



**THE EFFECTIVENESS OF UTILISING MERCHANDISE PLANNING AS
A CHANGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN THE CLOTHING RETAIL
INDUSTRY IN CAPE TOWN**

By

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Master in Retail Business Management in the Faculty of Business and
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Signed:

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ABSTRACT

Globalisation has resulted in the clothing retail industry being highly complex and clothing retail companies constantly have to deal with ever-changing consumer demands, competitive environment, economic challenges, and pandemics among other challenges. Clothing retail companies in South Africa are no exception to these challenges as the past years have witnessed some companies in the clothing retail industry closing their retail outlets. As a significant number of South African fashion retailers continue to struggle within the retail environment, a proposition was developed for this study as literature acknowledges the benefits of merchandise planning in a retail company.

The purpose of this research was to identify how merchandise planning could be used effectively to manage the ever-changing clothing retail industry in a selected fashion retail store in Cape Town. A clothing retail company was purposefully selected, and 12 participants involved in management were also purposively selected. A qualitative approach was used, and interviews were conducted on the selected participants. The study revealed the major challenges faced by the clothing retail company which other studies have also documented. This study also revealed that merchandise planning is being used as a strategy to manage demand effectively. Throughout this study, there has been examination and, where possible, explanation of the intricate relationship between merchandise planning and its ability to adapt to dynamic shifts in supply chains, global market trends, and local external factors, such as load shedding and the over-dependence on non-local manufacturing.

The study also established the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the fashion industry as a whole. The study further revealed the merchandise planning strategies used by the clothing retail company, including supply chain management, strategic management, technology and communication. By synthesising the evidence presented in the preceding chapters, meaningful conclusions that shed light on the significance and implications of merchandise planning in the retail business landscape were drawn. This study makes substantial contributions to the field of retail business management, particularly the field of clothing retailing, where there is not much literature available.

Keywords: Merchandise planning, change management, demand change, supply change, retail sector.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Globalisation has directly affected several economies and as a result, the clothing fashion industries among other industries, have often entered complex periods (Varat, 2021:1; Gazzola, Pavione, Pezzetti and Grechi, 2020:3). The fashion industry in South Africa has not been isolated by these globalisation pressures (Russell, 2021). The research problem identified for this study is centred on clothing retail companies that are facing several challenges in South Africa, as reported in Adam (2020:1). The problems that arise in the clothing and fashion industry are a result of the nature of the products, which have short life cycles as well as their highly unpredictable demand (Afrifa et al., 2021:585). This is aided by high inventory cost problems, which are primarily due to mismatches in supply-demand for products that either have short life cycles or are in highly unpredictable demand (Afrifa et al., 2021:585). Proper planning of merchandise, therefore, maximises return on investment through the proper and sound planning of sales and inventory to increase business profitability (Martínez-de-Albéniz and Kunnumkal, 2022:5049).

Merchandise planning is the process that is used to match supply with demand in the retail industry (García-Dastugue et al., 2023; Sarma et al., 2023). The objective of merchandise planning is to ensure that products are available to the customers at the right price, quantity, place, and time (Jacobs and Karpova, 2019:272). The major decisions that arise in the merchandise planning process include the choice of products, determining quantities to purchase, deciding how to source the products as well as how to distribute them to the retail stores, and finally, if necessary, changing their prices (Jakhar et al., 2020:2759). As proper merchandise planning has been regarded as a solution to avert unwanted losses, it is necessary to evaluate how clothing retail businesses in South Africa implement this management practice. This is motivated by the closure of clothing retail outlets of companies in South Africa (Davids, 2023) as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that caused a nationwide lockdown, forcing clothing retail businesses to close their stores. In this regard, this study aimed to establish how merchandise planning can be used as a

change management strategy by a selected clothing retail company in Cape Town, South Africa in order to understand better how product planning is used in retail businesses in South Africa. The next section provides the background of this study, contextualising information about the research topic.

1.2 Background

The retail clothing and fashion industry is recognised as a global business of approximately US\$1.3 trillion, which employs hundreds of millions of people worldwide and represents a significant economic force as well as a substantial driver of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (BOF & McKinsey, 2019). In recent times, this industry has experienced vast transformations and attained fast growth (Cunningham and De Meyer-Heydenrych, 2021:752) despite the deep financial crisis of the last decade (Wójcik and Ioannou, 2020:387). Retail clothing industries are presently operating in a dynamic and competitive environment as they offer similar products that target the same consumer market according to McKinsey, Deloitte Group and Boston Consulting Group (BCG), which are some of the leading international consultancy companies (Gazzola et al., 2020:1). In order for these retail clothing industries to stay ahead of this dynamic and ever-changing industry, they need to regularly produce innovative ideas (Joy et al., 2022:338).

One of the major factors that cause the retail clothing and fashion industry to be dynamic is consumer behaviour (Priyanka, 2019:5). With the ever-changing consumer behaviour, it is also essential for clothing retail companies to rethink the way they operate their business as they must focus their merchandise based on customer demand, termed merchandise planning (Cunningham, and De Meyer-Heydenrych, 2021:752). Merchandise planning is defined as the processes conducted by retailers to ensure that their products are available to the customers at the right place, time, quality, quantity, and price (Kartanegara, 2020:8). The overall goal of merchandise planning in the clothing retail industry is to maximise profits by reducing markdowns as well as achieving targets while limiting some excessive inventories (Cant and Bothma, 2023:408). Consumer demand is influenced by the changes in their income due to the economy, changes in sense of style, pandemics, and natural disasters just to name a few (Han, Liu and Ma, 2023:02). It is the responsibility of the merchandise

planner to predict or forecast these changes and implement the necessary steps to deal with them (Joy et al, 2022:339). Merchandise planners will have to implement a strategy called demand planning to deal with changes in consumer demand (Kumar et al., 2022:445). According to Ren et al. (2020:763), in the retail sector, the demand planning process is the process by which a retailer uses existing data and insights to predict how much of a specific product or service customers will want to purchase during a specified period. This technique combines the most appropriate features of existing systems (for example, historical data and deviance assessment) with brand-new features and methods, allowing clothes shops to overcome important issues that have yet to be resolved (Joy et al., 2022:339). This approach can be used by retailers whose primary business is to supply a particular classification, which is clothing, as well as the accomplishment of customer satisfaction.

The South African clothing retail industry is not an exception to the various pressures that affect the industry (Jacobs and Karpova, 2022a:56). The retail clothing sector in South Africa employs more than 350,000 people (Molala, 2024). Despite the economic power of the clothing retail industry in South Africa, various brands and clothing industries closed over the years with some forming partnerships in order to stay afloat in the changing world (Wood and Bischoff, 2020:31). The challenges experienced by various fashion designers in the retail industry as documented by Pooe and Mugobo (2020:68) include cash flow and funding, fabric, challenges associated with cutting, making and trimming (CMT) companies, skills and knowledge, fashion designer's business acumen, market access and location, human skilled resources, garment and production quality, fragmentation, costing, marketing and competition.

The clothing and textile industries are important economic sectors in the Western Cape Province (Pike, 2020) and Cape Town boasts explicitly a trove of stores and is a centre for fashionistas (Blyth, 2023). Clothing retail industries in Cape Town supply a wide range of authentic products that include handmade African garments, international brands, and casual wear among others (Blyth, 2023). Cape Town retail clothing companies however, also face the challenges described in the previous paragraph which motivated for the formation of the Cape Clothing and Textile Cluster (CCTC) in 2005. The aim of the CCTC was to assist textile and clothing firms to bolster

their competitiveness. Clothing and textile products valued at up to R4 billion are exported per annum from the Western Cape Province and approximately 220 000 workers are employed (Molala, 2024).

Several researchers have studied how merchandise planning is used in different aspects of the retail industry (Jacobs and Karpova, 2022a:53). They have identified a pattern in the retail sector in terms of consumer demand and performance according to historical data which helps merchandise planners make decisions for the upcoming sale of products. South African clothing retailers find themselves in a situation where they must determine the change in consumer demand after a series of events that influence consumer demand (Makhitha and Mbedzi, 2023:142). The challenges that the clothing industry of South Africa is facing in the retail aspect have not been explicitly documented, and as a result of this, the problems are largely unknown (Pooe and Mugobo, 2020:68).

It was therefore necessary to explore how merchandise planning is used in South Africa. This is based on the notion that the rightful delivery of a product at the rightful time and place is possible only if the retailers plan the merchandise well ahead of time, which instils customer trust and maximises profit. This study, therefore, investigated how merchandise planning is being used as a management strategy in an unpredictable situation, such as an economic downturn or an environment in which there are pandemics and unpredictable climates in South Africa. The next section discusses the problem statement of this study.

1.3 Problem statement

Globalisation has resulted in the clothing retail industry being highly complex and competitive as consumers' demands vary, thus pressuring companies in this sector to invest in better planning tools (Alatawy, 2022:119). The rapid changes in consumer preferences make it difficult for clothing retailers to predict the products that consumers will purchase and responding to the volatile market has proved to be a challenge for South Africa's clothing retail industry (Katemauswa and Naude, 2020:1). One of the biggest challenges that the clothing retail industry faces is supplying the right product at the right time and this requires a sound merchandise planning

protocols to prevent losses (GoVise Tech, 2020). Losses affect the performance of any retail business in the world, which can result in the closure of the business and associated economic losses that cascade to livelihoods (Mortimer et al., 2022:1496). The problem identified for this study is centred on the clothing retail industry that is facing several challenges in South Africa. During past years, the clothing retail industry has witnessed companies in South Africa closing some of their retail outlets (Davids, 2023). Many clothing companies relocated to other countries, while in some instances, the challenges experienced were so serious that some completely closed their operations in South Africa (Matsoma and Ambe, 2017:1; Calabrese and Balchin, 2022:34). Recently, the clothing retail industry was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic that caused a nationwide lockdown forcing clothing retail businesses to close their stores (Nimo, 2023). This is of concern owing to the contribution of the clothing retail sector to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of South Africa which decreased by nearly 16% between the first and second quarters of 2020 (Stats SA, 2020).

The absence of sound merchandise plans by fashion retailers has been shown to result in wrong merchandise being supplied and ultimately in customer dissatisfaction (Rintamäki et al., 2021:404). When customers are dissatisfied, there is a high chance that there will be goods overflowing which will result in heavy discounts being pegged on the goods to sell out the excessive undesired merchandise (GoVise Tech, 2020; Mortimer et al., 2022:1495). Losses are therefore incurred by discounting the goods and moreover, with no or poor merchandise planning, the clothing retailer will lose consumers to other competitors in the market (Shen et al., 2022: 682). As a significant number of South African fashion retailers continue to struggle within the retail environment (Pooe, 2020), this could be linked to lack of merchandise planning as documented in other studies. The purpose of this research was to investigate how merchandise planning is used effectively to manage the ever-changing clothing retail industry in a selected fashion retail store in Cape Town. The next section presents the significance of this study.

1.4 Significance of the study

The challenges faced by the clothing retail industry in South Africa have not been explicitly researched or documented. This study makes a substantial contribution to

this field of clothing retailing where there is not much literature and yet the clothing retail industry faces several challenges. The thrust of this research was to identify whether utilising merchandise planning as a change strategy will help retailers to make more accurate forecasts, which will help retailers to precisely plan quantities and goods to manufacture according to market changes.

This research will help the clothing retailing industry in Cape Town to understand product planning better, how to use it in their business, and how it may help them achieve their strategic organisational goals and profit margins. Merchandise planning will also assist merchants in defining and assessing diverse client preferences, allowing them to stay current with new industry trends, innovations, and market demand. Customers will benefit from the information in this study if used in a business since the business will stock the merchandise that customers want in the proper quantities, resulting in more satisfied customers.

This study is also important to the academic field as the information generated may be used for future references. In the future, a researcher might be interested in checking the progress of the implementation of merchandise planning in clothing retail companies in South Africa, and this study will serve as a reference point that will be useful for comparisons and establishing trends. This study also contributes to the fulfilment of the requirements of the Master's degree in Retail Business Management. Presented in the next section are the objectives of this study.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

South African clothing retailers find themselves in a situation where they must determine the change in consumer demand after a series of events that influence consumer demand. It is, therefore, necessary to explore how merchandise planning is used in South Africa. This study aimed to establish how merchandise planning can be used as a change management strategy by a selected retail shop.

1.5.1 Sub-objectives

- To determine the factors causing demand change in the clothing retailing industry in Cape Town.

- To determine the strategies within merchandise planning that can be used to deal with demand changes in the retail clothing industry in Cape Town.
- To identify the benefits of having efficient and effective merchandise planning strategies in the clothing retailing industry in Cape Town.

1.6 Primary Research Question

How is merchandise planning being implemented as a change management strategy in the clothing retailing industry in Cape Town?

1.6.1 Supporting Questions

- What are the major factors that cause demand changes in the clothing retailing industry in Cape Town?
- What strategies within merchandise planning can be used to deal with demand changes in the retail clothing industry in Cape Town?
- What are the benefits of having an efficient and effective merchandise plan in the clothing retailing industry in Cape Town?

1.7 Proposition

- *Proposition 1*

Much has been written about how strategies within merchandise planning can be used to deal with the ever-changing demand in the clothing retail industry (Cant & Bothma, 2023:408). By exploring the major factors that cause customer change the following proposition was formulated:

There are major factors that cause demand changes in clothing retailers in Cape Town.

- *Proposition 2*

The dynamic nature of the present clothing retail market places a premium on a retailer's ability to anticipate and respond to customer needs and changing pressures (Coskun et al., 2020:764). By exploring these strategies implemented by the retailers, the following proposition was formulated:

There are strategies within merchandise planning that can be used to deal with demand changes in the retail clothing industry in Cape Town.

- *Proposition 3*

The literature indicates the benefits of merchandise planning in the fashion retail industry (Parker-Strak et al., 2022:248). It is necessary to explore how retailers in South Africa implement merchandise planning as a business strategy. The following proposition is set in the context of the above-mentioned:

There are benefits to having an efficient and effective merchandise plan.

1.8 Definition of key concepts

Merchandise planning

This is the process by which a retailer strives to provide the appropriate amount of merchandise at the right time, in the right place while staying within the company's financial budget (García-Dastugue et al., 2023).

Change Management

It is defined as transforming current business practices into a new style or model to deal with quick changes in the business world while optimising profit (Errida and Lotfi, 2021).

Demand change

This is a shift in consumer desire to purchase a particular good or service (Bianchini, and Tricase, 2017).

Never Out of Stock

This is a strategy utilised by retailers to never run out of stock of their key value items that contribute a high-profit margin (Bianchini, and Tricase, 2017).

Change influencers

These are external or internal factors that contribute to changes in demand, change in supply, and change in strategy (Belanche et al., 2021).

Demand planning

In the retail industry, demand planning is a process in which a retailer uses existing data and insights to forecast how much of a given product or service customers would wish to buy over a set period (Ren et al., 2020:761).

Product assortment planning

Refers to the determination of variety (that is, number of different product categories), depth (that is, number of stock-keeping units/distinct items for sale, within a product category), and service level (that is, amount of merchandise inventory within a product category) in retailers product portfolio (Tsafarakis, 2015).

Automatic store ordering system

This is a system in a retail shop adapted to automatically order merchandise for future sale according to the average past sales of the merchandise (Cao, 2021).

Demand seasonality

This is a report that forecasts which merchandise will be in demand in a specific season (Borucka, 2023).

