Influencing Generation Y students’ clothing brand awareness: A gender perspective

Heleneze-Tiané Lues, (a)*

(a) Associate Professor, School of Management Sciences, North-West University, 1174 Hendrick Van Eck Boulevard, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly affected the global fashion industry, causing several changes that intensified competition between fashion retailers and brands, making it more challenging to establish or increase clothing brand awareness. Gender plays a crucial role in consumers’ perceptions and decision-making, highlighting the importance of understanding the role of gender in effectively establishing and increasing clothing brand awareness. The objective of the study was to determine whether differences exist in the creation of clothing brand awareness of Generation Y male and female students. This study followed a descriptive research design. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to students for voluntary completion. A total of 625 completed questionnaires were analysed by performing frequency analysis, descriptive statistics, internal consistency reliability, correlation analysis and regression analysis. After establishing the reliability of the measurement instrument, and confirming significant statistical relationships between all the constructs, multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The findings of the regression analysis revealed that for Generation Y male students, product, store image and advertising of clothing brands significantly influence their awareness of a brand; while for Generation Y female students, the price and advertising of clothing brands significantly influence their awareness of clothing brands. This study contributes to the literature relating to gender studies and brand awareness, and provides practical recommendations for clothing brands and retailers to more effectively establish or strengthen clothing brand awareness among Generation Y male and female consumers, respectively.

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic had an immense effect on the global economy and has affected the global fashion industry in numerous ways. While most economies are recovering, and the revenue generated from the fashion industry in South Africa and several other countries is expected to rise (Statista, 2022), some of the changes that occurred in the fashion industry include the ‘buy local’ campaigns implemented by various countries. These initiatives were implemented to encourage consumers to purchase locally manufactured apparel, thereby boosting the local economy (Businesswire, 2022; Smith, 2021). Furthermore, the increase in digitalisation has resulted in more e-commerce platforms to shop from (FashionUnited, 2021). A change in consumer behaviour was also noted, as more consumers are shopping online (Statista, 2022). This increase in online shopping and the consequent increase in local and international online stores has led to intensified competition among retailers (IBISWorld, 2022). As a result, it has become increasingly challenging for fashion manufacturers and retailers to remain competitive and gain and maintain the interest of their target market (McKinsey, 2021).

Branding has widely been used by organisations in various industries, including the fashion industry, as a way of differentiating a product from similar products on the market. This involves the development of a name or symbol and linking it to the manufacturer’s products (Keller, 2013). Within the fashion context, a fashion brand would, therefore, be any apparel, accessory or cosmetic product with a distinctive characteristic, such as a logo or name (Levy & Weitz, 2012). The brand adds value to the product beyond its basic or functional attributes. When consumers see a specific name or symbol, they ideally should be able to recognise the manufacturer...
of the products, or more importantly, be able to recall the brand from their memory when faced with the relevant product category (Keller, 2013).

Brand awareness plays an essential role in fashion retailers and brands’ financial performance and success (Decker, 2021). Brand awareness refers to an individual’s ability to identify a particular brand (Keller, 2013). As such, consumers can only purchase a product, service or brand if they know that the brand exists (Tweeddy, 2021), and the higher the brand awareness, the more likely it is that the brand would be considered in purchase decisions. To increase the awareness of brands, marketers make use of various marketing tools to enhance the individual’s experience with the brand (Keller, 2013). Some of these tools include product, price, store image and advertising (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000). To attain the maximum effectiveness of these marketing tools, it is essential that fashion brand managers and marketers understand their target markets clearly as well as the factors that could cause differences in perceptions, attitudes and ultimately, consumer behaviours (Rath, Bay, Petrizzi, & Gill, 2015).

