Precursors of customer satisfaction for sustainable high-end footwear fashion in omni-channel retailing

Tatenda T. Chabata (a)*

(a) Ph.D., Department of Marketing and Retail Management, University of South Africa, Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, Pretoria, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intricate relationship between omni-channel retailing, high-end sustainable footwear, and customer satisfaction within an emerging market context. With a focus on Generation Z consumers, the research delves into the correlation between customisation, pricing, customer service, personalisation, and supply chain transparency as precursors of customer satisfaction in the high-end sustainable footwear fashion sector. The study is grounded in the recognition of the growing importance of sustainability in the fashion industry, whereby eco-conscious consumption is on the rise. The research addresses the gap in fragmented studies on omni-channel retail strategies in the high-end sustainable market. Utilising a positivist quantitative research approach, the researcher employs a convenience sampling technique by collecting data from a total sample of 268 Generation Z consumers who have purchased high-end sustainable footwear from South African omni-channel retailers. A structured online survey questionnaire, featuring five Likert-scale questions is used for data collection. The researcher proposes hypotheses that are tested primarily by utilising the latest SPSS version. The results of the study demonstrate that customisation, price, customer service, personalisation and supply chain transparency all positively influence customer satisfaction with regard to high-end sustainable footwear. The significance of the study lies in its potential to contribute valuable insights for high-end sustainable footwear omni-channel retailers in an emerging market, enabling them to enhance customer satisfaction levels and align with the growing demand for environmentally friendly and ethically sourced sustainable fashion. Additionally, the research aims to fill existing knowledge gaps in the South African market and contribute to the global discourse on sustainable fashion and consumer behaviour.

Introduction

The retailing industry is moving towards omni-channel (OC) retailing, where customers can move seamlessly from one channel to another (Melacini et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift towards omni-channel retail supply chain procedures, with large and small retailers investing in multi-channel supply processes (Wajid Ali & Islamia, 2022). Omni-channel retailing has become a phenomenon in the retail sector, revolutionising and enabling both retailers and customers to transact across diverse platforms. Omni-channel retailing refers to “an approach that involves the use of various digital and physical channels by retailers to interact with their customers” (Intel, 2019). It includes social media, mobile applications (apps), e-commerce sites, conventional brick-and-mortar retailers, etc (Siregar et al., 2023).

Omni-channel retailing can also be considered a customer-centric approach that focuses on delivering a unified and consistent brand experience across multiple channels. In addition, omni-channel retailing refers to the seamless integration of various shopping channels, such as online platforms, mobile apps and physical stores, to provide customers with a unified and enhanced shopping experience (Riaz et al., 2021). The definitions of “omni-channel retailing provided in this study highlight the emphasis on the integration of channels, consistency, personalisation and a customer-centric approach to deliver a unified shopping experience...
The shopping experience in the fashion industry has been altered by omni-channel shopping procedures, which have also influenced consumer behaviour in general.

Trends show that the fashion industry is investing heavily in digitalisation to meet the needs of a new generation that demands mobility and immediacy (Lorenzo-Romero et al., 2020), while catering for customers’ channel preferences. On the other hand, the notion of sustainability has grown enormously in significance in the modern fashion industry. Customers are looking for products that are both eco-friendly and stylish. High-end sustainable footwear has come to represent responsible consumption; it is distinguished by its eco-friendly materials, craftsmanship and ethical sourcing (Popa et al., 2019). Therefore, it becomes crucial to comprehend the elements and circumstances that influence consumer satisfaction – through their purchase of sustainable high-end footwear – to increase sustainable product consumption.

“Customer satisfaction” is defined as a measure of how happy customers are with a business’s product or service (Franklin, 2023). Jegadeeswari et al. (2021) define “customer satisfaction” as the overall positive impression of a supplier, encompassing all customer interactions. According to Jocevski et al. (2019), business views and the process of business changes through omni-channel strategies remain underinvestigated from a customer satisfaction perspective. Focusing on South Africa specifically, this study investigates the complex interaction between omni-channel shopping, high-end sustainable footwear and customer satisfaction (Wedelbrand & Ödling, 2021) as the main variables of interest. South Africa, which has one of the largest economies on the African continent, has experienced an increase in the interest of eco-conscious consumption and a growing understanding of environmental challenges. The research gaps identified reveal a dearth of empirical studies that are specific to South Africa and limited research on the impact of omni-channel retailing antecedents on customer satisfaction specific to high-end sustainable footwear fashion.

