors, is a significant variable as it influences consumer preference, interpersonal service quality, merchandise quality and monetary price perception, as well as shopping experience cost (Baker *et al.*, 2002; Thang & Tan, 2003). Furthermore, Newman and Patel (2004) reported that store atmosphere is one of the crucial factors and determinants of store choice.

Richardson *et al.* (1996) found that the aesthetics of a store can improve the evaluation of the quality of products by customers. Samli *et al.* (1999) included the attribute *interior décor* in their study on the contrast between management and customer perceptions of store image. The results indicated that décor is perceived as slightly less important by management than by customers. However, this attribute was included in their service quality dimension with the notation that the retailer could very easily exceed customer expectations through the use of these attributes. Terblanché and Boshoff (2006) supported this by indicating that store décor is important to the store environment as it is a controllable aspect that can contribute to

creating customer satisfaction through fulfilling expectations. This is due to the fact that décor and popular music can align a store with its target market (Newman & Patel, 2004).

Smell (as part of store interior) is a very strong emotional trigger. The sense of pleasant arousal derived from fragrance increases exploratory tendencies behaviour (Orth & Bourrain, 2005). The emotional experience is as important as the shopping experience, because consumers have affective expectations too (Wirtz, Mattila & Tan, 2007). According to Sway (2007), scent marketing can make a consumer feel comfortable and put consumers in a good mood that could positively influence purchasing decisions. Smell is a strong emotional trigger. However, Donovan and Rossiter's (1982) evaluation of the emotional states aroused by store atmosphere and the effect on approach/ avoidance behaviour came to the conclusion that research on store atmosphere does not achieve strong results because it affects an emotional state which is difficult to verbalise and is transient, therefore difficult to recall. Their research therefore proposed that store atmosphere affects emotion and this, in turn, affects shopping related intention. This research was extended by Donovan, Rossiter, Marcolyn and Nesdale (1994), who found that emotional state not only affects intention but actual purchase behaviour as well. A positive emotional experience engendered by store atmosphere will increase the estimated spending and time spent in the store. According to Donovan *et al.* (1994), this is partly due to the emotional variable being evaluated apart from cognitive variables, e.g. quality and price perception. Wirtz *et al.* (2007) confirmed the positive effect of emotional arousal congruence on in-store behaviours.

Based on the expectations of the target market, store designers should therefore make tactical decisions regarding store atmosphere, in order to positively influence consumers' in-store experience (Hartman & Spiro, 2005). From the above-mentioned, it is clear that atmosphere is a significant tool, since it provides management with the power to manipulate the effect of store environment on consumer behaviour.

2.5.3.2 Convenience

Convenience is a vital part of society at present. With expanding internet facilities and individuals spending more time at work and less time at home, time spent on shopping is an expensive resource. Chowdhary (1999) notes that convenience is a specifically desirable characteristic for older consumers. Hyllegard *et al.* (2005), however, found that convenience was less important to consumers aged 56 to 88, but very important to the age groups between

18 and 55. They furthermore established that the preference for convenience differed across nationalities (Spanish, European and American consumers). They, however, did not find any gender differences in terms of preference. In a study by Kim and Jin (2001) convenience was cited as a reason for consumers preferring multi-national discount stores over national stores. Store hours comprise another aspect of convenience. Hyllegard *et al.* (2005) found that store hours are less important to older consumers, because older consumers have more time to shop. They concluded that store hours and convenience have the strongest influence on patronage behaviour across nationalities. Retail stores focusing on younger markets should therefore incorporate a focus around convenience and extended shopping hours. This greater concern identified in the younger market could be due to changing lifestyles and busy social lives (Hyllegard *et al.*, 2005)

A vital part of convenience is site selection/ location planning, because it influences parking, location and transportation. This is a significant decision because it cannot be altered once made. Location, transportation and travelling time influence the consumer market patronising the store and, inevitably, sales (Wood & Browne, 2007). Thang and Tan (2003), for instance, note that retailers are chosen on the basis of accessibility, ease of transportation and time duration of travelling. They found that accessibility of a store is rated second to merchandising and that even stores located on the same street still engendered varying perceptions with regard to accessibility. The smallest distance can however influence a store's success or failure (Wood & Browne, 2007). The importance of travelling distance in influencing intention to remain loyal to a store was noted by Miranda *et al.* (2005).

Newman and Patel (2004) reported that, by focusing on features which influence the ease of shopping, retailers are able to differentiate themselves from the competition. Koo (2003), on the other hand, investigated the inter-relationships among store images, store satisfaction, and store loyalty among Korean discount retail patrons, and found that convenience has a direct and indirect impact on store loyalty, but not on store satisfaction. This is contradicted by Chang and Tu (2005), who found that convenience has a direct relationship with customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, as well as an indirect relationship with customer loyalty through customer satisfaction. Retailers should therefore consider convenience and its sub-dimensions carefully as this can help build a consumer base and consumer loyalty.

2.5.3.3 Facilities

Facilities refer to the provisions made to ease the shopping process and the infrastructure that enhances the consumer's comfort while shopping (Nevin & Houston, 1980). According to Thang and Tan (2003), consumers tend to view a store with good facilities in a favourable light. Consumers' shopping orientations determine their preference for facilities (Moye & Kincade, 2002), therefore facilities contribute to differentiate the retailer from its competition. Features which could differentiate a store by easing the shopping process are the availability of changing rooms, fast checkout facilities and layout (Newman & Patel, 2004). These authors postulated that customers' perceptions and behaviour could be altered through any small change made in store image, specifically store entrances, checkouts and queuing. However, if inappropriate, these features could also create an unwillingness to remain in a store.

Lee, Ibrahim and Hsueh-Shan (2005, p. 333) investigated the importance that male consumers place on certain attributes and found a friendly design layout to be one of the few variables obtaining high scores, "... which is not difficult to rationalise given [its] prominence in shaping the retail environment and...enjoyment level". Kent (2003; 2007) focused on the design behind a store image. This 2003 study focused on the design of the brand with the retailer environment centred around consumer buying behaviour. He found that the interior design as well as the functional elements enhance the brand identity and create a strong experience. The focus of design therefore is also on the facilities now, not only on merchandise and store fronts. Kent (2003) concentrated on factors such as the ability to actually reach products, the significance of floor space and the maximisation of sales space by arranging a lot of stock in a manner that seems spacious through the use of open aisles. Hence, by changing a store's style of layout, specifically, facilities can create and support the brand identity. A 2007 study by Kent extends this idea of design to focus on stores and facilities that the store could offer. The space chosen for a store ideally is what will affect the layout and store appearance; the decision, for example, cannot solely be based on location.

Even though the importance of facilities is established, Marianne (2003) reports that fitting rooms and fitting room lighting have not received enough attention over the years, due to the fact that management perceive these aspects to be less important to customers. Kerfoot, Davies and Ward (2003) conducted a study on visual merchandising, and found that the role of lighting should not be to merely provide light through brightness or fluorescent lights, but

should rather aim to be inviting. Their research also brought perceptions regarding fixtures and aisles to light. Consumers consistently indicated that glass was the best material for presentation. Furthermore, consumers felt that clear aisles increased browsing through the perception of a route to follow, whereas a store without a clear aisle made it difficult for consumers to decide where to start browsing and hard to move through the store (Kerfoot *et al.*, 2003). In other studies where the importance of store image attributes was investigated, facilities did not receive very high importance ratings (Bearden, 1977; Hansen & Deutscher, 1977-1978; Lee *et al.*, 2005). Facilities form part of the complete store image presentation, and neglect thereof can have an impact on the perception of the store as a whole.

2.5.3.4 Institutional

Janse van Noordwyk (2002) identified and described institutional, store reputation and store association attributes and grouped them together as the institutional dimension of store image. The institutional dimension plays a significant role in the overall impression of the corporate identity. Before an identity or the reputation of the company can affect consumer behaviour, the consumer should have experienced some involvement and identification with the identity. This is explained through the low involvement theory and classical conditioning, which states that repetition builds awareness, whereupon a particular emotion will be associated with the stimulus (identity) (Alessandri, 2001). This positive association influences consumer behaviour. According to Newman and Patel (2004), identity adds a much needed symbolic aspect to shopping, therefore store image imitates the corporate identity to encourage the association which customers form, and subsequently uses the association to influence patronage behaviour.

Huddleston *et al.* (1990) describe reputation as a desirable characteristic that attracts consumers. Huddleston *et al.* (1990) investigated the relationship between retail store attributes and the lifestyle characteristics of mature female consumers. They found a relationship between lifestyle and store reputation, suggesting that lifestyle influences consumer preference for store reputation. An investigation into the perception of preference for retail stores based on multi-attributes of store image concluded that a reputable store is preferred because better quality and value is assumed (Thang & Tan, 2003). Reputable stores are better able to secure consumer affiliation and trust, and thereby build store loyalty and encourage repeat purchase. A store can even improve its reputation by carrying a reputable in-store brand, which will positively influence the store brand reputation, therefore strengthening store loyalty even further (Collins-Dodd & Lindley, 2003). The fact is that reputation builds a

brand name, and this conveys useful information to consumers in their pre-purchase decision-making process (North *et al.*, 2003).

Erdem *et al.* (1999) studied the relationship between the importance of consumer values and the importance of store image attributes. The results indicated that consumers who attached high importance to a comfortable life, an exciting life, pleasure and social recognition, would also attach high importance to store status, which includes clientele and reputation. According to Shostack (1982), the store's reputation and clientele are functions of retailing and merchandise, thus they cannot be separated. The institutional dimension is consequently dependent on the quality and class of service and merchandise. Newman and Patel (2004), note that this relationship works both ways, in that reputation influences the quality and price perceptions held by customers. Sales personnel should therefore "live the brand" (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001, p. 99). These authors state that sales personnel's behaviour will align with the values of the corporate identity if internal communication and human resource management are aligned with the same values (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001).

Corporate reputation influences customers' intention to buy, assures quality and service and influences customer loyalty (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). This is because customers identify with the corporate identity and expect its values to be present in the store image. It is thus apparent in the fiercely competitive marketplace that the institutional dimension as representation of the corporate identity and reputation in store image is imperative as it influences consumer store preference.

2.5.3.5 Merchandise

The attributes of merchandise that are included in the current study are merchandise assortment, merchandise style, merchandise price and merchandise quality. Thang and Tan (2002) included selection and assortment, styling and fashion as attributes, while Birtwistle *et al.* (1999) included assortment, merchandise quality and merchandise style. According to Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2002), as well as Thang & Tan (2002), merchandise is considered the most important factor contributing to consumer store preference. This view is supported by Birtwistle and Shearer (2000), Collins-Dodd and Lindley (2003), Sullivan *et al.* (2002) and North *et al.* (2003), who found that merchandise has a significant influence on brand perception and store choice across consumer segments.

Brand and product assortment are part of the assortment strategies followed to satisfy consumer needs and influence brand perception. Consumers tend to seek stores with a greater assortment of merchandise to satisfy their needs (Sullivan *et al.*, 2002). But brand assortment is also a strategy to build a store's image through developing a private brand label (Ailawadi & Keller, 2004). According to Ailawadi and Keller (2004), the consumer segment most likely to buy private brand labels are price sensitive, of middle income, and educated. This then indicates that merchandise strategies should be formulated on the basis of target market demographics, as it influences consumer preference and patronage behaviour. Customers' perception is that the private label's quality is usually higher than that of other labels and this positively influences their perception of the store image. Vahie and Paswan (2006) reported the contrary, though, stating that store atmosphere and quality will also influence the perception of a private label brand's quality. Congruence between the quality associated with a store and the quality of a private label brand will favourably influence the emotional effect of private label brands. The customers' perception of store image is situation specific and the selection of merchandise can overshadow the positive effect of other attributes (due to its importance to the apparel retail industry). A single visit to a store where a consumer may meet with unsatisfactory style could dis/confirm a consumer's perception and instantly influence the perception of store image (Newman & Patel, 2004).

Erdem *et al.* (1999) state that consumers who attach greater value to personal gratification would be more inclined to shop at a store with a wide selection of merchandise, whereas Huddleston *et al.* (1990) found a relationship between the lifestyle characteristics of mature female consumers and merchandise. Hu and Jasper (2006) concluded that a store with more social cues created an even higher favourable preference toward merchandise. Customers' lifestyle qualities form part of social cues. The research findings illustrate the importance of linking merchandise with the chosen target segment. This is corroborated by Paulins and Geistfeld (2003, p. 375), who have remarked that "Stores losing touch with their customers through inappropriate merchandising selections will lose customers".

2.5.3.6 Promotion

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) focuses on building a clear position and image through integrated marketing, with advertising being an important channel (Kliatchko, 2005). Sales incentives, displays and advertising are attributes of promotion. The dimensions of promotions form a part of IMC. However, promotion does not only form a part of IMC; by

incorporating promotion into the IMC strategy the gap between promotion and sales can be eliminated, thereby increasing profit (Smith, Gopalakrishna & Chatterjee, 2006). The goal of IMC is to build a stronger brand and increase sales through the influence of consumers. Promotions are a precondition of brand recognition and enhancement, which influence sales (Ratnatunga & Ewing, 2005). One of the major changes in marketing includes new technology in which advertising is consumer focused to nurture customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kliatchko, 2005). The promotions dimension is therefore a significant tool in the IMC process because of its proximity to consumers and its direct influence on consumer behaviour.

Although promotion is viewed as a positive stimulus by management, a study of patronage motives and product purchase patterns found that special events/exhibits and promotions were among the least mentioned motives for product purchase, and were therefore indicated as less important than other store image attributes (Yavas, 2001). This is in contrast to other research. Paulins and Geistfeld (2003) reported a distinct difference between highly educated and less educated consumers in the response to advertising. The fact that educated consumers are more selective makes them more difficult to entice through advertising. Thang and Tan (2003) found that promotions have a significant influence on consumer preference. Consumers have to be constantly attracted by advertising to stimulate interest and create store awareness. But consumers are exposed to a large amount of information and advertising messages, therefore an integrated and consistent marketing communication strategy is critical for strengthening the message which marketers strive to send. A strong communication strategy is vital in competing in the marketplace and in managing the corporate identity, while promotions provide the key in conveying information to consumers (Markwick & Fill, 1995). Lincoln and Samli (1981) assessed the influence of actually promoting store image attributes. They found that consumers who had seen the relevant advertisements gave higher image scores than the consumers who did not see the advertisements. Du Frene, Engelland, Lehman and Pearson (2005) found that consumer-centric advertising through interactive e-mailing changed consumers' attitudes towards the brand, which, in turn, affected intention to purchase.

According to Sen, Block and Chandran (2002), displays do not hold high incentive value for consumers, but rather act to make customers aware of the possible purchase and usage of the merchandise. Window displays, for example, relay information before a client enters a store and contribute to store entry and product purchase. It is evident that the expenditure on

promotions should be viewed as a contributing factor to building store image and subsequent profit.

2.5.3.7 Sales Personnel

Building interpersonal relationships with customers can provide the edge in creating store loyalty when competing in a fairly homogeneous market (Janse van Noordwyk, in press). Sales personnel play an important role in creating the social cues in a store that are found to improve evaluations of store image (Hu & Jasper, 2006). The interaction with customers through sales personnel is central to consumer-focused communication (Knee, 2002). Koo (2003) notes that Korean consumers first need to form a favourable store image on non-physical characteristics to promote a positive attitude towards the store. This emphasises the need to improve sales personnel service. Lee *et al.* (2005), however, did not find a significant relationship between sales personnel and store loyalty or store satisfaction. Oates *et al.* (1996) argued that consumer segments based on lifestyle differ with regard to the importance that they attach to sales personnel. This could be attributed to differences related to value. Baker *et al.* (2002) investigated the influence of store environmental cues on customers' perceived merchandise value and patronage intention. They concluded that sales personnel influenced the perceptions of interpersonal service quality, which, in turn, influenced patronage intention, thus underscoring the importance of sales personnel in building store image.

The sales personnel's product knowledge is a key store image attribute in male shopping behaviour, according to Lee *et al.* (2005). The personal appearance of sales personnel influences the customers' perception of a store. If, for example, the personnel is described as obese, regardless of sex or age, the store is perceived as having a poorer image and being less successful (Klassen, Clayson & Jasper, 1996). Not only do sales personnel have an effect on how the store is viewed, but the perceptions of the retail environment can influence customers' beliefs about the people who work in such an environment. Arun and Stafford (2000) for instance found that sales personnel are regarded as having more credibility in the *prestige store ambience* and less in the *discount store ambience*.

2.5.3.8 Service

Service is a crucial element of a brand; this includes staff-customer interaction (sales) (Newman & Patel, 2004). As shown above, sales personnel are responsible for the social interaction with customers through this interplay between service and sales personnel. Service builds customer relationships and leads to positive-word-of-mouth and customer loyalty (Newman & Patel, 2004). Customers' perception of social cues, which includes service, improves their perception of merchandise (Hu & Jasper, 2006; Newman & Patel, 2004). Teller, Kotzab and Grant (2006) found that sales personnel service greatly affect store choice, even more than modern services, such as home delivery. Service by sales personnel through knowledge and courteousness is emphasised by Berman and Evans (1992). Good service therefore contributes toward forming a positive store image.

Thang and Tan (2003) concluded that stores that provide good service leave shoppers with a more favourable perception which promotes repeat visits and has a positive impact on consumer purchase behaviour. Miranda *et al.* (2004) underscored this by concluding that intention to remain loyal to a store is influenced by several factors, including service. Hellier *et al.*, (2003) also showed that customers' repurchase intention is influenced by service. While the repurchase intention is thus influenced by service quality, Wirtz *et al.* (2007) stated that the effect of service on consumer behaviour is moderated by emotional arousal. Huddleston *et al.* (1990), found that mature female consumers' lifestyle characteristics influence their preferences for services. In contrast, Oates *et al.* (1996) showed that the perception of the importance of the service dimension is not notably different among elderly consumer segments on the basis of lifestyle. Research results, however, highlight the fact that management should take note of the impact that service can have on consumer behaviour and that the preference for service is influenced by independent consumer variables.

Section 2.5 commenced with defining store image, followed by an explanation of the structure of store image. This led to the discussion of the eight dimensions of store image. With this, objective three was achieved. Section 2.6 will investigate the relevance of gap analysis with regard to improving the influence of store image.

2.6 Congruity Analysis

It is evident from the previous sections that management uses store image to influence consumer behaviour in order to enhance store choice, store loyalty and customer satisfaction. Store image should be strategically designed according to valid and integrated research of what management perceives customers' needs to be. The question of whether there is congruence between the perceptions of management and those of consumers regarding store image remains, however. Furthermore, the possibility remains that the consumers' 'true' perception of the marketing strategy is not consistent with the intended marketing strategy, even if management's conceptualisation of the marketing strategy is accurate. Matching correspondence mechanisms should exist between management's perception of what customers want and need, and what customers' ideals are and what they actually experience. Only when these different perceptions show congruity, can a store influence consumer behaviour positively (Osman, 1993; Samli & Lincoln, 1989). Congruity, however, is influenced by perception. The literature review therefore includes a brief discussion of perception. Store image congruity will also be examined as this is an essential part of the conceptual framework (refer to Figure 2.1).

2.6.1 Perception

*...image... is the totality of a stakeholder's **perceptions** of the way an organisation represents itself, either deliberately... or accidentally.... Images form through encounters with characteristics of the organisation ... the net result of the interaction of all the experiences, beliefs, feelings, knowledge and impressions that each stakeholder has about an organisation.*

(Markwick & Fill, 1997, p. 398)

Consumer behaviour is not directed by information alone, but is a product of images that a person perceives (Lindquist, 1974-1975). "Perception is defined as the process by which an individual selects, organises, and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world" (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007, p.158). People do not react to what is true, but to what they perceive to be true. Inference theory argues that people form judgements according to the information they receive from cues that are available to them. Consumers have schematic structures formed through experience, which guide inferences and perceptions (Fisk, 1961-1962). Experience helps shape customers' expectations in new situations.

Customers view their physical environment as a worthy information source (Baker *et al.*, 2002, p. 123). The importance they attach to store image dimensions and attributes influence customers' perceptions and, in turn, consumer behaviour (Moye & Kincade, 2002). According to Thompson and Chen (1998), perception is highly volatile and is influenced by consumers' age, lifestyle and other descriptors.

The key to influencing consumer behaviour lies in not only communicating a store image that is attractive, but in addressing customers' perceptions of actual store image (Thompson & Chen, 1998). To attain certainty of this 'true' perception held by customers, and to establish a significant advantage, the store image must be designed to not only fit the perceptions but also to be perceived as doing so. The apparel industry is a highly competitive environment and differentiation on the basis of store image is paramount to ensure a retailer's survival, as differentiation is the strategic key to retain and obtain customers. In line with this, Assael (1992) points out that store choice is even more important than product choice, since store choice precedes product choice.

2.6.2 Store image congruity

An image is comparable to a symphony. It is dynamic and complex. The composer, as well as the conductor, has control over the structure. Each instrument plays an important part, and the rendering of the composition is melodious only when all the players and instruments are properly integrated and tuned to each other.

(Dichter, 1985, p.77)

Major themes that have come to the fore in image research are summarised in Table 2.1. The trends portray the development in the research and the relevance of congruity analysis in image research. Congruity analysis within consumer behaviour focuses primarily on the congruity between self-image and store image; theme five in Table 2.1 (Mo, 2002). Congruity models have traditionally been related to purchase motivation (e.g. product preference and purchase intention) (Sirgy & Danes, 1982). This, study however, turns the attention to the congruity level between (1) what management perceives to be important store image dimensions to their customers and (2) what customers themselves view as the ideal regarding importance of store image dimensions.

Retailers spend scarce resources of time and money to create a store image that will offer a competitive advantage (Joyce & Lambert, 1996). Consequently, resources cannot be randomly allocated among different marketing and communication tactics (Miranda *et al.*, 2005). Newman and Patel (2004) suggest that retail management lacks expertise and market awareness, even though their policy is market-oriented. Customers' perceptions therefore should be understood to ensure quality market orientation. Managers should be able to differentiate their marketing strategy from that of the competition and concentrate their resources on store image dimensions that customers regard as important. When congruity analysis is used as a strategic management tool, store image can become the differential advantage. Congruity analysis is a somewhat unrecognised tool for managerial decisions, but it can be very helpful in manipulating action (Samli *et al.*, 1998). If the store image can be consistent with the ideal as perceived by consumers, consumers will patronise the store (Moye & Kincade, 2002).