1.9 Outline of the dissertation

The outline of this dissertation is illustrated in Figure 1.1:

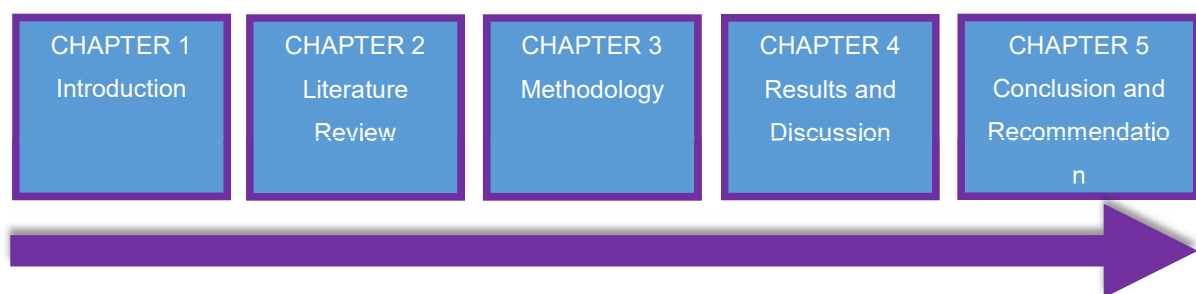


Figure 1.1: Outline of the dissertation

Source: Researcher

Chapter 1 introduces the research and conceptualises the research background and research problem. This chapter also presents the research objectives as well as the

research questions and propositions which all align with the research objectives. This chapter further presents the key concepts and provides a summary for the chapter.

Chapter 2 provides the literature review of this study. The literature review chapter provides an overview of key studies that are relevant for this study. It provides a smooth-flowing discussion of what studies have been done, what is currently known and the research gaps. The chapter further presents the conceptual framework for the study as well as a summary.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology and design that was adopted for this study. In this chapter, different methods used in research projects are described. The chapter then narrows down to the research methods and approaches that were adopted for this study and explains why those approaches were suited for this study. This chapter presents the various data collection and data analysis tools used for this study.

Chapter 4 provides the research findings from this study. These are presented to answer the research questions that were presented in Chapter 1. Chapter 4 further discusses the results as they are being presented.

Chapter 5 reflects on the study objectives and presents a conclusion based on the research findings. The chapter further provides recommendations emanating from this research study.

1.10 Chapter Summary

The chapter introduced the study and provided a contextual background of the clothing retail industry. Also introduced in this chapter is the problem emanating from the study topic. In order for clothing retail companies to thrive in the changing environment they operate in, merchandise planning is important as the clothing business is centred on customer needs. Research objectives, research questions, and the significance of this study were also presented in this chapter. The next chapter provides a literature review to provide the theoretical background for this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the background of the study and unpacked the problem statement, research objectives, and research questions. This chapter presents a literature review to establish the theoretical framework for this study, focusing on merchandise planning strategies and tactics employed by clothing retailers. It aims to examine how these strategies are used to adapt to changes in the clothing retail industry. One of the most impactful changes to affect clothing retailers is the change in demand which can be caused by various factors. Due to insufficient consumer demand, clothing retailers may close, and many may reduce their production capacity (van Scheers, 2018). To evade these effects, clothing retailers need to determine how merchandise planning can be used as a change management strategy (Rintamäki et al., 2021:407). The retail planning process begins with a sales plan. Besides sales history and statistics, the retailer needs to understand the overall business in order to plan for change in the business whether internally or externally. This information is provided in this chapter which begins with an overview of the clothing industry and the factors that affect it. The chapter describes merchandise planning, as well as the change management strategies, presenting the theoretical and conceptual frameworks associated with this study. The chapter further narrows down to the research gap in which this study fits into which is presented in the chapter conclusion. The next section discusses the theoretical framework guiding this study.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The best-known change theoretical models are those that were developed by Lewin (1951) and Beckhard (1965) which are summarised in Oladokun, Soutunde and Makinde (2018). Other important contributions to understanding change mechanisms have been made by Thurley (1979) and Bandura (1986). Kotter (1995) also designed the 8-step change model to understand and manage change in an organisation. This section discusses only the Kotter's 8-Step Change Model theories and how it applies to this study.

2.2.1 Kotter's 8-Step Change Model

Kotter (1995) designed the 8-step change model to understand and manage change. This change model has been considered one of the best change management models in the world (Strongitharm, 2022). Each of the eight steps is characterised by a key principle, in which individuals see, feel, and then change. Figure 2.1 illustrates the 8-step change model by Kotter (1995).

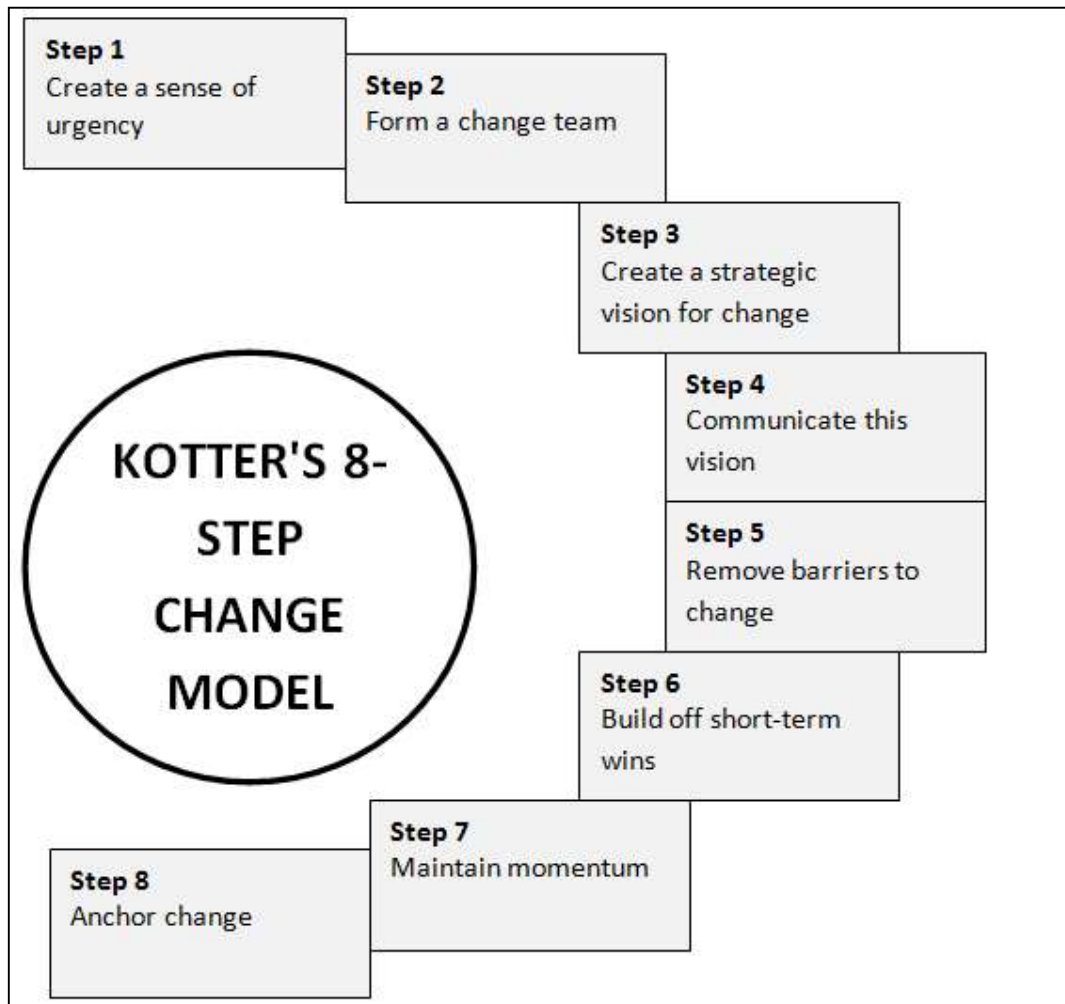


Figure 2.1: Kotter's 8-step change model

Source: Kotter (2022)

In the first step, a sense of urgency is created to initiate change (Haas et al., 2019:65-67; Errida and Lotfi, 2021:1-3; Laig et al., 2022:35-36; Strongitharm, 2022). In the first step, managers and leaders get the ball rolling to prepare for the second step where

a change team is formed. In the second step, change leaders are identified and coalitions are established to facilitate the change process. The third step aims to create a strategic vision for change to formulate a clear and understandable statement relating to how the change will be executed. The vision is then communicated in the fourth step as the strategic vision is embedded into the organisation. In the fifth step, barriers or impediments to change are described. In this step, the change team considers feedback from the departments. In the sixth step, the initial benefits of a change are demonstrated to increase the likelihood of acceptance. Weekly reviews and reports can be conducted to reflect on the initial success of the change. In the seventh step, change momentum should be maintained as the process continues so that the organisation keeps on delivering the outputs and benefits associated with the change. Lastly, the change should be anchored in the eighth step. With the change benefits having been realised and accepted, the change should be permanently embedded through organisational guidelines, protocols and policies (Haas et al., 2020:65-67; Laig et al., 2022:35-36; Strongitharm, 2022).

The Kotter's 8-step change model has been proven to help organisations in their continuous efforts of change in order to thrive in the business environment (Laig et al., 2022:36). When organisations improve their ability to change, they increase their chances of success. The finding of this study contributes to the theory of organisational change as it explores merchandise planning as a change management strategy. This study reaffirms the use of the Kotter's 8-step change model to implement organisational change with regards to merchandise planning.

2.3 The global clothing industry

The global clothing industry is a vital component of livelihoods as clothes are a basic requirement for all people (Matsoma and Ambe, 2017:2; Mortimer et al., 2022). The clothing industry is an established global business, a sub-sector of the general retail industry umbrella, and comprises 2% of the world's GDP (Kumar, 2018; Gazzola et al., 2020:1). The clothing industry includes designing, manufacturing, marketing, distributing, and retailing of different clothes, wear and accessories ranging between everyday wear to high street designer wear (Priyanka, 2019:12). Clothing retail

involves the sales of fashion or clothes products for consumers from stalls, stores or online e-commerce shops (Rosenbaum et al., 2021:93).

The global clothing industry operates in a highly competitive market that is dominated by esteemed global brands (Nabee and Swanepoel, 2021:1). In recent times, the fashion industry has attained fast growth despite the deep financial crisis of the last decade (Papadopoulou et al., 2022:351). Developing countries have accounted for the rising share of the clothing industry (Fernández-Stark et al., 2022:92). Clothing firms particularly those in developing countries are under pressure to improve performance as well as to increase their competitiveness (Fernández-Stark et al., 2022:92). As new and low-cost producers enter the global market, competition intensifies as companies coordinate the chains which connect the producers in developing countries with advanced country markets (Nguyen et al., 2021:579). The growing importance of export-oriented industrialisation has therefore made integration into the global economy almost synonymous with development for a number of nations (Akhilendra and Aravendan, 2023:137).

During the last few years, clothing and fashion consumers have become more squeamish and more demanding. Customers are presently having high expectations for quality products and choose clothing items according to their values as well as their personal lifestyle (Cunningham and De Meyer-Heydenrych, 2021:752). For this reason, clothing companies globally have to understand how to offer products and experiences that the customers will perceive as unique (Blazquez et al., 2019:122). Many clothing industries have answered to this trend by enlarging their product portfolio and diversifying their brands (Colucci and Pedroni, 2022:930). This solution works well, but sometimes the clothing company has to think of the difference that the product makes of a brand unique for both competitors and customers. Wrong choices can rapidly destroy the reputation of the brand, and this is why diversification of brands cannot be the only optimal solution (Gazzola et al., 2020:4). The next section discusses clothing retailers.

2.4 Clothing Retailers

This section addresses issues affecting clothing retailers which require merchandise planning strategies. The basic concept of merchandise planning is getting the correct product, from the correct supplier, at the correct cost in order to sell it at the right price (Parker-Strak et al., 2023: 247). Figure 2.2 depicts a basic definition of a clothing retailer as well as the connected strategies that deal with changes in the retail clothing industry reviewed.

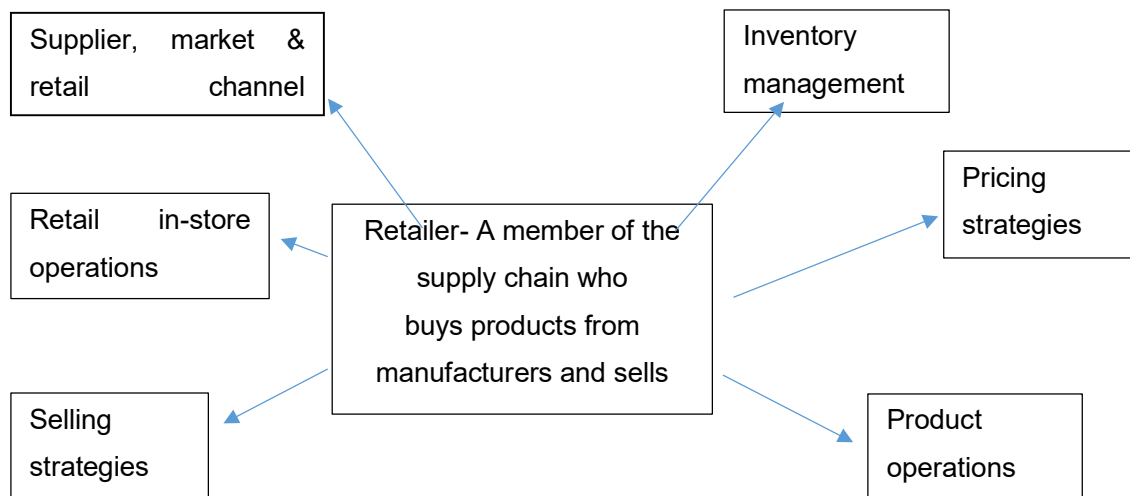


Figure 2.2: Basic definition of a clothing retailer and the connected strategies that deal with changes in the retail clothing industry

Source: Hitchcock (2023)

In the dynamic retail clothing industry, several key strategies play a crucial role in maintaining competitiveness and meeting consumer demands as presented in Figure 2.3. Supplier, market, and retail channel selections are foundational, influencing product availability and market reach (Bijmolt et al., 2019). Choosing the right suppliers ensures a steady flow of quality merchandise, while strategic market and channel choices such as online platforms versus physical stores which help retailers align with consumer shopping preferences (Wang et al., 2020).

Retail in-store operations involve managing the physical retail environment, ensuring a pleasant shopping experience, and optimising store layout to enhance product visibility and customer engagement (Hitchcock, 2023). This is intricately linked to

selling strategies, which encompass techniques like personalised customer service, promotions, and visual merchandising to drive sales. Inventory management is critical for balancing stock levels, minimising overstock and stockouts, and responding to changing fashion trends (Jin and Shin, 2020). Efficient inventory practices help in maintaining a seamless supply chain and meet consumer demand without excessive markdowns (Jin and Shin, 2020).

Pricing strategies are another vital aspect, involving setting competitive prices while considering factors like cost, market conditions, and consumer willingness to pay (Hitchcock, 2023). Lastly, product operations encompass the lifecycle of products from development to sales, ensuring quality and alignment with market trends. Together, these strategies enable clothing retailers to adapt to industry changes and meet evolving consumer expectations (Hitchcock, 2023).

2.4.1 Supplier, market and retail channel selections

Clothing retailers face risks from the supply side, such as supplier responsibility, lead time, supply quality, and supply quantity uncertainty (Sumarlia et al., 2021:578). As a result, finding a qualified and trustworthy supplier remains a difficulty for clothing retailers (Mejías et al., 2019:143). Arrigo (2020) proposes a two-stage supplier selection method, in which the fashion retailer filters weak suppliers in the first stage and then uses stochastic dynamic programming to select the best supplier from the remaining suppliers in the second stage. The significance of integrating the two stages is that a manufacturer who is best for a single decision may not be best for the entire supply chain (Arrigo, 2020). The next section discusses inventory management and operations.