Jibril et al. (2020) explored the initial adoption of online retail stores in a low internet penetration context, which could be relevant to the digital aspect of omni-channel retailing; however, that study was not conducted in the context of high-end sustainable footwear, which is a growing sector among South African consumers. Furthermore, Hole et al. (2019) provided a broader perspective on the opportunities and challenges of omni-channel retailing but did not focus on the South African context. These studies collectively point to the need for more comprehensive research on South African omni-channel retailers, particularly in terms of fashion-related consumer behaviour and digital transformation. Therefore, there is a need to better understand the specific challenges and opportunities for omni-channel retailers in the South African market. Customer satisfaction dynamics are further complicated by the dynamic nature of omni-channel retailing, which requires additional empirical studies to investigate and provides novel insights for omni-channel retailers. Businesses need to know the precise omni-channel factors that influence customer satisfaction to optimise their operations and satisfy sustainability-conscious customers. This research recognises the importance of customer satisfaction in the retail industry through the process of assessing the influence of omni-channel retailing strategies on customer satisfaction. The study researcher emphasises the need for retailers to prioritise and understand their customers’ preferences, expectations and experiences across such a channel. A better understanding of the factors that influence customer satisfaction from an omni-channel retailing perspective may ultimately foster customer loyalty and retention.

The research problem first revolves around the limited understanding of omni-channel retailing, then around the antecedents that result in customer satisfaction: when purchasing high-end sustainable footwear brands through omni-channel retailers. The problem further revolves around the lack of insight into the factors within omni-channel retailing that influence customer satisfaction in general. Thus, the key research question that guides this study is as follows:

**What are the omni-channel retailing factors that influence Generation Z customer satisfaction, derived from purchasing high-end sustainable footwear fashion?**

The objectives of this study are as follows: i) to investigate the effect of omni-channel customisation on customer satisfaction; ii) to ascertain the relationship between omni-channel prices and customer satisfaction with regard to high-end sustainable footwear; and iii) to evaluate the contribution of customer service to customer satisfaction. iv) Determine the effect of personalised omnichannel sustainable product offerings on customer contentment. v) Assess the relationship between supply chain transparency and customer satisfaction. vi) Determine the overall level of consumer satisfaction that is obtained from the purchase of premium sustainable footwear through an omni-channel retail setting.

**Literature Review**

Omni-channel retailing is conceptualised as a strategic approach adopted by sustainable high-end footwear retailers to provide a seamless and integrated shopping experience across various channels, including physical stores and online platforms (website and mobile) for their customers. Whereas people sometimes confuse omni-channel retailing with multichannel retailing, where the latter focuses on offering multiple channels independently, in this study the researcher clearly shows that omni-channel retailing emphasises the importance of multichannel integration to enhance sustainable high-end footwear customer experience (Hee et al., 2021).

Omni-channel selling is especially noteworthy in the realm of high-end sustainable footwear. Customers who are interested in such products typically seek out items that strike a harmonious mix between luxury and environmental responsibility (Afonso, 2021). Consumers of such products desire a shopping experience that is consistent with their principles, one that skilfully blends the luxury...
appeal of fashion with the comforts of environmental sustainability. Within this framework, omni-channel strategies let merchants demonstrate their dedication to sustainability while satisfying the needs and wants of customers seeking high-end, environmentally friendly products.

Although the uptake of omni-channel retailing was on the rise because of technological innovation and the demand for convenience by consumers, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the significance and adoption of omni-channel retailing. The pandemic gave rise to abrupt changes in consumer behaviour, most notably a rapid uptake of digital touchpoints and online buying. Lockdowns and health concerns made it difficult for customers to shop in-store, so many resorted to social commerce, mobile app purchases and e-commerce (Solem et al., 2023). Consequently, it is now more important than ever to integrate online and offline channels to meet the ever-evolving demands of customers' purchasing habits. Because omni-channel retailing provided a link between the physical and digital worlds and allowed customers to access luxury sustainable footwear while maintaining social distancing and safety protocols, it became a lifeline for both retailers and customers (Nguyen, 2023; Pettip Olavarrieta, 2022).

