RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRADERS' LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF TARGET CONSUMER PREFERENCES OF SELECTED APPAREL IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

This paper examines how consumer preferences and buying practices affect apparel trade within a liberalised market in Nairobi, and the awareness level of apparel traders of these preferences. Data were collected using interview schedules and observation checklists. A random sample of 90 apparel traders was drawn from Kenyatta, Jericho and Central Business District market centres in Nairobi. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS®). Results showed that all traders had some level of formal education. The main types of apparel sold were: New Imported and Custom-tailored. Majority of the traders targeted women as their main clientele because they were considered the most willing buyers. They also stocked apparel for men and/or children for more profit. Chi-square analysis showed that the traders' age, position held in business and source of fabric/clothing significantly influenced the types of apparel they sold. Moreover, the type of apparel sold was affected by consumer preferences for those imported because locally-produced apparel did not meet consumers' needs in terms of quality and variety. The Ministry of Trade and Industry should formulate mechanisms to enable apparel traders' easy access to information on existing trends and policies that affect their businesses.

INTRODUCTION

As a basic need, apparel (also called clothing) serves to adorn and protect the body and communicates information about an individual (Storm, 1987). Apparel needs of people have stimulated clothing production, which has become more specialised and varied. It has given rise to sectors such as fibre and fabric production, apparel design, marketing and sales. As nations develop and their populations become more educated, conscious of their appearance, and aware of what the market offers in terms of apparel, demands for the same have become more diverse and yet specific to each person. These demands have given rise to a more diversified industry, according to the type of apparel produced, target clientele or consumers, size of apparel producing establishment, exclusiveness of designers and location of various establishments. The apparel industry has also contributed significantly to global development. Dickerson (1995) observes that since the early 1900s, these industries have been the world's leading employer in the manufacturing sector. In addition, Donnel, Sharp and Stamper (1986) observe that the apparel industry has been the single largest employer of women and minorities in the United States of America. Furthermore, data on employment in African textile and clothing industries from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have indicated that in 1979, Egypt had the largest textile industry labour force of 291,000, while South

Africa was the leading apparel sector employer with a workforce of 111,000. Protection of local industries from cheap fabric and apparel imports as a result of liberalization has allowed these industries to develop. This was clearly seen in the United States of America and Nigeria where these commodities were banned allowing for these industries to flourish (Werbeloff, 1987). Unlike the aforementioned countries, the Kenya Government undertook market liberalisation in 1993 with a view to increasing the efficiency in trade for improved economic growth. While this allowed apparel manufacturers and traders to buy and sell their products to the international market, it also led to increased importation of both new and second-hand apparel into the Kenyan market. Liberalisation also diversified Kenyan consumer choice. This study was, therefore, undertaken to find out apparel traders' awareness of the factors influencing consumers' preferences and buying practices within a liberalised market in Nairobi, Kenya.

The Apparel Industry in Kenya

The textile and apparel industry in Kenya started before the country attained political independence; when there were seven textile mills owned by the private sector. After independence, however, the government invested heavily in foreign-owned industries and bought shares in new ones as a way to reduce the country's dependence on production of

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primary raw materials and importation of manufactured and processed goods (importation substitution). As a result, Kenyans took up the top management positions, although these industries continued to rely on expatriates as technical managers. Kenyans of Asian origin owned most private firms as the industry drew most of its textile technical expertise from India. These industries have continued to use both local and imported raw materials and inputs. The main locally available fibres include cotton, wool and sisal, while the imported ones are mainly synthetics, such as nylon, polyester, acrylic, jute, linen and some cotton. All auxiliary inputs (dyes, chemicals and resins among others) are imported (African Development and Economic Consultants [ADEC], 1998). Of the 350 garment making units in Kenya, the highest concentration is found in the urban areas. The industry utilizes locally available raw materials and the products earn the country valuable foreign exchange. The industry is organised into formal and informal sectors, and faces a number of internal and external problems (ADEC, 1998). The problems include duty exemptions, illegal imports, low quality of raw cotton, high costs of production, consumer preferences for imported products (Nyang'or, 1994; Otieno, 1990; Werbeloff, 1987), and lack of planning (ADEC, 1998).