2.4.2 Inventory management and operations

A clothing retailer's inventory management is crucial to its success (Boada-Collado and Martínez-de Albéniz, 2020:583; Gunawan and Setiawan, 2022:347). By offering great customer service with minimal inventory-related costs, a high-performance inventory management system can increase retailers' competitiveness and profitability in the highly unpredictable and fast-changing fashion market (Wen, Choi and Chung, 2019). The inventory replenishment strategy decides the time to place an order and

the quantity to be ordered (Boada-Collado and Martínez-de Albéniz, 2020:583). Efficient utilisation of the information collected from the market is crucial to make high-quality inventory decisions (Brandimarte et al., 2024:604). Retailers buy inventory replenishment from suppliers either before or during the season in the clothing retail industry (Wang et al., 2022:4118).

In the clothing retail industry, residual inventory (both returned and unsold items) is widespread because of the fluctuating consumer demand and short selling season (Brandimarte et al., 2024:604). Sharing surplus goods with other merchants, clearing at a low price, and returning to the suppliers are all common techniques for dealing with unsold inventory (Mechmech et al., 2022:147). When a clothing company has numerous stores and a lot of leftover inventory, it is important to figure out what the best inventory allocation strategy is so that each store gets the right amount of product (Mechmech et al., 2022:147). The next section discusses the strategies used in pricing and selling.

2.4.3 Pricing and selling strategies

Clothing retail pricing is a high-stakes game that involves guessing competitors' moves, consumer valuing, and the retailer's own operational costs (Mortimer et al., 2022:1497). Many pricing optimisation software programs based on the analysis of massive historical data now assist clothing retailers in making more intelligent and dynamic pricing selections in order to deal with the fast-changing industry (Wen, Choi and Chung, 2019).

Selling strategies used in the clothing industry include bundling, advance selling, and probabilistic selling (Wang and Liu, 2023:3599). To begin, the bundling selling technique involves bundling many items and selling them all at once (Cao et al., 2019:1909). It is used in a variety of industries, including fashion apparel, food, entertainment retailing, electronics, and cosmetics. Logistics cost reduction, increased market share and profit, and packaging difficulties are all reasons for bundling sales. The next section focuses on customers.

2.4.4 Customers

Customer demand influences clothing retailer decisions, which are subject to a variety of risks (Lynch and Barnes, 2020:472). As a result, understanding consumer behaviour improves demand forecasts, and dealing with consumer returns is critical to a clothes retailer's success (Haller et al., 2020). Customer behaviour is concerned with the customers' experience, knowledge, cognition, and psychological traits (Haller et al., 2020). Customers choose what to buy, how much to buy, and when and where to buy it (Joo and Wu, 2021:260). Kullak et al. (2023) investigated the impact of customer preferences on a fashion manufacturer's choice of a direct online channel vs a traditional retailer channel. They discovered that if customers prefer to shop online rather than in person, the supplier should use the online channel. Furthermore, the online channel helps reduce product prices, improving consumer welfare (Forghani et al., 2022:625).

Contrary, other studies (Xu et al., 2015; Yoo, Kim and Park, 2015; Chen and Chen, 2016; Aydinliyim, Pangburn and Rabinovich, 2017) argued that fashion retailers' actions influence consumer behaviour. Online fashion businesses, for example, can increase consumer purchasing intent by strategically exposing inventory levels and communicating the risk of stock out by intentionally obscuring or showing the precise inventory level (Forghani et al., 2022:625). Customers should determine whether to return or keep the merchandise based on their valuation, which is influenced by the retailer's return deadline (Abdu El Haq et al., 2021:18; Forghani et al., 2022:627). A longer return period improves the product's consumer valuation (Abdu El Haq et al., 2021:18). They also recommend that the return policy takes into account the product's life cycle and previous return rate (Kant Hvass and Pedersen, 2019:146). These concepts determine the best consumer return deadline, refund amount, pricing, and inventory level for a fashion business (Kant Hvass and Pedersen, 2019:146).

Strategic consumers are those who learn from their experiences, foresee future discounts, and alter their purchasing behaviour (Rashidi-Sabet and Madhavaram, 2022:268). When customers become strategic, a fashion retailer's profit suffers, and a clothing retailers efficiency suffers (Das et al., 2021:2717). According to Rashidi-Sabet and Madhavaram (2022:268), strategic consumers would postpone purchases

in the hopes of getting a better deal based on historical pricing data, even if it means risking stock out. The reference price is the predicted lower price expected by strategic consumers (Rashidi-Sabet and Madhavaram, 2022:268). The next section discusses merchandise planning.

2.5 Merchandise Planning

The topic of merchandise planning has been covered by numerous researchers in different sectors including the manufacturing and retail sectors (García-Dastugue et al., 2023). There are various definitions of merchandise planning. Kim and Takashima (2019:2582) define merchandise planning as a medium to long-term forecasting process aimed at defining business plans for purchasing and distributing items to points of sale (POS). Varley and Clark (2019:155) explain that the purpose of merchandise planning is to determine what to sell, to whom to sell it, and at what price to sell it, as well as to ensure that the product arrives on schedule. Kim and Takashima (2019:2582) note that merchandise planning is knowing how much to sell to whom and at what price.

As a result, all actions of a retailer are aimed at defining and managing what products to offer, in what quantities, at what price, and on which clothing degree-level, to which stores of the organisation, and by what delivery cycle during the year are included (Akhilendra and Aravenda, 2023:120). Merchandise planning is developing strategies for stocking the right quantities at the right pricing to suit the needs and wishes of a target client within an organisation (Varley and Clark, 2019:155). The right merchandise refers to things appropriate for the firm and its target clients (Stroebe et al., 2019:186). Cross-channel planning, inventory management, forecast-based clustering, dynamic allocation, and range and assortment planning are all important parts of product planning, according to Gunawan and Setiawan (2022:347). Merchandising is planning the things that must be created or purchased and then selling them for a profit (Parker-Strak et al., 2022:247).

Martínez-de-Albéniz and Kunnumkal (2022:5050) also point out that assortment planning is a step in the product planning process. According to Kunnumkal and Martínez-de Albéniz (2019:436), when a merchant creates an assortment plan, he or

she is thinking about the needs and wants of the customers. Assortment, according to Berbeglia and Joret (2020:683) can be shallow, deep, narrow, or wide. Shallow assortment, according to Flores et al. (2019), refers to a small number of product lines, whereas deep assortment refers to a significant number of items in a product line. A broad assortment refers to a large number of product lines, whereas a narrow assortment refers to a retailer's restricted number of product lines (Kunnumkal and Martínez-de Albéniz, 2019:436).

One of the biggest expenses for clothing retailers is buying merchandise and placing them (Parker-Strak et al., 2022:247). Other additional costs include shipping costs, storing costs, and delivery costs, among others. For many clothing retailers, merchandise planning has always been a top priority, considered to be more important than any other merchandising strategies (Kim et al., 2022:20). Merchandise planning involves financial plans, which include establishing budgets, allocating budgets to each category for purchasing merchandise (Kabeyi, 2019:27). Besides financial planning, merchandise planning consists of forecasting the demands of the consumers for fabrications, colours, and other style features (Akhilendra and Aravendan, 2023:120). The clothing retailer, therefore, has to be more careful while planning to order merchandise.

Merchandise planning helps to avoid the pitfalls that retailers fear the most, which are (1) greeting customers with shelves that are sparsely stocked and (2) greeting customers with gluts of out-of-style, unpopular, and marked-down merchandise (GoVise Tech, 2020). If the retailer does not have a sound merchandise plan, their business might not be successful in fulfilling the needs of their customers (Kim and Takashima, 2019:2582). Delivering the right product at the right time and place is only possible if the retailer plans the merchandise well ahead of time. If the clothing retailer opts for the wrong merchandise, then there is a high chance that merchandise will overflow in their business, and therefore, heavy discounts will result in order to sell out the excessive undesired merchandise (Boardman et al., 2020:495). Ultimately, what results is the loss of customers as the clothing retailer would have failed to deliver the right product at the right time (Cunningham and De Meyer-Heydenrych, 2021:752). In this regard, it is vital for clothing retailers in South Africa, to enhance their

competitiveness and plan their merchandise well to ensure customer satisfaction, enhance profits and subsequently prevent losses. The next section discusses the stages in merchandise planning.

2.5.1 Merchandise planning stages

There are several stages of planning throughout the supply chain that clothing retail companies undertake to ensure that the needs of the customer are met. These include (1) merchandise planning; (2) assortment planning; (3) allocation planning; (4) replenishment planning, which are summarised in Marais (2019:3). Merchandise planning has been well described in the previous sections. Another important planning stage is assortment planning, which establishes the width as well as the depth of each product for the retailer (Mani et al., 2022:5002).

Clothing retailers will base their decisions on the quantity and the assortment of products in order to stock in their stores (Backs et al., 2021:488). The width of the products is the collection, as well as the family of products that retailers decide to stock, which concerns the higher levels of the merchandise classification hierarchy (Chen et al., 2021:85). The depth of those categories, is the colours, styles, and sizes of products, which concern the lower levels of the merchandise hierarchy (Maldini et al., 2019:1414). The assortment depth allows customers an opportunity to have variety in a particular product, and the width therefore offer customers variety in the types of products (Marais, 2019:3).

Figure 2.3 shows a standard merchandise classification scheme or hierarchy that categorises how some of the retailers differentiate the nature of their products. This classification takes products of similar attributes and groups them into categories (Marais, 2019:3). The hierarchy specifies the market, the season, the family and style, the article that identifies the particular product style, and the size and colour of the product. This then ultimately refines products to what is termed as stock-keeping unit (SKU) level (Lu et al., 2022:35), which will be difficult to determine what units to procure without the initial grouping of items into categories. A retail store can therefore have this structure of products stocked in its retail store, that is, having multiples of

each level of the merchandise hierarchy in order to appeal to all customers (Marais, 2019:3).



Figure 2.3: Standard merchandise classification hierarchy for retailers

Source: Levy et al. (2012)

The allocation planning phase involves allocating products to specific locations for sale (Czerniachowska et al., 2022:119). This process determines the quantity of products being sent to each of the selected locations and the mix of products that are allocated for each location (Düsterhöft et al., 2020:253). Products are then sorted, packaged, and then transported to the respective stores. The final stage in the planning process is replenishment planning. Retail stores make a distinction between replenishment products as well as fashion products (Bianchi-Aguiar et al., 2020:3). Replenishment products are those that are in continuous demand throughout the year and have relatively stable sales over an extended period and the demand is predictable (Bianchi-Aguiar et al., 2020:3). An error in forecasting can therefore easily be overcome and replenishment products require continuous monitoring in order to ensure that the inventory levels do not deviate to dangerous levels (Marais, 2019:3).

Fashion products on the other hand are products that are only in demand for a relatively short period of time and typically have a seasonal life span (Nguyen et al., 2021:579); Shen et al., 2022:681). It is therefore more difficult to forecast the performance of these products, as it is less flexible to correct forecasting errors. The next section summarises the studies on merchandise planning.

2.5.2 Merchandise planning studies

Several researchers have studied how merchandise planning is utilised in different aspects of the retail industry (Varley and Clark, 2019; Katemauswa and Naude, 2020; Kim et al., 2022; Jacobs and Karpova, 2022(b); Makhitha and Mbedzi, 2023; Sarma et al., 2023). They have identified a pattern in the retail sector in terms of consumer demand and performance according to historical data which helps merchandise planners make decisions for the upcoming sale of products.

Researchers such as Kunnumkal and Martínez-de Albéniz (2019:436), Gunawan and Setiawan (2022:347), Martínez-de-Albéniz and Kunnumkal (2022:5050) agree that optimal product assortment planning is the most important strategy in periods of economic crises or any major change that affects clothing retailers. In a retailer's product portfolio, variety (i.e., the number of different product categories), depth (i.e., the number of stock-keeping units/distinct goods for sale), and level of service (i.e., the number of inventory items within a product line) are determined.

Retailers strive to satisfy customers' changing demands by supplying the right merchandise in the right shop at the right time by making optimal inventory assortment decisions (Arrigo, 2020:3; Boada-Collado et al., 2020:585). It is also known that the integration among different functions in the supply chain, the strategic planning process, and the development of targeted distribution plans are key to the success of the successful adaption of change in customer demand (Roggeveen et al., 2021:81).

McMaster et al. (2020:2) suggest that the change in customer demand is paired with the season of the year. To get the best out of this change in demand the retailer must incorporate the seasonality of demand and the computerised shop ordering system (Casciani et al., 2022:775). For retailers to be in line with changes in customer demand

they need to adopt demand seasonality instead of an automatic store ordering system (Casciani et al., 2022:775). An automatic store ordering system is a system in a retail shop adapted to automatically order merchandise for future sale according to the average past sales of the merchandise while demand seasonality is a report that forecasts which merchandise will be on-demand on a specific season (Weber and Schütte, 2019:264).

Previous studies have proved that retailers use merchandise planning as an ordering tool to order for future sales using historical data, which makes future sales unpredictable due to changes in customer demand (Iannone et al., 2013; Jacobs and Karpova, 2020, 2022(a) & (b); Rajkumar, 2021). The gap is identified in a situation where they normally use historical sales data to plan what to offer the customer. It is clear that retailers forecast future sales according to previous sales reports as well as the season of that forecasted period. Nimo (2023:216) states that a recession is one of the most crucial environmental threats to a retailer's viability, profitability, and survival. There is literature on how SMEs survived the global recession and an economic downturn in South Africa but there is no on-point research on how South African retailers can survive through a global pandemic because there is no historical data on how a pandemic similar to the Covid-19 has previously affected change in demand (Chiloane-Phetla and Mathipa, 2021:3). The next section discusses the change management strategies.

2.6 Change management strategies

In contemporary organisations, change is inherent, and its management is not only crucial for the success of the organisation but is also at the centre of the development of an organisation (Baines et al., 2019:1). Businesses should constantly evolve as well as to adapt in order to meet various of challenges in the environment they operate in (Carvalho et al., 2019:1497). These challenges include technological changes, rise in new competitors, pandemics, shifts in laws, regulations and underlying economic trends, which all call for an organisation to implement changes failure, which can lead to stagnation of an organisation or failure (Miller, 2020).

Change management strategies are defined by Hanelt et al. (2021:1159) as sets of managerial actions and decisions that determine the performance of an organisation in the long run. This includes the following aspects: environmental scanning, formulation of strategies, implementation of strategies, and evaluation and control (Miller, 2020). Change management strategies are designed to set a firm's courses of action thereby identifying strategies that will be used to compete in the market as well as how it will organise its internal activities (Benner and Waldfogel, 2020:3; Merzlikina and Kozhanova, 2020:2). There are several types of change management which include: strategic, operational, transformational, structural, and unplanned changes among others, which are described in detail in the following subsections.

2.6.1 Strategic change

Strategic change deals with broad, long term as well as organisational issues that involve change (Merzlikina and Kozhanova, 2020:2). Strategic change is about moving to a state in the future that has been generally defined in terms of strategic vision and scope covering the purpose as well as the mission of the organisation (Ketemaw and Amente, 2023:1). Strategic change is also defined in terms of its corporate philosophy on matters such as growth, innovation, quality, and values concerning customers and workers, competitive positioning of the organisation and strategic goals to achieve and maintain competitive advantage as well as for product market development (Wu et al., 2021:154; Ketemaw and Amente, 2023:1). These goals are supported by the policies that concern manufacturing, product and process development, marketing, sales, finance, and human resource management (Ketemaw and Amente, 2023:1).

Strategic change therefore occurs within contexts of the external, competitive, socioeconomic environment, and the organisation's internal resources, capabilities, culture, structure and systems (Machimbi and Kilika, 2022:1). The successful implementation of strategic change requires a thorough analysis as well as an understanding of these factors in planning stages formulation (Wu et al., 2021:155).

2.6.2 Operational change

This relates to new procedures, structures, systems, or technology that will have an immediate effect on the working arrangements within a part of the organisation

(Chowdhury and Shil, 2021:190). Operational change is mainly about making improvements in the short term based on rapid response and adaptation. The impact of operational change on the people, however, can be significantly greater than that of broader strategic change (Chowdhury and Shil, 2022:32).