Omni-channel retailers aim to connect all customer touchpoints by enabling customers to transition seamlessly between channels during their shopping journey. This integration requires retailers to align inventory, promotions, pricing and customer information across all channels (Locad, 2023). Channel integration enables customers to switch between channels effortlessly, allowing them to browse, purchase and interact with the retailer seamlessly (Schmidt, 2022). Moreover, retailers aim to provide consistent brand messaging and experiences across channels. This approach is crucial in omni-channel retailing as customers expect a seamless transition and access to the same product information, prices and promotions, regardless of the channel that they choose (Lee et al., 2019).

Numerous studies have been conducted on omni-channel retailing and customer satisfaction within the larger field of retailing (Wang et al., 2022; Sorkun et al., 2020). In another study, Zhang et al. (2018) showed that when a retailer integrates their channels, it can lead to increased customer empowerment, trust and satisfaction. Furthermore, the use of online services in omni-channel retailing can enhance customer satisfaction and increase profits, with the optimal strategy depending on the specific scenario and the webrooming effect (Ji et al., 2022). Researchers and industry professionals have investigated how integrating several shopping channels, such as physical storefronts, online retailers and mobile apps, can improve customers’ overall shopping experiences (Sousa et al., 2021; Lin & Chen, 2022). Exceptional shopping experience is particularly important for those consumers who are tech-savvy and value seamless interactions across channels (Gunawan et al., 2021).

To achieve a seamless customer experience, customers can begin their shopping journey through one channel and then continue through another without disruption or disturbance. A good example could be a customer’s starting by browsing high-end sustainable footwear online, then visiting a physical store to try the product on, and then making the final purchase through a mobile app (Locad, 2023), after which the product is couriered to their doorstep. Therefore, the ability of customers using omni-channel retailing to transition between channels effortlessly provides them with convenience, flexibility and a wider choice, which can enrich the purchase satisfaction of customers.

Customer satisfaction is the degree to which a customer's expectations are fulfilled by a product or service (Hee et al., 2021). It consists of the subjective judgement of the customer's encounter with the business, product or service while considering multiple elements like product quality, service interactions, pricing, convenience and post-purchase encounters (Al Mamun & Nawi, 2017; Kibebsii et al., 2022). Customer satisfaction signifies the customer's viewpoint on the value they have received in comparison with their initial expectations, and it significantly influences their loyalty, repurchase intentions and likelihood of recommending the brand to others.

Therefore, the link between omni-channel retailing and customer satisfaction is noteworthy as, firstly, omni-channel retailing and meeting customer expectations are vital across various aspects. Meeting customers’ expectations is not always easy for businesses, but ensuring product quality is delivered is ideal for customer satisfaction. Thus, it is important that consumers find products that match their needs and desires. Secondly, pricing plays a role in customer satisfaction because customers are becoming increasingly price-conscious and expect competitive pricing across all channels. Moreover, customer perception of value is influenced by the price they pay and the benefits they receive from the products or services they buy. Retailers who implement fair pricing, discounts, promotions, and transparent pricing strategies enhance the perceived value of their offerings, thus contributing to greater customer satisfaction (Mulder & Cunningham, 2022).

In addition, retailers who excel in excellent customer service delivery across all touchpoints can build trust and foster loyalty in their customers (Christoforou & Melanthiou, 2019). Supply chain transparency has a significant impact on customer satisfaction in the retail industry. Ahmed (2021) found that a strategic supplier partnership, customer relationship, information sharing, information quality and postponement practice all positively influence customer satisfaction. Customisation in retail also significantly influences customer satisfaction. In a study by Wang et al. (2022), it was established that the trade-off between customer satisfaction and enterprise profit in a dynamic customisation model was crucial in co-creating the need for a balance of trade.

Research has shown the importance of personalisation for customer satisfaction in the retail industry (Sharok & Ivanova, 2022). Tyrvåinen et al. (2020) found that personalised marketing in e-grocery settings can increase customer trust. The positive effects of personalisation on customer experience and loyalty in omni-channel retailing is also regarded as essential. Herbas Torrico and Frank
(2019) added a cultural perspective, showing that consumer desire for personalisation can moderately affect customer satisfaction and enhance the importance of perceived usage benefits in product evaluations. The aforementioned studies collectively underscore the importance of personalisation in driving customer satisfaction in the retail sector. By focusing on these key areas, omni-channel retailers can create a positive and satisfying shopping experience that resonates with their customers and drives business success.