Before the 1993 import liberalisation, the textile industry in Kenya was effectively protected. As a result, local apparel manufacturers concentrated on the domestic market and paid little attention to product quality and pricing. On the other hand, liberalisation had increased the importation of textiles, apparel fabric and ready-made garments, such as second-hand clothes from the Far East. Thus, the manufacturers had to compete with these imports in the domestic market resulting in some enterprises being threatened with closure (ADEC, 1998). Although import substitution was encouraged, penetration to export markets was not very successful because Kenyan firms that were making good profit in the heavily protected domestic market shunned away from the more competitive and risky export markets. Among the few firms that developed some export trade were the Manufacturing Under Bond (MUB) and Export Processing Zone (EPZ) garment factories. The products of these firms are exported mainly to the USA, the United Kingdom and, to a small extent, to the Common Market for East and Southern African (COMESA) countries. The apparel industry also experienced the quota system imposed by America on imports of shorts and shirts that led to a fall in exports of Kenya's textile products. For example, there was a fall of 88% in shirt exports in 1993 and 1994. This fall affected other products not allocated quota, such as pillowcases and many of the export-oriented firms under MUB, and EPZ closed down or started operating at low capacities (ADEC, 1998). Performance of local apparel firms remained subdued in 1998, despite the government stepping in to implement tariff restrictions on imported garments in 1999. This was due to the inability of the textile industry to compete with lowly priced imports, depressed local market demand, and a combination of infrastructural constraints (CBS, 1999; 2000). Some growth was, however, observed in the production of trousers that rose by 10.7% from 39.4 thousand dozens in 1997 to 43.6 thousand dozens in 1998. At the same time, output of vests and underwear rose by 59.9% (CBS, 1999). With the recent lifting of the punitive quota imposed on Kenyan textiles by the United States, growth in exports of Kenyan textiles is expected, although this remains to be seen

(Bundotich, 2000). Thus, it seems that cheap imported apparel has had a negative effect on locally produced apparel countrywide, to an extent that traders are forced to select the most suitable apparel to sell. The study sought to clarify on why traders choose to sell specific types of apparel over others.

Critical Issues on Traders' Awareness and Consumer Preferences

The textile and apparel industry in Kenya faces problems that negatively affect its development. These problems include a local market limited by low per capita income, thus reducing the purchasing power of consumers. Moreover, shortages of local skilled personnel hence, the need for expatriates, and increased imported textiles and apparel that are sold at informal open markets have been cited as some major problems. With relatively higher taxes being imposed on locally produced items, imported apparel has become affordable to local consumers (CBS, 1995). Other factors, such as an item's workmanship and enhancing the wearer's appearance, have also contributed to this trend (Otieno, 1990). As a result of market liberalisation and the directed consumer preferences towards imported apparel, local textile industries have experienced competition from these cheap foreign garments that have flooded the Kenyan market (Kipyegon, 1997) leading to the closure of some of these industries, such as Allied Industries Limited and Kisumu Cotton Mills (KICOMI) just to mention a few. As salespersons of apparel, traders should have knowledge of their merchandise and be able to promote their sales intelligently. This promotion will enhance career stability and profits for the business because the customers they attract will feel satisfied and come back for more products (Addison, Gillespie & Wingate, 1964). Research on imported apparel in the area of consumer preferences and selection (Nyang'or, 1994) has indicated that traders of locally produced apparel are unable to meet consumer needs due to poor quality, and thus are often out-competed by traders of imported apparel. Regardless of the type of apparel being traded, the ability of the trader to influence preferences of a consumer contributes significantly to his or her purchasing decisions.

However, the existing trend of consumer preferences for imported items is clearly reflected in the noticeable increase in traders of imported apparel in Nairobi. The increased availability of this commodity and the stigma attached to locally produced apparel may lead to eventual collapse of the local apparel industry in Kenya. Thus, there is a need to implement strategies and/or policies for a level playing ground in the apparel industry for the benefit of local traders. This study, therefore, sought to answer two pertinent questions: What are the factors determining the types of apparel sold by local traders within a liberalised market in Nairobi? Second, what are these traders doing to enhance the growth of the local clothing industry? These questions, among others, need clear affirmative answers if traders of local apparel are to capture consumer preferences and meet their clothing requirements.