2.6.3 Transformational change

While changes can be sudden or incremental, such changes become transformational when a situation is altered from an undesirable state to a stable or desired one (Nyamunda et al., 2022:200). Transformational changes occur when there is fundamental and comprehensive change in structures, processes as well as behaviours that have dramatic effects on the ways in which organisations function (Bosso, 2020). The transformational change process occurs in an organisation to bridge the gaps that emanate in the organisation due to various reasons which led the organisation to embark on the transformational change journey (Lather et al., 2022:160).

2.6.4 Structural change

These are changes that are made to the structure of an organisation that stem from either internal or external factors (Saatci and Ovaci, 2022:608). Structural changes include management hierarchy changes, reshuffling of teams, changes in occupational responsibilities within departments, administrative procedures and changes in the chain of command (van der Heijden, 2022:385). Job duplications, acquisitions and mergers, policy changes and changes in the market are the circumstances that lead to structural changes (Gupta, 2022).

2.6.5 Unplanned change

An unplanned change is a necessary action that follows unforeseen events (Grimm, 2021:17). Unplanned changes are not predictable but can be addressed by effective change management (Bosso, 2020).

2.7 South African Clothing Sector

The apparel clothing sector of South Africa has evolved significantly as a result of intensified competition, technological development, the number of fashion seasons,

and the ever-changing as well as complex structures of present supply chains (Wood and Bischoff, 2020:33). The South African clothing industry is one of the leading distribution channels within the retail industry of the country and contributes approximately 8% of the country's GDP (Katemauswa and Naude, 2020:3). In addition, it provides employment to millions of South Africans and makes a significant contribution to the growth of the country in terms of sales (Stats SA, 2021; Mbatha and Mastamet-Mason, 2022:1970).

In 2014, 21% of the R707 billion contributed by the retailing industry to South Africa's economy belonged to the clothing industry, making it the second largest contributor in the retailing industry (StatsSA, 2015). The clothing industry of South Africa is certainly not without its risks and challenges. The clothing industry of South Africa is highly dependent on imported products, with China being the main supplier (Calabrese and Balchin, 2022:37; Torreggiani and Andreoni, 2023:201).

Responding to the volatile market of the clothing industry has proved to be one of the main challenges in the South African clothing retail sector (Pasquali et al., 2021:368). South African clothing retail companies see demand forecasting and merchandise planning as key investment areas since they have to develop a demand-driven supply chain strategy that is customer-focused (Jacobs and Karpova, 2022a:65-67).

2.8 Factors affecting the clothing retail industry

The clothing industry is affected by several factors such as season, location, trends, the economy, pandemics, and other external factors (Iannone, 2013; Pasquali et al., 2021:369; Wood and Bischoff, 2020:31). The retail clothing industry is complex because it consists various parties; furthermore, the competition is intense leaving no room for inaccuracies in stock planning, inventory replenishments, or promptness of promotion deals (Ertekink et al., 2020:271-272; Calabrese and Balchin, 2022:37).

Diseases and pandemics also affect the clothing industry, for example, the Covid-19 pandemic, although it was not the first pandemic that occurred in this world (McMaster et al., 2020:1; Castañeda-Navarrete et al., 2021:953; Liu et al., 2021:324; Kempen and Tobias-Mamina, 2022:221). It is a known fact that there have been several

pandemics in the Variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, foot, and mouth disease, and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) have occurred in the past (Ceylan and Ozkan, 2020:21; Pang et al., 2021:1355), which has caught the attention of the world but they had no major effect on the global economy (Jordà et al., 2021:2; Kumar, 2022:43-45), although the viruses affected retailers, especially the food retailers as sales decreased because some of the diseases were found in meat (Batta et al., 2023:271-273).

Diseases such as the bird flu (H5N1), swine flu (H1N1), Ebola, and Tuberculosis (TB) just to name a few, have had a significant impact on the economy especially healthcare, travel and tourism, transport, and agriculture (Jordà et al., 2021:1-3). These pandemics affect the clothing industry sector as it depends on the other sectors of the economy to operate optimally for retailers to perform (Castañeda-Navarrete et al., 2021:953; Liu et al., 2021:324; Kempen and Tobias-Mamina, 2022:221; Kumar, 2022:43; Batta et al., 2023:271-273). The next section illustrates the conceptual framework for this study.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework guides one's research to achieve research objectives, and it is a product of the theoretical framework (Chukwuere, 2021:2681). A conceptual framework provides the map or pathway on the literature composition within a study and binds social research into one (Varpio et al., 2020:989-991). The function of the conceptual framework is to inform the rest of the research methods and design in order to refine the goals, develop realistic as well as relevant research questions and to identify potential validity threats (Lindgreen et al., 2020:A2). The conceptual framework for this research study is illustrated shown in Figure 2.4.

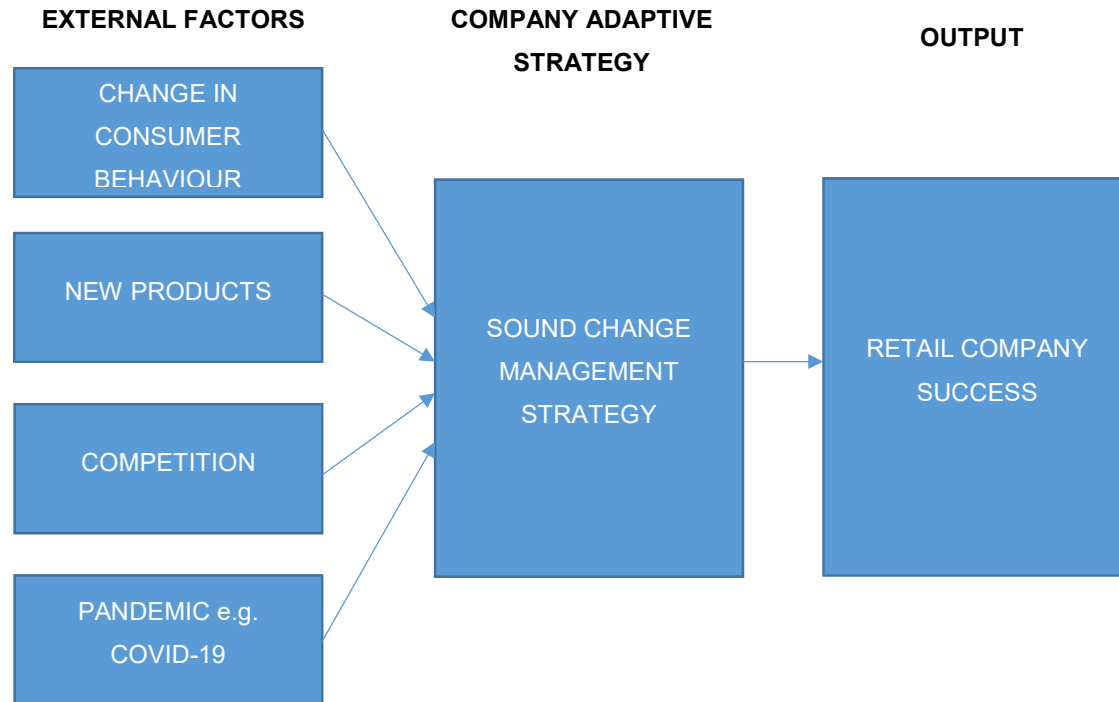


Figure 2.4: Conceptual framework for this study

Source: Researcher

Figure 2.4 illustrates the conceptual framework for this study. What warrants this study is the external factors that include: changes in customer behaviour (due to the ever-changing fashion industry), new products (due to more fashion products being introduced into the market), competition (from other fashion retail businesses), and pandemics (for example the Covid-19). The external factors require the retail businesses to implement change management strategies which when sound, they ensure its success and to stay afloat in uncertain periods such as pandemics.

2.10 Research gap

The problem identified for this study is centred on the clothing retail industry that is facing several challenges in South Africa presented in this chapter. The challenge is aggravated by unreliable consumer data as the plans to reorder and replenish merchandise would potentially not be aligned with present customer requirements or according to the change in customer demand (Blazquez et al., 2019:111; Dohale et al., 2022:109). Literature has shown that merchandise planning can be one of the change management strategies that can be used by business organisations.

Merchandise plans are usually made according to the previous year's figures, or they order according to how it was selling at a certain store (Black, 2020:327). Present customers' requirements, which might have changed compared to the previous year due to several factors such as trends, economic factors, environmental factors, and changes in consumer demand, need to be considered to prevent situations whereby retailers offer customers items that they do not presently need as they would not be corresponding with the present state (Black, 2020:328; Parker-Strak et al., 2023:249). This, therefore, requires retailers to have sound merchandise plans (Braglia et al., 2020:191; Poee, 2020:171). This study makes a substantial contribution to this field of clothing retailing where there is not much literature (Poee and Mugobo, 2020:68). The thrust of this research was to identify whether utilising merchandise planning as a change strategy will help retailers make more accurate forecasts, which will help them plan quantities and goods to manufacture according to market changes.

2.11 Summary

As described in Chapter 1, the clothing retail industry in South Africa has over the years witnessed the closure of companies in South Africa and some of their retail outlets (Poee and Mugobo, 2020:68). This chapter identified several factors that affect these fashion retail companies which are centred on the dynamic nature of the fashion industry, competition, and the recent Covid-19 pandemic. Managing and buying merchandise is the biggest cost for a clothing retail business. The retailer should have effective plans that can help the clothing business achieve its end goals, in most cases, profits and customer satisfaction. Merchandise planning in the clothing retail industry is quintessential to deliver the rightful quantity of the rightful product at the rightful time and place. In case of any wrong merchandise planning, the clothing retail business will ultimately face stock overflow issues. The merchandise planner should be someone who has experience with a proper understanding of the market and consumer behaviour. In this regard, it is, therefore, necessary to evaluate clothing retail businesses in South Africa to determine how merchandise planning can be utilised as a change management strategy. The next chapter presents the research methodology and design that was used for this study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the literature review unpacking the clothing industry globally and in South Africa. Discussed in the previous chapter is the role of merchandise planning in a business and the challenges associated with not implementing it. The previous chapter presented the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This chapter describes the research methodology and design that was adopted for this study. The chapter explains the research approach and design choices that the researcher made. The population, sampling methods as well as the procedures for data collection and analysis are also outlined in this chapter. Furthermore, the clarification on the reliability and validity of all the techniques and procedures employed in this study is provided. The relevance as well as applicability of these procedures to this study is highlighted. Finally, ethical considerations that were followed for this study are laid out and this chapter concludes with a summary relating to material covered in this chapter. The next section describes the research methodology.

Research methodology is defined as a field that assesses and explains the justification for appropriate research techniques and methodologies for a certain research topic (Dion et al., 2020:122). Hazari, (2023:1) define research methodology as a systematic way or method of solving research problems. It comprises of the theoretical analysis of a body of methods as well as principles associated with a branch of knowledge (Creswell and Creswell, 2018:309). The research onion, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, is a diagram that shows the various methodological choices that can be used, including research philosophies, research approaches, research strategies, research choices, and time horizons (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019:130). Components of the research onion are unpacked in the following sections which further narrows down to how this study fits in the onion.

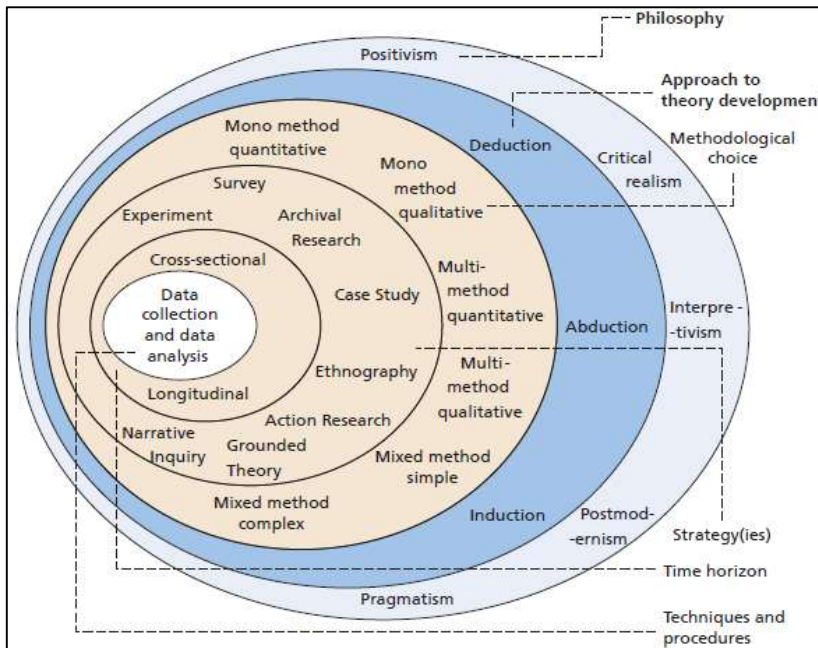


Figure. 3.1: The research onion

Source: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019:130)

The next section discusses the research philosophies.

3.2 Research Philosophies

Research philosophy, according to Turyahikayo (2021:209), refers to the philosophical orientations about the world as well as the type of research being conducted. At the core of the research, philosophy is knowledge: the researcher's nature of knowledge, the development of knowledge, and the source of that knowledge (Lee et al., 2021:880; Mathotaarachchi and Thilakarathna, 2021:945). The choice of the method to be used by a researcher is motivated by the researcher's epistemology as well as theoretical position (Mathotaarachchi and Thilakarathna, 2021:945; Ylönen and Aven, 2023:581). According to Khatri (2020:1435), the main research philosophies are: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, pragmatism and postmodernism. The next section discusses the epistemology philosophy.

Positivism emphasises objective reality and seeks to discover general laws through empirical observation and scientific methods (Mathotaarachchi and Thilakarathna, 2021:945). It assumes that reality can be measured and observed without bias. Critical

Realism combines elements of realism and interpretivism (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020:39). It acknowledges that while an objective reality exists, our understanding of it is always mediated through human perceptions and social contexts. Interpretivism focuses on understanding the subjective meaning and experiences of individuals (Muhaise et al., 2020:202). It argues that reality is socially constructed and best understood through interpreting the context and perspectives of participants (Muhaise et al., 2020:202). Pragmatism focuses on the practical implications of research (Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020). It values both qualitative and quantitative methods as tools to solve problems and address research questions, prioritising outcomes over adherence to any single philosophical approach (Allemang et al., 2022). Postmodernism focuses on questioning grand narratives and emphasising the plurality of perspectives (Stewart et al., 2021:1051). The philosophy assumes that truth is relative and context-dependent, and there are multiple, equally valid perspectives (Stewart et al., 2021:1051).

3.2.1 Research Philosophy for this study

At the core of research philosophy is knowledge; the researcher's nature of knowledge, development of knowledge and the source of that knowledge (Bajpai, 2011:20). Poee (2020) used the interpretivism philosophical perspective to conduct the study of South African fashion designers and their role within the retail clothing industry.

For this research, an interpretivism philosophy was used. This is because the study was based on the use of merchandise planning as a change management strategy. Interpretivism is well-suited for this study because it emphasises understanding the subjective experiences and meanings that individuals and organisations attach to their practices (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020:39). In this context, interpretivism allows researchers to explore how employees and managers perceive and experience the implementation of merchandise planning as a change management strategy.

This philosophy is valuable for capturing the nuances of how these actors interpret the effectiveness of merchandise planning in their specific socio-cultural and economic setting (Ma and Ma, 2022:10). By focusing on qualitative data and the meanings that

participants ascribe to their experiences, interpretivism helps to reveal the complex, context-dependent factors that influence the success or challenges of change management strategies in the clothing retail industry. This approach not only provides a deeper insight into the personal and organisational dynamics at play but also acknowledges the local context of Cape Town, thereby enriching the understanding of how merchandise planning can be tailored to fit the unique needs and practices of the local industry. The next section discusses the research approach.