In the world of fashion, high-end sustainable footwear is a unique symbol of ethical consumption, which seems to be less addressed in extant literature. High-end sustainable footwear is distinguished from traditional luxury goods by its unwavering dedication to exceptional quality, ethical sourcing, environmentally friendly materials and flawless craftsmanship (Marques, 2018). High-end sustainable footwear is the epitome of a tasteful yet sensible fusion of fashion and environmental consciousness. Customer satisfaction becomes a very complex and multidimensional aspect in such a setting. It goes beyond the conventional characteristics, such as cost and ease of use, that are usually linked with customer satisfaction (Dabija et al., 2019). When purchasing such products, consumers expect that their purchases will both express a strong commitment to environmental and ethical ideals and complement their unique style.

Consumers of high-end sustainable footwear prioritise the product's environmental and ethical features, which are linked with their level of satisfaction. This involves incorporating aspects such as ethical labour practices, sustainable material sourcing, fair labour treatment and lowering the carbon footprint of the product over its whole existence. These are the essential components that set sustainable high-end footwear apart and attract customers (Cagnin & Nicolas, 2022). Consumers of high-end sustainable fashion are fulfilled by knowing that their purchase makes a real difference in the fashion industry's transition to a more ethical and sustainable one. Additionally, being delighted with the product's appearance and functionality (Gazzola et al., 2020) would fulfill customers’ requirements, while reducing any potential post-purchase dissonance.

Consequently, the elements affecting customer satisfaction in the context of high-end sustainable footwear are deeply ingrained in ethics and sustainability rather than being purely transactional. These goods are appealing not only because they are luxurious but also because they are good examples of responsible consumption. Fulfilling the demands of customers of high-end sustainable footwear means providing more than simply a fashionable shoe; it is also a means of representing their dedication to a better, more conscientious fashion future. High-end sustainable footwear can be better identified by its adherence to sustainability principles. Customers are searching for items that can demonstrate their dedication to sustainability in addition to those that simply claim to be eco-friendly (Piporos et al., 2017). Consumers of high-end, sustainable footwear are becoming increasingly interested in customisation choices (Baier et al., 2020). This interest is driven by a desire for unique, personalised products that align with their ethical and sustainable values (Luca & Loghin, 2016). This feature gives customers the ability to influence the style and customisation of their shoes. In addition, personalisation not only makes a product more distinctive, but it also shows a brand's dedication to making shoes that suit individual preferences and morals.

Supply chain transparency is another essential component of consumer happiness that cannot be compromised. Customers are curious about the process that goes into making their shoes, from sourcing to production (Cotarelo et al., 2021). They may be guaranteed ethical, responsible labour practices and traceable materials with a transparent supply chain. A brand and its customers create a trusted relationship when there is a mutually acceptable level of transparency.

While research on sustainability in luxury goods and fashion has been conducted, relatively little of it focuses on high-end sustainable footwear in the context of omni-channel factors influencing customer satisfaction of such niche products. This research deficit is especially noticeable in the South African setting, where there is a distinct consumer base with sophisticated and environmentally concerned preferences (Purcărea et al., 2022).

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks are mandatory in research, with the former explaining the nature of being and the latter guiding the research process (Wade et al., 2016). The integration of a theoretical framework into a research study is challenging but essential, as it informs the problem, purpose and significance of the research (Heale & Noble, 2019). Moreover, theoretical frameworks reflect the researcher's ontological and epistemological perspective and should be integrated into every aspect of the research to demonstrate its contribution to knowledge (Heale & Noble, 2019). The theoretical framework that underpins this study consists of five omni-channel factors adopted from the omni-channel retailing model, as well as how those factors influence customer satisfaction. In this study, they are referred to as the five precursors of customer satisfaction, namely customisation, pricing, customer service delivery, personalisation and supply chain transparency.