Gender, as a socio-demographic variable, is prominent in the marketing and consumer behaviour literature, with the focus on understanding consumer behaviour and the influence of gender on consumers’ attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, purchase decision-making and the like (Büyükdag, 2021; Lee & Workman, 2021). This is because males’ and females’ decision-making processes, and the way in which information is processed, differ. Kartajaya, Kotler, and Setiawan (2017) explain that a man’s path to purchase is short compared to females. This means that most males shop with the intention to get the task done as quickly and as effortlessly as possible, while females will go to extra lengths to find the perfect product. Some of the studies found in the literature have focused on males and females’ responses to various marketing tools and on how to use gender as a segmentation variable (Khan, Fatma, Shamim, Joshi, & Rahman, 2020; Lee & Workman, 2021) across different industries, including the fashion industry (Kuruvilla, Joshi, & Shah, 2009). In the study conducted by Khan et al (2020), it was reported that gender moderates customers’ hotel brand loyalty. Furthermore, in the study conducted by Lee and Workman (2021) on fashion trendsetting among students at a Midwestern US university, it was found that male consumers are more loyal to their favourite fashion brand and perceived that brand to be of higher quality than females. Traditionally, females were known as the knowledgeable fashion-conscious consumers (Kurtulus & Ertekin, 2015); however, males’ involvement in fashion shopping has increased (Jackson, Stoel, & Brantley, 2011; Janse van Rensburg, 2022). This highlights the importance of understanding the role of gender in consumers’ clothing brand awareness, in order to alter marketing strategies to more effectively create and increase brand awareness among male and female consumers and thereby influence their fashion purchase decision-making. As such, the aim of this study is to determine whether differences exist in the creation of clothing brand awareness among Generation Y male and female students.

The introduction of the paper is followed by the literature review that comprise the conceptual background of brand awareness, an empirical review of the marketing mix elements and hypothesis development and a discussion on Generation Y individuals. Thereafter, the research and methodology of the paper is outlined, followed by the section that reports on the research findings, and the subsequent discussion thereof. Lastly, the conclusion of the paper sheds light on the key points of the paper, limitations, recommendations and future research avenues.

**Literature Review**

The aim of the literature review is to explore the theoretical foundations of brand awareness and the marketing mix elements’ influence on brand awareness. This section firstly investigates brand awareness within the context of Aaker’s brand equity model, followed by an empirical review of studies that are relevant to the focus of this study.

**Conceptual Background of Brand Awareness**

Brand awareness is defined by Jooste, Strydom, Berndt, and Du Plessis (2012) as the presence of a brand in the minds of consumers. Based on the brand equity model developed by Aaker in 1991, brand awareness plays a significant role in the building of brand equity. In fact, it is considered the first step of the process (Kucuk, 2017). This means that it is impossible to establish quality perceptions of a brand, brand associations (Buil, Chernatony, & Martínez, 2013), or to become loyal to a brand (Tong & Hawley, 2009), without first being aware of that brand (Kucuk, 2017). Moreover, a consumer will not purchase a brand without being aware of the brand’s existence (Malik, Ghafoor, Iqbal, Riaz, Hassan, Mustafa, & Shahbaz, 2013). In order to build brand equity, a brand should invest in its marketing mix elements and ensure the effective use thereof (Kucuk, 2017, Yoo et al, 2000). The relationship between the marketing mix elements and brand equity dimensions is illustrated in the extended brand equity model developed by Yoo et al (2000), which forms the conceptual framework of this study. Within this model, marketing mix elements such as price, store image and advertising were found to significantly influence consumers’ awareness of and association with a brand and ultimately brand equity. This is because a high level of brand exposure is required for a brand to be registered in a consumer’s memory. Only through repeated exposure will a consumer’s familiarity with a brand increase, which will create and strengthen the consumer’s awareness of the brand (Keller, 2013). Since the literature contribution made by Yoo et al (2000), numerous authors have become aware of the role that the marketing mix elements play in building brand awareness and as such, several other studies have investigated the relationship between brand awareness and the marketing mix with reference to store image, price, product and advertising (Andik, Munandar, Najib, & Rashid, 2021; Baig, Abrar, Jamil, Amjad, & Khan, 2017; Danil, 2016; Khan & Awan, 2019; Lang, Behl, Guzmán, Pereira, & Del Giudice, 2022; Lim & Guzmán, 2022; Oo, Jung, & Lee, 2021; Peter, Oundo, & Lydia, 2018; Rusdianto, 2016).
Empirical Review of the Marketing Mix Elements and Hypothesis Development