Congruity can also be referred to as a matching paradigm, thus the match or mismatch between two objects. Congruity theory is one of the socio-psychological consistency theories. The universal proposition is that, if an individual has two related thoughts or perceptions that are somehow inconsistent with each other, psychological tension arises to restore consistency/congruity (Jacoby & Mazursky, 1984). Congruity theory is focused on when a source associates with or disassociates itself from some object. If both the source and the object are linked positively and valued equally by the consumer, there should be no incongruity, and therefore no tension to restore consistency. Hence, if congruity is interpreted in terms of store image, what a consumer expects and wants in a store must be consistent with what is experienced. If not, the consumer will attempt to find consistency elsewhere. Incongruity therefore undermines the role and performance of store image.

TABLE 2.1
MAJOR THEMES OF IMAGE RESEARCH IN RETAILING*

Theme	Sample Studies	Findings	Implications
1. Retail image components	Hansen and Deutscher (1977-1978) Martineau (1958) Lindquist (1974-1975)	There are multiple key dimensions in store image analysis	It is necessary to understand the extent and implications of store the image concept.
2. Comparative image analysis	Lessing (1973) Kunkel & Berry (1968)	Consumer store images and store loyalties are related.	By comparing our store's image with those of competitors, we can improve our competitive advantage
3. Image measurement techniques	Marks (1974) Wyckham (1967) Doyle & Fenwick (1974-1975) Fishbein (1967)	A number of refined techniques is used to measure store image.	Unless we measure the store image accurately, this concept cannot be used for effective managerial decisions.
4. Store versus area image	Samli & Sirgy (1981) Sirgy & Samli (1985) Steenkamp & Wedel (1991)	There is a strong relationship between store image and loyalty to geographic area.	Location can be an enhancer or detractor of store image.
5. Congruence between store image and self-image	Sirgy, Samli, Bahn & Varvoglis, (1989) Stern, Bush & Hair (1977) Sirgy, Johar, Samli & Claiborne (1991)	Congruence between store image and self-image can be measured.	High degree of positive congruence implies strong store loyalty.
6. Using a store image by different constituents as a diagnostic tool	Samli & Lincoln (1989)	Store image is perceived differently by management and by customers.	Discrepancy between the store customers and store management is a strong diagnostic tool.
7. Classifying different degrees of incongruence as a more powerful diagnostic tool	Samli <i>et al.</i> (1998)	Customer-management images are classified into six key categories of incongruence.	Six categories of incongruence provide a powerful prioritisation system for management action.

*Although a number of studies cut across more than one theme the authors classified them on the basis of their main focus

(Samli *et al.*, 1998, p. 29)

The paradigm of perceived image conflicts diagnostics as proposed by Samli and Lincoln (1989) was incorporated in the conceptual framework (refer to Figure 2.1) to indicate the process of assessing and attaining store image congruity. Samli *et al.* (1998) and Mo (2002) also refer to this congruity analysis model as *The gap model*. This process has five stages, namely (1) compare store image perceptions of customers with that of management; (2) categorise congruence-incongruence relationships; (3) specify the most significant differences; (4) establish priorities regarding the most important of two images; and (5) take

corrective action starting from the most important differences. The process, however, is ongoing due to the constant fluctuation of image perceptions.

[T]he general idea of the GAP model is reinforced in three different ways. First, differences can occur between the actual and the perceived characteristics or performance of the store. Second, the idea of the GAP model that multiple publics can be involved in such analyses is reinforced. Finally, making it clear that management's perception of [store image] and [its] performance can be evaluated using image factors extends the GAP model.

(Mo, 2002, p. 5)

After management has decided on what its target market perceives as important store dimensions, management designs the store according to these perceptions. Management's perception of the image that their store portrays is often based solely on those dimensions and attributes that they perceive as important to their customers. Customers' perception of the store image dimensions unfortunately remains unclear to most retailers, because of a lack of measurement. Customers' actual perception regarding store image is critical. A retailer's success or failure of a retailer is related to the level of understanding managers have of consumers' perception of store image. "Managerial action can be taken when image components are measured as unfavorable and can be used as advantages when found to be favourable" (Samli *et al.*, 1998, p. 27). "The indication is that when management display[s] a greater awareness, the store is more successful" (Birtwistle *et al.*, 1999, p. 245).

If management's perception of the importance of store image dimensions differs from customers' perception, their decisions regarding store design may be unsuccessful. "Management's misconceptions can influence decisions that meet its perceived customer image expectations, but are, in fact, different or opposite of the customers actual image" (Samli *et al.*, 1998, p. 28). Steps should therefore be taken to identify such conflicts in perceptions. If inconsistencies are found between management's and customers' perceptions of store image, corrective action should be taken to achieve congruence. If no discrepancies are found, the store image perceptions of management and customers are similar and these attributes are a major strength and should be capitalised on as a differential advantage. Successful retailers would have insignificant gaps between the perceptions of management and customers. Discrepancies in perceptions could indicate problem areas. Customers' needs will not be satisfied sufficiently if customer and management perceptions of store image differ

significantly. Variances indicate that store image is not being optimised to its full potential (Samli & Lincoln, 1989).

In line with the research by Samli *et al.* (1999) classification types will aid diagnostics (congruence/incongruence). Samli *et al.* (1998) built on the research findings obtained by Samli and Lincoln (1989), and suggested six types of image analysis combinations. The diagnostic orientation enables management to focus their attention on the areas of incongruence which are most critical (Mo, 2002). The diagnostic types are used to assess and group the significance of found discrepancies and classify the congruence or incongruence according to: “(1) whether the item average for the combined group of [customers] and managers was greater or less than the average ratings for all items; (2) whether customers’ and managers’ ratings were found to be statistically different (incongruent); and (3) in the case of difference, whether it was the managers or [customers] who had the highest average rating ” (Samli *et al.*, 1998, p. 27). Six types of image combinations were recorded.

These combinations are as follows (Mo, 2002, p. 8; Samli *et al.*, 1998, p. 33):

- Type 1: Image congruence – above average. There are no statistical differences between how consumers and managers evaluate an image factor.*
- Type 2: Image congruence – below average. For this image factor, there are no statistical differences between how consumers and management perceive this variable.*
- Type 3: Image incongruence – above average, management higher. Both groups rate the dimension as positive; however, for this dimension, there are statistical differences of perception between consumers and management.*
- Type 4: Image incongruence – below average, management higher than consumers. There are statistical differences between the two groups on this image dimension, with management rating the dimension higher than consumers.*
- Type 5: Image incongruence – above average, consumers higher. There is a statistical difference with consumers rating the factor higher than management.*
- Type 6: Image incongruence – below average, consumers higher. There is a statistical difference between the two groups on how they rate this image dimension. These are general weaknesses of the store that are taken more seriously by the management.*

The areas of incongruity can be analysed and addressed in strategic decisions regarding the importance of store image dimensions and attributes. Consumers base preferences for stores on the importance they place on certain attributes according to their needs. If the actual store image can be adjusted to suit the segment's ideal concerning the importance of store image dimensions, then consumers' behaviour could be influenced in a favourable manner with a resultant increase in sales and market share – all contributors to success in the highly competitive apparel market. With this discussion on congruity analysis, objective four has been attained.

2.7 Conclusion to Chapter 2

This chapter has provided an overview of the literature relevant to the current study. The conceptual framework for the current study was developed by integrating Osman's *Model of retail image influences on loyalty patronage behaviour* (1993) and the *Paradigm of perceived image conflicts diagnostics* by Samli and Lincoln (1989). The discussion on corporate identity served to highlight the strategic role of store image in retailing. Relevant variables in store image research were discussed, namely independent variables (demographics, lifestyle and shopping orientation) and dependent variables (store patronage, store loyalty and customer satisfaction) to indicate the embedded significance of store image to retailers. Definitions and dimensions of store image were explored in accordance with the research by Janse van Noordwyk. The chapter concluded with a discussion on gap analysis in terms of perception and store image congruency. The importance of the congruence between management and customer perceptions was highlighted, with reference to the research conducted by Samli and Lincoln (1989) as point of departure.

This literature review served to provide a framework for the design of the empirical study, and objectives one to four with regard to the literature were attained through it. The next chapter will focus on the research methodology employed in the current study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodology that was followed to reach the empirical objectives for the current study. As South African research on store image is limited, the current study can be defined as exploratory research with the aim to develop the body of knowledge regarding an existing phenomenon (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster & Prozesky, 2001). Methodology is the key to finding answers to the question that initiates the research and therefore comprises a very important part of any study. To confirm the appropriateness of the research methodology, it is necessary to revisit the empirical objectives. As stated in Chapter 1, these were:

5. To investigate the reliability of the SIS
6. To measure the ideal importance of store image dimensions for customers
7. To measure managements' perception of what their customers view as the ideal store image
8. To determine how customers perceive the actual store image of an apparel retailer
9. To determine congruency between customers' ideal concerning the importance of store image dimensions and what management perceives it to be
10. To classify congruence/incongruence according to six store image type combinations
11. To make recommendations regarding the strategic rectification of a possible poor fit between management and customers' perceptions of store image dimensions
12. To make recommendations regarding store image dimensions according to current acceptability
13. To make recommendations for future research

The research methodology that is chosen has to enhance the reliability, validity and generalisability of the results. It should furthermore be cost effective, efficient and versatile. This balance can only be obtained by using the appropriate methodology for gathering data (Scholtz, 2003).

3.2 Research design

For this current investigation, an exploratory research (Babbie *et al.*, 2001) and a non-experimental research design was used to explore the variance between management's and customers' perceptions of customers' ideal regarding the importance of store image dimensions. Furthermore, the differences between the customers' ideal concerning the importance of store image dimensions and customers' perception of actual store image were included. Non-experimental research was used when the researcher wanted to observe relationships between variables without controlling or manipulating the variables in any way (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

The research design more specifically can be classified as an ex post facto, type II quasi-experimental design. Use of this design is evident, in that no random assignment or manipulation was performed on the independent variables. The function of the research design was to try to obtain empirical evidence that can be interpreted unambiguously (Theron, 2006).

3.3 Method of sampling

This section discusses the sample domain and the sample description. The population from which a sample is drawn is important, because it affects the validity and generalisability of results. The sample domain affects whether the results are case specific or valid for prediction on the total population (Babbie *et al.*, 2001; Mouton, 1996).

3.3.1 Sample domain

The larger population from which the sample for the current study was drawn was drawn South African female apparel consumers. Datamonitor (2005, p.3) has indicated that "...womenswear dominates the South African apparel retail industry, accounting for 51.8% of its overall value".

The sample was drawn from a leading apparel retailer, one of the largest female apparel chain stores. North *et al.* (2003, p.42) define chain stores as "...organisations [that] own and operate several retail store units that sell similar lines of merchandise by a standardised method and function under a centralised form of organisational structure, centralised distribution and

standardised store décor and layout (store image)”. The apparel retailer group consists of 13 trading divisions dealing in lifestyle products that range from fashion, jewellery, accessories, cosmetics, sporting and outdoor apparel and equipment to home ware. The apparel retailer chosen for the current the current study has an average turnover of R3 billion. This constitutes approximately 42% of the total group's turnover of R6, 4 billion (The Foschini Group, 2007). The group trades in over 1200 stores, making it the foremost specialty retailer in South Africa (Datamonitor, 2005; Foschini, 2007; The Foschini Group; 2007). According to Datamonitor (2005), this retailer group is one of the five largest apparel retail companies in South Africa. Thus their target market can be seen as an ideal population to study, as it represents a considerable proportion of South African female consumers.

Eight stores were chosen from the retailer's stores in the Western Cape, namely those at Tyger Valley, N1 City, Golden Acre, Cape Gate, Somerset West Main Road, Kuilsrivier Main Road, Bellville Main Road and Tableview Mall. These stores are situated in different socio-economic areas and the choice was made specifically to obtain a valid representation of this apparel retailer's target market. Five of the eight stores are situated in shopping centres and three are street front stores. The store features for individual stores and stores in shopping centres differ in accordance with guidelines from Bearden (1977) and Léo and Philippe (2002). It was argued that both store types should be included to guarantee that results would be applicable for the dual marketing problem of downtown retailers and shopping centre stores. The location of a store is integral to the shopping process and influences the perception of store image dimensions (Burton, 2002). The similarities of stores within a chain group infer that the store image dimensions that affect overall store image, as well as those affecting store location preferences, have to be included to increase market share for all the stores (Bearden, 1977).

3.3.2 Sample description

Two samples (consumer and management) were drawn for the purposes of the current study. In order to gather information regarding management's perception of customers' ideal importance of store image dimensions, a respondent sample was drawn from the different management teams responsible for store image. After deliberation, it was decided that the management group would consist of management employees from the apparel retailer (from its Head office in Bellville) in the Store Design, Marketing, Brand and Merchandise departments, as well as a number of store managers. A sample of $n = 14$ was drawn. These

respondents are familiar with the marketing strategy and store image dimensions and importance of attributes in line with the company's strategy. The departments, however, emphasise various aspects of store image, which could potentially bias results towards the respective fields of specialty. This can be seen as a limitation of the sample and should be taken into account when interpreting the results. However, this limitation was addressed by ensuring that equal numbers of respondents from each department were taken. This achieved a more general perception of their store image strategy.

The sample for gathering information on consumer perspectives (ideal importance of store image dimensions and perception of the actual store image), was drawn from apparel buyers within stores. A convenience sample of $n = 200$ consumer respondents was drawn. Quota sampling was done in accordance with the provided target market information (*The Foschini Brand*) (Foschini, 2007). The target market profile is summarised in Table 3.1.

Consumers between the ages of 18 and 55 are regarded as the adult apparel buyer group because they have had exposure to the retail industry and have developed choices around preferences. The customer population of this leading apparel retailer predominantly ranges between the ages of 25 and 35. Joyce and Lambert (1996) reported that a consumer's age influences the perception of store image. Lumpkin and Greenberg (1982), and Shim and Kotsiopulos (1992), found the elderly to constitute a very unique market segment and members of groups younger than 18 years, or older than 55, are seen as displaying very different shopping behaviour, especially with regard to apparel. Age impacts on apparel shopping behaviour, the type of store and the style that customers will choose (Chowdary, 1999; Visser *et al.*, 1996). The target market of the retailer has a near equal representation of white and coloured consumers, with black consumers comprising the largest population group. The target market is literate, with middle to high income occupations and spend an average amount of R240 per visit on items of apparel (refer to Table 3.1).

3.4 Data gathering

The store-intercept survey data gathering method, and the data gathering is explained in greater depth in this section.

TABLE 3.1
THE TARGET MARKET PROFILE

Variable	Categories	
Gender	Female	
Age breakdown	15 – 19	0.7%
	20 – 24	9.8%
	25 – 29	15.0%
	30 – 34	15.6%
	35 – 39	13.9%
	40 – 44	12.1%
	45 – 54	17.0%
Income	Middle to upper income brackets (LSM 6 – 10) Average between R4500 – R6500 p.m. (personal)	
Characteristics	She wants flattering, easy-to-wear, practical and comfortable fashion She is fashion conscious but needs guidance in her choice of style She is a modern, informed, practical woman who wants style, quality and value for money	
Education	Grade 12 Diploma On-the-job-training	
Occupation	Assistant Clerical Nurse Teacher Sales representative Store manager Supervisor Receptionist Secretary	
Racial breakdown	Black	38.7%
	White	25 %
	Brown	26. 2%
	Unknown	10.1%
Spending patterns	Average spend per visit	R240
	Average visit per year	6.5
	Average units bought per year	13.7
	Average spend per month at this leading fashion retailer	R130

(Adapted from Foschini, 2007)

3.4.1 Store-intercept survey

The store-intercept method was deemed appropriate for the current study due to the efficiency and ease of using the method for obtaining access to a representative group of respondents (Dillon *et al.*, 1994; Du Preez, 2001; Loudon & Della Bitter, 1993). Other methods of data collection such as online-questionnaires, telephonic surveys, personal interviews and postal surveys were deemed unsuitable. A short review of the reasons why these methods were excluded follows.

Online questionnaires: Online sales are not popular in South Africa (South Africa: Market Profile, 2005), because internet and computer access is still very limited in South Africa. In 1999 only 5 out of 4000 black women had internet access and only 0.9% had a computer at home (Webchek, 2007). With this method, the researcher also has no control over who answers the questionnaires. Online questionnaires may therefore not have rendered a representative sample.

Telephonic surveys: Telephone surveys have an advantage because they enable the researcher to work from a central point and explain questions to respondents. The disadvantage is that the whole of South Africa's population does not have access to telephones. According to Lehmann (1989), most individuals feel that researchers invade their privacy by obtaining personal information, such as telephone numbers, elsewhere, therefore researchers try to avoid this method. Lastly, as Bradley (1995) has pointed out that telephone surveys are not ideal for the measuring of attitudes or perceptions, it was seen as clearly unsuitable, considering the empirical objectives of the current study.

Personal interviews: Personal interviews allow for complexity due to the advantage of facilitating the use of longer questionnaires and allowing for in-depth discussion. This, however, is a very cost- and time-intensive method.

Postal surveys: This method relies on respondents answering the questionnaire in their own time and returning it by mail. It has a very low response rate (Kotler, 1997).

During the process of evaluating data-gathering methods, it became evident that credit members of this retailer would have been an easily accessible sample. This would not have involved a random selection method, though, and would therefore not have ensured

representativeness (Babbie *et al.*, 2001). Consumers who prefer buying on credit could be significantly different from the rest of the consumer group and these may not be representative of the population.

All of the above-mentioned methods have the specific disadvantage that customers are not exposed to the natural shopping environment, thus they rely on simulated cues or the respondents' memory. Visual aspects (such as store interiors) have the effect of evoking superior mental imagery and are more easily remembered than verbal information (Baker *et al.*, 2002). As a result, the store-intercept survey was found to be the most appropriate method for data collection. As the store-intercept method has aspects of a personal interview, the fieldworker can relay more complex information, and it is more efficient than personal interviews (Janse van Noordwyk, in press; Scholtz, 2003; Du Preez, 2001).

A store-intercept survey takes place in a real-life context. Thus no artificial environment is created in which other error variances could influence the respondent. This method exposes the respondents to the actual environment and is able to cue the recall of information from previous experiences, thereby avoiding the limitations of a study conducted in a simulated environment or based on a customers' memory. The store-intercept survey method was also employed because of the low literacy level in South Africa, and therefore face-to-face surveys were seen as the most appropriate method for information gathering (Babbie *et al.*, 2001). The advantages and disadvantages of the store-intercept method are summarised in Table 3.2.

Design cues that are part of a store's image are usually more visual and affect the conscious mind whereas ambient cues are fairly subconscious. Pictures have the effect of evoking superior mental imagery and are more easily remembered than verbal information (Baker *et al.*, 2002). This information added to the advisability of using the store-intercept approach for selecting customers for gathering data. It made it possible to evade the limitations that studies conducted in a simulated environment have to overcome. In simulated scenarios, the impact of using different mediums with varied stimuli, for instance verbal, written and video-taped scenarios, all have different implications (Baker *et al.*, 2002).

TABLE 3.2
SUMMARY OF ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE
STORE-INTERCEPT RESEARCH METHOD

Criteria	Advantages	Disadvantages
Complexity and versatility	Highly flexible and versatile due to presence of fieldworker and exposure to store environment, allows respondent interaction. If needed, visual stimuli can be introduced (Baker <i>et al.</i> , 2002; Du Pont, 1987)	The speed of this method limits the depth and amount of questions (Blair, 1983; Blakenship & Breen, 1993; Bush & Parasuraman, 1985; Kotler, 1997; Lehmann, 1989; Nowell & Stanley, 1991; Smith, 1986)
	If needed, visual stimuli can be introduced	
Quantity of data	Time limit of 25 minutes or less – respondents usually hurried	
Sample control	Easy access to respondents (Du Preez, 2001; Janse van Noordwyk, in press)	Respondents limited to store shoppers – because frequent shoppers have greater chance of being included and potential respondents can intentionally avoid or initiate contact with fieldworker (Du Preez, 2001; Janse van Noordwyk, in press)
	Fieldworker chooses respondents	Not affected by time of day or weather
Quality of data	Allows complete and in-depth responses Unnatural environment of store can potentially produce biased responses (Baker <i>et al.</i> , 2002)	“Mall burnout” – the same people who frequently visit the store are repeatedly interviewed (Aaker & Day, 1986; Bagozzi, 1994; Blair, 1983; Du Pont, 1987; Nowell & Stanley, 1991)
	Provides opportunity to supervise the data gathering process, thereby reducing fieldworker bias (Blakenship & Breen, 1993; Smith, 1986).	Selection bias – fieldworkers tend to choose respondents who are similar to them and look approachable (Murry, Lastovicka & Bhalla, 1989)
	The fact that the respondents are questioned individually and not in a group lessens the chance of only giving socially acceptable answers (Lehmann, 1989)	
Response rate	The researcher has the data immediately and can start analysis (Smith, 1986)	
	Response rate is up to 80%, respondents feel obligated to participate in this method and others feel obliged to voice their opinions (Baker, 1991; Bush & Parasuraman, 1985; Du Preez, 2001; Lehmann, 1989; McQuarrie, 1996; Weiers, 1988)	
Speed	A large number of respondents can be questioned in a limited period of time, thus allowing the researcher to complete a study in a few days (Smith, 1986)	
Cost	Relatively low – determined by length and incidence rate (Aaker & Day, 1986; Blakenship & Breen, 1993; Bush & Parasuraman, 1985; Du Pont, 1987; Nowell & Stanley, 1991; Smith, 1986; Sudman, 1980.)	

Criteria	Advantages	Disadvantages
Time of questioning		Bias can develop if questioning only takes place on certain days in certain time slots (Blakenship & Breen, 1993; Sudman, 1980)
Quality of Sample	Stores within malls offer access to consumers from different geographical areas (Bush & Parasuraman, 1985; Nowell & Stanley, 1991; Smith, 1986)	It is also argued that the sample will only reflect the surrounding residential area, therefore excluding certain groups (Aaker & Day, 1986; Blakenship & Breen, 1998; Lehmann, 1989)

(Adapted from Du Preez, 2001; Janse van Noordwyk, in press; Scholtz, 2003)

The disadvantages of store-intercept surveys were limited through planning of the data gathering process and by utilising trained fieldworkers.

3.4.2 Data gathering and fieldworker training

Fieldworkers were selected and trained to ensure the valid gathering of information. Due to monetary and time constraints, as well as a limited number of gift vouchers sponsored by the retailer, the possibility of receiving unusable questionnaires had to be kept to a minimum. Fieldworkers were selected on the basis of their knowledge of the subject, their understanding of research, language proficiency and the ability to approach respondents. The fieldworkers were compensated for each completed questionnaire, as well as travel expenses. Data gathering took place over a four-week period during June - July 2007.