3.3 Methodological choice

Methodological choices are plans and procedures that consist of the steps of broad assumptions to the detailed methods of collecting data, analysis, as well as interpretation (Fuyane, 2021:29). In some publications, these may simply imply data collection and data analysis methods in general and the differences between quantitative and qualitative methods in particular (Strijker et al., 2020:263). The Creswell and Creswell (2018:41) definition is discussed in this section to describe the approach used in this study. Three methodological choices include qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. The next section discusses the qualitative approach.

3.3.1 Qualitative method

A qualitative research method is a research approach in which the researcher explores bounded or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection that involves multiple sources of information and reporting case descriptions and case-based themes (Rees et al., 2020:846; Khoa et al., 2023:187). A bounded system as used the qualitative approach definition can be a process, programme, activity, event, individual(s), as well as political or social occurrences within a social context (Fischer and Guzel, 2022:256). The next section discusses the quantitative approach.

3.3.2 Quantitative methods

The quantitative research method is an offshoot of the positivist or objectivist paradigm which prefers numerical data and measures in data collection, analysis, and the presentation (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023:241). The strategy is mostly used in the natural

sciences in which reality is perceived as external and objective (Fischer and Guzel, 2022:257). The next section discusses the mixed methods approach.

3.3.3 Mixed methods

These involve the integration of qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis, and presentation procedures in the same research project (Timans et al., 2019:193). It is based on philosophical assumptions that guide data collection and analysis and the mixing of quantitative and qualitative collection techniques and analysis procedures (O'Donoghue, 2022:14). The core assumption of this approach is that the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches yields additional insight beyond the information provided by either of the approaches alone (Strijker et al., 2020:263). The next section discusses the research approach for this study.

3.3.4 Approach for this study

This research study applied only one research approach, the qualitative method and is referred to as a mono-method because it only used one research model (Hampson and McKinley, 2023). The qualitative approach was used to gather empirical data in order to accomplish the objectives of this research. According to Busetto et al. (2020:2) qualitative research is the study of things in their natural settings with the goal of making sense of or interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people assign to them. Qualitative data can be gathered through personal experiences, interviews, observations, open-ended questionnaires, and subject data (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023:242). In this case, the researcher adopted a qualitative method to interpret how merchandise planners deal with changes in the clothing retail industry and what meanings they assign to all the internal as well as external changes in the clothing retail industry.

Bradshaw, Atkinson and Doody (2017:14) describes qualitative research as the “interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world”, and Pham (2018) further explicated that qualitative research is an approach that presents a comprehensive understanding of the research participants’ environment through evaluating their substantial societal conditions or situations. There are several studies that used qualitative approaches with similar topics to this study, for example, a study about approaches and models

for change management by Teczke (2019) used a qualitative research approach as the nature of the research was focused on a small specific group of people. Poee (2020) also used a qualitative approach in her study about South African fashion designers in the retail clothing environment and used a naturalistic approach by conducting interviews with the retailers.

Additionally, this study used an inductive theory-building approach, where theory was developed in response to the research findings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). Accordingly, the theory (of the effective utilisation of merchandise planning) was the result of empirical realities (of change management in the retail environment), resulting in conclusive reasoning influenced by reality (Bradshaw, Atkinson and Doody, 2017). In order to identify and develop the essential elements of an efficient and sustainable merchandise planning process in accordance with the requirements and/or recommendations of clothing retailers, this research examined the realities of various changes in the clothing retail industry. The next section describes the data collection techniques.

3.4 Research Strategy

A research strategy is the action plan, that is in this context, the data collection process that provides guidance for conducting the research methodically, yielding correct results, and producing thorough reporting (Pham, 2018). The following subsections describes the general research strategies as well as the strategies that were taken for this study.

3.4.1 Case Study Strategy

This study adopts a case study research design, as outlined by Yin (2018), to provide an in-depth understanding of how external factors influence change management strategies and retail company success. A case study approach was appropriate because it allows for a detailed examination of real-world phenomena within their contextual settings (Calandra, Secinaro, Massaro, Dal Mas and Bagnoli, 2023:1404), making it suitable for exploring how fashion retail businesses respond to dynamic external conditions. The study targeted only one clothing company, enabling a focused and comprehensive exploration of the company's adaptive strategies in response to

external pressures. This design enhances the study's depth by allowing for a rich, context-specific analysis, capturing unique insights into how the company implements change management to navigate consumer behaviour shifts, competition, new product introductions, and pandemic-related disruptions (Chowdhury and Shil, 2021:191).

3.4.2 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a flexible method, grounded theory enables relationships between the theory and the evidence (Birks et al., 2019:1). It permitted the researcher to keep an open mind to the unexpected, to compare the facts gathered to find out how they differed and how they were similar, and to compile, organise, and analyse data to develop conceptions or models. Being a qualitative research project, the theory was created as the data were being gathered. This provided an example of an inductive approach to data collection, which helped to support the theory with facts.

As the most effective way to utilise merchandise planning as a change management strategy in a clothing retailer was unknown during the data-collection process, it was imperative for this research study to remain flexible and open to the unanticipated data collected from Cape Town clothing retailers, merchandise planners and other participants in the study. Once the data was collected, it was then interpreted with the assistance of a qualitative data analysis software called Atlas.ti.

Using the grounded-theory method, participant responses were assessed in order to determine a general theory (Pham, 2018). In order to develop a general theory of how merchandise planning can be utilised as a change management strategy, it was appropriate to examine each merchandise planner in the clothing retail sector separately. Bradshaw Atkinson and Doody (2017) allude that grounded theory encompasses, but is not limited to, sorting, synthesising, and summarising data as a researcher breaks it down and specifies how that data is linked. For example, in a fashion-related study by Pooe (2020) where she wanted to identify an effective supply chain system by fashion designers in a South African clothing retailer, she applied a grounded-theory strategy, as it allowed the researcher to take the data and discover meaning within the inductive data. Karpova and Bayat (2021) also used the grounded theory to develop a theory-based typology for apparel consumers. The grounded

theory was also used by Chun et al. (2021) on merchandising in the dressmaking industry based on empirical data.

3.4.3 Interviews

The interview method is based on research in which a research participant is asked oral questions with the goal of receiving oral responses in-person, over the phone, or online (DeJonckheere and Vaughn, 2019:2). Hunter (2019) correlates in-depth interviews with qualitative research and hypothesised that while they might seem naturalistic, they will not be similar to regular conversations.

An interview is a series of questions presented to each participant in a systematic way so that participants can discuss topics other than the question. They are a major type of data collection method in qualitative research (Ongena and Dijkstra, 2021:177). There are three types of survey interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Ongena and Dijkstra, 2021:177). Structured interviews are conducted using an interview schedule that includes a list of predefined questions (Jain, 2021:546). Semi-structured interviews can be conducted using an interview guide (Oerther, 2021:2142). The interview guide highlights the areas that need to be discussed and allows the interviewer to pursue new ideas that may arise. There are no rigorous steps to follow for an unstructured interview (Oerther, 2021:2142). This type of interview is usually time-consuming as there may be no interview guidelines and it can confuse participants if the discussion is not successful (Jonkman, 2023).

DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019:2) pointed out that semi-structured interviews are good for allowing the scope of the conversation to flow naturally in an interview since they allowed the participants to answer the questions frankly based on their own personal and professional experiences. Semi-structured interviews also make it possible for the researcher and the participants to work together and come to a shared understanding of the research. This research study was found to need the participation of skilled merchandising planners and clothes retailers, in particular, to establish the changes in the clothing retail business they experienced and determine the best techniques to be utilised to deal with the changes.

When conducting the interviews, the researcher made use of semi-structured interviews to expand the advantages of both structured and unstructured interviews as they balance the limitations of each other. This allowed the researcher to ask relevant questions as well as probing questions to gain more information. The interviews had key questions that covered all aspects of the research. It allowed the participant and the researcher to further stretch the discussion into other relevant information that came out of the interview. Semi-structured interviews were used by Jain and Sundström (2021) to collect data from ten retail companies, including the cosmetics, apparel and home textiles. Edirisinghe et al. (2020) also used semi-structured interviews to collect data from SME clothing retailers. Jonkman (2023) used semi-structured interviews to collect data from 11 clothing retailers in Netherlands to determine their merchandising experiences. It seems in all the research presented above, semi-structured interviews allowed informants to fully express their views.

Normally semi-structured interviews can be time-consuming and transposing all the information gathered from the interview can be a tedious task (Oerther, 2021:2142). Nevertheless, the data was collected through recording and then transcribed, followed by checking obvious themes. The researcher had digital interviews due to time constraints and social distancing rules. Recording the data offers an advantage to the researcher of repeatedly listening in case of doubt and during data analysis to offer a way of validating data and checking for reliability (Rutakumwa et al., 2020:565). The researcher adopted this technique during the semi-structured interviews. The next section discusses the time horizon.

3.4.4 Time Horizon

Cross-sectional studies are often known as 'status' or 'one-shot' studies because they provide a comprehensive picture of the situation at a certain point in time, which is crucial for figuring out how common a given situation is (Kesmodel, 2018). Marshall and Rossman (2016) noted that cross-sectional data did not imply that all participants provided information at a single precise moment or even in a single session; rather, it meant that participants provided information over a brief period, and it was assumed that time produced variance rather than bias.

Longitudinal studies compile data at many time intervals to show a changing picture of events, people, or social relationships across time. Therefore, longitudinal studies are the outcome of a research study that integrates time rather than the length of time it takes to research a certain topic of study (Mund et al., 2020:25). The participants in longitudinal studies are repeatedly visited, typically over a lengthy period of time, to assess trends, changes, and/or patterns of that specific study (Mund et al., 2020:25).

Between April 2022 and November 2022, the participants in this research project were contacted in order to gather information about their views on the retail clothing business as a whole and their responses to change. To create an efficient and long-lasting change management tool for merchandise planning, the feedback obtained, data gathered, and analysis conducted during the merchandise planning process in the retail clothing industry was compared to the theory available and practices of the current clothing industry.

Davies and Hughes (2014) recommended that cross-sectional research be used for macro-level change, where the focus is wide and not individual-based. As this study was cross-sectional, the data collected was compared to other theories of change management strategies, as well as data collected from merchandise planners, and supporting stakeholders, instead of comparing two distinct time points, as in longitudinal studies. Additionally, as a cross-sectional study, this research evaluated what would be deemed an effective and sustainable merchandise planning strategy, post examining current change management theories and interviewing merchandise planners, and supporting stakeholders, instead of studying the pattern of change or trends, due to time, as in longitudinal studies. A cross-sectional study was used by Dhir et al. (2020) to determine why retail companies stock certain apparel products. Boardman and McCormick (2021) also used a cross-sectional study to determine the attitude of fashion consumers. The next section describes how data from this study were analysed.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Target population

Dion et al. (2020:123) states that the population of the study is what defines the boundaries of the study. Population is defined, as a collection of objects that possess the information that is sought after by the researcher (Leko et al., 2021:279). The population of this study consisted of retail clothing companies drawn from Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa. The study, however, targeted a single retail clothing company in Cape Town to establish how merchandise planning can be used as a management strategy. Targeting only one clothing company allowed for a more in-depth analysis of its specific merchandise planning strategies and tactics. A total of 15 individuals met the inclusion criteria for this study and hence, made up the target population. The sample size and sampling are discussed in the next section.

3.5.2 Sampling Method and Sample Size

Sampling is an important aspect of every research project because it involves critical decisions about what is to be observed by a researcher, as well as how this is to be selected (Fafowora, 2020:105; Taherdoost, 2021:10). There are two broad categories of sampling strategies available to researchers namely probability and non-probability sampling (Fafowora, 2020:105). Probability sampling is a statistical sampling method which emphasises on sample randomisation whilst non-probability sampling is a non-statistical technique of selecting a sample, especially in situations where the study population is difficult to define (Fafowora, 2020:105). Non-probability sampling includes, snowball, convenience, purposeful and volunteer sampling (Berndt, 2020:225). The study adopted purposeful sampling as the researcher needed a sample with certain characteristics. Potential participants had to be involved in merchandise at a senior level in the selected retail clothing company. The sample for the current study was made up of 5 merchandise planners, 5 merchandise buyers and 2 merchandise allocators from 5 departments of a selected retail clothing shop in Cape Town, which is one of the leading clothing retail companies in South Africa.

Where qualitative research is concerned, sample size determination is less a function of statistical power but rather one of ensuring depth and richness of data (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The sample sizes presented in the previous paragraph thus reflects a

focused approach to getting detailed insights from key stakeholders directly involved in merchandise planning. In qualitative research, the saturation point is reached when the collection of more data does not add anything new or substantial, indicating that the researcher has identified the significant themes and variations from the people being studied (Guest et al., 2020). Here, with a sample of only 12 participants across different roles, saturation might be approached quickly, assuming the data collected is adequate and the participants are familiar with the subject being covered. Given the specialist roles and departments represented, the researcher would determine saturation through constant analysis of data as they were collected. If, after interviewing all participants, no new themes or insights are emerging and the data coming from interviews start to repeat what was already known, then saturation was be considered reached. Data saturation was reached after conducting interviews with 10 participants, at which point no new themes emerged from the data. The next section discusses the research strategy.

3.5.3 Pilot Study

In conducting the pilot study for this research, a preliminary study was conducted to test the feasibility and effectiveness of the study and research instruments. The pilot study aimed to refine the research approach, assess the appropriateness of the sample selection, and evaluate the data collection process. For this purpose, a small subset of the target population was selected, which included 5 retail students from CPUT. This sample allowed for an early assessment of the research design.

The pilot study provided valuable insights into the practicality of interviewing key stakeholders and the clarity of the questions posed. It helped identify potential issues with the sampling strategy and data collection methods, enabling the researcher to make necessary adjustments before the full-scale study. Feedback from the pilot participants highlighted areas for improvement in the interview protocol and confirmed the relevance of the chosen roles. Additionally, it assisted in verifying that saturation would be achievable with the proposed sample size, ensuring that the final study would yield rich and comprehensive data.

3.6 Data Analysis

When conducting qualitative research, data analysis calls for a researcher to investigate data patterns by assessing repeating behaviours, events, and systems (Lester et al., 2020:64). Once the patterns are found, the researcher will go from describing empirical data to interpreting the data gathered (Bingham, 2023:1). One of the fundamental ideas in the analysis and interpretation of acquired data is coding (Parameswaran et al., 2019:630). The classification or categorisation of the data collection's major concepts and the retrieval of those concepts are referred to as coding (Parameswaran et al., 2019:630). Identifying the information that was particularly important to the study required taking notes, which were then used to code the data from interviews.

Finally, once the important content was found, quick notes of themes, meanings, and ideas were made to identify the key variables generated from the data (Bingham, 2023:1). After the interviews were taped, a freelance writer transcribed them, and the researcher then re-listened to the recordings while reviewing the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. The researcher was helped during the coding process by this procedure of comparing transcripts with recordings because key information was found and highlighted to create prospective code groups.

Mohajan and Mohajan (2022:50) demonstrated that coding starts with open coding, which is the primary sorting and labelling of data, followed by axial coding, which is the analysis of open coding through the grounded-theory method, intended to identify the important general concepts, and concludes with selective coding, which is building on the results of open coding and axial coding to identify the fundamental concepts that organise the 'body of textual material' through grounded theory. As previously stated, the research strategy for this study was rooted in grounded theory.

Previous studies like Stemmet (2021) utilised Atlas.ti by rephrasing the interview. The researcher generalised meanings and extracted objective processes from the data. This was done using a coding structure in the Atlas.ti analysis tool to identify the impact of advanced planning systems on the design of central inventory planning teams in retail. In this study, transcribed data were entered into Microsoft Excel and sorted

according to the respondents per given construct. Data were qualitatively analysed using Atlas.ti to generate word clouds and tables. Word clouds (also known as tag cloud, word collage or wordle) are visual representation of text that give greater rank to words that appear more frequently (Rungruangthum and Chaiyasit, 2023:121). They provide quick and simple visual insights that can lead to more in-depth analyses (Limna, 2023:272). Themes were extracted from the responses that were recorded so that logical interpretations were reported. Direct quotations were also used to state the findings from the interview data.