Store image can be explained as the way in which a store is perceived in a consumer’s mind (Diallo, Burt, & Sparks, 2015). Several tangible and intangible factors contribute to the image that is formed in consumers’ minds, such as the building design, customer service, store atmosphere and product quality (Watanabe, Torres, & Alfinito, 2019). Store image is a key component of the place element of the marketing mix (Kucuk, 2017) that not only attracts new customers (Burlison & Oe, 2018) and influences consumers’ store choices and preferences (Gundala, 2010), but also influences consumers’ awareness of brands (Kucuk, 2017). In the study conducted by Peter et al (2018), which investigated brand awareness combined with brand association, it was found that store image has a significant relationship with brand awareness/brand association. Likewise, Baig et al (2017) reported that store image has an impact on the awareness and association of private label brands’ prestige in the metropolitan cities of Faisalabad and Lahore, Pakistan. In line with the findings of these studies, Danil (2016) hypothesised that store image will have a significant impact on brand awareness/association; however, this hypothesis was rejected in the study. Based on the discussion above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1a: Store image has a statically significant influence on Generation Y male students’ clothing brand awareness.

H1b: Store image has a statically significant influence on Generation Y female students’ clothing brand awareness.

Price, which refers to the monetary expenditure in exchange for a product or service, is known to play a key role in consumers’ product selection (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). This role is highlighted by the fact that consumers frequently conduct price comparisons prior to purchasing a product (Kartajaya et al, 2017). While price is an indicator of product costs (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021), it also represents the value of factors such as the product benefits, attributes, quality and the image of the brand (Kincade & Gibson, 2010). Consequently, if the price of a product exceeds the value of its benefits, it is unlikely that the product will be purchased. From the literature, there is evidence that the price of a product could influence consumers’ awareness of a brand. In the study conducted by Rusdianto (2016), it was hypothesised that price influences brand awareness in mobile telecommunication services in Indonesia. Within the same line, Baig et al (2017) discovered evidence that perceived price moderates the relationship between store image and awareness and association in private label brands. Furthermore, in their study that focuses on supermarkets in Kenya, Peter et al (2018) found a statistically significant positive association between price and brand awareness. As such, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H2a: Price has a statically significant influence on Generation Y male students’ clothing brand awareness.

H2b: Price has a statically significant influence on Generation Y female students’ clothing brand awareness.

Within the context of the marketing mix, the product encompasses a physical article, service or idea that is purchased or used to satisfy a need (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). The product is considered central to the marketing mix, as it is the core motivator of a purchase (Jooste et al, 2012). Since the product itself comprises both intrinsic attributes, which refer to the physical characteristics such as the texture, colour and material, as well as extrinsic attributes that are indirectly related to the product, such as the packaging (Grunert, Loose, Zhou, & Tinggaard, 2015; Porral & Levy-Mangin, 2016), it is essential that manufacturers craft products with desirable intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics (Rosenau & Wilson, 2006) to ensure that the product is accepted in the market (Goi, 2011). Kucuk (2017) opines that a product has a significant impact on consumers’ awareness of a brand. The relationship between product and brand awareness was also supported in the study conducted by Khan and Awan (2019), who investigated the drivers for brand equity and found that a product’s functionality is a significant driver of brand awareness. Against the background outlined above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H3a: Product has a statically significant influence on Generation Y male students’ clothing brand awareness.

H3b: Product has a statically significant influence on Generation Y female students’ clothing brand awareness.