The omni-channel retailing model highlights how crucial it is to provide clients with a unified and consistent purchasing experience in the context of high-end sustainable footwear. By adopting the omni-channel retailing model, the researcher recognises that buyers of luxury sustainable products, such as expensive or premium sustainable shoes, anticipate a shopping experience that goes beyond typical brick-and-mortar stores and online retailers (Ye et al., 2018). Consumers want ease of use, adaptability and the ability to communicate with brands through a variety of channels, including social media, mobile apps, online shopping and physical stores (Quang Hung et al., 2022).

Consequently, the sustainable fashion theory is important in this study because it provides crucial background information and guiding ideas for comprehending the idea of upscale sustainable footwear. This theory goes beyond the simple aesthetics of apparel.
and accessories to explore the many facets of sustainability in the fashion industry. It emphasises the importance of ethical sourcing and promotes materials that are produced and acquired in a way that respect workers' rights and dignity and lessen social exploitation (Hwang et al., 2023). The sustainable fashion theory also promotes the use of environmentally friendly materials, encouraging the use of materials and components with low environmental impact during manufacturing and disposal (Bhutto et al., 2023). The theory further supports supply chain transparency, advocating for an identifiable and transparent route from the outsourced raw material to the finished product and to the purchase and use of the product; as such, it guarantees that ethical standards are maintained throughout the value chain. The sustainable fashion theory promotes ethical production methods and encourages fashion labels to cut back on pollution, waste and energy use during production (Zaka & Al Juboori, 2023).

Additionally, the sustainable fashion theory serves as the cornerstone for understanding the qualities that are most significant to environmentally concerned buyers of luxury sustainable footwear. These customers are not merely looking for a fashionable item; they are also using their purchase to demonstrate their devotion to moral and environmental principles (Sony & Ferguson, 2023). Hence, this research focuses on how the factors derived from the theoretical framework influence customer satisfaction in a high-end sustainable footwear environment.

Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual model developed for this study.

![Figure 1: Conceptual model explaining customer satisfaction precursors; Source: Authors (2024)](image)

**H1:** Omni-channel customisation positively influences customer satisfaction regarding high-end sustainable footwear.

**H2:** Omni-channel prices have a significantly positive influence on customer satisfaction regarding high-end sustainable footwear.

**H3:** Omni-channel customer service delivery positively influences customer satisfaction regarding high-end sustainable footwear.

**H4:** Omni-channel personalisation positively influences customer satisfaction regarding high-end sustainable footwear.

**H5:** Supply chain transparency through omni-channel retailing has a significantly positive influence on customer satisfaction regarding high-end sustainable footwear.

The researcher therefore aims to test the proposed hypotheses to address the aforementioned research objectives.

Research and Methodology

Data were collected through an online questionnaire in the months of September and October 2023. The questionnaire was provided to young Generation Z individuals who had purchased high-end sustainable footwear from an omni-channel retailer. The online questionnaire was shared using convenience sampling techniques through social networks (Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter)). Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and participants were informed about the purpose of the study so that the researcher could obtain their informed consent. A pre-test of the survey was also performed to assess whether respondents understood the questions. The sample collected contained successfully completed responses from 268 participants. The questionnaire comprised two main sections: the first section contained questions regarding the socio-demographic characterisation of the participants; the second section contained questions pertaining to the variables of interest for the study. The questions were anchored on a 5-point scale, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree. The data were analysed by using the latest Statistical Package for Social Sciences to obtain both descriptive and inferential statistics.
Results and findings

Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are crucial aspects of research, ensuring the consistency and accuracy of data collection and analysis (Bashir & Marudhar, 2018; Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021). Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of results, while validity concerns the truthfulness and accuracy of the data (Mohan, 2017). A Cronbach alpha result/value above 0.70 would be considered acceptable, but higher values, such as 0.80 or 0.90, are preferred, especially when dealing with critical assessments (Bhattacherjee, 2011). Table 1 provides the Cronbach alpha results for the constructs in question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>α (or coefficient alpha)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customisation</td>
<td>0.761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>0.867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service delivery</td>
<td>0.792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalisation</td>
<td>0.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply chain transparency</td>
<td>0.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer satisfaction</td>
<td>0.865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors (2024)

All the constructs obtained a Cronbach alpha value above 0.7 and were thus acceptable based on the criteria for reliability tests. Generally, a Cronbach alpha above 0.70 is considered acceptable, but it is important to acknowledge that the level of reliability can vary depending on the nature of the construct being measured and the specific goals of the research (Ellis, 2012). In this context, the reliability coefficient obtained suggests a reasonable and acceptable degree of consistency among the items in question, indicating that the scale or instrument used in the procedure has an acceptable level of reliability.