Fieldworker training: Training was given one week prior to data gathering to ensure that fieldworkers would be able to recall information easily. Refer to Appendix A for the fieldworker training manual. The following was discussed during the training session:

- The research objectives
- The measurement scale and method of completing the scale
- Criteria for selection of respondents
- Selection of respondents
- Stores included in the research
- Practicalities

The research objectives: Fieldworkers were given a brief explanation of the theory behind the research and the objectives of the study. This provided them with a general understanding of the objectives of the study and the importance of valid data gathering

The measurement scale and method of completing the scale: Fieldworkers were familiarised with the measurement scale and instructions for completion. Emphasis was placed on the specific instructions for each section, as well as the interview schedule. The fieldworker asked each respondent to rate each statement in accordance with the instructions for the particular section (1 = unimportant to 5 = very important or 1 = unacceptable to 5 = acceptable) by means of a visual representation of the scale format. The 5-point Likert scale is classified as an intensity scale due to the wording of the anchors. The fieldworker recorded the answers.

Important issues for data gathering were highlighted. This included:

- Respondents should in no way be led in their answers.
- It is very important that respondents give responses to all the items in the measurement scale. If this were not the case, the particular respondent's feedback would be unusable and resources wasted.
- A strict quota system had to be followed to ensure that the research is conducted scientifically. The quota related to store location, population group and time as per store schedule.
- Details related to the quotas needed to be captured on the questionnaire according to the code sheet provided.

Criteria for selection of respondents: The selection of respondents was based on a quota system derived from the retailer's target market description (refer to Table 3.1). A store grid was attached to the training manual, which fieldworkers used to document the quotas for each day, time slot and population group.

Selection of respondents: Every female consumer, after having purchased for themselves or a family member, was a possible participant. Fieldworkers had to position themselves inside the allocated stores. To start the interview process, they had to approach the first customer who fitted the respondent criteria. The introductory letter could be presented if needed, and the customers were informed that every participant would receive a R50 gift voucher on completion of the questionnaire. Individual customers were not to be forced to participate. The number of consumers refusing to participate had to be recorded on the response page. Lastly, the fieldworkers had to inform the participants that all data would be handled in strict confidence and that the data would be used for research purposes only.

Practicalities: Each fieldworker was issued with questionnaires and a letter of permission from management. Included in the fieldworker training manual were the introductory letter by which fieldworkers were identified; the contact details for customers of persons representing management and of the researcher, the store schedule, and the code sheet. Lastly, fieldworkers received the vouchers for rewarding respondents who would participate in the study. The R50 vouchers were used as incentives to participate in the study to facilitate approaching possible respondents and more favourable customer reactions with regard to the interview and the fieldworkers. This, however, may have influenced the results as participants could have been motivated to participate in the study in order to obtain the voucher, rather than participating truthfully.

3.5 Measurement Instrument

The SIS developed by Janse van Noordwyk (in press) was chosen for the current study. It was used for both the management and the customer sample, to measure the importance of the various store image dimensions. This questionnaire was deemed appropriate since its development included quantitative and qualitative phases. It was also specifically developed for the South African context. It is imperative that measurement scales that have been constructed for empirical research, be reliable.

The reliability of a scale indicates the extent to which it is free from random error variance. The most commonly used statistic to indicate internal consistency is Cronbach's coefficient alpha. This statistic provides an indication of the average correlation among all the items that make up the scale. The Cronbach alpha values range from 0 - 1; values close to 1 signify greater reliability (Nunnally, 1978; Pallant, 2005). Nunnally (1978) and Pallant (2005) recommend a reliability coefficient of 0.7 as acceptable. Nunnally (1978), however, explains that reasonable Cronbach alpha values differ depending on the purpose and nature of a scale and he therefore suggests that a value of 0.6 is acceptable for explorative research. The SIS reported acceptable Cronbach alphas ranging between 0.691 and 0.812.

Cronbach alpha values are dependent on the number of items in a scale. When there is a small number of items in the scale (less than ten), Cronbach alpha values can be fairly small. In such a situation it is suggested to further calculate and report the mean inter-item correlation for the items (Nunes, 2003; Nunnally, 1978; Pallant, 2005; Scholtz, 2003). Values ranging between 0.2 and 0.4 are said to be optimum inter-item correlations (as recommended

by Briggs & Cheek, 1986). The inter-item correlations of the various dimensions were above .30. The instrument also showed acceptable levels of face and discriminant validity. The model fit indices were acceptable. The convergent validity showed unsatisfactory results for the institutional and merchandise dimensions, however, these results were inconclusive (Janse van Noordwyk, in press). The use of the SIS furthered the objective of refining the scale.

The SIS was adapted to gather the information required for reaching the objectives set in Chapter 1. Firstly, the scale of importance was replaced with an acceptability scale. This provided the opportunity to gather information on how the same dimensions that are measured on importance are viewed in the current research with regard to acceptability. However, because the questionnaire was not developed for this purpose, this use could have influenced the reliability of the questionnaire. Due to the multiple objectives of the current study, the questionnaire was doubled in length, to include the importance scale as well as the acceptability scale. This extended the questionnaire from 4 to 7 pages. The questionnaire became too long and even motivated participants became irritated with the last two sections dealing with importance. The importance ratings were constantly high, indicating that participants had exhibited rater bias in order to finish the questionnaire. This tendency could, however, also have been due to the scaling format, since the Likert scale lends itself to being lenient. However, the Likert-type format is also the easiest to respond to and thus is appropriate for such a questionnaire comprising 135 items (Menezes & Elbert, 1979). These limitations were considered, however, and were addressed in the research design and interpretation of the results.

The SIS is a self-administered, structured questionnaire. This warrants the gathering of appropriate data and limits the mistakes that fieldworkers could make (Bradley, 1995). The SIS covers the importance of store image dimensions and consists of three sections. Respondents rated importance on a five-point bipolar scale ranging from 1 = unimportant to 5 = very important, with a sixth option of unable to rate. The points were verbally anchored and restricted to five points, which decreases the level of difficulty for respondents (Du Preez, 2001).

The questionnaire that was used in the current research to gather data on the customers' perceptions had five sections, to include a measurement of the acceptability of actual store image dimensions (refer to Appendix B). In order to measure customer's perception of the actual store image in Section A and B, Janse van Noordwyk's (in press) original scale was

adapted by replacing the verbally anchored options for importance with 1 = unacceptable to 5 = acceptable (refer to Appendix B). The questionnaire used for the customers' perceptions covered the following: Section A: Apparel Store Attributes; Section B: Apparel Store Image Dimensions (the perception of acceptability of the store image attributes and dimensions); Section C: Demographics, Section D: Apparel Store Attributes; and Section E: Apparel Store image Dimensions (perception of the importance of store image attributes and dimensions).

The questionnaire that was used for measuring management's perception of consumers' ideal regarding the importance of store image dimensions had only two sections, namely Section A: Apparel Store Attributes and Section B: Apparel Store Image Dimensions (refer to Appendix C). Management's demographic information was gathered through personal interviews.

Importance measures provide more useful information than semantic differentiations, e.g. modern vs classic; since these differentiations still do not indicate whether the customer finds one more alluring than the other and whether it is a salient belief of customers. According to the multi-attribute model, a consumer's attitude toward a product is a function of the presence and evaluation of product beliefs and/or attributes (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004). This model firstly recognises that a store can have several desirable/undesirable attributes and that these attributes, secondly, can differ in importance between individuals (Hanna & Wozniak, 2001). Even a top-rated store has store image dimensions that are not perfect, but these dimensions might not be important and therefore do not influence how the store is perceived. The reason for using a questionnaire that measures importance was to indicate which dimensions are central in forming an appropriate store image. Salient beliefs/activated beliefs are formed through experiences and are the beliefs that are held consciously (Peter & Olsen, 2005). Therefore it is possible to question individuals on these beliefs. This is, however, complicated by the gestalt nature of store image, which indicates that consumers cannot differentiate the parts from the whole. Furthermore, store image has various aspects that overlap to form the whole and therefore the perception of one attribute influences the perception of another. If a store image dimension is consequently found to be unimportant (or less important), it would not be advisable to spend large amounts of capital on the dimension, as it would be unlikely to influence behaviour.

3.6 Statistical analyses

The reliability of the SIS was established with Cronbach Alpha, item-total correlations and inter-item correlations. “Analysis of variance (ANOVA) evaluates the differences among the means relative to overlap in the sampling distribution” (Tabachnick, & Fidell, 1989, p.37). Therefore ANOVA was used to compare means, to assess whether there were any significant differences among the two consumer groups (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

Three measures served as independent variables (X), namely:

- Customers’ perception of actual store image dimensions
- Customers’ ideal importance of store image dimensions and
- Management’s perception of customers’ ideal importance of store image dimensions.

The dependent variables (Y) are the eight store image dimensions surveyed in the questionnaire. One-way repeated measures ANOVA were used to indicate differences between the groups. A significant F-test indicates that the possibility of no difference is rejected (Pallant, 2005; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001(b)). This provided an opportunity to explain and recommend possible store image alterations to improve the congruity between customer and management perceptions by refining the actual store image.

A statistically significant difference indicated that the difference between two measures was more than an error measurement. However, a statistically significant difference does not warrant that a company should change the store image, therefore the size of the statistical difference was taken into account for recommendations. All statistically significant differences do not necessarily require a response and should be considered strategically. The key aspect of the present study is that a discrepancy between the perceived images of consumers and management could be measured statistically and used diagnostically. This diagnostic orientation enables management to focus on the areas of incongruence that are most critical and practical to act on. The methodology used in the current study emphasises the necessity to measure the significance of discrepancies and to classify them according to the six types of image combinations proposed by Samli *et al.* (1998, p. 32). The classifications were provided in Chapter 2 (section 2.6.2).

3.7 Conclusion to Chapter 3

An appropriate and scientifically sound research methodology is crucial to the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn and recommendations made from the results of a study. The researcher set out to plan the empirical study by using the objectives of the study as point of departure and attempted to follow the scientific research method by using the most appropriate methods for statistical analysis and to recognise the possible shortcomings of the different methods, assumptions and conclusions resulting therefrom. In the next chapter, the results of the study and the interpretation of the findings will be discussed.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the results and offer an interpretation and discussion of the data that were assembled according to the objectives set for the study. A graphic summary of the objectives and consequent results and discussion are presented in Figure 4.1.

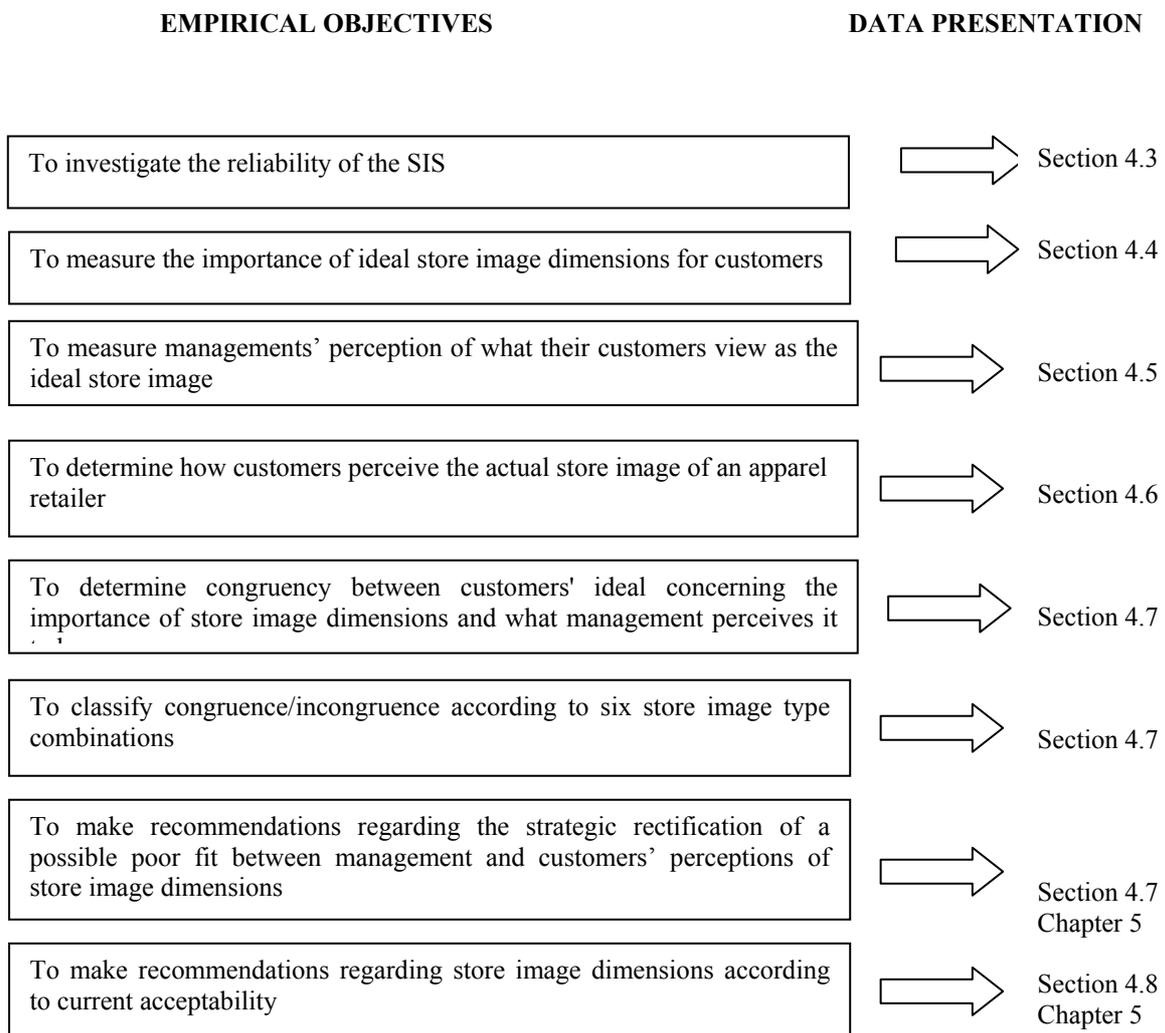


Figure 4.1: Summary: The presentation of data to reach the research objectives

4.2 Sample profile of customers and management

The demographic profile of customer respondents is presented in Table 4.1. As some of the respondents did not answer all the questions (missing cases), the total sample size varies for the different variables.

The sample comprised equal percentages (35%) of African/Black and Coloured respondents. White (28%) and Indian (1%) respondents were representative of the consumer profile provided (refer to Table 3.1). The language distribution was a reflection of the sample's home language, with 43% being Afrikaans speaking. This could partly be attributed to the region selected for data gathering. The Western Cape is a predominantly Afrikaans-speaking area, especially for white and coloured participants. Among the respondents, 28% represented English and 29% represented other languages (mostly Xhosa).

Respondents' ages mainly ranged between 20 to 29 (50%) and 30 to 39 (22%). This is on par with the target market profile. A small number of respondents (2%) did not fit the customer profile of up to 54 years of age (refer to Table 3.1), but it was decided to include these participants, as they represented a very small percentage of the total sample.

The largest portion of respondents (45%) chose the *other* category as occupation, indicating that they were students or house workers. A substantial group (23%) indicated clerical, salesperson, technician and secretarial under occupation. The third largest group (12%) held middle management positions (e.g. nursing sisters, educators). A mere 4% of the participants were unemployed. This is not representative for South Africa or even the Western Cape (26% unemployment), but it fits the retailer's customer profile (matriculated or have a diploma; clerical, teacher or middle management).

Twelve percent of the respondents had a total monthly household income lower than R1000.00. The lower middle income group (R1001 - R5000) represented the largest group of respondents (37%). The upper middle income group (R5001 - R10 000) was insignificantly smaller (33%). The higher income groups were also well represented, with 20% of the respondents having a monthly household income of above R10 000. The income distribution was related to the occupational data, as 94% of the sample were employed and only 2% were retired (refer to Table 4.1).

TABLE 4.1
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF CONSUMER RESPONDENTS

Variables	Categories	n	%
Population Group	Black	70	35
	Coloured	69	35
	Indian	2	1
	White	57	28
	Other	2	1
Home Language	Afrikaans	84	43
	English	55	28
	Other	58	29
Age	18- 20	8	4
	20-29	99	50
	30-39	44	22
	40-49	35	18
	50-59	11	6
	Older than 60	3	2
Employment Status	Unemployed	7	4
	Clerical, Salesperson, Technician, Secretarial	47	23
	Middle management (Teacher, Nursing)	23	12
	Corporate (management)	13	7
	Professional (Doctor, Director)	7	4
	Homemaker	11	6
	Retired (including a severance package)	4	2
	Other	89	45
Total Monthly Income Gross)	Less than R500	4	2
	R501 – R1000	19	10
	R1001 – R3000	43	22
	R3001 – R5000	29	15
	R5001 – R7000	33	17
	R7001 – R10 000	31	16
	R10 001 – R20 000	16	8
	R20 001 – R30 000	14	7
R30 001 and more	9	5	
Marital Status	Cohabitation	15	8
	Married	64	32
	Not Married	103	52
	Divorced/ Separated	13	7
	Widow	4	2
Frequency of Clothing Purchases	Only when I need clothes	57	28
	Once a year	1	1
	Twice a year	4	2
	Three times a year	19	10
	Monthly	89	45
	Weekly	18	9
Other	10	5	
Clothing Expenditure per Month	Less than R99	0	0
	R100 – R199	13	7
	R200 – R299	24	12
	R300 – R399	45	23
	R400 – R499	44	22
	R500 – R599	39	20
	More than R600 per month	34	17

Marital status strongly influences female spending and consumer decisions (Du Preez, 2001). Fifty-two percent of the respondents were single with a resulting influence on lifestyle. Customers' lifestyles were not explicitly measured in the current study, and could only be deduced from some of the other biographical data. Lifestyle does, however, influence consumer spending decisions and buying patterns. Young, single women, for example, do not necessarily have the same expenditures as married women and might not have expenditures such as rent impacting their monthly spending. The second largest respondent group was married (32%). This group is viewed as the largest spenders with regard to apparel, as they buy for themselves, and also for the rest of the family (Du Preez, 2001)

A family's income, occupational status and marital status affect the percentage of disposable income available for apparel purchases. These factors impact the frequency and value of apparel purchases. The majority (45%) of respondents preferred to shop for clothes on a monthly basis, with 28% only purchasing when clothing was needed. 45% of the respondents on average spent between R300 – R499 per month on apparel. Participants' responses were widely distributed, however, as seen in Table 4.1. When compared to the monthly income statistics, it should be taken into consideration that gross monthly income was indicated and not net monthly income. A low income does not necessarily indicate that little is available for apparel purchases.

The second sample of respondents was the Management group (n = 14). Their profile is depicted in Table 4.2. The majority of this sample comprised white, male and English-speaking respondents who also were affluent, considering that they were employed in managerial positions.

TABLE 4.2
DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF MANAGEMENT RESPONDENTS

Variables	Categories	n	%
Population group	Coloured	2	14
	Indian	1	7
	White	11	79
Home language	Afrikaans	2	14
	English	12	86
Age	20–29	2	14
	30–39	10	72
	40–49	1	7
	50–59	1	7
Employment status	Middle Management	4	29
	Store Manager	4	29
	Senior Management	4	28
	Director	2	14
Total monthly income (gross)	R5001 – R7000	4	29
	R20 001 – R30 000	4	29
	R30 001 and more	6	42
Marital status	Cohabitation	2	14
	Married	10	72
	Not Married	2	14
Frequency of clothing purchases	Only when I need clothes	1	7
	Three times a year	1	7
	Monthly	11	79
	Weekly	1	7
Clothing expenditure per month	R200 – R299	4	29
	R300 – R399	2	14
	R400 – R499	2	14
	R500 – R599	2	14
	More than R600 per month	4	29
Gender	Male	6	42
	Female	8	58

4.3 Questionnaire reliability

Two versions of the SIS were used, one for Customers and another for the Management group (See section 3.5). An item analysis was performed on all scales and sub-scales in order to identify items that did not contribute to the internal consistency of the measuring instrument. The reliability results are portrayed in Tables 4.3 to 4.5.

The Cronbach alpha values of the dimensions were high across all questionnaires, ranging between 0.67 and 0.92. These were well above the recommended value of 0.6 (Nunnally, 1978). The Item-total correlations provide an indication of the degree to which each item

correlates with the total score; low values (less than 0.3) indicate that the item could be measuring something different (these items are shaded in the table) Table 4.3 indicates the results of the item analyses of customers' perceptions of the ideal importance of store image dimensions. The Cronbach alpha values of the dimensions ranged between 0.84 and 0.91.

TABLE 4.3
RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF THE CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS

Construct	Dimensions	Items	No. of Items	Coefficient alpha	Alpha if deleted	Item-total correlations	
Store image			55	0.85			
	Atmosphere		6	0.91		0.66	
		1				0.88	0.83
		2				0.88	0.82
		3				0.88	0.80
		4				0.88	0.80
		5				0.91	0.66
	Convenience	6				0.90	0.64
			7	0.88			0.52
		7				0.87	0.62
		8				0.84	0.79
		9				0.85	0.73
		10				0.86	0.70
		11				0.86	0.71
	Facilities	12				0.88	0.54
		13				0.87	0.55
			7	0.88			0.54
		14				0.88	0.59
		15				0.86	0.75
		16				0.86	0.70
		17				0.86	0.73
	Institutional	18				0.87	0.68
		19				0.86	0.70
		20				0.88	0.59
			6	0.88			0.55
		21				0.86	0.68
		22				0.85	0.71
		23				0.84	0.76
	Merchandise	24				0.86	0.67
		25				0.85	0.70
		26				0.87	0.60
			8	0.89			0.53
		27				0.88	0.59
28					0.87	0.67	
29					0.86	0.79	
30					0.86	0.78	
31					0.87	0.72	
32					0.87	0.74	
33				0.89	0.51		

Construct	Dimensions	Items	No. of Items	Coefficient alpha	Alpha if deleted	Item-total correlations
	Promotions		8	0.88		0.50
		35			0.87	0.64
		36			0.86	0.71
		37			0.87	0.70
		38			0.86	0.73
		39			0.88	0.59
		40			0.87	0.70
		41			0.87	0.65
	42			0.88	0.54	
	Sales Personnel		5	0.86		0.58
		43			0.89	0.43
		44			0.84	0.66
		45			0.81	0.80
		46			0.80	0.83
	Service	47			0.83	0.72
		8	0.84		0.40	
48				0.85	0.26	
49				0.85	0.24	
50				0.84	0.39	
51				0.80	0.68	
52				0.79	0.73	
53				0.81	0.62	
54				0.79	0.74	
55			0.78	0.79		

The item analyses indicated that no items should be deleted on the basis of Cronbach alpha values. However, two items indicated low item-total correlations (shaded in Table 4.3). This indicates that these two dimensions measured something different to the rest of the scale. The overall Cronbach alpha value (0.85), however, is high and therefore it was necessary to delete these two items. Table 4.4 presents the results of the item analyses of Customers' perception of the acceptability of store image dimensions. The Cronbach alpha values of the dimensions ranged between 0.81 and 0.92.