Advertising, as an element of the promotion mix, includes any type of nonpersonal promotion of goods, services or ideas that are paid for and in which the sponsor can be identified (Keller, 2013). While advertising has been used for centuries, the development thereof throughout the years ensured that it remains an effective means of communication between sellers and customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). The effectiveness of advertising is, however, dependent on the input factors such as the available budget, the type of messages conveyed in the advertisements (Martínez, Montaner, & Pina, 2009) as well as how accurately the target audience is identified and understood (Jobber, 2010). Advertising’s primary purpose is to attract consumers’ attention, convince consumers to purchase and create awareness for a brand (Kotler & Armstrong, 2021). These effects have been studied by researchers for several years and continue to be a topic of interest. When exploring the factors that affect brand preference, Andik et al (2021) found advertising to be a significant influencer of brand awareness. Likewise, Lang et al (2022) reported that the advertising efforts of global brands in fast-moving consumer goods in emerging markets, positively affect their brand awareness, while Lim and Guzmán (2022) reported that advertising had a significant influence on brand awareness of low involvement products. Oo et al (2021) reported similar findings in that advertising awareness positively affects the awareness of Korean brands. In light of this, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H4a: Advertising has a statically significant influence on Generation Y male students’ clothing brand awareness.
H4b: Advertising has a statically significant influence on Generation Y female students’ clothing brand awareness.

Generation Y Individuals

The youth, also labelled Generation Y individuals and millennials, are identified as the world’s largest consumer segment (Tolani, Sao, Bhadade, & Chandak, 2020). In South Africa, these individuals make up approximately 34 percent of the South African population (Stats SA, 2022). The Generation Y cohort is demarcated as consumers who were born between 1986 and 2005 (Bibby, Thiessen, & Bailey, 2019; Markert, 2004), which means, in the year 2023, they are between the ages of 18 and 37 years. The student portion of this consumer segment is a well-sought-after target market, given their promising future earning potential (Bevan-Dye, Dhurup, & Surujlal, 2009), which is associated with more disposable income and aggregate spending (Bevan-Dye, 2015). In 2022, there were 1 093 353 students registered at South African public higher education institutions (Chawula, 2022). The typical age range of the students is between 18 and 24 years (Tan, Teoh, Tan, Teo, & Tan, 2013). The average monthly spending of students amounts to R5 287 (Pillay, 2022), with clothing being a key expenditure (Ruha, 2022; Student village, 2019). Generation Y individuals are known to be fashion-conscious (Chui, Nik, & Azman, 2017) and considered fashion trendsetters (Smith, 2017), and therefore have the power to influence fashion brands and retailers’ success (Tangsupwattana & Liu, 2017). According to Kul (2018), these individuals are flexible in their fashion preferences, and consequently are open to trying new products (Tangsupwattana & Liu, 2017).

Research and Methodology

A descriptive research design was followed in this study. The study is quantitative in nature and a self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data from a convenience sample of 750 Generation Y students between the ages of 18 and 24 years. These students were registered at a South African higher education institution (HEI). The questionnaire was distributed to these registered students at three HEI campuses that were selected from a sampling frame of 26 HEIs using the judgement sampling method. The questionnaire included a section that requested the students’ demographic information and another section that measured the participants’ perceptions regarding the product, price, store image, advertising and awareness of their preferred clothing brand. The scaled questions that were used in the questionnaire comprised 16 items that were adapted from previously published scales (Chattopadhyay, Shivani, & Krishnan, 2010; Chen & Green, 2009; Dopico & Porral, 2012; Kim & Brandon, 2010; Lee, 2008; Tong & Hawley, 2009; Yoo et al, 2000). The IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 27, was used for data analysis. Data analysis included frequency analysis, descriptive statistics, internal consistency reliability, correlation analysis and regression analysis. For the descriptive statistics, the mean and standard deviations were calculated for each construct. Given that a six-point Likert scale was used, mean scores of above 3.5 indicated that the sample’s responses fell within the agreement range of the scale. The internal consistency reliability was assessed by calculating the Cronbach alpha for each construct, which should exceed 0.6 to be regarded as reliable. Correlation analysis was performed by assessing the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, where statistically significant relationships between all constructs suggest nomological validity. Thereafter, multiple linear regression analysis was performed and the regression model summary reports, the ANOVA results and coefficients were analysed.