The socio-demographic results regarding age revealed that most respondents were within the 18–20-year age bracket, thus accounting for the Generation Z cohort of respondents. In terms of gender, 64.15% of the respondents were female and only 35.85% were male. Based on their academic qualifications, the majority had a bachelor’s degree, accounting for 49.1% of the sample. This was aligned with their knowledge of sustainable consumption practices. Most respondents earned below R10 000, accounting for 66% of the sample. Table 2 provides the results of the hypotheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesised relationships</th>
<th>Path coefficients</th>
<th>P-values</th>
<th>Significant/Insignificant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>0.688</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Significant and supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>0.908</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Significant and supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>0.732</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Significant and supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>0.751</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>Significant and supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>Significant and supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors (2024)

Table 2 provides a summary confirming the positive significance of all the variables as precursors of customer satisfaction in an omnichannel retail environment. The p-value of all the precursors was less than 0.05, signifying that all the hypotheses were accepted. Supply chain transparency had a much stronger effect on customer satisfaction in terms of the purchase of high-end sustainable footwear, with a beta coefficient of 0.965. This was followed by price, with a beta coefficient of 0.908. Personalisation also influences customer satisfaction regarding the purchase of high-end sustainable footwear, with a beta coefficient of 0.751. Both customer service delivery and customisation had a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction, with a beta coefficient of 0.732 and 0.688, respectively.

Findings and Discussions

Customisation was statistically significant (F (1, 51) = 31.118, p < 0.001), explaining 37.9% of the variance in customer satisfaction (R² = 0.379). The unstandardised coefficient for customisation (B = 0.688, p < 0.001) indicates that for each one-unit increase in customisation, customer satisfaction is expected to increase by 0.688 units. Greater customisation options contribute positively to customer perceptions of product satisfaction. This can also be seen in previous research. Hu et al. (2016) and Hu et al. (2022) both highlight the positive impact of customised logistics services on online shoppers' satisfaction and loyalty. The findings in this study align with the work of Jain and Sundström (2021), who emphasised the importance of customisation in creating unique and satisfying customer experiences. Customisation fosters a sense of personal connection and ownership, contributing to overall satisfaction (Scholl-Grissemann, et al., 2020).

The price variable is highly significant (F (1, 51) = 93.488, p < 0.001), explaining 64.7% of the variance in customer satisfaction (R² = 0.647). The unstandardised coefficient for price (B = 0.908, p < 0.001) indicates that for each one-unit increase in prices, customer satisfaction is expected to increase by 0.908 units. This finding aligns with economic theories suggesting that consumers often
associate higher prices with enhanced product quality or exclusivity, thus positively affecting satisfaction. Price positively influences satisfaction (Ramadhanii et al., 2020; Indajang et al., 2023) in different settings and contexts.

The customer service variable is highly significant (F (1, 51) = 74.547, p < 0.001), explaining 59.4% of the variance in customer satisfaction (R² = 0.594). The unstandardised coefficient for customer service (B = 0.732, p < 0.001) indicates that for each one-unit increase in customer service quality, customer satisfaction is expected to increase by 0.732 units. This aligns with established principles in customer relationship management, emphasising the critical role of service delivery in shaping positive customer perceptions. Hee et al. (2021) and Merritt and Zhao (2020) also highlight the importance of a seamless and integrated shopping experience in increasing customer satisfaction. Superior customer service has consistently been linked to increased satisfaction and loyalty (Khan et al., 2022). These findings reinforce the notion that exceptional service is a key driver of overall customer satisfaction in the high-end sustainable footwear sector.