Consumer Apparel Selection and Buying Practices in Kenya

A consumer is a person who buys and uses goods and services. According to the United States (US) Office of

Education (1973), the apparel trader must acknowledge the dominant role of consumers in determining trends in the supply and demand of apparel. All successful fashion industries recognise that people do not actually demand new products and designs of which they have little or no knowledge; neither do they demand change but their individual and collective power is exercised in the selections they make, on the one hand, and in their refusal to buy, on the other (Dickerson & Jarnow, 1997). It is by acceptance or rejection that consumers often influence the goods presented and the methods of presentation (Dickerson & Jarnow, 1997). Ultimately, fashion is determined by consumers, and the apparel industry simply proposes styles which, if accepted by consumers, make fashion for different groups of people. It is important that apparel traders understand consumer characteristics and how these characteristics influence the fashion industry. For example, it was found that Kenyan adolescents and adults make a majority of household decisions on clothing for themselves and others (Otieno, 1990). Also, Nyang'or (1994) indicates that working female consumers prefer and have become dependent on imported apparel, negatively affecting locally produced apparel. These decisions are usually affected by physiological, psychological and socio-economic factors that determine their satisfaction with apparel.

Physiological factors that influence consumer decisions on clothing include the look, construction and finishing of an item, colour and design of the fabric, fitting characteristics, the purpose for which the item is bought, and its fabric finishes. An item in which one looks beautiful, the cost of the item, an acceptable style and prestige were sighted as psychological factors influencing consumers' clothing decisions. Among the socio-economic factors were the amounts of money available, the number of dependants in a household, age, status in society, and types of social activities all significantly influenced clothing decisions by consumers. In addition, Otieno (1990) points out that among the factors that cause dissatisfaction with apparel selection and buying in the Kenya market are: availability of clothing information, experience with previous items bought, availability of label information, consumer protection service and quality of items in the market. Existing researches emphasize the significance of consumer clothing preferences in determining trends in apparel trade and industrial performance. It is necessary to address the role of apparel traders in meeting the clothing needs of consumers while making a profit at the same time. This study focuses on these issues.

Types of Apparel Traders

Apparel traders are mainly categorised according to the type of apparel they sell (Dickerson & Jarnow, 1997). These categories include:

1. Haute Couture: Refers to the designers and manufacturing houses of fashionable clothes that are made on order by individual customers. They operate in residential buildings known as fashion houses. In many cases, the head designer is also the owner of the firm that also carries the designer's name, such as Christian Dior and Hugo Boss. Haute couture garments are usually very costly and designs are created exclusively for the customer.

2. European Ready-To-Wear fashion centres: Talented designers are involved in the production of fine quality products that are innovatively styled. These designers may specialise in the production of specific products such as lingerie, underwear and sportswear.

3. Low Wage Countries: These are involved in large-scale production of textiles and textile products at much cheaper costs than those existing in the domestic markets. These types of traders are common in Japan and target USA retailers. According to Tottora (1992), these retailers steadily increase the quality of imported apparel and household textiles causing domestic industries to suffer severe economic losses.

The aforementioned types of traders are based mainly in Europe and the USA but have branch outlets in other parts of the world such as Kenya. In Nairobi, these apparel traders would be categorised as follows:

(a) Custom Tailors: These traders make garments according to personal measurements of a client. Some well-known custom tailors in Nairobi include KikoRomeo, Reuben Omollo and Sally Karago. These tailors may make specific items for a group of clients such as women's wear or may be general tailors. They may design by themselves or may copy designs from catalogues or fashion magazines, or as desired by the client.

(b) New Imported Apparel Traders: These are involved in the sale of new ready-to-wear garments imported into the country from the Far Eastern countries such as Dubai. A group of traders may share a premise located within a commercial centre.

(c) Second-Hand Apparel Traders: These are involved in the sale of used garments. In Kenya, the garments are imported mainly from Europe and America. These garments are usually cheaper than new ones. Traders can be located in a premise within a commercial centre or may have stalls at open markets.