TABLE 4.4
RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION OF THE ACCEPTABILITY OF STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS

Construct	Dimensions	Items	No. of Items	Coefficient alpha	Alpha if deleted	Item-total correlations
Store image			55	0.89		
	Atmosphere		6	0.88		0.57
		1			0.85	0.73
		2			0.84	0.77
		3			0.84	0.81
		4			0.85	0.73
		5			0.86	0.66
6			0.90	0.46		

Construct	Dimensions	Items	No. of Items	Coefficient alpha	Alpha if deleted	Item-total correlations
	Convenience		7	0.81		0.39
		7			0.79	0.49
		8			0.79	0.53
		9			0.77	0.60
		10			0.78	0.58
		11			0.77	0.60
		12			0.79	0.52
		13			0.79	0.49
	Facilities		7	0.87		0.49
		14			0.86	0.57
		15			0.85	0.66
		16			0.85	0.65
	Facilities					
		17			0.84	0.69
		18			0.85	0.65
		19			0.85	0.62
		20			0.85	0.67
	Institutional		6	0.85		0.51
		21			0.83	0.64
		22			0.82	0.68
		23			0.82	0.68
		24			0.81	0.73
		25			0.82	0.70
		26			0.87	0.47
	Merchandise		8	0.92		0.61
		27			0.92	0.66
		28			0.91	0.81
		29			0.90	0.81
		30			0.91	0.77
		31			0.91	0.78
		32			0.91	0.80
		33			0.91	0.70
		34			0.92	0.58
	Promotions		8	0.87		0.47
		35			0.85	0.65
		36			0.85	0.69
		37			0.85	0.63
		38			0.86	0.57
		39			0.85	0.64
		40			0.86	0.61
		41			0.85	0.63
		42			0.85	0.63
	Sales Personnel		5	0.82		0.51
		43			0.78	0.64
		44			0.75	0.74
		45			0.78	0.64
		46			0.80	0.59
		47			0.82	0.49
	Service		8	0.91		0.58
		48			0.90	0.66
		49			0.90	0.64
		50			0.90	0.69
		51			0.90	0.67
		52			0.90	0.73
		53			0.89	0.77
		54			0.89	0.75
		55			0.89	0.78

The results of Management's perception of Customers' view of the importance of store image importance are presented in Table 4.5. The Cronbach alpha values of dimensions range

between 0.67 and 0.85. The Cronbach alpha value for the scale is 0.89, indicating very high reliability.

TABLE 4.5
RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF THE MANAGEMENT'S PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION
OF THE IMPORTANCE OF STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS

Construct	Dimensions	Items	No. of Items	Coefficient alpha	Alpha if deleted	Item-total correlations	
Store image			55	0.84			
	Atmosphere		6	0.73		0.30	
		1				0.70	0.47
		2				0.62	0.68
		3				0.68	0.51
		4				0.69	0.48
		5				0.63	0.66
	Convenience	6				0.79	0.05
			7	0.69			0.26
		7				0.65	0.44
		8				0.68	0.33
		9				0.67	0.34
		10				0.70	0.25
		11				0.58	0.63
	Facilities	12				0.68	0.35
		13				0.62	0.56
			7	0.75			0.32
		14				0.75	0.33
		15				0.68	0.62
		16				0.69	0.59
		17				0.73	0.43
	Institutional	18				0.73	0.43
		19				0.75	0.32
		20				0.71	0.52
			6	0.67			0.29
		21				0.61	0.45
		22				0.53	0.64
		23				0.52	0.75
		24				0.72	0.05
		25				0.62	0.47
	Merchandise	26				0.73	0.21
			8	0.84			0.41
		27				0.84	0.42
		28				0.79	0.80
		29				0.81	0.73
		30				0.78	0.86
		31				0.80	0.77
		32				0.86	0.23
		33				0.86	0.27
	Promotions	34				0.83	0.54
			8	0.78			0.32
		35				0.74	0.63
36					0.74	0.58	
37					0.78	0.28	
38					0.75	0.55	
39					0.79	0.28	
40					0.78	0.34	
41					0.75	0.54	
42					0.72	0.70	

Construct	Dimensions	Items	No. of Items	Coefficient alpha	Alpha if deleted	Item-total correlations
	Sales		5	0.85		0.57
	Personnel					
		43			0.83	0.64
		44			0.82	0.68
		45			0.81	0.73
		46			0.81	0.72
		47			0.85	0.58
	Service		8	0.83		0.37
		48			0.81	0.63
		49			0.86	0.11
		50			0.83	0.32
		51			0.81	0.51
		52			0.77	0.75
		53			0.78	0.73
		54			0.79	0.67
		55			0.76	0.81

Comparison of the scales showed that the reliability analysis of the customers' perception of the importance of store image dimensions (Table 4.3) and reliability analysis of the customers' perception of the acceptability of store image dimensions (Table 4.4) show higher reliability and item-total correlations than the reliability analysis of the management's scale of importance (Table 4.5). A number of items (9) presented low item-total correlations (less than 0.3). The Cronbach alpha values of the dimensions ranged between 0.67 and 0.85. The Cronbach alpha (0.84) of the scale was high, therefore the items indicating low item-total correlation were retained. These items could, however, be considered for deletion in further applications.

Generally, the Cronbach alpha values were satisfactory with acceptable internal consistency. Thus, the SIS proved to be reliable in this application. This section succeeded in reaching objective five, to investigate the reliability of the SIS.

4.4 Importance of store image dimensions: Customers' perceptions of the ideal apparel retail store

What do the customers of this retailer view as the most important store image dimensions? This information is regarded as critical for any store, especially when deciding how to allocate marketing funds. Investment into store image dimensions should be managed cautiously in order to influence store choice, loyalty and satisfaction. Those dimensions which customers perceive as important are most significant to this management process, as they will affect consumer behaviour. Table 4.6 indicates the importance of store image dimensions according to customers' perception of the ideal apparel retail store.

TABLE 4.6
IMPORTANCE OF STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS: CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION
OF THE IDEAL APPAREL RETAIL STORE

Dimension	Item	very unimportant %					very important %					not able to rate %
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Atmosphere	1: fashionability of store interior	-	1	7	20	71	-					-
	2: style of décor in store	-	1	7	23	69	-					-
	3: attractiveness of décor in store	1	-	7	19	73	-					-
	4: colours used in store	2	1	7	23	68	-					-
	5: suitable finishing materials used in store	2	3	10	22	63	1					
	6: shopping experience	1	2	4	19	74	-					
Convenience	7: time it takes to travel to store	3	4	13	27	54	-					-
	8: proximity of store to variety of other stores	3	4	13	27	53	-					-
	9: accessibility of store	2	3	11	28	56	-					-
	10: flow of people in mall where store is situated	2	4	12	32	49	1					
	11: amount of walking required within store	3	6	9	25	56	-					-
	12: ease of finding merchandise items	1	1	6	21	71	1					
Facilities	13: store opening hours	1	4	8	27	61	-					-
	14: accessibility of store entrance/exit	1	3	11	27	59	-					-
	15: position of aisles in store	1	2	14	31	53	-					-
	16: width of aisles in store	2	1	15	30	53	-					-
	17: accessibility of merchandise rails	-	1	8	26	66	-					-
	18: number of fitting rooms	-	2	9	27	61	1					
	19: lighting in fitting rooms	1	3	7	24	64	1					
Institutional	20: ease of shopping with family in mall where the store is situated	1	5	8	22	63	1					
	21: social class appeal of store	1	1	16	36	46	1					
	22: store's appeal to friends	2	3	15	34	45	2					
	23: similarity in appearance between sales personnel and customers	2	3	21	32	41	-					-
	24: ability to identify with store	1	1	12	33	53	-					-
	25: similarity between store image and self-image	1	2	15	31	51	-					-
	26: store's effort to build personal relationship with customers	-	4	11	19	63	3					

Dimension	Item	very unimportant %				very important %	not able to rate %
Merchandise	27: variety of merchandise categories	-	1	8	11	79	1
	28: availability of imported merchandise	3	4	19	23	48	3
	29: availability of unique merchandise	2	3	12	25	57	2
	30: availability of exclusive merchandise	3	3	12	21	59	2
	31: availability of designer label merchandise	3	4	39	24	48	3
	32: availability of fashion merchandise	-	1	7	24	67	1
	33: availability of styles suited to my age	1	1	5	12	82	-
	34: quality of merchandise in store	-	1	4	12	83	1
Promotions	35: credibility of store advertising	2	1	7	22	68	2
	36: models used in store advertising	2	3	15	21	58	2
	37: inclusion of brochures in mailed store card account	2	5	10	17	56	11
	38: spaciousness of in-store displays	1	6	13	23	57	-
	39: ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays	1	1	9	21	68	1
	40: sales with marked-down prices	2	1	8	17	72	-
	41: timely announcement of sales	1	3	7	16	72	1
	42: availability of special offers	3	3	7	12	74	2
Sales Personnel	43: fashionability of sales personnel	2	1	16	24	57	-
	44: attractiveness of sales personnel	1	4	22	26	47	-
	45: similarity in body type between sales personnel and myself	4	6	31	23	36	-
	46: similarity in age	5	7	27	26	35	-
	47: similarity in gender	6	8	25	25	37	-
Service	48: expertise of sales personnel	2	2	5	16	75	1
	49: courteousness of sales personnel	1	1	5	11	82	1
	50: number of sales personnel	1	2	6	21	70	1
	51: availability of gift vouchers	3	5	16	23	49	5
	52: availability of gift registry	5	10	15	17	42	11
	53: availability of inter-store transfers	3	3	13	23	54	5
	54: availability of mail-order facility	9	14	13	17	31	16
	55: availability of alteration services	5	7	18	14	44	12
Dimension	Atmosphere	1	1	5	15	79	-
	Convenience	3	2	5	16	74	-
	Facilities	1	1	4	27	67	1
	Institutional	1	2	8	24	65	1
	Merchandise	-	1	4	15	79	-
	Promotion	1	1	6	24	69	-
	Sales Personnel	-	1	9	23	65	1
	Service	1	-	5	18	76	1

Atmosphere: Participants rated this dimension very highly on all attributes. The majority of participants rated each of the items as either 4 or 5. *Shopping experience* was rated as most important with a combined importance score of 93%. *Finishing materials* were regarded as less important with 10% of respondents indicating an average rating of 3. These results support the importance placed on atmosphere in recent research and the fact that Atmosphere has been the most frequently studied dimension in recent research (Janse van Noordwyk, 2002; Kleinhans, 2003; Orth & Bourrain, 2005). The fact that *shopping experience* was rated as most favourable could be due to the emotional manifestation evoked by Atmosphere (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). Respondents might find it difficult to verbalise or comprehend exactly which atmosphere attributes are responsible for the formation of the experience while shopping, and therefore they opt for a broader attribute, *shopping experience*.

Convenience: This dimension was rated lower than Atmosphere. A marked increase in average responses was noted. The *ease of finding merchandise in the store* was the most important attribute in this dimension. The *amount of walking required in the store* was considered least important. Convenience could have been rated as slightly less important due to the customers' demographic profile. Chowdary (1999) indicated that convenience is an important dimension, but more so to elderly consumers. The age profile of the respondents (and thus the specific target market) could therefore have contributed to this result.

Facilities: Facilities were rated similar to Convenience, thus it is also seen as relatively important, with some neutral responses recorded. *Accessibility of merchandise rails* was rated important or very important by 92% of the respondents. This attribute forms part of store layout. According to Kleinhans (2003), a lot of research on physical facilities indicate the importance of store layout, more specifically wide aisles and resting areas. This is confirmed by Lee *et al.* (2005) stating that facilities are prominent in shaping the retail environment.

Institutional: This dimension was rated less important than most other dimensions, with a large percentage (11% to 21%) of respondents recording neutral ratings. This could be attributed to the nature of the items, as the focus was on personal views and items could be regarded as socially desirable. This dimension is not widely recognised (like merchandise), being more abstract, and may not have been noticed by respondents as influencing store image. While the other dimensions concern objects that are tangible, the institutional dimension focuses on the impact of the store's identity. This could also have caused respondents to be more cautious in their rating. An institution's identity is revealed through

behaviour, communications and symbolism (Van Riel & Balmer, 1997). Its symbolism is what appeals to people. An identity stands for something; *social class appeal*, for instance, could indicate social class to customers, together with the *ability to identify with the store's identity*.

Merchandise: The *quality of merchandise* (83%), *availability of styles suited to my age* (82%) and *variety of merchandise* (79%) were the most highly rated attributes in this dimension. *Availability of imported merchandise* (48%) and *availability of designer label merchandise* (48%) were rated lowest. The high occurrence of neutral ratings confirmed that customers do not find these specific attributes to be of great importance. Hyllegard *et al.* (2005) reported that income influences preference for merchandise, while Sullivan *et al.* (2002) found that price sensitivity significantly affects chain store shopping. Therefore this specific differentiation in preference can be ascribed to the type of store and specific market that a particular store is trying to reach. This result corresponds with the target market profile (refer to Table 3.2), which is described as wanting fashionable clothing at reasonable prices, while also needing guidance concerning style. Thus, a consumer purchasing predominantly at boutiques, would probably have rated imported and designer goods more highly. However, these consumers also pay much higher prices than regular chain store customers. Ailawadi and Keller (2004) found that private label brands build store brand equity. This leading apparel retailer could concentrate more on the developing of their own brand name, which could address price issues and suit these fashion seekers. Private brands also increase customers' perception of the quality of merchandise and this could increase the variety that they can offer (Vahie & Paswan, 2006)

Promotions: A general assumption is that this dimension merely involves advertising, and it could consequently be perceived as less important to consumers. This dimension, however, received very high ratings. *Sales with marked down prices* (72%), *timely announcement of sales* (72%) and *availability of special offers* (74%) were rated as the most important attributes. *Inclusion of brochures in mailed store card accounts* (56%) and *spaciousness of in-store displays* (57%) were rated least important. The three most highly rated attributes in this dimension were connected to promotional sales. Stewart (1996) proposed that the promotional budget is a very important expenditure for companies, and these importance measures indicate that different levels of expenditure are needed. Promotional sales provide a key promotional tactic to increase promotion-to-sales ratio. Promotional sales are used as a discriminative stimulus in the learning process, and when it is retracted people will hopefully

continue the learnt shopping behaviour (Kunkel & Berry, 1968). Therefore it is clear that this leading apparel retailer should focus their promotional expenditure on promotional sales.

Sales personnel: Customers rated *fashionability of sales personnel* (57%) as the most important item in this dimension. The other items received very neutral ratings; they were therefore viewed as less important. The customers of this retail chain tend to be fashion conscious, but they still need guidance (Foschini, 2007). Sales personnel represent the store and provide the first line of contact, therefore they are responsible for advising and guiding customers in a store. Customers thus expect and want them to be knowledgeable regarding fashion and the merchandise they represent and sell. Hu and Jasper (2006, p.28) concluded that stores that provide more social cues increase the favourable preference toward merchandise. Sales personnel represent the social interaction of customer service. Therefore the sales personnel represent the social connection with the store.

Service: Clothing stores are in the service industry, therefore service should be a key aspect of what they offer to consumers. The *expertise of sales personnel* (75%) and *courteousness of sales personnel* (82%) were seen as the most important attributes by customers in this dimension. According to Baker *et al.* (2002), service provides the key to exceeding customer expectations. If a store provides good service customers view the store as reliable, which is necessary for survival in the retail industry. A salesperson's knowledge, helpfulness and friendliness enhances the quality of service during the shopping experience (Samli *et al.*, 1998). The results support the importance of salespeople and service, because the highest rated attributes in this dimension concerns salespeople.

Some of the items related to service in this dimension are not offered by this leading retailer. Respondents regarded these items as less important and presented a large percentage of *unable to rate* responses. The following items do not apply to this specific apparel retailer: *availability of gift registry* (42%), *availability of mail-order service* (31%) and the *availability of alteration services* (44%). The unavailability of these services could have affected the perception and experience that customers have of these services.

Summary: As a whole, customers' ratings on all the dimensions were very high. The most important dimensions (in terms of their ideal leading apparel retail store) were Atmosphere and Merchandise, both with importance ratings of 79%. The Institutional dimension was given the lowest score (65%). The general important evaluation could be due to the Gestalt

nature of store image, according to which store image is viewed as a whole rather than its parts. The effect refers to the consumer's inability to differentiate between the store image as a whole and the different dimensions (Feeley, 2002; Wu & Petroschius, 1987). Because of this inability, "...the ratings of [store image dimensions/attributes] may be either inflated or deflated, depending on... the raters' overall attitude..." (Wu & Petroschius, 1987, p. 44). As pointed out earlier, it could also be postulated that the *halo effect* contributed to the ratings, which implies that a consumer shows a tendency to rate all dimensions on the basis of the perception of one (either positive or negative). This can be viewed as a less favourable result, as no large distinctions were made between the importance of ideal store image dimensions (as perceived by the consumer).

The aim of this section was to reach Objective six, to determine the ideal importance of store image dimensions to customers. Each dimension had at least one attribute that 74% or more of the respondents rated as *very important*. Consumers therefore view all the dimensions as important, supporting the notion that even though dimensions of store image can be manipulated and atmosphere and merchandise were deemed most important; all the dimensions should be managed to contribute towards forming a positive store image.

4.5 Importance of store image dimensions: Management's perceptions of customers' importance ratings

The management sample was asked to indicate their perceptions of what customers' importance ratings of store image dimensions and attributes were (refer to Table 4.7). It was assumed that the company distributed its resources among those store image dimensions that they perceived as impacting most strongly on customers. This information was imperative to ascertain whether the management's perception was congruent with that of the customers. Congruency between management and customers' perceptions assures that marketing funds are appropriately allocated to affect consumer behaviour favourably.

Atmosphere: Management rated *shopping experience* (79%) highest, while *colours used in store* (21%) and *suitable finishing materials used in store* (14%) received the lowest ratings. The majority of managers rated the importance of items at either 4 or 3, thus they did not perceive this dimension as very important but as rather neutral. Management, like customers, perceived *shopping experience* as most important. This result confirms the importance of

store *atmosphere* in creating an emotional effect and contributing to a positive shopping experience, rather than specific materials that may be used to achieve this.

Convenience: Managers perceived *amount of walking required within a store* (7%) to be the least important item, while they perceived the *ease of finding merchandise items* (79%) most important. The least and most important attributes, according to customers and management, consequently corresponded. The *ease of finding merchandise* is related to “ease of shopping”, as identified by Janse van Noordwyk (in press). Ease of shopping decreases the cost of time and effort associated with shopping experience cost. The higher customers perceive the cost of shopping to be, the lower their patronage intention becomes. When consumers weigh these options, they want the best quality at the lowest perceived cost, therefore *ease of finding merchandise* is an important aspect for consumers (Baker *et al.*, 2002).

TABLE 4.7
IMPORTANCE OF STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS: MANAGEMENT’S PERCEPTIONS OF CUSTOMERS’ IMPORTANCE RATINGS

Dimension	Item	very unimportant %		very important %		not able to rate %	
Atmosphere	1: fashionability of store interior	-	-	3	64	29	-
	2: style of décor in store	-	-	21	50	29	-
	3: attractiveness of décor in store	-	-	14	50	36	-
	4: colours used in store	-	-	29	50	21	-
	5: suitable finishing materials used in store	-	-	50	36	14	-
	6: shopping experience	-	-	-	21	79	-
Convenience	7: time it takes to travel to store	-	-	50	29	21	-
	8: proximity of store to variety of other stores	-	7	21	50	21	-
	9: accessibility of store	-	-	8	50	42	-
	10: flow of people in mall where store is situated	-	-	14	36	50	-
	11: amount of walking required within store	-	21	36	36	7	-
	12: ease of finding merchandise items	-	-	-	21	79	-
	13: store opening hours	-	-	7	43	50	-

Dimension	Item	very unimportant %		very important %		not able to rate %	
Facilities	14: accessibility of store entrance/exit	-	-	14	43	43	-
	15: position of aisles in store	-	-	50	29	21	-
	16: width of aisles in store	-	-	46	31	23	-
	17: accessibility of merchandise rails	-	-	14	43	43	-
	18: number of fitting rooms	-	-	14	43	43	-
	19: lighting in fitting rooms	-	-	7	29	64	-
	20: ease of shopping with family in mall where the store is situated	-	7	14	50	29	-
Institutional	21: social class appeal of store	-	-	36	36	21	7
	22: store's appeal to friends	-	-	36	36	29	-
	23: similarity in appearance between sale personnel and customers	-	-	36	57	7	-
	24: ability to identify with store	-	-	-	57	43	-
	25: similarity between store image and self-image	-	-	-	54	46	-
	26: store's effort to build personal relationship with customers	-	7	14	36	43	-
Merchandise	27: variety of merchandise categories	-	-	-	43	57	-
	28: availability of imported merchandise	21	21	36	43		-
	29: availability of unique merchandise	-	29	14	43	14	-
	30: availability of exclusive merchandise	-	50	21	29	-	-
	31: availability of designer label merchandise	14	36	43	7	-	-
	32: availability of fashion merchandise	-	-	-	36	64	-
	33: availability of styles suited to my age	-	-	7	43	50	-
	34: quality of merchandise in store	-	-	-	36	64	-
Promotions	35: credibility of store advertising	-	-	14	36	50	-
	36: models used in store advertising	-	17	29	50	14	-
	37: inclusion of brochures in mailed store card account	-	-	7	57	35	-
	38: spaciousness of in-store displays	-	21	36	29	14	-
	39: ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays	-	7	-	36	57	-
	40: sales with marked-down prices	-	-	36	29	36	-
	41: timely announcement of sales	-	7	43	29	14	7
	42: availability of special offers	-	14	14	43	29	-
Sales Personnel	43: fashionability of sales personnel	-	7	50	21	21	-
	44: attractiveness of sales personnel	-	12	50	14	14	-
	45: similarity in body type between sales personnel and myself	-	14	57	7	21	-
	46: similarity in age	-	36	29	14	21	-
	47: similarity in gender	-	29	43	21	7	-
Service	48: expertise of sales personnel	-	-	-	57	43	-
	49: courteousness of sales personnel	-	-	-	29	71	-
	50: number of sales personnel	-	-	50	21	29	-
	51: availability of gift vouchers	-	21	43	7	29	-
	52: availability of gift registry	50	21	14	-	7	7
	53: availability of inter-store transfers	-	14	-	57	29	-
	54: availability of mail-order	43	36	7	7	7	-
	55: availability of alteration services	36	43	7	7	7	-

Dimension	Item	very unimportant %		very important %		not able to rate %
Dimension	Atmosphere	-	-	43	57	-
	Convenience	-	-	21	29	50
	Facilities	-	-	14	57	29
	Institutional	-	-	21	50	29
	Merchandise	-	-	7	14	79
	Promotion	-	7	-	36	57
	Sales Personnel	-	-	29	36	36
	Service	-	-	7	36	57

Facilities: These attributes ease customers' shopping experience. *Lighting in fitting rooms* (64%) received the highest rating from management, while it was rated as second most important by customers, with *accessibility of merchandise rails* as most important. *Accessibility of merchandise rails* is related to store layout, which is connected to the ease of shopping (Kleinhans, 2003; Lee *et al.*, 2005). *Lighting in fitting rooms* is related to the decision to purchase a product, and the sale of products could be more important to management themselves. Management's judgement of customers' perception of the ideal was very similar to the customers' own perception.