Findings

A total of 625 questionnaires were completed and met the sample requirement of being between 18 and 24 years of age and therefore were included for data analysis. Table 1 indicates that the sample included slightly more female (53.5%) participants, while the largest portion of the sample was 20 (24.6%) years of age, followed by those who indicated being 21 (20.2%) years of age. In terms of the participants’ mother-tongue language, those speaking Sesotho (30.5%) were represented the most in the sample, followed by those who indicated isiZulu (20.8%) as their mother-tongue language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>isiNdebele</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>isiXhosa</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>isiZulu</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>Sesotho</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Sesotho sa Leboa Setswana</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SiSwati</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tshivenda</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Xitsonga</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors

Table 1: Sample description
The descriptive statistics for the total sample were calculated for the individual constructs, namely the means and standard deviations. In addition, Cronbach alpha values were computed for each construct to establish the internal consistency reliability of the scales. To ascertain the relationship between brand awareness, price, product, store image and advertising, and to establish nomological validity, a correlation matrix was constructed. The means, standard deviations, Cronbach alpha values and correlation coefficients are indicated in Table 2.

### Table 2: Descriptive statistics, reliability measures, and correlation matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Standard deviations</th>
<th>Cronbach alpha</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
<th>F4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand awareness (F1)</td>
<td>5.13</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.777</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price (F2)</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.653</td>
<td>0.206*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product (F3)</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.708</td>
<td>0.277*</td>
<td>0.233*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store image (F4)</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.614</td>
<td>0.263*</td>
<td>0.205*</td>
<td>0.359*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising (F5)</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.868</td>
<td>0.310*</td>
<td>0.123*</td>
<td>0.332*</td>
<td>0.329*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Statistically significant at p≤0.01 (2-tailed)

**Source:** Authors

As evident in Table 2, the mean scores of all the variables for the combined sample of male and female participants ranged between 4.52 and 5.13, exceeding 3.5, which suggests that the participants perceive their preferred clothing brand’s prices, product features and advertising as favourable as well as the image of the stores through which the brand is distributed. In addition, brand awareness (X̄ = 5.13) obtained the highest mean score, which implies that the participants are well aware of the preferred clothing brand.

The Cronbach alpha values of all the variables were calculated and are above the acceptable value of 0.6 (Malhotra, 2020), which suggests internal consistency reliability. The results of the correlation matrix revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between all five variables, ranging between (r=0.12; p<0.01) and (r=0.36; p<0.01), suggesting nomological validity (Malhotra, 2020).

**Table 3: Regression model summary and ANOVA results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1 (Brand awareness among males)</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Adjusted R²</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p-values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 2 (Brand awareness among females)</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>21.034</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Authors

As evident in Table 3, Model 1 predicts South African male students’ clothing brand awareness, whereas Model 2 predicts South African female students’ clothing brand awareness. The R² values of Model 1 demonstrate that 23 percent of the variance in South African male students’ clothing brand awareness (Model 1) and 14 percent of the variance in South African female students’ clothing brand awareness (Model 2) are explained by the four independent variables, namely price, product, store image and advertising. Conversely, 77 percent of the variation in Model 1 and 86 percent in Model 2 is not explained by these four variables, which means that other variables influence South African male and female students’ clothing brand awareness. The following step in the regression analysis is to determine each variable’s contribution toward the prediction of the students’ clothing brand awareness.

**Table 4: Contribution of independent variables to predict clothing brand awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardised beta coefficient</td>
<td>t-values</td>
<td>p-values</td>
<td>Standardised beta coefficient</td>
<td>t-values</td>
<td>p-values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store image</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistically significant at p < 0.05

**Source:** Authors

Based on the results presented in Table 4, product (β = 0.18, 0.00<0.05), store image (β = 0.27, 0.00<0.05) and advertising (β = 0.13, 0.02<0.05) have a statistically significant positive influence on South African male students’ clothing brand awareness. Therefore,
H1a, H3a, H4a was concluded and H2a was rejected. For South African female students, price (β = 0.11, 0.04<0.05) and advertising (β = 0.31, 0.00<0.05) have a statistically significant positive influence on their clothing brand awareness. As such, H2b and H4b was concluded and H1b and H3b was rejected. Figure 1 represents the findings of the regression model results, including the standardised beta coefficients.