(d) Locally Manufactured Apparel Traders: These traders are involved in the sale of apparel manufactured in Kenya by local companies such as KenKnit. They may sell apparel exclusively or with other products such as in the case of supermarkets. They are usually located in premises within a commercial centre, or may have stalls at open-air markets.

In this study, the researcher intended to find out how the aforementioned types of apparel traders function and affect each other within Nairobi.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out using a survey design in which data were collected from a sampled population to determine their current status with respect to various variables. This study was carried out in 2003 in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya. The sampling frame consisted of 583 apparel traders from which a random sample of 90 respondents (representing 15% of the total population of apparel traders in Nairobi) was drawn from 3 market centres (Kenyatta market, Jericho market and Central Business District). The respondents were categorised according to the type of apparel they sold, i.e. New Imported, Second-hand, Locally manufactured, and Custom-tailored/designer apparel traders. The researcher personally held interviews with apparel traders at hteir business premises. The results were presented using frequencies and percentages

obtained using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS®). Results from the observation checklist were used to describe sales promotion techniques used by the respondents, elaborate findings from interviews and explain unexpected phenomena. Chi-square was used to establish which socio-economic factors significantly influenced the types of apparel sold by traders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of the Apparel Businesses

The Target Clientele

Target clientele in the study referred to the main customers the apparel traders wanted to sell to. An overwhelming majority (89%) of the traders interviewed had women as their target clientele, compared to only 39% men, 30% children and only 12% infants. With new designs for women clothing being introduced into the market quite often, women strive to acquire them at the same pace. As a result, women become very potential customers for apparel traders.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution showing Respondents' Reasons for Selected Target Clientele

Reasons for selected target clientele	Frequency	%
Women always need clothes	26	30.2
Women are willing buyers	18	20.9
Women enjoy dressing up	9	10.5
Several categories of clients can be	15	17.4
exploited easily	1	1.2
Most of my clients are men	4	4.7
Men are earners themselves	3	3.5
Most tourists are adults! teenagers	2	2.3
Men prefer new items	8	9.3
Specialisation of the business		
* Multiple responses were allowed		

Table 2: Respondents' Use of Visual Merchandising Techniques in their Businesses

Merchandising Techniques		Frequency	%
Window displays		27	30.0
□	Hanging clothes	27	30.0
□	Using mannequins	13	14.4
□	Window painting	8	8.9
Interior displays		81	10.0
□	Counter/table	48	53.3
□	Wall	81	90.0
□	Shelves/ rail	35	38.9
□	Aisle	9	10.0
□	Island (centre)	5	5.6
□	Showcase	4	4.4
□	Ceiling	4	4.4
Door display		74	82.2
□	Premise sign	35	38.9
□	Hanging clothes	35	61.1

* Multiple responses were allowed

The results from Table 1 showed that, according to most (30%) apparel traders, women always needed clothes, and thus were sure their merchandise would be bought. Frisbee (1985) has observed that women today have more clothes than men and working women have more than those not working. Moreover, 21% of the traders emphasized the fact that women were always willing buyers of their merchandise since they enjoyed dressing up. It was evident that several of the apparel traders that had women as their target clientele also included children and/or infants/babies as their target clientele. Those traders who targeted men reasoned that men were generally

high earners and preferred new items. Some of these traders sold women's wear as well, and targeted mainly tourists. Most traders, however, had more than one type of clientele since this would enable them to exploit multiple categories of customers more easily and efficiently. Only a few traders had only one target clientele, mainly because they had specialised in specific categories of clothing thus did not include other categories in their stocks. The apparel traders, therefore, stocked merchandise that would meet the needs of their target clientele (i.e men's wear, women's wear, infants' wear). Apparently, when traders received other clientele in addition to their regular clientele, some realised increased sales. This was considered a boost to their business.