Institutional: That managers perceived as most important was *similarity between store image and self-image* (46%). It was to be expected that the company's identity would be of greater importance to the company and its employees than to consumers. Management tend to be more aware of a company's identity and what it stands for and hopes to achieve. Therefore managers may not have found the Institutional dimension as abstract as it was to customers who rated it between 41% and 63% on importance. Notwithstanding, management recorded very neutral ratings on this dimension.

Merchandise: Management viewed attributes in the merchandise dimension as more important than most attributes across all dimensions. These included *availability of fashion merchandise* (64%) and *quality of merchandise in store* (64%). Other items, namely *availability of imported merchandise*, *availability of exclusive merchandise* and *availability of designer label merchandise* did not receive any very important ratings. There was a clear distinction between the items management perceived as important and unimportant. Once again, management's perceptions were similar to those of customers.

Promotion: The ratings were widely varied. Management rated two items very important, namely *credibility of store advertising* (50%) and *ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays* (57%). Customers, however, focused their higher ratings on the attributes that deal with promotional sales. Management did not rate these items as favourably as customers did. This could be attributed to management's awareness of the smaller profit margin of promotional sales. Promotional sales decrease the income generated by the day-to-day sale of merchandise. Promotional sales lure customers but, if promotional sales are used overly regularly, customers will adapt and, to a lesser degree, exhibit purchase behaviour under "normal" shopping conditions (without promotional sales). This could lead to a decrease in regular sales figures.

Sales Personnel: According to managers' perception, customers do not view Sales Personnel as an important store image dimension, the highest rating for this dimension being 21% (very important). At between 29% and 57%, neutral ratings were also very high. Some similarities with customers' evaluations were evident, as consumers rated Sales personnel as one of the less important dimensions, with a highest rating of 57%. The similarity between consumers and salespeople (age, body type, gender) is strongly related to the self-image and store image congruity argument. This suggests that consumer choice is related to the matching of self-image and store image (Hongwei & Mukherjee, 2007). This is not a conscious deliberation for consumers. It could be postulated that they therefore do not realise the importance of the congruity. Consumers rather focus on functional and service dimensions, which clearly is to their advantage.

Service: The *courteousness of sales personnel* (71%) was indicated as very important. The sales personnel's interaction with the clients provides a social connection that builds a bond between the store and the customers. This is because salespeople are experienced as a representation of the store's personality (Hu & Jasper, 2005). Thang and Tan (2003) concluded that stores that provide good service leave shoppers with a more favourable perception that promotes repeat visits and has a positive impact on consumer purchase behaviour. Managers perceive the *availability of gift registry* (7%), *availability of mail-order* (7%) and *availability of alteration services* (7%) as unimportant, which may explain why this retailer does not offer these services. Customers rated the services that this apparel retailer does not offer as less important than the services offered. The customers, however, did not rate these attributes as unfavourably as management did. Service could therefore be improved by re-evaluating the worth of these services and consequently starting to offer some of them.

This section focused on management's perception of customers' ideal regarding the importance of store image dimensions to identify management's perception of what consumers view as an ideal store image. The management ratings on the dimensions, as a whole, were moderately high. Merchandise received the highest rating at 79% and Atmosphere, Promotion and Service were regarded as second most important with a rating of 57%. Newman and Patel (2004) reported that the merchandise, promotion and atmosphere dimensions are the most important dimensions influencing customers' store choice. The management ratings seem much more moderate than those of the customers. This section realised Objective seven by measuring and reporting managements' perception of what customers viewed as the ideal store image. The significance of differences between customer and management perceptions will be discussed in section 4.7.

4.6 Acceptability of the current store image: Customers' perception

A further objective of the current study was to investigate how acceptable customers perceive the current store image to be (Objective 8). The results concerning what customers view as important in an ideal store is not adequate for recommending which dimensions need to be altered. In this respect, Mo (2002, p. 6) pointed out that "Store image is the summation of all the attributes of a store as perceived by the customers through their experiences with their store". Thompson and Chen (1998) believe that the solution is to address customers' perception of the actual store image, because perception is a very subjective factor and relies on personal experience. Therefore, even if the congruency between management and customers' perceptions of store image is high, the actual image might not be perceived as management intended it to be. Table 4.8 presents the ratings by customers regarding the acceptability of the current store image dimensions.

Atmosphere: *Fashionability of store interior, style of décor in store and attractiveness of décor in store* were rated as acceptable (4 and 5 ratings) by 86% of the participants in the survey. All the items in this dimension received more than 70% when ratings of 4 and 5 were combined. This indicates relatively high importance (refer to Table 4.6). *Store atmosphere* was rated as the most important attribute, but was not the most acceptable. The functional objects in atmosphere (namely colour, décor and finishing materials) were rated as favourable (50%; 45% and 44% respectively). This could be because these attributes are the variables that designers of store atmosphere recognise as important, and therefore pay more attention to. Due to the physical nature of these attributes, consumers more easily recognise them than

more emotive attributes. Emotive aspects, however, are most important to customers. Even though customers realise the importance of *store atmosphere* for their emotional state, they do not notice it as easily in a store.

Convenience: Customers rated the current *store opening hours* as most satisfactory, with a combined 90% (4 and 5), while the *accessibility to store, flow of people in mall where store is situated* and *ease of finding merchandise items* were also rated as very acceptable at 82%. *Store opening hours* was rated second most important (61%) by customers (refer to Table 4.6). This shows a great degree of consistency between customers' actual experiences and expectations of customers, which should influence patronage behaviour positively. The other attributes were less important but were still regarded as satisfactory (which is important for the gestalt nature of store image). All dimensions contribute to the whole, therefore negative/unsatisfactory evaluations should be avoided, as they could impact the total image negatively.

TABLE 4.8
ACCEPTABILITY OF CURRENT STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS: CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION

Dimension	Item	un-acceptable %					acceptable %		not able to rate %
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Atmosphere	1: fashionability of store interior	1	2	12	38	48	-	-	
	2: style of décor in store	-	2	12	41	45	-	-	
	3: attractiveness of décor in store	-	3	10	38	48	-	-	
	4: colours used in store	1	5	14	30	50	1	-	
	5: suitable finishing materials used in store	1	3	21	27	44	4	-	
	6: shopping experience	3	3	11	35	49	-	-	
Convenience	7: time it takes to travel to store	2	3	18	34	43	-	-	
	8: proximity of store to variety of other stores	1	4	18	31	46	-	-	
	9: accessibility of store	1	1	17	30	52	-	-	
	10: flow of people in mall where store is situated	1	2	16	31	51	-	-	
	11: amount of walking required within store	1	3	14	35	47	-	-	
	12: ease of finding merchandise items	1	3	17	31	49	-	-	
	13: store opening hours	-	2	7	31	59	1	-	

Dimension	Item	un-acceptable %		acceptable %		not able to rate %	
Facilities	14: accessibility of store entrance/exit	1	1	13	37	50	-
	15: position of aisles in store	1	2	19	44	35	-
	16: width of aisles in store	2	4	26	36	33	-
	17: accessibility of merchandise rails	1	3	21	41	35	-
	18: number of fitting rooms	2	1	20	38	38	1
	19: lighting in fitting rooms	1	3	17	33	46	1
	20: ease of shopping with family in mall where the store is situated	-	1	14	33	51	3
Institutional	21: social class appeal of store	1	1	12	43	44	1
	22: store's appeal to friends	1	2	14	37	46	2
	23: similarity in appearance between sales personnel and customers	1	5	24	36	35	1
	24: ability to identify with store	1	2	17	40	41	-
	25: similarity between store image and self-image	1	3	24	35	38	-
	26: store's effort to build personal relationship with customers	3	5	17	26	35	14
Merchandise	27: variety of merchandise categories	-	2	19	26	54	
	28: availability of imported merchandise	1	6	27	27	29	11
	29: availability of unique merchandise	2	8	23	30	29	8
	30: availability of exclusive merchandise	2	10	22	29	29	8
	31: availability of designer label merchandise	5	5	23	26	33	8
	32: availability of fashion merchandise	1	5	16	35	42	2
	33: availability of styles suited to my age	-	4	16	33	47	
	34: quality of merchandise in store	-	1	11	29	58	1
Promotions	35: credibility of store advertising	2	1	14	33	49	2
	36: models used in store advertising	-	-	-	-	-	-
	37: inclusion of brochures in mailed store card account	2	3	8	27	36	24
	38: spaciousness of in-store displays	2	3	16	37	40	4
	39: ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays	-	3	12	35	50	-
	40: sales with marked-down prices	2	3	20	37	37	3
	41: timely announcement of sales	1	5	24	28	37	8
	42: availability of special offers	6	10	25	23	30	7
Sales Personnel	43: fashionability of sales personnel	1	3	18	41	37	-
	44: attractiveness of sales personnel	1	3	19	33	42	2
	45: similarity in body type between sales personnel and myself	2	7	27	36	28	2
	46: similarity in age	2	5	26	38	29	1
	47: similarity in gender	1	2	12	34	51	1

Dimension	Item	un-acceptable %			acceptable % not able to rate %		
		2	3	18	37	38	2
Service	48: expertise of sales personnel	2	3	18	37	38	2
	49: courteousness of sales personnel	2	3	19	28	47	1
	50: number of sales personnel	2	3	26	28	40	2
	51: availability of gift vouchers	5	6	20	26	26	19
	52: availability of gift registry	8	10	13	16	17	36
	53: availability of inter-store transfers	7	7	14	24	30	19
	54: availability of mail-order	8	7	12	13	17	43
	55: availability of alteration services	6	5	20	13	15	41
Dimension	Atmosphere	-	2	15	36	46	1
	Convenience	-	1	17	36	46	1
	Facilities	1	1	23	31	42	2
	Institutional	-	1	16	40	41	2
	Merchandise	-	1	20	32	47	1
	Promotion	-	3	17	38	41	2
	Sales Personnel	1	4	21	33	41	1
	Service	2	5	18	29	43	4

Facilities: The *accessibility of store entrance/exit* received the highest acceptability rating at 87%. *Width of aisles in store* received the highest neutral rating (26%) and the lowest general rating (69%). These two attributes were least important to customers when describing the importance of the ideal store image dimensions (refer to Table 4.6). Another area for possible improvement is the *accessibility of merchandise rails*; it has the third least acceptable rating. The *accessibility of merchandise rails* was, however, rated as the most important attribute by customers in their perception of the ideal store image. The *width of aisles in store* could be slightly narrow due to the amount of stock displayed within the store. Therefore it could be weighed against the importance of *variety of merchandise categories* (79%), as this attribute's acceptability rating is also more favourable. This could therefore be seen as a possible trade-off.

Institutional: The one item that stood out in this dimension was *store effort to build personal relationship with customer*, as it received the smallest combined acceptability rating (61%) and 14% of the participants indicated *unable to rate*. The highest combined rating was 87% for *social class appeal of store*. These ratings, when compared to the other acceptability ratings, indicate that this dimension was to the customers' satisfaction. Customers rated the institutional dimension one of the least important dimensions when they described the ideal importance of dimensions for store image. Management, however, perceived the institutional dimension as more important than customers did (refer to Table 4.6 & 4.7). The high acceptability rating therefore indicates that managers delegate budget and attention toward the

dimensions they perceive as important to customers, and therefore this dimension has satisfactory ratings.

Merchandise: This dimension was rated similarly to previous dimensions. The acceptability ratings recorded by management were consistently lower than those of the customers' ideal in importance ratings for store image dimensions (refer to Table 4.6). Merchandise is, however, rated as slightly less acceptable than previous dimensions. The highest combined rating is 87% for *quality of merchandise in store*. The lowest combined rating concerns *availability of imported merchandise* (55%). The *availability of unique merchandise* (59%), *availability of exclusive merchandise* (58%) and *availability of designer label merchandise* (59%) received an almost equal distribution of ratings across the scores (3, 4 and 5). Each of these attributes received an 8% response to *unable to rate*. The obvious assumption is that this apparel retailer should start including more of these aspects in their merchandise collection. This would increase prices however, which their target market might not be able to afford. Furthermore, managers and customers rated these attributes as less important to the ideal store image. This indicates that managers may not have focused on these items when constructing the store image, which explains the lower acceptability ratings. This leading apparel retailer should rather focus on the *variety* and *quality* of merchandise, which were the important attributes, according to the customers' perception of an ideal store image.

Promotions: An item that was notable was *inclusion of brochures in mailed store card accounts*, which received the second lowest rating (63%), and a very high *unable to rate* at 24%. This could be attributed to some participants not being store cardholders, although it might also indicate that customers experience brochures as unnecessary and do not read them. *Ideas for wearing merchandise in displays* received the highest acceptability rating (85%). The lowest combined rating was for *availability of special offers* (53%). *Timely announcement of sales* (65%) and *sales with marked-down prices* (74%) did not receive very high acceptability ratings either. These three attributes were most important, according to the customers in the ideal store image scenario (refer to Table 4.6). Promotional sales are very important to consumers, because they can buy items at marked-down prices. However it could be argued that customers will not be satisfied easily with the amount of promotional sales or the effort retailers put into it, because customers will always want more at the lowest prices. The customer profile corroborates this result, as the largest percentage of customers are from the lower middle income bracket who have a limited income to spend on apparel, while still wanting to be fashionable (refer to Table 4.1).

Sales personnel: This dimension did not receive very high ratings on the ideal importance questionnaire from customers or management (refer to Table 4.6 and Table 4.7), but received high acceptability ratings; *similarity in gender* was rated as the most satisfactory (85%). The other ratings were as follows: *fashionability of sales personnel*, 78%, *attractiveness of sales personnel*, 75%, *similarity in body type to customers*, 62%, and *similarity in age*, 67%. Only 3% – 9% of customer responses were combined on 1 or 2, and neutral ratings ranged between 12% and 27%. Thus these dimensions had higher neutral ratings but were still not rated as unacceptable. This indicates that management's and customers' perceptions are similar, which resulted in high acceptability ratings. If congruity increases, acceptability should also increase.

Service: The areas of Service in terms of *expertise* (75%), *courteousness* (65%) and *number of sales personnel* (68%) were viewed as very acceptable. The four service items which this retailer does not currently offer received very low combined scores; namely *gift registry* (33%), *inter-store transfer* (54%), *alteration services* (28%) and *mail-order services* (30%), together with high *unable to rate* ratings. Participants may have experienced some confusion as to how to rate a service that is not offered. The order of acceptability is similar to the order of importance, according to management. This indicates that the less important items received less or no effort from management's store design perspective.

It is evident that customers perceived the current store image dimensions as very acceptable. Atmosphere, Convenience and Merchandise were viewed as the most satisfactory. This is admirable, as customers also indicated this as most important dimensions in an ideal leading apparel retail store. This correspondence between management and customer perception of important dimensions indicates that the acceptability of that dimension and the store's attraction for consumers will increase. It confirms that management focuses store design on what they perceive as important to customers. Therefore, if the perceptions of what is important are in congruence with the acceptability ratings, it will increase even further. The least acceptable dimensions were Promotions, Sales personnel and Institutional. However, examining the store image dimensions holistically makes it apparent that respondents are relatively satisfied with the status quo of this retailer's current store image. This may indicate that the management group has a relatively accurate perception of their customers' actual perception of store image and that, although customers and management have similar perceptions of the dimensions, the actual store design still differs where attributes are concerned.

Section 4.6 was used to determine how customers perceive the actual store image, to realise Objective eight. The following sections focuses on analysing the congruency of these perceptions.

4.7 Congruity analysis: Customers' perception of the importance of store image dimensions versus management's perception thereof

The nature of the congruity between the customers' idea of the importance of ideal store image dimensions and what management perceives it to be is discussed here. Furthermore, the attributes will be classified according to six congruence and incongruence combinations. The significance of these differences in perception will be discussed at the same time, to ascertain whether any viable recommendations can be made regarding strategic rectification of a possible poor fit between management's and customers' perceptions.

4.7.1 Perception of the importance of store image dimensions

One of the primary objectives of this exploratory study was to investigate management's and customers' perceptions of the importance of apparel store image dimensions. Sections 4.4 and 4.5 dealt with the separate ratings recorded by customers and management. Table 4.10 presents the mean scores and standard deviations, the one-way ANOVA results and the type classification and congruency analysis for the various store image dimensions. It is evident from Table 4.10 that customers and management shared similar opinions on numerous store image attributes. The customers and management ranking of the dimensions are summarised in Table 4.9.

TABLE 4.9
RANK ORDER OF DIMENSIONS ACCORDING TO MANAGEMENT'S AND CUSTOMERS'
IMPORTANCE RATINGS

Rank order	Customers	Management
1	Atmosphere	Merchandise
2	Merchandise	Atmosphere
3	Service	Promotions
4	Convenience	Service
5	Promotion	Convenience
6	Facilities	Sales Personnel
7	Institutional	Facilities
8	Sales Personnel	Institutional

The findings for most store image dimensions indicated that management and customers perceive store image and dimensions as very important. The general trend, however, was that management's ratings were lower than those of customers. This is contradictory to the findings of Pathak *et al.* (1974-75) who stated that management gave consistent higher ratings because of their bias toward their own stores. These differences will be investigated in the following section.

4.7.2 Congruence analyses

This section presents a discussion on the congruency between customers' and management's perceptions and classifies it according to six types of congruence/incongruence, repeated for ease of reference (refer to section 2.6.2) (Mo, 2002, p. 8; Samli *et al.*, 1998, p. 33).

Type 1: Image congruence – above average. There are no statistical differences between how consumers and managers evaluate an image factor.

Type 2: Image congruence – below average. For this image factor, there are no statistical differences between how consumers and management perceive this variable.

Type 3: Image incongruence – above average, management higher. Both groups rate the dimension as positive; however, for this dimension, there are statistical differences of perception between consumers and management.

Type 4: Image incongruence – below average, management higher than consumers. There are statistical differences between the two groups on this image dimension, with management rating the dimension higher than consumers.

Type 5: Image incongruence – above average, consumers higher. There is a statistical difference, with consumers rating the factor higher than management.

Type 6: Image incongruence – below average, consumers higher. There is a statistical difference between the two groups on how they rate this image dimension. These are general weaknesses of the store that are taken more seriously by the management.

The classification of the store image dimensions congruence/incongruence (Atmosphere, Convenience, Facilities, Institutional, Merchandise, Promotion, Sales personnel and Services) according to the six-type classification system, was done by ranking the means of the items (attributes of each dimension) from high to low. A combined mean score (for both groups)

per dimension was calculated (refer to Tables 4.10 and 4.11). On a five-point scale, the average mean for each dimension in the current study was: Atmosphere $\bar{X} = 4.39$; Convenience $\bar{X} = 4.24$; Facilities $\bar{X} = 4.31$, Institutional $\bar{X} = 4.21$, Merchandise $\bar{X} = 4.11$, Promotions $\bar{X} = 4.24$, Sales personnel $\bar{X} = 3.67$, and Service $\bar{X} = 3.78$ (refer to Table 4.10).

The significance of variance in perception between customers and managers was analysed by means of the one-way ANOVA procedure. If the significant F-value is less than or equal to 0.05, there is a significant difference between the mean scores for the two sample groups (Pallant, 2005).

TABLE 4.10
MEAN SCORES FOR CUSTOMER AND MANAGEMENT GROUPS

Group	Dimensions							
	Atmosphere	Convenience	Facilities	Institutional	Merchandise	Promotion	Sales personnel	Service
Customer	4.64	4.38	4.48	4.33	4.53	4.54	4.05	4.27
Management	4.14	4.10	4.13	4.08	3.68	3.94	3.28	3.28
Average Combined Mean	4.39	4.24	4.31	4.21	4.11	4.24	3.67	3.78

The **average combined means** were used to classify items as Type 1, 3 and 5 for items that are high or above average and Type 2, 4 and 6 for items that are low or below average. Any significant gaps in the perception of store image dimension importance can be viewed as a potential managerial challenge that requires further attention. However, caution has to be practised in deciding which differences truly indicate corrective action. The classifications allow recommendations to concentrate on the critical areas of discrepancy. The following sections will present each of the classification types.