For the South African male students, the largest beta coefficient was calculated for store image, thereby making the strongest contribution to their clothing brand awareness, followed by product and advertising. For South African female students, advertising has the largest beta coefficient, and therefore, is the strongest contributor to their clothing brand awareness, followed by price.

**Discussion**

This study sought to determine whether differences exist in the creation of clothing brand awareness among Generation Y male and female students. In particular, it focused on the price, product, store image and advertising elements of the marketing mix and its influence on Generation Y male and female students’ clothing brand awareness. While advertising plays a vital role in creating brand awareness among both Generation Y male and female students, the findings of the study suggest that different approaches should be taken when aiming to increase brand awareness among Generation Y male and female students. This is because price, and more significantly, advertising, are important factors to create and strengthen brand awareness among female students, while product, advertising and store image are significant to male students.

A possible reason why advertising is more significant in creating or strengthening brand awareness among females in this study could be that females tend to do more research on products than males do, which means that they are likely to search and view more advertisements than males (Kartajaya et al, 2017). In the process of searching for information on products, they might become aware of new clothing brands or strengthen their awareness of clothing brands. Furthermore, females are often more price aware and sensitive than males (Goi, 2011; Borges, Babin, Spielmann, 2013) and as a result, compare the prices of products prior to decision-making (Kartajaya et al, 2017; Stuart, 2019). By searching and comparing prices of clothing items with the aim to get the best deals, they might become aware of new brands or strengthen their awareness of clothing brands. Based on these findings, it is recommended that when targeting female consumers, clothing brands and manufacturers should provide informative advertisements on platforms that are easily accessible and popular, as this will likely create and strengthen the awareness of their brands among female consumers.

While advertising also creates and strengthens male consumers’ awareness of brands, the findings of the study suggest that the product itself and the image of stores make a larger contribution towards males’ clothing brand awareness. Given that males have a short and straightforward path to purchase (Kartajaya et al, 2017), and are motivated to get the task done, they tend to limit their shopping to the specific clothing items that are needed at that time (Robinson, 2022). In addition, they are willing to settle for the first item that meets their needs (Stuart, 2019). As such, if a male consumer has a need for a specific clothing item, he will go to the store to purchase the product and in search of that product, might become aware of a new clothing brand. Moreover, given that the image of the store would have a significant influence on whether the male consumer will enter the store, it consequently influences the likelihood that the male consumer will become aware of new brands. Therefore, it is recommended that clothing manufacturers and brands should carefully select and manage the stores through which their products are distributed, as the images of these stores and the products that are stocked in these stores are likely to influence male consumers’ awareness of their brands, which ultimately influences their performance and success.
Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant effect not only on the global economy, but also on the fashion industry. While the fashion industry in South Africa is recovering, several changes occurred within the industry, which led to an increase in competition among fashion brands and retailers. As a result, effective branding has become essential, and increased brand awareness among consumers has become an important strategic objective for several fashion brands and retailers. However, the role of gender in consumers' attitudes, perceptions, behaviours, and more specifically clothing purchase decision-making cannot be ignored. Therefore, the study sought to determine whether there are differences in the factors that create clothing brand awareness among Generation Y male and female students. The findings of the study revealed that price and advertising are significant for creating and strengthening clothing brand awareness among Generation Y female consumers. However, product, store image and advertising were the contributing factors for clothing brand awareness among Generation Y male consumers. Caution should be taken when generalising the findings of the study, as a convenience sampling method was used. This study provided insight into how clothing brand awareness is formed and strengthened among Generation Y female and male consumers and, consequently, how fashion brands and retailers could alter their marketing strategies to more effectively establish and strengthen clothing brand awareness among Generation Y male and female consumers, respectively. When implemented effectively, it could enhance clothing brand awareness, which would likely lead to stronger brand associations and, if positive, could result in higher brand loyalty and brand equity. Given that 77 percent of the variation in males' clothing brand awareness and 86 percent in females’ clothing brand awareness is not explained by the four variables included in the study, future research could investigate other variables that might influence South African male and female students’ clothing brand awareness.

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