Type of Clothing Sold

In this study, the type of clothing referred to its mode of production and/or source. Results showed that 37% of the respondents sold Custom-tailored apparel that they made themselves and 32% of the traders sold New Imported apparel. The large proportion of these traders could be an indication that consumers considered both New Imported and Custom-tailored clothing as high quality items. Only 17% sold Second-hand apparel and 14% sold Locally Manufactured apparel, mostly uniforms for schools or work. Further, most traders preferred fabric/clothing from foreign sources (76%) to local (Kenyan) sources (24%). The main reasons most traders preferred foreign fabric/clothing were: most customers preferred imported apparel (29%), imported apparel is of high quality (23%); large variety to choose from (17%), cheap (9%), and is easily available (6%). Other reasons given by traders for preferring foreign apparel included the fact that local sources had been depleted forcing traders to look for alternative sources of merchandise (5%) and the merchandise sold quickly (2%). A few respondents mentioned that foreign items were up to date with current fashions. Of those who preferred Kenyan sources for their fabric/clothing, 56% of them said it was because these items were cheaper than foreign ones. Kenyan fabric/clothing was easily available for 24% of the respondents. Eight percent said Kenyan items were unique while another 8% said these were items that tourists wanted to buy. Only 4% said that using Kenyan fabric/clothing created employment for Kenyans. Most traders obtained the merchandise they sold by themselves (52%), while others (48%) got their merchandise through a second party (employer, agent/supplier). In some cases, customers would bring their own fabric to the custom-tailors to be made into garments. Regardless of whether the merchandise was obtained from local or foreign sources, the items brought profits to the apparel traders. Dickerson & Jarnow, (1997) has identified this as the ultimate goal of the fashion industry because if these businesses do not succeed in being profitable, then the fashion lines will not continue. A trader would not sell merchandise that did not realise any profits. However, the challenge to the local industries is to match imported merchandise in terms of quality and variety as these attract local consumers to purchase imported apparel.

Apparel Traders' Level of Awareness

Apparel Traders' Level of Awareness of Consumer Preferences

The present study also tried to determine the traders' awareness of the factors customers considered when selecting

Table 3: Chi-Square Results Showing the Relationship between the Types of Apparel Sold and Age of the Respondents

	Types of Apparel Sold by Traders				
Age (yrs)	New Imported	Second hand	Locally Produced	Custom-tailored	Total
20-30	20 (69.0%)	12 (80.0%)	5 (38.5%)	15 (45.5%)	52 (57.8%)
Above 30	9 (31.0%)	3 (20.0%)	8 (61.5%)	18 (54.5%)	38 (42.2%)
Total	29 (100.0%)	15 (100.0%)	13 (100.0%)	33 (100.0%)	90 (100.0%)

χ^2 =8.6, df=3, p<0.05, N=90

Table 4: Chi-Square Results showing the Relationship between Types of Apparel Sold and Trader's Position in Business

	Types of Apparel Sold by Traders		
Position	Imported	Locally made	total
Manager	19 (43.2%)	39 (84.8%)	58 (64.4%)
Ass. Manager	25 (56.8%)	7 (15.2%)	32 (35.6%)
Total	44 (100.0%)	46 (100.0%)	90 (100.0%)

χ^2=17.0 df=1, p<0.05, N=90

Table 5: Chi-Square Results showing the Relationship between Types of Apparel Sold and Sources of Fabric/Clothing

	Types of Apparel Sold by Traders		
Source	Imported	Locally-Made	Total
Kenyan	1(2.3%)	21 (45.7%)	22 (24.4%)
Foreign	43 (97.7%)	25 (54.3%)	68 (75.6%)
Total	44(100.0%)	46 (100.0%)	90 (100.0%)

χ^2= 22.9, df=1, p<0.05, N=90

specific apparel to buy. Generally, most traders in Nairobi (77%) agreed that majority of customers looked for good stitching/workmanship in the garments they selected since these garments were durable. The other major factors that influenced customer selection included the right size (57%), right style (57%) and right colour (50%). Interestingly, only 43% and 29% of the traders said that customers were concerned with a suitable price and fabric respectively. Only a mere 8% cared whether or not the clothing was a new arrival, mainly in keeping with new fashions. The knowledge of consumers' preferences when selecting apparel to buy assisted the trader in providing the right merchandise. Moreover, by pointing out these aspects to customers traders were able to sell their merchandise because the customer's buying points become the apparel trader's selling points (Addison, Gillespie & Wingate, 1964).