TABLE 4.11
MEAN SCORES, SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCES AND TYPE CLASSIFICATION: MANAGEMENT'S VERSUS CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION OF
IDEAL IMPORTANCE OF STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS

Dimension	Item	Management Mean	SD	Customer Mean	SD	Average Combined Mean	Significance of compared Management and Customer means		
							F-Value	Sig.	Classification Type
Atmosphere		4.14		4.64		4.39			
	1: fashionability of store interior	4.21	0.57	4.62	0.66		5.01	0.03*	6
	2: style of décor in store	4.07	0.73	4.60	0.64		8.89	0.003*	6
	3: attractiveness of décor in store	4.21	0.69	4.64	0.65		5.61	0.02*	6
	4: colours used in store	3.92	0.73	4.52	0.83		6.87	0.009*	6
	5: suitable finishing materials used in store	3.64	0.74	4.42	0.91		9.59	0.002*	6
	6: shopping experience	4.78	0.42	4.64	0.70		0.53	0.47	1
Convenience		4.10		4.38		4.24			
	7: time it takes to travel to store	3.71	0.82	4.26	0.98		4.15	0.04*	6
	8: proximity of store to variety of other stores	3.85	0.86	4.23	1.00		1.94	0.17	2
	9: accessibility of store	4.33	0.59	4.33	0.93		0.00	1.00	1
	10: flow of people in mall where store is situated	4.35	0.74	4.24	0.93		0.19	0.66	1
	11: amount of walking required within store	3.28	0.91	4.25	1.05		11.17	0.001*	6
	12: ease of finding merchandise items	4.78	0.42	4.59	0.74		0.87	0.35	1
	13: store opening hours	4.42	0.64	4.43	0.86		0.00	0.99	1
Facilities		4.13		4.48		4.31			
	14: accessibility of store entrance/exit	4.28	0.72	4.41	0.82		0.35	0.56	1
	15: position of aisles in store	3.71	0.82	4.33	0.84		6.98	0.009*	6
	16: width of aisles in store	3.76	0.79	4.32	0.85		3.49	0.02*	6
	17: accessibility of merchandise rails	4.28	0.72	4.55	0.68		2.08	0.15	2
	18: number of fitting rooms	4.28	0.72	4.49	0.72		1.05	0.31	2
	19: lighting in fitting rooms	4.57	0.64	4.51	0.78		0.08	0.78	1
	20: ease of shopping with family in mall where the store is situated	4.00	0.87	4.42	0.90		2.94	0.09	2

Dimension	Item	Management Mean	SD	Customer Mean	SD	Average Combined Mean	Significance of compared Management and Customer means		
							F-Value	Sig.	Classification Type
Institutional		4.08		4.33		4.21			
	21: social class appeal of store	3.84	0.76	4.24	0.83		3.00	0.08	2
	22: store's appeal to friends	3.92	0.82	4.20	0.90		1.24	0.27	2
	23: similarity in appearance between sales personnel and customers	3.71	0.61	4.07	0.96		1.92	0.17	2
	24: ability to identify with store	4.42	0.51	4.37	0.79		0.07	0.79	1
	25: similarity between store image and self image	4.46	0.49	4.30	0.83		0.46	0.5	1
	26: store's effort to build personal relationship with customers	4.14	0.94	4.45	0.84		1.77	0.19	2
Merchandise		3.68		4.53		4.11			
	27: variety of merchandise categories	4.57	0.51	4.70	0.63		0.57	0.45	1
	28: availability of imported merchandise	2.57	1.08	4.15	1.03		30.49	0.000*	6
	29: availability of unique merchandise	3.42	1.08	4.36	0.89		13.89	0.000*	6
	30: availability of exclusive merchandise	2.78	0.89	4.33	0.98		32.52	0.000*	6
	31: availability of designer label merchandise	2.42	0.85	4.14	1.03		36.35	0.000*	6
	32: availability of fashion merchandise	4.64	0.49	4.59	0.66		0.08	0.78	1
	33: availability of styles suited to my age	4.42	0.64	4.74	0.62		3.37	0.07	1
	34: quality of merchandise in store	4.64	0.49	4.77	0.55		0.74	0.39	1
Promotions		3.94		4.54		4.24			
	35: credibility of store advertising	4.35	0.74	4.55	0.78		0.86	0.36	1
	36: models used in store advertising	3.71	0.82	4.32	0.94		5.61	0.02*	6
	37: inclusion of brochures in mailed store card account	4.28	0.61	4.36	0.98		0.08	0.78	1
	38: spaciousness of in-store displays	3.35	1.00	4.28	0.98		11.54	0.001*	6
	39: ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays	4.42	0.85	4.55	0.75		0.36	0.55	1
	40: sales with marked-down prices	4.00	0.87	4.57	0.80		6.55	0.01*	6
	41: timely announcement of sales	3.53	0.84	4.56	0.83		19.43	0.000*	6
	42: availability of special offers	3.85	1.02	4.53	0.96		6.26	0.01*	6

Dimension	Item	Management Mean	SD	Customer Mean	SD	Average Combined Mean	Significance of compared Management and Customer means		
							F-Value	Sig.	Classification Type
Sales Personnel		3.28		4.05		3.67			
	43: fashionability of sales personnel	3.57	0.93	4.35	0.87		10.21	0.002*	6
	44: attractiveness of sales personnel	3.21	0.97	4.15	0.93		12.99	0.000*	6
	45: similarity in body type between sales personnel and myself	3.35	1.00	3.82	1.10		2.34	0.13	2
	46: similarity in age	3.21	1.18	3.81	1.13		3.61	0.06	2
	47: similarity in gender	3.07	0.91	3.80	1.18		5.09	0.03*	6
Service		3.28		4.27		3.78			
	48: expertise of sales personnel	4.42	0.51	4.62	0.80		0.79	0.38	1
	49: courteousness of sales personnel	4.71	0.46	4.71	0.70		0.00	0.98	1
	50: number of sales personnel	3.78	0.89	4.59	0.72		15.99	0.000*	5
	51: availability of gift vouchers	3.42	1.15	4.17	1.04		6.48	0.01*	6
	52: availability of gift registry	1.84	1.16	3.90	1.26		34.84	0.000*	6
	53: availability of inter-store transfers	4.00	0.96	4.29	0.98		1.19	0.28	1
	54: availability of mail-order	2.00	1.24	3.57	1.39		16.62	0.000*	6
	55: availability of alteration services	2.07	1.20	3.95	1.24		29.72	0.000*	6

* Sig. p < .05

4.7.2.1 Image congruence – Above average

The items classified as Type 1 can be regarded as positive because there is congruence between management and customer perceptions of the importance of the ideal store image variable. Therefore, there is no significant difference between management's and customers' perceptions and the items are perceived as above average in importance. Nineteen items were classified as Type 1 (refer to Table 4.11). These items primarily represent the Atmosphere (1 item), Convenience (4 items), Facilities (2 items), Institutional (2 items), Promotions (3 items), Merchandise (4 items) and Service (3 items) dimensions. They indicate the strengths in this apparel retailer's store image. Both management and customers rated these items very highly, indicating the importance to the retail establishment. *Variety of merchandise categories* ($\bar{X} = 4.70$), *shopping experience* ($\bar{X} = 4.78$), *quality of merchandise in store* ($\bar{X} = 4.77$), *ease of finding merchandise items* ($\bar{X} = 4.78$), *courteousness of sales personnel* ($\bar{X} = 4.71$) and *availability of styles suited to my age* ($\bar{X} = 4.74$) specifically received exceptionally high importance ratings. Both groups rated the *quality of merchandise* and customers found it to be acceptable. Customers further indicated *availability of style suited to my age* important. The *variety of merchandise category* was acceptable. Management viewed *availability of fashion merchandise* as important. All these items show congruency, whilst the items not rated as most important by either group show incongruence. The dimensions Convenience and Merchandise, show high levels of congruency and were also rated as two of the most important and most acceptable dimensions. These results support Visser *et al.*'s (2006) findings that Merchandise is the highest ranked dimension in terms of importance, followed by Convenience. Kleinhans (2003) also indicated that the quality of merchandise is the most important attribute in the dimension of Merchandise. Merchandise and Convenience have also attracted the most research interest (Janse van Noordwyk, 2002). The results of the current study corroborate the importance of merchandise and convenience as dimensions of store image.

Merchandise and Convenience each have four attributes classified as Type 1. These dimensions and attributes can be used to enhance this retailer's store image even further.

Such enhancement could be achieved through continuous communication and strategic marketing initiatives such as advertising and promotional messages. Lincoln and Samli (1981) indicated that people who are influenced by the promotion of store image attributes will give higher store image ratings. Type 1 image congruence should be utilised as a strength of the company and should be promoted and maintained. The attributes included in the merchandise dimension are also not overly costly to the retailer, and could encourage sales growth. Retailers can strive to provide even higher quality and a greater variety of merchandise to maintain and improve this dimension. Convenience attributes related to ease of shopping could be focused on, for example, *amount of walking required in store, ease of finding merchandise items* and *store opening hours* to lead to even higher levels of acceptability.

4.7.2.2 Image congruence – Below average

The items classified as Type 2 can be viewed as positive because of the congruence between management and customer perceptions regarding the ideal importance of the store image variable (no statistically significant differences between ratings of consumers and management). However, these items are not rated as above the average mean by both groups (as with Type 1 classifications). One of the groups or both rated the items as below the average mean. Ten attributes are classified as Type 2, and Institutional (4 items), Sales Personnel (2 items), Facilities (3 items) and Convenience (1 item) are represented. Attributes classified as Type 2 could be problematic as far as apparel retail is concerned. Type 2 items do not contribute as much to store image strength and enhancement as Type 1 items do. It is possible that Type 2 attributes are regarded as less important by both groups. If this is the case, it should not pose a problem. However, in the current study, customers' ratings were comparatively higher than those of management (who rated these items below the average mean).

When comparing the ranked importance of the Type 2 items, namely, *proximity of store to variety of other stores, accessibility of merchandise rails* and *store's effort to build personal relationship with customers*, it is evident that these items received similar

responses in terms of customers' and management's perceptions of the importance of store image attributes. The difference between ratings by management and customers does not reflect real differences in perception but are in line with overall lower ratings from management (refer to Tables 4.6 and 4.7). It is not necessary to spend capital on these items as they do not reveal significant problems (Samli *et al.*, 1998). The items that can be rectified with the least expense should be altered to suit customers' perceptions, because the cost spent on an enhancement will not equate to the level of improvement (Thang & Tan, 2003). Thang and Tan (2003, p. 199) conclude that "...perception is [a] subjective process; it does not necessarily mean that a more costly alternative will enhance an attribute better than a costly one." The retailer could rather only adjust *similarity in appearance between sales personnel and customers* by advising sales personnel on what to wear. Another option would be to rearrange rails to improve the *accessibility of merchandise rails*. The other attributes, such as *number of fitting rooms* and *ease of shopping with family in mall where store is situated* may not that easily rectified, but this is not problematic, considering that customers find these items acceptable.

With regard to similarity in ratings, May (1972) reported that consumers provided more favourable ratings than management on almost all store image dimensions that were investigated. "This phenomenon is not wholly unexpected. Usually when a specific item... is rated by two groups of people – one of which is immediately involved in it on a day-to-day basis, the other of which is less closely involved – the group which is more closely involved is more critical" (May, 1972, p. 24). Pathak, Crissy and Sweitzer (1974-75) questioned May's hypothesis, because they found that management consistently rated the dimensions more favourably. The current study, however, supports May's (1972) hypothesis, by indicating consistently more favourable ratings from customers.

The following sections present an investigation of Type 5 and 6 classifications, which are items that reveal significant differences between management and consumer ratings and for which customers' ratings are higher than those of management. No items were classified as Type 3 or 4.

4.7.2.3 Image incongruence – Above average, Customers higher

The items classified as Type 5 can be viewed as having a negative impact on store image. The reason is that there is incongruence between management and customer perceptions regarding the ideal importance of the store image variable. Both consumers and management rated Type 5 items above the average mean, but consumers rated the items higher than management. Management therefore underestimated customer perceptions in these areas. Only one attribute was classified as Type 5, namely *number of sales personnel*. This could be regarded as problematic, as the service dimension is rated as important. Furthermore, some additional discrepancies in service ratings were apparent due to services that this apparel retailer does not currently offer. Customers rated the *number of sales personnel* as important, while management perceived it as neutral. This attribute, however, supports the other Service items, namely *expertise of sales personnel* and *courteousness of sales personnel*, therefore it would be sensible to obtain more staff to assure quality of service.

4.7.2.4 Image incongruence – Below average, Customers higher

The items classified as Type 6 can be viewed as negative and as inhibitors of a positive store image, as there is incongruence between management and customer perceptions regarding the ideal importance of the store image variable. However, these items were not rated as above the average mean by both groups (as with Type 5 classifications). One of the groups or both rated the item below the average mean. Twenty-five items were classified as Type 6 (refer to Table 4.11). Customers perceived these items as more important than management, thus they should be considered as a general weakness of the store and management should take it seriously. When management perceives an item as more important than customers, it would have a less negative effect, because customers' expectations are exceeded. In the case of management perceiving items as less important, expectations will not be met and consumers may be disappointed. It is therefore recommended that Type 6 incongruencies be considered as the most pressing factors in management's rectification plan. These items primarily represent the

Atmosphere (5 items), Convenience (2 items), Facilities (2 items), Promotions (5 items), Merchandise (4 items), Sales Personnel (3 items), and Service (4 items) dimensions.

Service should be targeted as focus area for alteration because it is the factor that could exceed customer expectations (Baker *et al.*, 2002). The services, alterations, gift-registry, mail-order and inter-store transfers that are not currently offered, could be considered for inclusion. Atmosphere affects customer experience and mood and consequently also the way in which customers evaluate a store and its products (Koo, 2003). Service and atmosphere therefore are most critical in affecting the overall shopping experience. Any significant differences in perceptions should be rectified as soon as possible in order to prevent a negative impact on overall store image perception. Table 4.12 portrays a summary of the classification types.

TABLE 4.12
SUMMARY OF CLASSIFICATION TYPES

Overall ratings of image factors	Management ratings = Customer ratings	Management ratings > Customer ratings	Management ratings < Customer ratings
Above Average	19 (Type 1)	0 (Type 3)	1 (Type 5)
Below Average	10 (Type 2)	0 (Type 4)	25 (Type 6)
Total	29	0	26

4.7.2.5 Summary: Congruency between customers' and management's overall perceptions

Section 4.7.2 determined the degree of congruency between customer and management perceptions and classified these according to six types of congruence/incongruence. The six types of image congruence/incongruence variables were used to enhance the diagnostic analysis of the data.

No statistically significant differences were found for the Convenience, Facilities and Institutional dimensions when the combined scores for each dimension (refer to Table 4.13) were calculated. The mean scores for these three store image dimensions were higher than 4 (refer to Figure 4.2).

TABLE 4.13
SIGNIFICANCE OF COMPARED AVERAGE MEANS: MANAGEMENT'S VERSUS
CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTION OF CUSTOMERS' IDEAL IMPORTANCE OF STORE IMAGE
DIMENSIONS

Dimension	Compared management and customer means	
	F-Value	Sig.
Atmosphere	6.82	0.009*
Convenience	1.64	0.2
Facilities	3.23	0.07
Institutional	1.03	0.31
Merchandise	24.40	0.000*
Promotion	10.88	0.001*
Sales Personnel	8.94	0.003*
Service	22.56	0.000*

* Sig. $p < .05$

Statistically significant differences were found for Atmosphere, Merchandise, Promotions, Sales Personnel, and Service dimensions (refer to Table 4.13). Merchandise ($F = 24.4$) and Service ($F = 22.56$) revealed the largest discrepancy between customers' and management's perceptions, followed by Promotion ($F = 10.88$), Sales Personnel ($F = 8.94$) and Atmosphere ($F = 6.82$). The F-value represents the variance between the groups, and the larger the F-value, the greater the variance (Pallant, 2005). Probable reasons for the disparity between these values are, firstly, that some services described in the questionnaire are not rendered at this specific leading apparel retailer, and that this retailer has perceived it to be unimportant and therefore does not offer them. Secondly, merchandise is very closely connected to style and opinions regarding labels, imported goods and unique items are individually based. Insignificant differences between Convenience and Institutional dimensions are supported by the result that indicates that all the attributes within the Institutional dimension are congruent, while only two items are incongruent in the Convenience dimension.

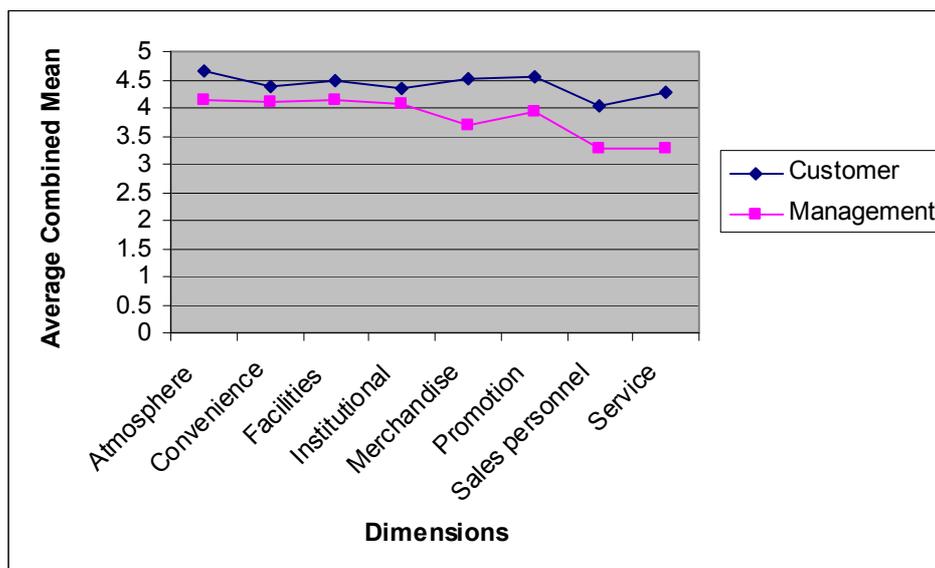


Figure 4.2: Compared average means per dimension: Management's versus customers' perception of consumers' ideal importance of combined store image dimensions

The classification of the results indicates that 29 out of 55 attributes were perceived similarly by both groups and are therefore in congruence. These attributes were classified as Type 1 and Type 2 (refer to Table 4.11). It was evident that the attributes related to the Facilities, Convenience and Institutional dimensions showed the highest degree of congruence, with Merchandise, Service, Promotion and Atmosphere showing the least (according to number of attributes showing incongruence). The dimensions Merchandise, Service, and Atmosphere, however, were perceived as most important by both groups. This result could firstly be due to the overall lower ratings by management. Within these dimensions, secondly, there were differences in the ranking of the importance of attributes. This may indicate that there are areas in which the management of this retailer does not correctly judge their customers' perceptions, for example *fashionability of store interior* and *attractiveness of décor in store*. The differences in Promotions and Merchandise are more difficult to judge, because of highly personal preferences connected to merchandise choice (designer label, imported goods, exclusivity and uniqueness) and the fact that consumers would always want more promotional sales. If the retailer's merchandise included more designer labels, imported, exclusive and unique goods, it would affect pricing. This could have a negative impact on the target

market, which is proportionally derived from the lower middle income group. Caution should thus be exercised when making decisions about merchandise assortment. Merchandise remains a very important dimension, though, and it is therefore advisable that this retailer should rather concentrate on the Merchandise items that show congruence of perception e.g. *variety of merchandise, availability of fashion merchandise, availability of styles suited to my age and quality of merchandise in store.*

This section has determined the levels of congruency between customers' perception of the ideal importance of store image dimensions and what management perceives it to be and has classified congruence/incongruence according to six store image factor combinations. Some proposals were made regarding the strategic rectification of a possible poor fit between management's and customers' perceptions of store image dimensions. Objectives ten and eleven were achieved. The following section investigates the gap between customers' perception of the current store image and customers' ideal, revealed in terms of the importance of store image dimensions and the current acceptability of the store image dimensions.

4.8 Congruity analysis: Customers' perception of current store image acceptability versus customers' perception of the store image dimension importance

The acceptability ratings of store image dimensions were measured and reported in Section 4.6. Customers' ratings concerning importance and acceptability should be compared next, in order to provide strategic guidance to the leading apparel retailer. The reason for this is that the dimensions which consumers regard as important will have the greatest effect on their shopping behaviour, and these dimensions would therefore be worth altering, if found inadequate (Osman, 1993; Patterson & Spreng, 1997). The current acceptability of relatively unimportant store image dimensions is of lower significance when considering the aforementioned.

The differences between the means of acceptability and importance ratings of the dimensions were very small, even less than were found when comparing management's and customers' perceptions of the ideal importance of store image dimensions (refer to

Table 4.11). Figure 4.3 presents the compared average mean values for the dimensions. The significance of the variance between the perceptions of acceptability and importance of dimensions is presented in Table 4.14.

The largest differences were revealed in the Merchandise ($F = 57.14$) and Atmosphere ($F = 33.32$) dimensions, followed by Facilities ($F = 24.64$), Promotion ($F = 17.25$) and Service ($F = 14.44$). Institutional ($F = 2.69$), Convenience ($F = 1.69$) and Sales personnel ($F = 0.69$) did not show any statistically significant differences and are congruent. However, the Institutional, Convenience and Sales personnel dimensions were rated as not very important by customers as well as managers. This indicates that the management's perception of importance is portrayed in the actual store image. The acceptability of these items is not very high but neither is the importance thereof. It therefore corresponds with customer expectations.

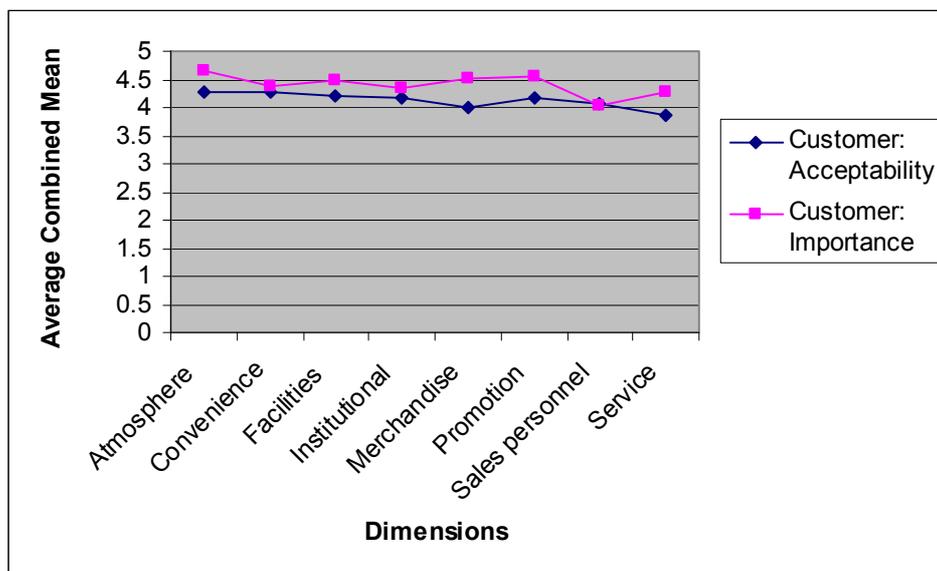


Figure 4.3: Compared average means: Customer acceptability and customer importance

The Merchandise, Atmosphere and Facilities dimensions showed a rather large degree of incongruence between the actual and ideal perceptions of customers. This could be problematic due to the importance of these dimensions. Even though management perceived these dimensions as important, the precise design according to the different

attributes differed from customers' perception. The leading apparel retailer should therefore pay closer attention to enhancing its store image atmosphere. The discrepancies concerning merchandise could be due to management's knowledge of what their specific offer is. The most important items were *variety* and *quality of merchandise*. The other attributes received some important ratings, due to personal preference for style and clothes. This leading retailer would, however, have to raise prices if they incorporated other merchandise, such as label brands or imported goods, but this would not suit their target market's income and apparel expenditure.