Atlas.ti was also used by Lorenzo-Romero et al. (2021) investigate the web innovation strategies employed by fashion companies in Spain, with a specific focus on analysing co-creation as an innovation strategy, aimed at enhancing customer engagement to improve efficiency and effectiveness in decision-making. Similarly, Jain, Mishra and Mukhopadhyay (2021) used a qualitative data analysis approach to empirically develop analytical frameworks of the critical success factors for luxury brands in the fashion industry. The next section discusses the ethical considerations.

3.7 Ethical considerations

To demonstrate professional, legal, and social accountability, a researcher must address ethical issues pertinent to the subject (Kang and Hwang, 2021). The researcher addressed several ethical principles before and throughout the research process to protect the participants and maintain the study's integrity. This study was given ethics clearance by the Faculty of Business Management Science Ethics Committee, CPUT (Clearance Certificate No | 2021_FBMSREC 091) (See Appendix 1). Further to the Ethics Clearance by CPUT, approval for this study was first obtained from the clothing retailers that were willing to participate in the research. The researcher contacted the individuals and invited them to participate in the study voluntarily. The participants received a letter outlining the study. The following are some of the most important ethical considerations the researcher adhered to.

3.7.1 Informed consent

Before conducting the research, participants were informed about the research so that the researcher obtains consent. The consent form (Appendix 2) informed each

participant about the details of the research, the ethical protocols and the rights of the respondent. This study was for academic purposes only and the respondents were not coerced to participate. Upon agreeing to participate in this study, the respondents signed the consent form (Appendix 2).

3.7.2 Privacy and confidentiality

This means that respondents have the right to share or withhold any information they may deem as private. It also involves the responsibility of the researcher to protect confidential information shared by respondents in confidence (Williams, 2023:42). The identification of the case firms' names and addresses was not revealed, ensuring privacy and secrecy. This encouraged participants to provide honest and sincere responses.

3.7.3 Voluntary withdrawal

This means the participants are not obliged to participate in the research, they can choose to stop engaging with the researcher at any given time (Kang and Hwang, 2021). It was both verbally explained and stated in the consent form that participants at any point, had the right to withdraw their participation without any reparations.

3.7.4 Anonymity

Anonymity is whereby research findings are reported without the names or any detail that may identify the specific respondents (Brown et al., 2020:747). The participants were only known by the researcher and their names or any form of their personal identification were not included in this study. Participants in this study were referred to as Participant A, B, C to ensure anonymity.

3.7.5 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is defined as reproducing others' original work or idea and failing to adequately acknowledge the source (Kang and Hwang, 2021). The researcher did not claim someone else's work or ideas as their own. The researcher neither put someone's work without full acknowledgment. This definition encompasses all published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, print, or electronic form. All work from other researchers were referenced accordingly.

3.7.6 Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that respondents have the right to share or withhold any information they may deem as private. It also involves the responsibility of the researcher to protect confidential information shared by respondents in confidence (Williams, 2023:42). The participants were informed that the information they shared was solely for the purpose of the study and was not going to be shared with anyone else for any other reason than for the study.

3.7.7 No harm principle

This means that no harm shall be posed to the participant if they select whether to engage in the study (Jaswinder et al., 2019:442). The researcher informed the participants that any form of harm was not going to occur whether physically, emotionally, or psychologically. The researcher ensured that no physical contact occurred during the interview due to the Covid-19 regulations and these interviews were done online. The next section discusses the reliability and validity.

3.8 Measures of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, reliability and validity are embraced under the concept of trustworthiness as proposed Ahmed (2024). Researchers achieve trustworthiness by demonstrating that research findings are confirmable, credible, dependable and transferable (Humphreys et al., 2021:856) as described in detail in the following sections.

3.8.1 Dependability

Dependability measures consistency and reliability of research findings (Haq, et al., 2023:151). This begins with the use of standardised methods for data collection, management analysis and interpretation so that the research may be theoretically replicated by other researchers (Stahl and King, 2020:27-28). To ensure dependability, this study makes use of standard methodologies in social sciences to collect the data as described in previous sections.

3.8.2 Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility measures the truth value to determine whether the research findings are accurate and correct (Rawhani, 2023:103). Credibility also is reflected through the credibility of the research methods as well as researchers themselves (Leko et al., 2021:281). Member checks, persistent observations, triangulation, negative case analysis, prolonged engagement with data, and referential adequacy are examples of procedures that can be done in qualitative studies to ensure credibility (The Farnsworth Group, 2023). To ensure credibility, detail from research findings were summarised to find overlapping themes that were consistent. The researcher also collaborated with an experienced supervisor in the retail field who immeasurably assisted to ensure that the research findings were credible.

3.8.3 Confirmability

Under confirmability, the researcher proves that the research is not influenced by the propositions or assumptions the researchers (Ahmed, 2024). Research findings should reflect information that was collected from the respondents or participants. To ensure confirmability, the researcher independently stated the propositions which were in the conclusion reflected upon based on the research findings to determine whether the assumptions of the researcher were proven or not proven.

3.8.4 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research measures the applicability of the research findings to other circumstances, contexts and settings (Stalmeijer et al., 2024:2). To demonstrate transferability this study provides detailed descriptions of the research methodology used to collect data (Stahl and King, 2020:28). This helps other researchers to evaluate whether the research findings are applicable to other circumstances, contexts and settings. The next section describes the limitations and delimitations of this study.

3.9 Limitations and Delimitations of Study

3.9.1 Delimitations of the study

In reference to delimitations of the research objectives and questions, this research was confined to investigating and subsequently developing an effective way of utilising

merchandise planning as a change management strategy in a clothing retailer. Nonetheless, this research study recognised that an effective merchandise planning strategy was not the only factor that impacted change management success and longevity within the retail environment. Entrepreneurial skills, internal operational management, organisational structures, and consumer needs are other factors that potentially impact the success and longevity of South African fashion designers within the retail environment.

With regards to the philosophical and methodological delimitations, this research study was focused on interpretivism reviewing the perceptions, consequent actions, and supply-chain representatives from a Cape Town retailer. Consequently, this research did not take the objective stance of reviewing research, which is research-based on one true reality of facts and quantifiable variables, making use of actual sample sizes of a set population to easily allow generalisation for set validation. The other delimitation was geographical as the study only focused on Cape Town retailers. The next section describes the limitations of this study.

3.9.2 Limitations of the study

Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019:261) suggested that restrictions could include issues with data gathering, participant unanswered queries, sampling issues, or the study's location. Primarily, the limitations of the research are the probable weaknesses of the study, which are out of the researcher's control (Leko et al., 2021:287).

The analysis of data collected in this research study was limited to the views, feedback, and consequent actions of merchandise planners, merchandise buyers, clothing retail staff, and supporting institutions at the specified time of the interviews. As a result, there were no quantifiable follow-up interviews to evaluate efficiency and sustainability over time as in longitudinal studies. Instead, the efficiency and sustainability of the change management strategy were developed based on the expertise and requirements of merchandise planners, clothing retailers, and stakeholders.

The total population size of Cape Town merchandise planners in the retail clothing environment was not documented, and the population included only one retail

company, which was a weakness and supporting industries. Therefore, there was a limitation with the population group, as change management partners such as customers, fabric suppliers, and clothing retail competitors could not be reached. This is a limitation of this study as research findings were based on one retailer. The development of an effective and sustainable change management strategy represented the most valued input from esteemed and experienced merchandise planners, merchandise buyers, and other industry stakeholders in Cape Town.

The effective change management strategy that was developed was limited to Cape Town merchandise planners only, as the qualitative research conducted and information obtained was from the Cape Town perspective only and may not be applicable to other South African provinces, as the perceptions, environment, information, and requirements may differ from province to province. Furthermore, the focus on a single company introduces certain limitations to the study. By concentrating exclusively on one organisation, the findings may not be representative of the broader industry, potentially overlooking diverse practices and strategies employed by other companies. This singular perspective can limit the generalisability of the results and may not capture the full spectrum of challenges and innovations within the fashion and accessories sector. Budgetary constraints also limited national travel and hampered extensive travel across the Western Cape. The next section provides the summary for this chapter.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the research methodology of this study, by first establishing the research philosophies as interpretivism, subjectivism, and pragmatism. The qualitative method was then introduced as this study's research approach, backed by the inductive-theory-building method. The grounded-theory method was presented as the strategy for this research study, which would be supported by in-depth, semi-structured, and cross-sectional interviews. The ethical considerations of this research study underpinned this chapter, with detailed accounts of the processes related to informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and participants' protection during the data-collection processes. The next chapter presents the results of this study and the discussion.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided detailed descriptions of the research methodology of this study. This included research philosophy, approach, sampling, data collection and analysis as well as ethical considerations. This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative analysis conducted as part of the research study on merchandise planning. In this chapter, the researcher explores the rich and nuanced data collected through interviews which provides a comprehensive understanding of the subject under investigation.

Throughout this chapter, the key themes and patterns that emerged from the analysis are presented. The results are presented according to the research questions and objectives outlined in Chapter 1 to ensure logical and coherent presentations of the data. By providing rich descriptions, direct quotes, and illustrative examples, this chapter aims to bring the findings to life and provide a comprehensive understanding of merchandise planning practices within the retail industry.

The researcher used the report from the qualitative analysis conducted through Atlas.ti. Word clouds, and tables were generated; and direct quotations were used to state the findings from the interviews from the participants. All the personally identifying information of respondents was not included to protect their anonymity and in this chapter, participants were referred to as for example, Participant A, B, C.

Word clouds (also known as tag cloud, word collage or wordle) are visual representations of text that provides greater rank to words that appear more frequently (Rungruangthum and Chaiyasit, 2023:121). They provide quick and simple visual insights that can lead to more in-depth analyses (Rungruangthum and Chaiyasit, 2023:121). From this word cloud that was generated (Figure 4.1), the researcher identified some key themes that are mentioned frequently. Load shedding, Covid-19,

clothing retailer, direct, supply chain, economic and global all seemed to have noticeable frequency within the dataset (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1: Word cloud depicting the words or phrases based on how frequently they appear in a dataset

Source: Researcher

4.2 Demographic Information

The sample for the current study consisted of 12 participants, including 10 males and 2 females. The participants were selected from 5 departments of the retail clothing company in Cape Town, South Africa. The participants' occupations included 5 merchandise planners, 5 merchandise buyers, and 2 merchandise allocators. This demographic mix reflects a diverse range of roles within the company, providing a comprehensive perspective on the merchandise planning and change management processes. While gender and occupation details were gathered informally during interactions, the research instrument itself did not include provisions for demographic information.

4.3 Main Objective: To establish how merchandise planning can be utilised as a change management strategy by a selected retail shop

The study revealed that merchandise planning can be effectively used as a change management strategy within the selected retail shop. Key findings indicated that a structured approach to merchandise planning enables the shop to anticipate market trends and consumer preferences, allowing for more agile responses to changes in the retail landscape. Through strategic forecasting and inventory management, the shop successfully minimised stockouts and overstock situations, thereby enhancing operational efficiency. The integration of real-time sales data into the planning process facilitated timely adjustments to product assortments, aligning offerings with current demand.

Moreover, the research highlighted the importance of collaboration across departments. Engaging teams from marketing, sales, and supply chain in the merchandise planning process fostered a cohesive strategy that reinforced the shop's adaptability. This cross-functional collaboration not only improved communication but also encouraged innovative solutions to emerging challenges.

Finally, customer feedback was identified as a crucial element in refining merchandise planning. By incorporating insights from shoppers, the retail shop was able to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty, further solidifying its position in a competitive market. Overall, effective merchandise planning emerged as a vital component of the shop's change management strategy, contributing to its resilience and growth.

4.4 Objective 1: Major factors causing demand changes in the clothing retailers in Cape Town

There were a number of factors that were highlighted to be acting on the demand for goods and services within the context of the past few years. The Covid-19 pandemic was the biggest challenge for the clothing retail market, and one of the influences on the demand change due to the economic conditions inflicted on consumers. These economic changes changed people's demand for certain types of goods, with an observable shift toward essentials as highlighted in Table 4.1. Another challenge being linked to this was the disruption to the supply chain, due to the global nature of the

manufacturing process as highlighted in Table 4.1. In the recent short term, load shedding and global trends have been identified as large influences on the demand by Participant F and G respectively. The economic changes were also mentioned by five participants. Interestingly, the most frequent challenge faced by the clothing retailers was inconsistent supply chain because 10 out of 12 participants cited it as a big challenge.

Table 4.1: The challenges faced by businesses in the clothing retail industry, as well as drivers of demand change as stated by 11 respondents to the survey

Challenges			Biggest challenge	Supply/Demand driver	Recent influence on demand	Result of influence
Load shedding; Supply Chain			COVID	Economic conditions	COVID	Online shopping
Load shedding; Supply Chain			Load shedding	Global trends	Load shedding	Increase Electric products
Load shedding; Supply Chain			COVID	Economic conditions	COVID	Online shopping
Supply chain			COVID	Global trends	COVID	Stabilising shopping
Load shedding; Supply Chain			Load shedding	Global trends	Sustainability	Local eco-friendly products
Load shedding; Competition			Supply Chain	Economic conditions	Loyalty program	Customer retention
Load shedding; Supply Chain; Economic changes			COVID	Economic conditions; Global trends	COVID	Demand shift to essentials
Load shedding; Supply Chain; Economic changes			Load shedding	Supply chain	Load shedding	Demand shift to essentials
Economic changes; Geographical; Supply Chain			COVID; Load shedding	Supply chain	COVID	Reduction in customers
Economic changes; Load shedding; Supply Chain			Load shedding	Global trends	Social Media	Online shopping
Economic changes; Load shedding; Supply Chain			Supply Chain	Global trends	Load shedding	Demand shift to essentials

Source: Researcher

4.4.1 COVID-19 Impact: Impact of COVID-19

As the Covid-19 outbreak spread throughout China, the epicentre of global manufacturing, apparel manufacturers from Bangladesh to Honduras began to face

input shortages, particularly fabric and other textiles (Castañeda-Navarrete et al., 2021). Moreover, as the pandemic spread to Europe and the United States, lockdowns were imposed, and demand for clothing plummeted (Castañeda-Navarrete et al., 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic had a marked effect on the global retail market. Among Africa's sub-regions, the hardest hit in terms of economic growth was Southern Africa, whose growth was estimated to have fallen by 7.0% in 2020 (Anyanwu and Salami, 2021). The pandemic accelerated the expansion of e-commerce towards new customers, types of products and firms (Beckers et al., 2021). E-commerce has enabled firms to continue operations despite contact restrictions and other confinement measures (Beckers et al., 2021). E-commerce transactions in many countries have partly shifted from luxury goods and services towards everyday necessities relevant to a large number of individuals, with Participants E and H also voicing a similar observation (Eger et al., 2021). The pandemic also impacted business operations in every industry and sector around the world. The effects of the social distancing measures, lockdowns, other restrictions on travel and trade, and consumer behaviour have yet to be fully understood; scholars, practitioners and policymakers are constantly trying to build a better picture (Eger et al., 2021; Grimmer, 2022).

1:23 ¶ 37 in Participant A

Answer: I think there are two major factors has impacted and thus changed the retail sector recently in South Africa. Those being Covid & Eskom.

1:30 ¶ 51 in Participant A

Answer: Our company has a massive reliance on international customers as well as customers travelling abroad. Thus, the travel restrictions over the last few years had a big impact.

5:4 ¶ 53 in Participant E

Covid and the resulting restrictions affected our sales massively - it changed what people were willing to spend their money on.