Traders' Level of Awareness of Specifications asked by Customers

In terms of what customers often asked for, an overwhelming majority (93%) of the respondents agreed that customers often asked for specific items to buy, probably because most customers had already decided on the type of garment they would like to buy before visiting the shop. The findings showed that most customers asked for, either, specific type of clothing (e.g. shirt, blouse, skirt or trouser [84%]), specific fabric (e.g. cotton or polyester [60%]), specific colour (57%) or size (21%). The low number of customers asking for specific size could be due to the fact that once they had found a garment they liked; consumers would simply fit various sizes until they got the best. This could form the focus for future business strategies.

Techniques Apparel Traders Use to Convince Reluctant Clientele

In order to convince reluctant customers to buy items, most traders tried various techniques. For example, majority of the

traders tried to explain the positive aspects of the garment to the customer such as durability and ease of care (71%) and its suitability to the customer in terms of enhancing their appearance (52%). Additionally, a good number of the traders (40%) lowered the prices to convince reluctant customers to buy, while 37% provided alternative colours to these customers. Other techniques used by the traders to enhance marketability of their items included providing alternative styles (33%) to reluctant customers as a way of convincing them to buy a garment, especially when business was low. Less than 10% of the respondents either introduced products available as these items were already on display, or asked the customer why they were buying an item or explained the item's value for money in order to convince the customer to buy the garment. As expected, 64% of the traders were sometimes successful in getting the reluctant customers to buy, while 36% were always successful in getting reluctant customers to buy after convincing them. The findings of a survey on National Micro and Small enterprises by CBS, International Centre for Economic Growth (ICEG) and K-Rep Holdings Limited (1999) identified 'lack of knowledge of what consumers want' as a major problem for traders. However, the findings of this study clearly suggested that most of the apparel traders were well aware of their customers' apparel needs (Blackwell, Engel & Miniard, (1993). For example, one of them said:

> Talking to customers helps them appreciate a garment in a way they probably had not thought of hence buy an item.

Visual merchandising techniques

The study established that visual merchandising techniques were important in turning a customer's browsing into purchase of an item (Table 2). The survey revealed that interior displays were the most used form of visual merchandising techniques

(90% o the respondents). These respondents mostly used interior displays by way of hanging clothes on the walls (90%), as well as displaying some merchandise on a counter! table positioned close or next to the shop's entrance (53.3%), while some (38.9%) had shelves rails in the shops for displaying their merchandise (Table 2). Only 10% of the respondents displayed items along the aisle. Six percent had items displayed at the centre (island) of the shop. Four percent of the traders had a showcase display of their most stunning merchandise. Though displaying merchandise in the aisle or having a showcase are very effective visual merchandising techniques, they are costly and require some skill hence very few traders could use these techniques. Four percent of the respondents used the ceiling to display their merchandise.

It was also observed that a large proportion (82.2%) of the apparel traders used door displays as a form of visual merchandising in their business premises. This was probably to attract clients passing by to come into the shop. Sixty-one percent of the respondents hung clothes on the door for browsing customers to see and maybe buy. On the other hand, 38.9% of the apparel traders had a premise sign on, above or close to the doorway (Table 2). This assisted potential clients in locating various business premises with ease. Window displays were also common among 30% of the respondents. All these respondents hung their merchandise on windows for display. However, 14.4% of the respondents used mannequins to display their apparel. Also window painting was done (8.9%), especially during Easter and Christmas. Notably, only the shops with adequate window space used this visual merchandising technique.

Factors Influencing the Types of Apparel Sold by Traders

This section addresses the objective of the study that sought to establish whether or not socio-economic characteristics influenced the type of apparel sold by traders. This objective was achieved using Chi-square to test the null hypotheses that the types of apparel sold are independent of the trader's number of employees, age, sex, level of education, position/designation, and experience, length of service and source of fabric/clothing. For the purpose of Chi-square, various categories (age, number of employees, level of education, experience, length of service, types of apparel sold) were collapsed to provide meaningful results for the study. Chi-square analysis reveavled the key factors that influenced the type of apparel sold (p<0.05) included age of the trader, position/designation and source of fabric/clothing. These factors are discussed in the following sub-sections.