Comparing the importance of the ideal ratings and the current state of store image dimensions is difficult, due to the high importance ratings on all dimensions. The importance ratings could be viewed as inflated, however, because participants would tend to rate dimensions which they view to be to their own benefit as important. It is exceptional to find such high ratings for current acceptability of store image. If customers experienced any major dissatisfaction with store image attributes, a definite indication of lower ratings (1 and 2) would have been prevalent (refer to Table 4.8). The acceptability ratings consistently were moderately high (4 and 5), however, revealing high acceptability with regard to store image as a whole.

The findings suggest that management understands and anticipates customer perceptions regarding the dimensions but not necessarily regarding the specific attributes. Management, however, is able to breach the gap from strategic perceptions to actual store image construction and hence the similarity between the acceptability ratings, and what management perceived as important or not important. The findings indicate some slight discrepancy between the importance and acceptability ratings of customers. Consumers are becoming more sophisticated and demanding in terms of what they expect of stores and therefore stores must do what is necessary to retain customers

TABLE 4.14
COMPARED AVERAGE MEANS: CUSTOMER ACCEPTABILITY AND CUSTOMER IMPORTANCE

Dimension	Compared Customer acceptability and Customer importance means	
	F-Value	Sig.
Atmosphere	33.32	0.00*
Convenience	1.69	0.19
Facilities	24.64	0.00*
Institutional	2.69	0.10
Merchandise	57.14	0.00*
Promotion	17.25	0.00*
Sales Personnel	0.69	0.41
Service	14.44	0.00*

* Sig. $p < .05$

This section thus determined the differences regarding store image dimensions according to the current acceptability, in accordance with objective twelve.

4.9 Conclusion to Chapter 4

In this chapter, the sample's profile was described and the results for the SIS's reliability were presented. Respondents' (customers' and management's) perceptions of the importance of store image dimensions were discussed in accordance with the objectives of the study, and customers' perceptions of the acceptability of the current store image dimensions were also reported. Further analysis of the significance of the differences and similarities revealed by the two groups, was undertaken by means of ANOVA as data analysis technique. Items were classified into six types according to congruence or incongruence. Results indicated that the sample of customers and of management have very homogenous views regarding store image dimensions and that customers have a very positive perception of the current store image. To summarise the main findings: Atmosphere, Merchandise and Service were rated as the most important dimensions according to customer perceptions of the ideal, while Atmosphere, Promotion and Service were the most important dimensions according to management. Atmosphere,

Convenience and Merchandise were rated as most acceptable by customers. Atmosphere, Convenience and Service already indicated some similarities in perception between the two parties. Furthermore, it was established that management focused store design on the attributes and the dimensions they deemed to be important to customers. Therefore, with customer and management perceptions being similar, customers' acceptability ratings should increase.

The congruency analysis yielded 29 of the 55 attributes as congruent. Atmosphere and Convenience yielded four Type 1 congruent items each, and Convenience and Institutional yielded four Type 2 congruent attributes each. The analysis for congruency between the acceptability and importance ratings of customers indicated that the Convenience, Institutional and Sales Personnel dimensions showed no significant differences. It was therefore concluded that management's perception and customers' perception of the importance of ideal store image are closely related, but more incisive consideration has to be given to the specific attributes. In the next chapter, the conclusions derived from this exploratory study and recommendations arising from it will be discussed in more detail.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of the current study was to expand the existing body of knowledge concerning retail store image and the female apparel consumers, with special reference to the perceived importance of retail store image dimensions as perceived by customers and management of a particular retailer. The research question for the current study was formulated as follows:

How do consumers perceive the various store image dimensions in apparel retail and how congruent are customers' and management's perceptions of these store image dimensions?

In Chapter 1, the introductory perspectives on the research topic were discussed, together with the problem statement and research objectives. The research framework developed by Osman (1993), Samli *et al.* (1998) and Samli and Lincoln (1989) was used as point of departure for the current study (refer to Figure 2.1). This framework informed the exploration of the literature presented in Chapter 2. The relationships proposed in the framework, together with the linkages among the store environment and the independent and dependent consumer variables, were investigated. These shed light on the importance of store image in retail strategy and communication.

In Chapter 3, the appropriateness and application of the chosen methodology was discussed. The research design was discussed in terms of the sample population, the data gathering method and procedure, the measurement instrument, and the statistical analysis applied in the current study.

The results and discussion thereof were presented in Chapter 4. Data was gathered from two samples: the customers and the management of this apparel retailer. The consumer

sample was used to determine how the retailer's customers perceive the importance of store image dimensions and their perception of the acceptability of the current store image dimensions. The management sample provided management's perceptions of what consumers view as important store image dimensions.

The results that were obtained make it possible to make recommendations to management, from which they could infer possible adjustments to the strategic management of store image dimensions. This is one of the first academic studies to attempt to provide management with feedback on the performance of their store image strategy. Feedback studies are not novel (companies undertake private internal or syndicated studies); this information, however, is not freely available to researchers who may be able to build and improve on it. The recommendations from the current study should help retailers to meet consumer needs, and thereby create a competitive advantage and unique market position for the store, thus increasing brand equity, store patronage and, consequently, sales. The findings could support the possibility of benchmarking the importance of specific store image dimensions as retail practices in the apparel chain store sector. In addition, the results raise intriguing issues that pertain to the cognitive and behavioural processes that may underlie the empirical results. These issues are identified and discussed in the following sections.

5.2 Conclusions

Osman's Model of retail image influences on loyalty patronage behaviour (1993) was used as point of departure for the research framework to facilitate the study of perceived importance of store image dimensions in relation to the congruence of management and consumer perceptions. Included in this framework, is the *paradigm of perceived image conflicts diagnostics* by Samli and Lincoln (1989), which indicates the process that has to be followed to measure and achieve congruence between management and customer perceptions. This research framework proved adequate to address the research problem and achieve the set objectives of the current study. Its implementation provides a valuable basis for future research, and contributes to the development of a useful

theoretical base in the field of consumer behaviour. The research was operationalised through the use of Janse van Noordwyk's SIS (in press) and conducted as a feedback study for the particular leading apparel retailer.

A large amount of research has been done internationally on isolated store image attributes and the impact thereof on consumer behaviour. However, only a limited amount of relevant research has been published in South Africa. Consumer perceptions of store image dimensions play a large role in store preference and can increase retailers' attraction and thus profitability. This ability to 'attract' consumers is only possible when store image expectations are met. This would mean that little or no discrepancy is perceived by customers and that the store could thereby differentiate itself through store image. Markwick and Fill (1997) argue that, if image studies are designed to expose the perceptions of key attributes of a company held by stakeholders, the company could feed information into their strategy management. This information would allow the company to align the perceptions held by stakeholders with the strategy that is designed to communicate the image. The current study investigated the importance and relative impact of each dimension of store image. The results provided feedback on the perceptions of the importance of store image dimensions to ensure that expenditure is targeted towards those store image dimensions that consumers view as important and eliminate the need for mere assumptions by management in this regard. The following conclusions can be made from the results:

The SIS is a reliable questionnaire, as indicated by the relatively high Cronbach alpha values. It is therefore a useful instrument for empirical research regarding store image and could be used reliably in future store image studies.

The specific attributes generated by Janse van Noordwyk (in press) all received relatively high ratings on all measures. All store image dimensions were rated highly by consumers. This supports the significance of these store image dimensions and attributes to customers of the apparel retailer that was investigated in the study. These high ratings may indicate that consumers are becoming more informed and discerning with regard to

what apparel stores can offer and what they themselves want. Increased knowledge of store image has increased consumer expectations.

All importance ratings by customers were comparatively higher than those of management. This was also indicated by the fact that no Type 3 or Type 4 classifications were made. Type 3 and 4 classifications are items that are incongruent, with management's ratings shown as higher than those of customers. This could be due to management being closely involved with store image and therefore being more critical. It could also indicate a misperception on the part of management about how significant store image is to their customers.

Customers identified the most important attribute items (items receiving a rating of very important from more than 70% of the sample) as (refer to Table 4.6):

Atmosphere: *fashionability of store interior, attractiveness of décor in store and shopping experience*

Convenience: *ease of finding merchandise*

Merchandise: *variety of merchandise categories, availability of styles suited to my age and quality of merchandise in store*

Promotions: *sales with marked-down prices, timely announcement of sales and availability of special offers*

Service: *expertise of sales personnel, courteousness of sales personnel and number of sales personnel*

Dimensions (in order of importance): Atmosphere (79%), Merchandise (79%), Service (76%), Convenience (74%), Promotion (69%), Facilities (67%), Institutional (65%) and Sales personnel (65%).

Management identified the most important attribute items (those that received a rating of very important from more than 50% [due to management's ratings being lower than customers' ratings] of the sample) as (refer to Table 4.7):

Merchandise: *shopping experience*

Convenience: *flow of people in mall where store is situated, ease of finding merchandise items and store opening hours*

Facilities: *number of fitting rooms and lighting in fitting rooms*

Merchandise: *variety of merchandise categories, availability of fashion merchandise, availability of styles suited to my age and quality of merchandise in store*

Promotions: *credibility of store advertising and ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays*

Service: *courteousness of sales personnel*

Dimensions (in order of importance): Merchandise (79%), Atmosphere (57%), Promotion (57%) and Service (57%), Convenience (50%), Sales personnel (36%), Facilities (29%) and Institutional (29%).

The importance measures show Merchandise and Atmosphere to be the dimensions of highest perceived importance for both groups. The importance of Merchandise as a dimension could be an indication of the particular target market's specific need to be fashionable, but within an affordable budget. For consumers who are fashion conscious, merchandise and specifically fashionable merchandise, becomes an important priority in general life as their fashion consciousness reflects their personal image. Therefore this dimension is very important for the expression of these customers' self-image and, thus, also a very important store image dimension. The high rating accorded to Atmosphere could be attributed to the customers' need to experience satisfaction during the shopping and purchasing experience. Atmosphere and Merchandise, the most highly rated dimensions, were followed by Service in perceived importance. The Institutional and Facility attributes received higher ratings in general than Service attributes, but these dimensions were not perceived to be as important. Service revealed the largest difference between least and most important attributes. This could be attributed to services included in the current study which are not rendered by the stores involved in the research, but customers are aware of the fact that these services are available at other retailers. However, the difference between the attributes and dimensions perceived as most and

least important was relatively smaller for customers than for management. Management's importance ratings indicated a clearer perception of what is most and least important. This could be credited to their involvement with the attributes and knowledge of what the store intends through the design of store image.

The results show that the acceptability ratings were moderately high and no attributes were rated as unacceptable, which indicates that customers find the store image satisfactory. This is a point of strength for this apparel retailer and signifies that the particular retailer understands the expectations and needs of its customers. However, the acceptability ratings are comparatively lower than the customers' importance ratings, which shows that there is room for improvement.

The reason for customer ratings being generally high could be linked to the Gestalt nature of store image, which results in consumers being unable to discriminate accurately between the various dimensions of store image. Retailers should take cognisance of this, as it does not imply that some store image dimensions can be ignored, but rather that the total store image is influenced by all the dimensions of store image, whether positively or negatively.

According to customers, the most acceptable items (those that received a very acceptable rating from more than 50% of the sample), are (refer to Table 4.8):

Atmosphere: *colours in store*

Convenience: *accessibility of store, flow of people in mall where store is situated and store opening hours*

Facilities: *accessibility of store entrance/exit and ease of shopping with family in mall where the store is situated*

Merchandise: *variety of merchandise categories and quality of merchandise in store*

Promotions: *ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays*

Sales personnel: *similarity in gender*

The Merchandise, Atmosphere and Convenience dimensions were perceived to be most acceptable. This indicates that, with the correspondence between management and customer perceptions of important dimensions, the acceptability of the particular dimension and the store's attraction for consumers may increase. Management focuses store design on what they perceive to be important to consumers. If the perceptions of what is important are congruent, the acceptability ratings could therefore increase even further.

The classifications indicate that 29 out of 55 attributes were perceived similarly by both groups and are therefore congruent. It is evident that the attributes related to the Facilities, Convenience and Institutional dimensions show the most congruence, with Merchandise, Service, Promotion and Atmosphere showing the least (according to amount of attributes showing incongruence). The dimensions Merchandise, Service, and Atmosphere, however, were perceived as most important by both groups. This could indicate that there are areas in which this apparel retailer does not correctly judge what the customers' perceptions are, for example concerning *fashionability of store interior* and *attractiveness of décor in store*.

The congruency analysis between the customers' acceptability and importance ratings indicates that the Convenience, Institutional and Sales personnel dimensions are congruent. These dimensions were not rated as very important by customers or managers, neither was the acceptability rating of these items very high. This indicates that management's perception of importance is portrayed in the actual store image. The dimensions of Merchandise, Atmosphere and Facilities show a rather large degree of incongruence. This is a problem because of the importance of these dimensions for both groups, which suggests that precise design according to the different attributes differs from the perception of the customers.

The current study demonstrated that store image is an important variable in the overall shopping experience. The fact that the acceptability ratings are moderately high over all the dimensions indicates that this leading apparel retailer has created a very positive store

image in the minds of its customers. Furthermore, the dimensions that were perceived as important were similar for both management and customers. Therefore no major adjustments to the current store image are indicated. The next section will, however, attempt to explain the implications of and give recommendations according to the results.

5.3 Recommendations to the apparel retailer

The results of the current study indicate that this retailer generally understands its customers. In general, they should realise that customers are becoming more discerning and that they view store image as much more important than the retailer thinks. This is indicated through the number of Type 2, 5 and 6 attribute classifications. Arising from the Type 6 classifications, however, some recommendations can be made to further enhance the congruency between management and customer perceptions and importance ratings.

Atmosphere: *Shopping experience* was incongruent. This is the most important attribute in this dimension and represents the composite experience of the functional attributes (*décor, colour, attractiveness* and *finishing materials*, which management perceived as less important). This apparel retailer could therefore further improve the interior design of the store to enhance the customers' shopping experience.

Convenience: This dimension was rated as very acceptable and management's perceptions were similar to those of customers. The only attribute with some incongruence was *amount of walking in the store*. This could be kept to a minimum by assuring that products that comprise complementary purchases are displayed in close proximity to one another.

Facilities: *Width of aisles* and *position of aisles* could receive management's attention. As this recommendation arises from the perception that too much stock is presented on the floor (the store seems congested), careful consideration should be given to the amount of stock kept on the floor and to arranging rails for best possible access.

Institutional: Although this dimension indicated no incongruence, the relatively low importance ratings indicate that the customers do not regard the retailer's identity as very important in the formation of store image. The acceptability ratings, however, indicate that the consumers are satisfied with the institutional dimension. These results could imply that the retailer's identity could be further developed to differentiate the store from the competition. This could strengthen its identity to increase the importance of its appeal to customers.

Merchandise: It is essential for this apparel retailer to concentrate on the *variety of merchandise* and the *quality of merchandise*. Some discrepancies were indicated for *imported, unique, exclusive* and *designer label merchandise*. This could be ascribed to the subjective nature of style. The retailer should not give higher importance to these attributes as they will increase the cost of merchandise and could alienate some clients. They should continue to focus on styles that fit specific age and body type groups within the variety of quality apparel on offer.

Promotions: Customers view promotional sales as very important. While the retailer cannot be expected to have more promotional sales, other attributes could be improved on, such as special offers and informing consumers ahead of time of upcoming sales. The *spaciousness of displays* was noted as a potential problem, but if the recommendations regarding facilities are considered, this would be addressed.

Sales Personnel: *Fashionability* and *attractiveness of sales personnel* were indicated as most important by customers. Managerial intervention could focus on communicating the importance of dress to salespeople. They should be helped to understand that the way in which they present themselves impacts on how consumers perceive the store.

Service: This retailer should consider including additional services such as mail-order, alteration services and a gift registry. Sales personnel service was identified as of paramount importance to customers. This apparel retailer would benefit by investing in

training sales personnel to equip them with knowledge and skills regarding fashion, their own specific merchandise and product knowledge, as well as general interaction with consumers.

5.4 Limitations

The nature of the current study presented certain unavoidable limitations that impacted on the interpretation of the results. A particular concern in the current study was that the halo effect could impact on the accurate measurement of store image dimensions. The presence of the halo effect, together with response biases and the principles of Gestalt theory, could have contributed to habitual positive (or negative) evaluations by consumers, as well as the inability to differentiate between dimensions and attributes when evaluating a construct that is usually experienced holistically by customers.

Other possible shortcomings include the following:

- The study concentrated on current customers of the leading retailer, which could have implicated a previously established congruity. Customers who had defected, consumers that do not purchase at this retailer, as well as other target market consumers were excluded. Insight was consequently gained into the effect that store image dimension adjustment could have on regaining market share or even market share growth.
- The store type selection (chain store) could have impacted on the generalisation of results. The decision to exclude other stores was based on the need to provide store-specific feedback to management.
- This retailer's opinion on what their customers perceive as important store image dimensions was gathered from a group of managers, without determining to which extent they were exposed to, or knowledgeable about, the company's strategic management of store image. The opinions provided by the management sample could also have been biased by subjective opinions based on personal experience gained from working in specific departments. Future research may benefit from the

inclusion of a larger management sample, as well as a measurement of prior knowledge regarding store image.

- The selection of the geographical area was based on practical and resource considerations, thus the study was not entirely representative of all ethnic and language groups. This could limit the generalisation of results.
- The fieldworkers chosen to assist in gathering data were bilingual (English and Afrikaans). A large percentage of respondents indicated these languages as second language, which could have impacted on the understanding of the SIS. Some confusion and even ambiguity could therefore have been avoided if fieldworkers had been fluent in another African language (such as Xhosa).

5.5 Recommendations for future research

Based on the results of the current study, the following could be recommended for future research:

- A qualitative research approach (focus group) may provide further in-depth guidelines for customers' preferred attributes constituting the various dimensions.
- Monitoring of changes in perceptions of ideal store image could be introduced via longitudinal research.
- The valency value of the various dimensions of store image could be investigated by determining how the dimensions contribute to the overall image of a store. These valency values could indicate to what extent a change in the importance score is expected to impact on the perception of store image. A small change in a dimension with a high valency score could have a large impact on the perception of store image. The interaction effect of the various dimensions of store image would thus provide rich opportunities for future research.
- Valuable information could be gained from a repetition of the current study with the inclusion of a competing store. This would allow an opportunity to compare ratings as well as provide information on how competitors perceive each others' store image. In addition, such an exercise could provide insight into a different target market, and

thereby provide ideas on how to adjust store image to retain current customers, and also to lure other consumers to this retailer.

- Future research may expand the scope of the current study to include a national sample and other store and retail formats.

5.6 Concluding remarks

Companies differentiate themselves from competitors on the basis of their corporate identity. The projection of the corporate identity depends on the total corporate communication mix. Their image is enhanced by the variety of cues and deliberately planned messages that interplay and support one another to form the corporate identity. Store image is a vital part of marketing communication and corporate identity representation, as it is a vehicle that affects customers' perception of the store and the store's identity. Store image is a large part of the direct communication that attracts customers. To be able to invest in store image optimally, retailers should take cognisance of the management thereof as it cannot be ignored. An appropriate store image has the potential to increase sales. Thus awareness of the importance of store image dimensions is fundamental to building a significant market share in the highly competitive apparel retail environment.

The current study should provide usable feedback for the retailer on management and customers perceptions of the importance of store image dimensions. Retailers who do not regularly make an effort to ensure that the image they portray is according to customer expectations, may run the risk of harming the corporate image and alienating customers. The current study makes a contribution to this retailer's ability to project a store image that fulfils customers' expectations while reinforcing the corporate identity.

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**APPENDIX A:
FIELDWORKER MANUAL**

FIELDWORKER TRAINING MANUAL

RESEARCH PROJECT

**The importance of store image dimensions in apparel retail:
Customer and management perceptions**

RESEARCH TEAM:

J VAN DER VYVER

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY, US

PROF. R DU PREEZ

DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY, US

STELLENBOSCH 2007

FIELDWORKER TRAINING MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

The apparel industry is one of the most profitable and largest industries in South Africa (South Africa, 2005). One would therefore expect an extensive body of knowledge on the consumers of these products, which could increase this industry's profitability even further. However, limited research has been published on the consumers of South African apparel, underlining the need for more scientific knowledge regarding the variables that influence apparel shopping behaviour.

Corporate identity is the organization's presentation of itself to its various stakeholders and the means by which it distinguishes itself from all other companies (Markwick & Fill, 1997; Morin, 2006). The image is enhanced by the variety of cues and deliberately planned messages that interplay and support one another to form the corporate identity. Of particular importance is the communication by which a company is presented to its stakeholders. A vital part of marketing communication and corporate identity representation is store image. Assael (1992, p. 633) states that, "Measurement of store image assists retailers in determining their competitive strengths and weaknesses".

The aim of a marketing communication is to portray that the company will satisfy consumer needs. According to Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal and Voss (2002), as well as Erdem, Oumlil and Tuncalp (1999) store image [dimensions] as a specific communication tool, is evaluated in terms of consumer values and store choice criteria. Successful evaluation could lead to store patronage. It has been suggested by Mazursky and Jacoby (1986) that consumers form a set of beliefs about a store, on the basis of which they decide whether that is the type of shopping environment that appeals to them, creating store patronage intention. The precise mix includes and is dependent on the retail sector, the target market and the motivation of the consumer (Birtwistle & Shearer, 2001).

Store image should be viewed from both the consumer's and the retailer's perspective. Consumers' perceptions of stores are resolutions from the messages and cues they receive from the store as well as their ideal importance of store image dimensions. The retailers' perception of their store's image is based on the company's identity and consequently, those attributes they perceive as important to their customers. These attributes should be managed in their marketing strategy to build and maintain patronage (Osman, 1993). Management's perception of the image that their store portrays is based on those attributes that they perceive as important to their customers. Management manipulates the variables they consider important in the strategy with the aim to expand and maintain their patrons (Osman, 1993). "Customers' perceptions that the store really possesses the promised attributes must survive, and be reinforced by, actual experiences in the store", according to Thompson and Chen, (1998, p. 171).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Store image is defined as the customers' perception of the cognitive/ functional/tangible (e.g. store lay-out) or the affective/psychological/intangible (e.g. store atmosphere) components of a store (Lindquist, 1974/75). The purpose of the current study is to look at the difference in perspectives of that which management views as customers' ideal importance of store image dimensions and customers' ideal image of store image dimensions. The theory states that if

what customers and management view as customers ideal importance of store image dimensions are similar, store image will satisfy the customers need and therefore increase sales. The outcome of the current study will provide feedback on a leading apparel retailer's store image and serve as monitor to what they have thought of their store image in the past, as well as providing evidence of the practical implementation of the measurement scale.