8:3 ¶ 32 in Participant H

The consumer's spending pattern has changed since Covid, critical needs outweighing the nice to haves. Even in my own capacity spending less and I am more cautious on what I spend on. The second thing is countries still dealing with covid and impacting on time handovers and deliveries.

10:6 ¶ 42 in Participant J

I would say Covid as the above explanation which was prolonged for over three years. This changes consumer behaviour and spending, with a big surge on online purchases for home delivery.

4.4.2 Business operations: Manufacturing

The participants confirmed that they rely on the international industry for their manufacturing businesses. Participants B, G and L recommended that local manufacturing industries should be revamped to cater for the needs of local merchandise distributors. The consensus is that local manufacturing will decrease the manufacturing costs and avoid any trade restrictions in the future. This is also supported by the Business Operations: Local production and manufacturing coding, which sheds light on the impact of Covid-19 on the demand for new products that could not be met due to reliance on foreign manufacturers. To date, South Africa is still the main importer of apparel in the region (Pasquali et al., 2021:371). This is, however, affecting other retailers in the apparel industry as they face strong competition from cheaper imports and new retailers (Pasquali et al., 2021:371).

2:14 ¶ 72 in Participant B

The idea has been on the table for year prior to Covid, but the demand only kicked in during Covid when the people realised that our dependency on foreign business could be detrimental. Local production and industry is the only way to improve the social standards in our country.

2:18 ¶ 92 in Participant B

A strong design and buying team to assist local manufacturers to create products which are right for market.

6:5 ¶ 125 in Participant F

Answer: Local manufacturing to be increased. Will lead to job creation and better pricing in stores with better margins and allow retailers to become more agile and get stock to our customers much quicker.

7:2 ¶ 31 in Participant G

Economic changes directly affect us as it affects our consumer spend and therefore directly on our sales. Consumer demand and also outside environmental factors affect how and where consumers spend. Load shedding and global changes, where our resource is affected, affect our price and therefore our margin. Load shedding increase our manufacturing cost and therefore our margin and how we trade going forward.

8:5 ¶ 40 in Participant H

Answer: Less travel post Covid. Now that travel bans have been relaxed it seems things are getting back to normal. Buying patterns will take some time to get back to normal.

12:5 ¶ 40 in Participant L

Unfortunately, due to the nature of our business, we are still dependent on producing certain outdoor equipment and footwear products in China.

12:10 ¶ 59 in Participant L

We have strived to increase our local production in our K-Way factory and tasked design team to create new products from redundant materials.

Another aspect of interest under Business Operations: Profitability, with respondents highlighting the need for merchandise planners to ensure profitability of the company. This is supported by Kartanegara (2020) who determined the role of merchandise planning in the success of a retail business. Implementing merchandise planning according to Jakhar et al. (2020: 2760) prevents losses in a retail organisation. However, the need for some functional and practical goods to spend on, means that meeting company margins is affected due to this change in demand. This is due to the

state of the economic changes happening within the country, which are shaping the spending habits of consumers (Ramakrishna et al., 2020:505). Some researchers have included techniques such as visual merchandising, as a component to drive profitability (Czerniachowska et al., 2021). These challenges would then require investment into improving these areas and alleviating the pressures on merchandise planners.

7:4 ¶ 37 in Participant G

Load shedding: this has increased the cost of our items due to factories increase in production costs as they are having to add more of their money to be able to function over load shedding, this in turn affects our cost which could lead to our customer paying more than they are used to.

10:5 ¶ 37 in Participant J

Lastly, in a crippling economy with rising costs in fuel, electricity and as a result, food and basic necessities, the South African consumer has less disposable income to spend on “luxury items”. This makes it more difficult to sell products at full price in the right seasons, leaving us to either lose profits by marking stock down, or again, an over stocked situation due to slower sales.

4.4.3 Economic factors: Economic challenges

Merchandise planners must anticipate and mitigate these risks by diversifying sourcing strategies, building buffer inventory, or developing contingency plans to ensure a consistent supply of products (Montoya and Flores, 2021). Economic factors such as increased competition, changes in customer purchasing power, and cost fluctuations can impact pricing strategies (Kaur et al., 2020; Bonfrer et al., 2022:3). Planners need to balance the need to remain competitive with maintaining profit margins. Within the South African perspective, there is mention of the load shedding aspect as a major agent of demand change spread across participant responses. For example, they highlight that in conjunction with Covid-19 and foreign manufacturing, load shedding is often present and affects the profit margin and where consumers spend their money.

The overarching theme or sentiment is that load shedding is a disruptive phenomenon (Inglesi-Lotz, 2023:1). Walsh et al. (2021) estimated the costs of load shedding in various sectors of South Africa based on the power outages between 2007 and 2019. The cost of load shedding in South Africa was estimated to be approximately R35 billion with transport, manufacturing, communications, agriculture, wholesale and retail trade being the most affected.

1:48 ¶ 112 in Participant A

The reliance on other countries for supply. We have the raw materials, the technology and the capability in South Africa however, struggle to provide the finished products that match the quality and costs of imported goods. Thus, a major portion of the market imports in the goods.

2:5 ¶ 38 in Participant B

From a socio-economic perspective, the backlash from Covid, increasing fuel cost, load shedding and general cost of living has put tremendous pressure on individuals and business. Even though we service a high LSM customer, the social dilemma hinders us from exploring new price brackets and the market is saturated with lower end price points.

7:2 ¶ 31 in Participant G

Economic changes directly affect us as they affect how consumers spend and therefore directly company sales. Consumer demand and also outside environmental factors affect how and where consumers spend. Load shedding and global changes, affect our price and therefore our margin. Load shedding increase our manufacturing cost and therefore our margin and how we trade going forward.

11:3 ¶ 22 in Participant K

We get affected by the fluctuation of the exchange rates, Covid-19 and the shift in customer needs/ demands, load shedding, strikes, weather patterns, international tourists, supplier capacity etc.

4.5 Objective 2: Strategies within merchandise planning used to deal with demand changes in the clothing retail industry in Cape Town

There were a number of solutions that the respondents talked about in response to the demand changes that are being observed in the clothing retail industry. Most changes revolve around improving the current systems of supply chain (45% of respondents), with one respondent suggesting diversification of supply chain as highlighted in Table 4.2). Other suggestions to mitigate the fluctuations in demand change mentioned include improving the adaptability of businesses to the continued shifts and the reaction times to the global trends. This adaptability was discussed as mostly linked to proper planning of merchandise acquisition, through historical data, reactivity and keeping in sight the available cash flow as highlighted in Table 4.2. The respondents also commented on the resources that were needed in implementing the strategies, and a large portion (54%) of respondents suggested that better trained personnel were a necessity. This increased capacity in personnel coupled with an efficient system of operation would be essential to the success of the merchandise plan as highlighted in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: The strategies used deal with the changes in demand in the clothing retail industry, Cape Town

Mitigation strategy	Merchandise planning implementation	Resources required	Role resource required
Improve Supply chain	Historical data	Personnel	Efficient system
Improve Reaction Time	Reactivity	Social Media	Efficient system
Improve Innovation	Planning	Personnel	Efficient system
Improve Adaptability		Supply chain	Efficient system
Diversify supply chain			
Increase markdowns	Planning	Software	Efficient system
Improve Supply chain	Planning	Personnel	Stakeholder buy-in
Improve Supply chain	Planning	Personnel	Marketing analytics
Improve stock	Planning		
Improve Supply chain	Cash flow	Personnel	Stakeholder buy-in
Improve Adaptability	Reactivity	Personnel	Efficient system

Source: Researcher

In Mexico, Nucamendi-Guillén et al. (2018) proposed methodologies to increase revenue in the highly volatile fashion retail industry. Findings from Nucamendi-Guillén

et al. (2018) revealed that shortage in fashion products can be significantly reduced by inventory management and forecasting demand. Ren et al. (2020) reviewed various studies and concluded that demand forecasting and merchandise planning for fashionable products prevent retail losses. As the fashion industry faces various challenges, Ahmad et al. (2020) recommends that fashion retail companies invest in business intelligence systems in order to forecast demand and be able to supply fashionable products.

4.5.1 Technology

An efficient system of operations is one of the biggest resources required by most merchandise planning staff because it allows for ease of drafting ideas and implementation. Through its ability to increase productivity, reduce costs, and deliver better goods and services, technology is transforming how every retailer conducts business (Rajkumar, 2021). This sentiment was shared by six participants, and they have similar thoughts about this system in an attempt to meet the shifting demands. The integration of technological solutions to address these dynamic demand changes is seen as a necessity in order to be able to keep up and dominate the market. To solve issues like excess inventory, buffer stock, reorder amount, stock movement across channels, sales centres, and stock outs, the use of IoT-enabled supply chains is promoted. These chains have various criteria for each channel (Gahletia, 2021).

1:48 ¶ 112 in Participant A

The reliance on other countries for supply. We have the raw materials, the technology and the capability in South Africa however, struggle to provide the finished products that match the quality and costs of imported goods. Thus, a major portion of the market imports in the goods.

2:19 ¶ 97 in Participant B

Government investment in infrastructure to create tools and knowledge to create more technical footwear and equipment related products.

3:10 ¶ 84 in Participant C

Social Media incl. news, Shipping updates for external. WRT internal resources, systems are important, and they need to be updated constantly in order to keep up with demands.

3:16 ¶ 121 in Participant C

Better systems to better do your job. Compensate your employees better. Have a set structure to allow growth internally.

4:9 ¶ 84 in Participant D

More employees to spread the work load, better computer systems – ordering process to be more streamlined.

10:8 ¶ 63 in Participant J

Investment has gone into our online presence as well as bolstering up our resources in this area. Business KPI's has been adjusted to incentivise merchants to pay more attention to online visibility, data integrity, etc.

4.5.2 Operations management: Supply chain management

This system would directly lead to improving of the current supply chain systems in place, reducing their wasteful and/or inadequate support of local clothing retail industry. The skill of risk assessment and management is handicapped if there are no follow-ups that ensure a smooth supply chain line. The research study by Hove-Sibanda et al. (2021), primarily discovered that the majority of grocery retail establishments deal with their individual suppliers for late deliveries, damaged product, theft, expensive fuel, and expired stock.

The apparel industry is characterised by inevitable inherent uncertainties, short life cycles, diverse products, rigid supply procedures, and high impulse buying behaviour; which complicates supply chain management (Hove-Sibanda et al., 2021:228). The supply chain is an important strategy in the fashion retail industry as it ensures that fashion and clothing products are delivered at the right time to meet the ever-changing demand (Fung, 2020). Fashion retailers with well-managed supply chain experience

faster turnarounds, lower operational costs, maximised profits and ultimately, high customer satisfaction (Fung, 2020).

In a study by Teke et al. (2022), the researchers evaluated the performance of the six major clothing retailers that are listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange using a supply chain index. The study by Teke et al. (2022) encouraged clothing retailers to measure the performance of their supply chain and to share information with their partners. For retailers to have a supply chain which is efficient, they need to achieve both service and cost leadership (Teke et al., 2022:86). In Mouhsene et al.'s. (2019) study, 26 different types of models related to the performance evaluation of the supply chain were identified and applied in different areas. One of the widely used supply chain evaluation models was supply chain operation reference, which provides an assessment method to evaluate where the retailer stands, relative to its competitors (Melkonyan et al., 2019:145).

1:22 ¶ 32 in Participant A

Retailers are reliant on the suppliers to provide goods in agreed quantities and on time. The simplest delay in the supply chain (i.e. shipping issues, factory delays) has an impact on stock availability and can thus have impact on turnover and stock turn metrics.

1:38 ¶ 74 in Participant A

Buyers Assistant (responsible for placing orders with the supplier as per the instructions from buyer and planner and responsible for tracking the order that they arrive on time to meet the demand).

2:7 ¶ 41 in Participant B

Even though there is a big focus on local manufacturing, the prolonged Covid control measures in China have put tremendous strain on our supply chain.

5:6 ¶ 75 in Participant E

We have really close and strategic relationships with key suppliers who assist us in managing stock levels. When demand changes, we have conversations and come up

with solutions collectively to assist both supplier and retailer. This might include re-flowing stock or cancelling what has not yet been produced. I am the key 'relationship holder' and communicate with my suppliers when this need arises.

7:8 ¶ 67 in Participant G

Trying to go more local where we can, but also to balance risk over one or more supplier and not to have it all in one basket.

9:6 ¶ 73 in Participant I

Due to a heavy import supplier base within the footwear space, it has been difficult to react to trade, however we have emphasised increasing our supplier base and our local supplier base. I need to ensure we buy the correct quantities and ensure an adequate order pipeline to support these trends.

11:3 ¶ 22 in Participant K

Fluctuation of the rate of exchange, effecting the rand to dollar exchange, international lead times, cross seasonality when dealing with brands which stem from Europe, Covid-19, and the shift in customer needs/ demands, load shedding, strikes, weather patterns, international tourists, supplier capacity etc.

4.5.3 Strategic management

The use of analytics and appropriate interpretation to understand the implications of merchandise plans on the bottom line of each business objective is important. Participants C, J and I highlighted this in their responses. The need to react quickly to demand change trends across the scope is very apparent for the specific roles they play. The use of historic information and technical knowledge of the current drivers of market trends through researching the competitors is a skill that is invaluable to any merchandise planner.

Strategic management in the clothing retail industry requires a special kind of expertise to formulating strategies required to analyse, weigh and conceptualise business situations (Basu and Kolte, 2019:28). Generally, there is no single strategy that is universally applied to all clothing retail companies but instead, each company must

determine a strategy based on its resources, capabilities, objectives and market position (Basu and Kolte, 2019:28). Though ZARA is a leader in the clothing industry, it also encounters multitude of problems as described by Duoyan (2020). Strategic management is prioritised by ZARA to minimise the impact of these multitudes of problems. One of ZARA's strategies is corporate social responsibility which has hidden added values with associated environmental, social and ethical implications (Cui and Fan, 2021). ZARA's corporate social responsibility report indicates the positive contributions of the company to the economy, the environment and human development (Cui and Fan, 2021).

3:1 ¶ 4 in Participant C

Merchandise Planner – I analyse historical trends within my portfolio to determine the best possible way to optimise future sales. Inventory Planning, manage OTB (budgets) and ensure the Department has efficient stock to fulfil sales or if required, cancel, or roll out stock to ensure business is not overstocked. Replenishment of stock on a weekly basis to ensure stores are well equipped to make sales. Post seasonal analysis to determine the best possible strategy for future seasons. Having a strong relationship with suppliers is key to ensure stock gets delivered when required and there is openness between all parties. React to current trade on a weekly basis. Store analysis.

3:7 ¶ 66 in Participant C

Analyse competitors and follow them closely, follow the news and social media. Extremely important. Management and the team work closely to react as quickly as possible to certain changes – you could say almost immediately.

5:6 ¶ 75 in Participant E

We have really close and strategic relationships with key suppliers who assist us in managing stock levels. When demand changes, we have conversations and come up with solutions collectively to assist both supplier and retailer. This might include re-flowing stock or cancelling what has not yet been produced. I am the key 'relationship holder' and communicate with my suppliers when this need arises.

9:10 ¶ 102 in Participant I

Systems that are efficient and allows for adequate analysis to take place, as well as a clearly defined strategy from upper management.

9:13 ¶ 122 in Participant I

Statistical analysis, interpretation of data and understanding the implications of supply chain and how to react accordingly. Being proactive is essential.

10:2 ¶ 17 in Participant J

As the buying manager, I work closely together with my planning manager. Together we plan budgets, analyse sales and performance and devise product strategies for the department.

11:16 ¶ 71 in Participant K

Product sustainability and sustainable product/ supplier sourcing needs to be measured, spoken about, and improved upon drastically.