Influence of Age of the Traders

According to Solomon (1989), fashion is strongly influenced by three factors: social norms, individual expressions and technology. Thus, an individual's age would determine the extent to which the aforementioned factors would influence their choice of apparel. It was therefore necessary to establish whether or not age influenced the types of apparel sold by traders. The Chi-square results indicated that age of the apparel traders influenced the type of apparel the traders chose to sell (χ^2 = 8.6, p < 0.05). It is clear from these results that a higher percentage of younger apparel traders (20-30 years) sold New Imported apparel (69.0%), Custom-tailored/designer

apparel (15.5%) and Second-hand apparel (80.0%). Other age brackets showed most traders selling Custom-tailored/designer apparel (Table 3). This could be attributed to the fact that the traders chose to sell apparel that they and their customers could identify with, which in this case were foreign items.

Influence of Position Held by Respondent in Business

The current trends in the apparel business are that there is a dominance of small producers, product specialisation, contracting system and style piracy {US Office of Education (1973); Mbuvu, M and Thwala, W.D (2008)}. Thus, there was need to determine whether or not the trader's position influenced the types of apparel they sold. From the results (Table 4), it was evident that the position held by the trader in business influenced the types of apparel sold. All traders held the position of manager or assistant manager in their businesses. Thus, they were able to make crucial business decisions about the types of apparel to sell depending on the business' performance in terms of customer satisfaction and sales made.

Influence of Sources of Fabric/Clothing

According to the study, that fabric/clothing from foreign sources was considered of high quality and most preferred by clientele, compared to fabric/clothing from Kenyan sources. It was therefore necessary to determine whether or not the types of apparel sold by traders were influenced by these sources. A Chi-square of 22.9 with p<0.05 indicated that the source of fabric/clothing is associated with the types of apparel sold by traders (Table 5). Most Imported and Locally made apparel traders (97.7%, 54.3%) preferred foreign sources for their merchandise compared to 2.3% and 45.7% of the locally made apparel traders that preferred Kenyan sources for their fabric/clothing. The study revealed that most of the traders who preferred Kenyan items either sold uniforms for school and work or sold tourist items.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that there is a strong influence (p<0.05) of specific traders' socio-economic characteristics (age, position, source of fabric/clothing) on the types of apparel they chose to sell. Apparel traders already in the business or aspiring traders (especially in developing countries experiencing market liberalisation) could adopt these factors to increase their competitiveness. Further the results revealed that apparel traders were aware of such factors as good workmanship, right size, right style and right price that customers considered when selecting garments to buy, thus tried to buy merchandise accordingly. Knowledge of such issues as selecting merchandise that appealed to clientele, being a good salesperson, using eye-catching techniques of visual merchandising to display apparel, planning for the future and enjoying one's occupation was prevalent among most traders. These factors contributed to increased sales hence positive business performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Local fabric/clothing producers and other related organisations need to address themselves to the socio-economic factors influencing local apparel traders to prefer foreign to local fabric/clothing sources. Attention should be given to the implications of these factors on local fabric/clothing production and marketing if the local industry is to meet consumer needs satisfactorily.

2. There is need for various consumer organisations responsible for protecting consumers' interests to launch a vigilant campaign on the need to promote local apparel.

3. The role of various sectors in the apparel industry, such as the Export Processing Zone, Kenya Bureau of Standards and Ministry of Trade and Industry, should be included in the Home Economics curriculum at all educational levels. This will provide learners with adequate knowledge on the functioning of the apparel industry, should they pursue it.

4. The Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Kenya Bureau of Standards should formulate mechanisms that will enable apparel traders to access information easily on existing trends and policies to improve the quality of local items.

This study provides critical information on local apparel traders' knoeledge of consumer clothing preferences and buyng practices and how they harnessed this knowledge in order to flourish within the liberalised market. The information collected through this study is important to apparel traders in Kenya, fabric/ clothing producers, curriculum developers, consumer organisations and related government ministries.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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