MEASUREMENT SCALE

The measurement scale consists of five sections:

Section A & B:	These sections relate to how acceptable customers view the current store image
Section C:	This section includes some demographical information
Section D & E:	These sections relate to the measurement of the ideal importance of store image dimensions

ON ARRIVAL

Seek out the store manager and inform him/her that you are there.

COMPLETING THE MEASUREMENT SCALE

The following procedure will be followed:

- The measurement scale will be completed in an interview situation. The fieldworker will give instructions for the completion of the measurement scale as indicated by the headings within the scale, i.e. by asking the respondent how important/ acceptable each of the items in the measurement scale are as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image. Following this, the fieldworker will state each item in the measurement scale to the respondent.
- Respondents must indicate their response to each statement on a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from 1=unimportant to 5=very important or 1=unacceptable to 5=acceptable. Each respondent will be provided with a page with a visual representation of the scale format. Respondents will choose their answers by indicating a number as it relates to the response format.
- The respondent's answer will be recorded by the fieldworker by indicating the correct answer number in the appropriate box next to the correct item with X.
- Respondents should in no way be lead in their answer. Each of the scale items should be stated objectively and answers noted accurately. Under no circumstances should an own opinion be given.
- It is very important that respondents give responses to all the items in the measurement scale. If this is not the case, the particular respondent's feedback will be unusable and time will be wasted.
- Measurement scales will be completed based on a quota system. To ensure that the research study is conducted scientifically, the guidelines for the quotas to be filled should be followed carefully. These guidelines include quotas relating to store location, population group and time as per store schedule.
- Details related to the quotas need to be captured on the measurement scale. There are spaces available on the scale page to code these details. Please ensure that these are filed out correctly, since this information is important for the later analysis of the data. Refer to the included sheet for the code information.
- Each fieldworker will be allocated one store in one location. The fieldworker will visit this store in the allocated times and complete the number of measurement scales as per the quota on the store schedule.

- Fieldworkers who are unable to fill their quota on the allocated times, will return the following week to fill the quota.
- If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact any of the individuals on the study committee. Their contact details are on the last page of this manual.
- Please do not ask anyone else to complete your measurement scales. Rather return them if they are not completed.
- Completed measurement scales should be handed in on the date that has been agreed.

RESPONDENT CRITERIA

- Stores from this leading apparel store in different locations have been identified for the purpose of the current study. You will be conducting interviews with consumers inside these stores in the specific locations after shopping.
- Population groups will serve as criteria for respondent selection. Black, coloured and white customers will be approached for the participation in the study based on the quotas indicated in the store schedule.
- Only female customers will be included in the study.
- Please approach individuals of different age groups (20-55, preferably between 25-40) to keep the study scientifically correct.
- Quotas fitting the respondent criteria will be filled within the allocated times.

SELECTION OF RESPONDENTS

The following procedure will be followed:

- Position yourself in the store you were allocated. Start the interview process by approaching the first customer who fits the respondent criteria
- Introduce yourself and inform the customer that you are part of a research study for which their help is needed. Ensure that you extend a friendly request to customers partake in the study by completing the measurement scale. [Show them the introductory letter included in the measurement scale if needed.]
- Inform customers that by participating in the study, they will receive a R50 gift voucher from this leading apparel chain group.
- If individuals refuse to participate, accept this in a positive manner. No individual should be forced to complete the measurement scale. If an individual refuses to partake in the study, be sure to record this on the included no-response page.
- Be sure to stress to the customers that the information collected will be handled in the strictest confidence, that individuals will remain anonymous and that there is no way for the information given to be linked to any one individual. Information gained will be used for research purposes only.
- If an individual is willing to partake in the study you will complete the measurement scale with them as discussed previously.
- Upon completion of one measurement scale, the following customer will be approached. This process will continue within the allocated times until all the quotas are filled.
- Please ensure that all interviews are recorded on the store schedule and handed in with the completed measurement scales. Please ensure that the quota guidelines as represented in the store schedule are followed carefully.

STORES INCLUDED IN THE RESEARCH

- Interviewing takes place within this retailer's stores, permission was obtained from management and store managers will be informed. Fieldworkers will be allowed to

interview customers inside the store on specific days and times. Please ensure you have introductory letter with you to identify yourself. The contact details for the individuals representing management are included should any problems arise.

- The store schedule is included and stipulates the times and stores locations where each individual field worker needs to be present. Please ensure that you keep to these schedules.

COMPENSATION

You will receive R11 per questionnaire and on top of that a fee, that will cover your transport for the day.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

June 2007

Dear Respondent

**STUDY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS:
Request to complete questionnaires**

In order to conduct research on *The Importance of Store Image Dimensions*, we need information regarding your preference for store image dimensions and how you view the current store image of this leading apparel retailer. We therefore request your help with the completion of the attached questionnaires.

Please note that your participation in the study is completely voluntary. You can decide for yourself whether you will participate by choosing to complete the attached questionnaires and returning it to the researcher. No one will be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way for choosing to complete or not complete the questionnaires. For the purposes of the current study, all responses will be treated with anonymity and no individual personal data or results will be made available to any unauthorized person. However, for the purposes of developmental and feedback a summary of the results will be made available to management of this leading apparel retailer.

To increase the anonymity of the results and to ensure that only authorized individuals will gain access to these results, a numerical code will be linked to your name. Only the code and the results will be used when working with results. **Confidentially and anonymity** is a priority and will be honoured in this manner.

Should you decide to take part in the current study, please complete the attached questionnaires. There are **five sections** attached. **Section A and B looks at your perception of the actual store image of this leading apparel retailer and whether you find it acceptable. Section C will cover basic demographic information. Section D and E want you to rate the store image dimensions according to which you find to be important in the formation of an apparel store image.** Please respond to **all questions in all of the sections**. Choose the relevant option to each item and indicate your answer in the applicable manner. The questions are intended to cover your views towards Foschini's store image and to indicate which store image dimensions you find important and which should be focused upon when designing a store image. There are **no right and wrong answers** to any of the questions; we are only interested in your personal opinions. Please keep in mind that you are participating in a scientific study, frank and truthful answers are the most important contributions you can make to its success.

Different instructions will precede different sets of questions. Please follow the instructions as carefully as possible. The questionnaires should take you approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Thank you for your time and important contribution to the current study!

Yours sincerely

J. van der Vyver
Master's student
131 Goulburn Street
Goodwood, 7460
Tel. (021) 591 7792
janetta@vdv.co.za

Dr. R. du Preez Lecturer & Supervisor
Department of Industrial Psychology
Stellenbosch University
Tel: (021) 808-3011

STORE SCHEDULE:

WEEKDAY	09h00-11h30	11h45-14h15	14h30-17h00
Black			
Coloured			
White			

NO-RESPONSE	09h00-11h30	11h45-14h15	14h30-17h00
Black			
Coloured			
White			

WEEKEND	09h00-11h30	11h45-14h15	14h30-17h00
Black			
Coloured			
White			

NO-RESPONSE	09h00-11h30	11h45-14h15	14h30-17h00
Black			
Coloured			
White			

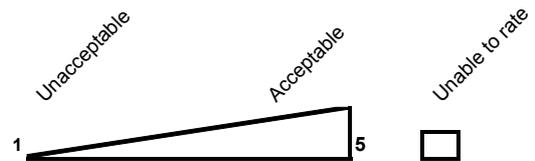
**APPENDIX B:
STORE IMAGE SCALE: CONSUMERS**

With regards to the **MERCHANDISE (clothing and related products)** dimension, ask yourself how acceptable are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [item...] is unacceptable/acceptable in my perception of the apparel store image)

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 27 variety of merchandise categories (e.g. formalwear/leisurewear lingerie/shoes/accessories) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 28 availability of imported merchandise | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 29 availability of unique merchandise (e.g. only offered by specific store) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30 availability of exclusive merchandise (e.g. limited number manufactured) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 31 availability of designer label merchandise (e.g. Calvin Klein) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 32 availability fashion merchandise | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 33 availability of styles suited to my age | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 34 quality of merchandise in store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

With regards to the **PROMOTION** dimension, ask yourself how acceptable are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [item...] is unacceptable/acceptable in my perception of the apparel store image)

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 35 credibility of store advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 36 models used in store advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 37 inclusion of brochures in mailed store card account | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 38 spaciousness of in-store displays | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 39 ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 40 sales with marked-down prices | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 41 timely announcement of sales | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 42 availability of special offers (e.g. buy one get one free) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |



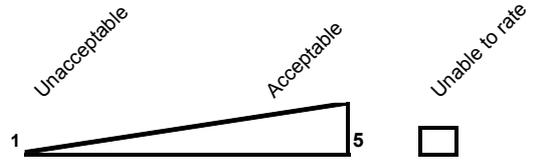
With regards to the **SALES PERSONNEL** dimension, ask yourself how acceptable are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [item...] is unacceptable/acceptable in my perception of the apparel store image)

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 43 fashionability of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 44 attractiveness of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 45 similarity in body type between sales personnel and myself (e.g. large-size/petite) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 46 similarity in age between sales personnel and myself | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 47 similarity in gender between sales personnel and myself | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

With regards to the **SERVICE** dimension, ask yourself how acceptable are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [item...] is unacceptable/acceptable in my perception of the apparel store image)

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 48 expertise of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 49 courteousness of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 50 number of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 51 availability of gift vouchers | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 52 availability of gift registry | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 53 availability of inter-store transfer facilities (e.g. find items from other stores) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 54 availability of mail-order service | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 55 availability of alteration service | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SECTION B: APPAREL STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS



Ask yourself how acceptable are the following **DIMENSIONS** as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [dimension...] is unacceptable/acceptable in my perception of the apparel store image;

1 atmosphere (e.g. store interior/store atmosphere)	1	2	3	4	5	
2 convenience (e.g. transportation/location)	1	2	3	4	5	
3 facilities (e.g. fixtures/fitting rooms)	1	2	3	4	5	
4 institutional (e.g. clientele/store reputation)	1	2	3	4	5	
5 merchandise (e.g. assortment/style)	1	2	3	4	5	
6 promotion (e.g. advertising/displays)	1	2	3	4	5	
7 sales personnel (e.g. appearance/promotion)	1	2	3	4	5	
8 service (e.g. payment options/delivery options)	1	2	3	4	5	

SECTION C: DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Please indicate your gender:

Male
Female

2. Which population group do you belong to?

Black
Coloured
Indian
White
Other (please specify)

3. What is your home language?

Afrikaans

English

Other (specify in box below)

4. How old are you?

Younger than 20

20-29 years old

30-39 years old

40-49 years old

50-59 years old

Older than 60

5. What job do you do?

Unemployed

Clerical, salesperson, technician, secretary

Middle management (teacher, nursing sister)

Corporate (Manager)

Professional (doctor, director)

Homemaker

Retired (including a severance package)

Other (specify in box below)

6. What is the total **monthly** income of your household before tax and deductions?

Less than R500

R501-R1000

R1001-R3000

R3001-R5000

R5001-R7000

R7001-R10 000

R10 001-R20 000

R20 001 - R30 000

R30 001 and more

7. What is your marital status?

Cohabitation/living together

Married

Not married

Divorced/Separated

Widow/widower

8. How often do you buy clothes?

Only when I need clothes

Once a year

Twice a year

Three times a year

Monthly

Weekly

Other (specify in box below)

9. Approximately how much money, **on average**, do you spend on clothing and related products **per month** (including all outerwear, underwear, shoes and accessories, but excluding fine jewellery)?

Less than R99

R100-R199

R200-R299

R300-R399

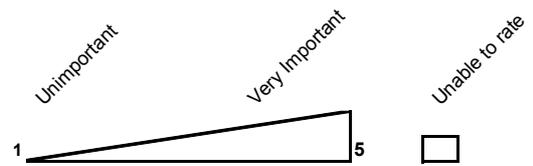
R400-R499

R500-R599

More than R600 per month

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND COOPERATION WITH THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION D: APPAREL STORE ATTRIBUTES



With regards to the **ATMOSPHERE** dimension, ask yourself how important are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. *the [item...] is unimportant/important in my formation of apparel store image*)

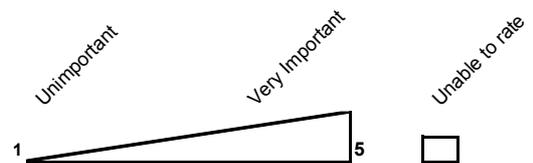
- | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 fashionability of store interior | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 style of décor in store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 attractiveness of décor in store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 colours used in store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 suitable finishing materials used in store (e.g wood/stainless steel) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 shopping experience (feeling when shopping in store e.g. special/welcome) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

With regards to the **CONVENIENCE** dimension, ask yourself how important are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. *the [item...] is unimportant/important in my formation of apparel store image*)

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 7 time it takes to travel to store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 proximity of store to variety of other stores (e.g. grocery store) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9 accessibility of store (e.g. location within mall) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 flow of people in mall where store is situated (i.e. ease of movement) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11 amount of walking required within store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12 ease of finding merchandise items | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13 store opening hours | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

With regards to the **FACILITIES** dimension, ask yourself how important are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. *the [item...] is unimportant/important in my formation of apparel store image*)

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 14 accessibility of store entrance/exit | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15 position of aisles in store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16 width of aisles in store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17 accessibility of merchandise rails | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18 number of fitting rooms | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19 lighting in fitting rooms | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20 ease of shopping with family in mall where store is situated | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |



With regards to the **INSTITUTIONAL** dimension, ask yourself how important are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. *the [item...] is unimportant/important in my formation of apparel store image*)

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 21 social class appeal of store (e.g. high/low class) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22 store's appeal to my friends | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23 similarity in appearance between sales personnel and customers | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24 ability to identify with store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25 similarity between store image and self image | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26 store's efforts to build personal relationship with customers (e.g. personalised letters) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

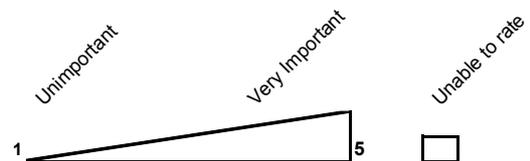
With regards to the **MERCHANDISE (clothing and related products)** dimension, ask yourself how important are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. *the [item...] is unimportant/important in my formation of apparel store image*)

— — — — — —

27 variety of merchandise categories (e.g. formalwear/leisurewear/ lingerie/shoes/accessories)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
28 availability of imported merchandise	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
29 availability of unique merchandise (e.g. only offered by specific store)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
30 availability of exclusive merchandise (e.g. limited number manufactured)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
31 availability of designer label merchandise (e.g. Calvin Klein)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
32 availability fashion merchandise	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
33 availability of styles suited to my age	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
34 quality of merchandise in store	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>

With regards to the **PROMOTION** dimension, ask yourself how important are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. *the [item...] is unimportant/important in my formation of apparel store image*)

35 credibility of store advertising	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
36 models used in store advertising	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
37 inclusion of brochures in mailed store card account	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
38 spaciousness of in-store displays	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
39 ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
40 sales with marked-down prices	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
41 timely announcement of sales	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
42 availability of special offers (e.g. buy one get one free)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>



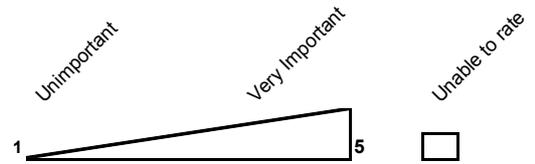
With regards to the **SALES PERSONNEL** dimension, ask yourself how important are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. *the [item...] is unimportant/important in my formation of apparel store image*)

43 fashionability of sales personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
44 attractiveness of sales personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
45 similarity in body type between sales personnel and myself (e.g. large-size/petite)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
46 similarity in age between sales personnel and myself	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
47 similarity in gender between sales personnel and myself	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>

With regards to the **SERVICE** dimension, ask yourself how important are the following items as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. *the [item...] is unimportant/important in my formation of apparel store image*)

48 expertise of sales personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
49 courteousness of sales personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
50 number of sales personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
51 availability of gift vouchers	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
52 availability of gift registry	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
53 availability of inter-store transfer facilities (e.g. find items from other stores)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
54 availability of mail-order service	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
55 availability of alteration service	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>

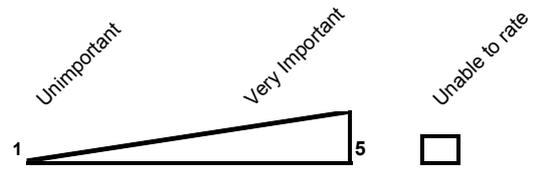
SECTION E: APPAREL STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS



Ask yourself how important are the following DIMENSIONS as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image
 (i.e. *the [dimension...] is unimportant/important in my formation of apparel store image*)

1 atmosphere (e.g. store interior/store atmosphere)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 convenience (e.g. transportation/location)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 facilities (e.g. fixtures/fitting rooms)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 institutional (e.g. clientele/store reputation)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 merchandise (e.g. assortment/style)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
6 promotion (e.g. advertising/displays)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 sales personnel (e.g. appearance/promotion)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 service (e.g. payment options/delivery options)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/>

**APPENDIX C:
STORE IMAGE SCALE: MANAGEMENT**



With regards to the **INSTITUTIONAL** dimension, how important are the following items to your customers as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [item...] is unimportant/important in the customers perception of the apparel store image)

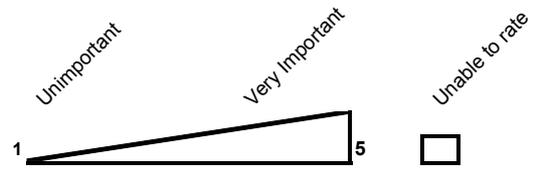
- | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 21 social class appeal of store (e.g. high/low class) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22 store's appeal to my friends | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23 similarity in appearance between sales personnel and customers | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24 ability to identify with store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 25 similarity between store image and self image | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 26 store's efforts to build personal relationship with customers (e.g. personalised letters) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

With regards to the **MERCHANDISE (clothing and related products)** dimension, how important are the following items to your customers as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [item...] is unimportant/important in the customers perception of the apparel store image)

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 27 variety of merchandise categories (e.g. formalwear/leisurewear lingerie/shoes/accessories) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 28 availability of imported merchandise | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 29 availability of unique merchandise (e.g. only offered by specific store) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 30 availability of exclusive merchandise (e.g. limited number manufactured) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 31 availability of designer label merchandise (e.g. Calvin Klein) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 32 availability fashion merchandise | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 33 availability of styles suited to my age | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 34 quality of merchandise in store | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

With regards to the **PROMOTION** dimension, how important are the following items to your customers as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [item...] is unimportant/important in the customers perception of the apparel store image)

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 35 credibility of store advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 36 models used in store advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 37 inclusion of brochures in mailed store card account | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 38 spaciousness of in-store displays | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 39 ideas for wearing merchandise given in displays | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 40 sales with marked-down prices | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 41 timely announcement of sales | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 42 availability of special offers (e.g. buy one get one free) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |



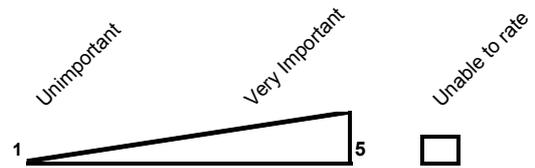
With regards to the **SALES PERSONNEL** dimension, how important are the following items to your customers as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [item...] is unimportant/important in the customers perception of the apparel store image)

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 43 fashionability of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 44 attractiveness of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 45 similarity in body type between sales personnel and myself (e.g. large-size/petite) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 46 similarity in age between sales personnel and myself | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 47 similarity in gender between sales personnel and myself | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

With regards to the **SERVICE** dimension, how important are the following items to your customers as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [item...] is unimportant/important in the customers perception of the apparel store image)

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 48 expertise of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 49 courteousness of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 50 number of sales personnel | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 51 availability of gift vouchers | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 52 availability of gift registry | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 53 availability of inter-store transfer facilities (e.g. find items from other stores) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 54 availability of mail-order service | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 55 availability of alteration service | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SECTION B: APPAREL STORE IMAGE DIMENSIONS



How important are the following **DIMENSIONS** to your customers, as they contribute to the formation of apparel store image (i.e. The [dimension...] is unimportant/important in the customers perception of the apparel store image)

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 atmosphere (e.g. store interior/store atmosphere) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 convenience (e.g. transportation/location) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 facilities (e.g. fixtures/fitting rooms) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 institutional (e.g. clientele/store reputation) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 merchandise (e.g. assortment/style) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 promotion (e.g. advertising/displays) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 sales personnel (e.g. appearance/promotion) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 service (e.g. payment options/delivery options) | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**APPENDIX D:
PERMISSION LETTER**

FOSCHINI

28 May 2007

The Store Managers of:
TYGERVALLEY/NI CITY/GOLDEN ACRE/CAPE GATE/SOMERSET WEST
MALL/KUILSRIVER/TABLE VIEW/BELLVILLE/PINELANDS

Janetta van der Vyver of the University of Stellenbosh has been give permission to conduct interviews with customers in your store.

Each customer will be given a R50 voucher to thank them for their participation.

Please could you assist Janetta by allowing her to interview customers inside your store.

Many thanks

Yours faithfully
For FOSCHINI RETAIL GROUP (PTY) LTD
T/A FOSCHINI STORES



Karen Knipscheer
Research and Database Manager
021 938 7731

Foschini Stores a division of Foschini Retail Group (Pty)Ltd. 1988/007302/07
POSTAL ADDRESS: PO Box 6020, Parow East, 7501, RSA
STREET ADDRESS: Stanley Lewis Centre, 340 Voortrekker Rd, Parow East, 7500, RSA
TEL: 021 - 938 1911, FAX: 021 - 938 1128
DIRECTORS: DM Polak, SN Bowley (Brit), HB Godfrey, PS Meiring, AD Murray (Brit), MC Park, R Stein
DIVISIONAL DIRECTORS: FJ De Klerk, II Goodman, RB Stewart (Scot), A Harris, M Maritz, K Sakalis, J Thomson (Brit)