The regression model, featuring the personalisation variable, is statistically significant (F (1, 51) = 38.796, p < 0.000), explaining 43.2% of the variance in customer satisfaction (R² = 0.432). The unstandardised coefficient for personalisation (B = 0.751, p < 0.000) indicates that for each one-unit increase in personalisation, customer satisfaction is expected to increase by 0.751 units. These findings align with contemporary marketing principles that highlight the significance of tailored and personalised experiences in shaping positive customer perceptions. Therefore, omni-channel retailers in the high-end sustainable footwear industry should prioritise and invest in effective omni-channel personalisation strategies to enhance overall customer satisfaction and potentially foster long-term customer loyalty. This is supported by previous research, which emphasises the importance of personalisation in enhancing customer satisfaction in retail (Baier & Rese, 2020; Tyrväinen et al., 2020). Personalisation tailors services to individual preferences, enhancing the overall shopping experience (Tyrväinen et al., 2020). This aligns with the growing trend in retail literature highlighting the role of personalisation in influencing and building customer loyalty and satisfaction. Sartorti et al. (2020) focused on the personalisation of the consumer experience in fashion e-commerce, particularly using virtual fitting rooms and personalised recommendations for shoppers.

The regression model indicating the supply chain transparency variable is highly significant (F (1, 51) = 119.670, p < 0.001), explaining 70.1% of the variance in customer satisfaction (R² = 0.701). The unstandardised coefficient for supply chain transparency (B = 0.965, p < 0.001) indicates that for each one-unit increase in supply chain transparency, customer satisfaction is expected to increase by 0.965 units. Transparent supply chains enhance consumer trust and satisfaction, reflecting the increasing importance of corporate social responsibility in consumer decision-making (Alshurideh et al. 2023). Increasing cross-channel coordination, optimising online and offline interfaces and using customer data to provide tailored recommendations are important tactics.

This study is significant for omni-channel retail stores in South Africa selling sustainable high-end footwear, as well as those intending to enter the lucrative fashion market. The study findings shed light on the factors influencing customer satisfaction regarding sustainable high-end footwear by emerging market Generation Z consumers. The understanding of customer satisfaction in the study context will assist businesses to formulate more appropriate strategies targeted at the market to achieve greater loyalty and retention of customers.

Omni-channel retailers in the high-end sustainable footwear industry should consider investing in personalisation strategies, competitive pricing, customer service delivery, personalisation and robust supply chain transparency to enhance customer satisfaction and potentially gain a competitive edge in the market. These are strategic recommendations that are in line with the distinct traits, interests, and behaviours of the target market, which consists of Gen Z customers. This entails improving the quality of the products offered, significantly improving omni-channel fulfilment procedures and utilising technology to provide a smooth and customised purchasing experience. As a result of the findings, businesses in the high-end sustainable footwear sector are urged to apply and maximise the proposed omni-channel components from this study carefully to improve customer satisfaction.

Omni-channel retailers’ plans should include personalisation, competitive pricing that matches perceived value, excellent customer service, tailored experiences, and open supply chain procedures. It is essential to invest in technology to enable smooth and customised interactions across channels. Furthermore, encouraging an ethical and transparent culture in the supply chain not only improves customer satisfaction but also reflects the values of socially and environmentally conscious consumers. Businesses may improve consumer loyalty, strengthen their position in the market and support the long-term viability of the high-end footwear sector by implementing these suggestions.

Conclusions

Retailers in the South African fashion industry can benefit greatly from the insights provided by this study, especially those that aim to improve their sustainability initiatives through omni-channel retailing best practices. The study offers a roadmap for those omni-channel retailers to optimise their operations and services by examining the effect of pricing strategies, supply chain transparency, personalisation and product customisation on customer satisfaction. This helps their bottom line and harmonises with the increasing demand for environmentally ethical retailing. Although the data analysis offers insightful information, it is important to recognise some constraints that might affect the applicability and complexity of the conclusions. The study is limited in its applicability to diverse consumer categories or businesses because of its reliance on a specific sample within the high-end sustainable footwear market. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the data limits our capacity to determine the long-term relationship between the
variables in question. Longitudinal research would offer a more thorough understanding of the dynamic correlations between the constructs in question. Future research projects could use a longitudinal design to capture the changing dynamics of customer satisfaction in response to shifting omni-channel tactics, thereby addressing the constraints, and building on the insights obtained. Lastly, there are other variables that were not considered in this study, such as the state of the economy and world events; these might have an impact on customer satisfaction and require further investigation. A more thorough perspective would be derived from considering how external influences, including cultural changes and technological improvements, affect customer satisfaction.

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All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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