4.5.4 Communication

After the acquisition of the relevant information, the communication skills of merchandise planners among themselves and other departments within the company is important in order to streamline the processes, to ensure a more efficient supply chain (Jacobs and Karpova, 2022a). All participants stressed the importance of communication as a crucial ability required to carry out their daily tasks both inside and outside of the firm. Internal systems, and social media for external communication are also important to alert the consumer of upcoming products timeously. Seasonal success depends on the capacity to brief suppliers accurately, which guarantees the timely supply of the right product. When working with suppliers from different countries and speaking different languages, communication was extremely crucial.

A number of studies (Robles, 2012; Frazier and Cheek, 2016; Dal Mas et al., 2022:223; Jacobs and Karpova, 2022b) also emphasised the importance of communication in a clothing retail company. The success of a clothing retail company is also based on the ability of the employees to accurately relay information on stock

to ensure delivery the timeous delivery of the right products (Lynch and Barnes, 2020:473). Not only must employees of a clothing retail company be able to communicate with customers, but also between departments (Fraccastoro et al., 2020). With customers in the clothing sector increasing and with the world going digital, fashion retailers need to invest in modern communication tools so that they engage with customers over various platforms (Chaturvedi, 2020; Peng, 2020). Having social media platforms, a clothing retail company will be able to follow trending products and merchandise planning will incorporate these trending products so maximise profits (Casadei and Lee, 2020).

3:10 ¶ 84 in Participant C

Answer: Social Media incl. news, Shipping updates for external. WRT internal resources, systems are important, and they need to be updated constantly in order to keep up with demands.

4:7 ¶ 68 in Participant D

Answer: Management strategies and meetings to respond to the changes – need to sign off the budgets where it increases or decreases in order to make the requires sales and margin and stock plans.

5:6 ¶ 75 in Participant E

We have really close and strategic relationships with key suppliers who assist us in managing stock levels. When demand changes, we have conversations and come up with solutions collectively to assist both supplier and retailer. This might include re-flowing stock or cancelling what has not yet been produced. I am they key 'relationship holder' and communicate with my suppliers when this need arises.

4.6 Objective 3: Benefits of having an efficient and effective merchandise plan

Despite the South African apparel retail industry's economic power, the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (2016) identified significant gaps in workers' skills and knowledge. Due to the rapid internationalisation of the apparel retail landscape, the demand for skilled merchandising professionals in South Africa has increased since the late 2000s. The merchandising function has since evolved into a

centralised, team-based function as merchandisers play a significant role in synchronising retail functions and navigating globalised supply chains to deliver products that meet consumer demand (Jacobs & Karpova, 2020). There was discussion around the perceived benefits of having an efficient and effective merchandise plan.

Six soft skill types (communication, diplomacy, flexibility, administrative/managerial, positive attitude, teamwork), one hard skill type (technology), five explicit knowledge types (retail operations, manufacturing, marketplace awareness, assortment management, product development), and one tacit knowledge type were among the thirteen 'must-have' skills and knowledge types (professional experience) (Jacobs and Karpova, 2022b). The respondents' thoughts on what the benefits could be, showed the largest portion (64%) of them referring to the ability to use long term planning to form strategies and minimise losses in order to remain within the company margins of competitiveness, profitability and sustainability as highlighted in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Benefits of an effective merchandise plan

Benefits of merchandise plan	Competencies for merchandise planning	Shortcomings
Strategise	Analytical	Supply chain deficiency
Long term planning	Analytical	Slow/incorrect response
Strategise	Analytical	Lack independence
Strategise	Analytical	High prices
	Flexibility	Low quality
Strategise	Analytical	Lack independence
Strategise	Collaboration	Supply chain deficiency
Competitive	Flexibility	Low quality
Strategise	Analytical	Lack independence
Strategise	Knowledge	Lack independence
Minimise loss	Collaboration	Supply chain deficiency

Source: Researcher

Respondents also highlighted the need for a good merchandise planner to have an analytical mindset (Jacob and Karpova, 2020), have the flexibility to enable them to effectively collaborate with other sectors within the business to ensure an effective

merchandise plan was in place as highlighted in Table 4.3. There were comments on the shortcomings of most merchandise plans or planners, lacking independence which led to supply chain deficiency. This is also made worse by low quality goods and high prices due to factors such as load shedding and the economic shifts.

Merchandise planning is an important management aspect that ensures the success of a retailer (Akhilendra and Aravendan, 2023:122). Sarma et al. (2023) investigated the strategies that are used by fashion retailers to mitigate against the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and found out that the role of merchandise planning in fashion retailers. The importance of merchandise planning in the fashion retail industry was also highlighted by Roggeveen's (2021:81) study. Sound merchandise planning enables fashion retail companies to efficiently make short and long-term plans as well as business decisions that maximises profits. Merchandise planning decisions that are made by fashion retail companies include procurement of adequate products, planning production policies, product pricing decisions, monitoring of sales and the management of funds (Wen et al., 2019:36). These merchandise planning decisions help the fashion retail company to effectively allocate resources allowing customer demand to be met (Aggarwal and Rathee, 2025:337). Poee (2020) developed an effective supply chain model in the retail clothing industry of South Africa. Among Poee's (2020) recommendations, clothing retail companies should implement sound merchandise planning protocols. Sound merchandise planning was also recommended by Choi and Guo's (2018) study.

4.6.1 Collaboration

There were eight quotes from the respondents addressing the need for collaboration between multiple departments and role players to achieve a successful merchandise plan. This included the development of good working relationships with the design and quality control teams to allow for an efficient execution of the plan. This aspect of a merchandise plan is beneficial because it allows all key players to participate to their best abilities and state their limitations where another department may cover that vulnerability, increasing efficiency. This specific outcome of merchandise plans enables the strategic readjusting and flexibility that is needed to keep up with the

volatile South African retail market. Therefore, efficiency and quick reaction timeframes are crucial for the supply of relevant goods to consumers.

Collaboration within a company contributes to its success (Todeschini et al., 2020:1). Katemauswa and Naude (2020:3) further confirmed that lack of collaboration between departments, miscommunications, uninformed changes affect merchandise planning and ultimately affects profitability. These findings corroborate with Wen et al.'s (2019:34) findings that for companies to succeed, they need to effectively collaborate within the company itself as well as with external collaborators. Collaboration with external partners is increasingly becoming important as companies seek to expand their products and maximise profits by meeting the changing consumer preferences and needs (Gocek, 2023). Identifying the suitable collaborators is a challenge given the general diversity of companies. Dangers that come with incompatible collaborations include conflict of interest, management issues, monetary losses and partnership imbalances (Chen et al., 2020). Contrary to this, effective collaborations result in increased sales, expanded markets, as well as lower retailing costs (Joseph et al., 2019; Gocek, 2023).

1:40 ¶ 78 in Participant A

However, DC staff, marketing, omni team, photography, suppliers, store staff etc are all involved as well.

2:16 ¶ 82 in Participant B

Since the goal is not only to produce product locally, but to support local business, it requires effort from every individual in the business, from stationery needs, tailor made finance deals, etc.

2:24 ¶ 125 in Participant B

Skills development lays at the centre of a successful economy. Government must push this agenda and the public and private sectors must work together to achieve the goal. As a retailer with plenty of experience in manufacturing, we can assist in supporting this agenda.

4:1 ¶ 16 in Participant D

Buyers and Planners work closely, the buyer selects the ranges and the planner put units and budgets against these styles. Together we will agree on the store grids – how many stores to send the products to Top, Middle or All stores.

5:2 ¶ 17 in Participant E

I work directly with my merchandise planner who plans the sales, stock levels, store grading and size curves for our products.

5:16 ¶ 150 in Participant E

Communicate strategies clearly to all levels and create a strong reputation for clarity and transparency – this really makes change easy and digestible.

8:10 ¶ 60 in Participant H

Including the current team I mentioned above, we need our extended team to execute strategies and for example. Design, QC, and good relationships with external suppliers.

12:17 ¶ 92 in Participant L

A strong design and buying team to assist local manufacturers to create products which are right for market.

4.6.2 Efficiency

The respondents are aware of the benefits of a merchandise plan where the efficiency rating is high. After investing effort, money and time, the ease of troubleshooting when problems arise makes it worth a lot more. This also helps with minimising waste and losses, while maximising sales and feeding directly to the company's margins. The elevated competitiveness of the business will mean that they will see an increase in profits, tying back to the profitability coding. This is the best-case scenario for all involved parties because when service and goods delivery are of a high quality, the satisfaction of the relevant stakeholders is also elevated. This would represent a good and sustainable business model. An effective merchandise planning system has been shown to be a critical factor for the success of any retailer (Keenan, 2022).

3:6 ¶ 59 in Participant C

Answer: extremely quickly. Suppliers are very flexible and if they react quickly, it gives the business the opportunity to react quickly as well.

5:13 ¶ 118 in Participant E

Having clear outlines also help isolate problem areas – this can be adjusted and affected easily when merchandise plans are thorough and well thought-through.

6:5 ¶ 125 in Participant F

Answer: Local manufacturing to be increased. Will lead to job creation and better pricing in stores with better margins and allow retailers to become more agile and get stock to our customers much quicker.

7:7 ¶ 55 in Participant G

We have increased our critical path and now places things sooner than the past to avoid any delay in deliveries. Work closer with suppliers and strategically so we can support one another especially through load shedding where alternate solutions need to be implemented.

9:10 ¶ 102 in Participant I

Systems that are efficient and allows for adequate analysis to take place, as well as a clearly defined strategy from upper management.

10:18 ¶ 117 in Participant J

If we all know where we need to go, we can all go there together. Having a sound merchandise plan, that all members bought into, creates cohesion and direction. If it is clear, it is easy to execute on the below.

11:13 ¶ 60 in Participant K

Less waste: (maximise sales, less markdown, less end-of-life stock, efficiencies across shipping and distribution)

Other general commentary by the respondents expressed their feelings that more companies needed to invest in development of their staff members, in order to enrich their efficiency in carrying out their particular roles as outlined. There was a strong sentiment for progression within a role and between roles, from junior to senior and management.

4:13 ¶ 122 in Participant D

The hiring and induction process to be effective in allowing a new employee to hit the ground running. A great training program as well as a rewards programme to select the correct candidate as well as to retain the talent.

5:15 ¶ 148 in Participant E

Employ strong, passionate, and open-minded individuals and make sure they remain challenged and rewarded.

9:14 ¶ 139 in Participant I

Employing the correct people and ensuring there are good training programs within the company. Mentorship and knowledge distribution is key to ensuring the longevity of a company. Allowing those people to then bring their own individual ideas without stifling their innovation will ensure the company is constantly adapting to change within the retail space.

4.5 Chapter summary

The chapter concludes by summarising the major factors influencing demand changes in Cape Town clothing retailers. It emphasises the importance of retailers continuously monitoring and adapting to these factors in order to remain competitive. Understanding the economic climate, Covid-19, manufacturing, and socio-economic issues allows retailers in Cape Town's clothing retail market to effectively respond to shifts in demand and meet the evolving needs of their customers. The study found that merchandise planning serves as an effective change management strategy for the selected retail shop by enabling agile responses to market trends and consumer preferences. Through strategic forecasting and collaboration across departments, the shop improved operational efficiency and enhanced customer satisfaction.

Additionally, incorporating real-time sales data and customer feedback allowed for timely adjustments to product assortments, reinforcing the shop's adaptability in a competitive landscape. The general consensus is that Cape Town clothing retailers should use data analytics and integrate technology solutions into their merchandise planning processes. This entails analysing sales data, customer insights, and market trends with advanced analytics tools. Retailers can gain valuable insights, make data-driven decisions, and optimise their merchandise by leveraging the power of data and technology. Efficient merchandise planning streamlines operations improves overall supply chain efficiency and promotes cohesion among the various relevant departments through collaboration. Retailers can optimise inventory flow and reduce lead times by aligning product assortments with production and procurement schedules. This results in more efficient operations, better coordination with suppliers, and increased product availability. The next chapter provides the conclusion and recommendations for this study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the research findings and provided a discussion of the research findings. In this concluding chapter, key findings and insights from this study that looked at merchandise planning as a strategy to effectively manage demand change are brought together. The chapter revisits the objectives presented in Chapter 1 and provides a conclusion under each objective and further provides recommendations. Throughout this research, there has been examination and where possible explanation of the intricate relationship between merchandise planning and its ability to adapt to dynamic shifts in supply chain challenges, global market trends, and local external factors, such as load shedding and the over dependence to non-local manufacturing. As a significant number of South African fashion retailers continue to struggle within the retail environment (Pooe, 2020), this could be linked to lack of merchandise planning as documented in other studies (Rintamäki et al., 2021). By synthesising the evidence presented in the preceding chapters, meaningful conclusions that shed light on the significance and implications of merchandise planning in the modern business landscape can be drawn. The next section revisits the research aim and objectives.

5.2 Revisiting the research aim and objectives

The primary aim was to establish how merchandise planning can be used as a change management strategy by a selected retail shop. By employing a qualitative data collection technique, there was a holistic understanding of the interactions of the staff and the multifaceted nature of merchandise planning which informs its impact on demand management in the South African context (Smith, 2019). The next section revisits the research questions.

5.3 Revisiting the primary research question

How can merchandise planning be implemented as a change management strategy in a selected retail shop in Cape Town?

In order to answer the primary research question, the data analysis (Chapter 4) was planned, executed and written in such a manner that the specific question would be answerable in multiple parts. The ways in which it has been implemented include, merchandise buyers and planners working together albeit with minimal cohesion and command of the supply chain. The participants discussed this in the context of how this shortcoming was exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, whereby the systems in place were halted due to restrictions in response to the national states of disasters across the globe.

In conclusion, implementing merchandise planning as a change management strategy in the selected retail shop in Cape Town can significantly enhance the store's adaptability and responsiveness to market dynamics. By establishing a systematic approach to forecasting and inventory management, the shop can better align its product offerings with consumer demand, thereby minimising stockouts and excess inventory. Furthermore, fostering collaboration among departments ensures that insights from various functions inform the merchandise planning process, leading to more effective decision-making.

Incorporating customer feedback into planning initiatives will further strengthen customer loyalty and satisfaction, positioning the shop as a responsive and customer-centric retailer. Ultimately, a well-executed merchandise planning strategy not only supports change management but also drives operational efficiency, enhances competitive advantage, and promotes sustainable growth in the evolving retail landscape of Cape Town.

5.4 Findings and themes

Having analysed the empirical data and conducted an in-depth review of existing literature, several key findings were identified, that contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of merchandise planning and change management. These findings are presented to answer the supporting questions in the following sub-sections.

5.4.1 What are the major factors that cause demand changes in the clothing retailers in Cape Town?

The major factors that cause demand changes in the clothing retail industry were identified as the economic conditions, load shedding, supply chain and global trends. In this study, Covid-19 was also identified as a factor that caused demand changes in clothing retailers after the 2020 lockdown. These factors are linked in varying degrees, from closely tied to one another (economic conditions and supply chain being a good example) or have little to no relationship (Covid-19 and load shedding) and yet, all of them put together have influence on the demand changes. The presence of these major factors does confirm that *Proposition 1* (which states that “*there are major factors that cause demand changes in clothing retailers in Cape Town*”) is true.

However, the extent to which these factors drive demand change is yet to be determined, therefore further investigation into their intensity is beneficial in scaling them. Various studies have also confirmed that clothing retailers are affected by major factors such as season, location, trends, the economy, pandemics, and other external factors. Highly mentioned in this study as a major factor that affected the clothing retail industry is the Covid-19 pandemic which was also mentioned by several studies. Through sound merchandise planning, these challenges can be to some extent contained and the next section presents a conclusion based on results on how merchandise planning can be used to deal with demand changes.

5.4.2 What strategies within merchandise planning can be used to deal with demand changes in the retail clothing industry in Cape Town?

Conforming to *Proposition 2* (which states that “*there are strategies within merchandise planning that can be used to deal with demand changes in the retail clothing industry in Cape Town*”) by adopting data-driven decision making and promoting collaborative demand planning and forecasting, organisations can navigate uncertainty, seize market opportunities, and achieve competitive advantage. This research study contributes to the existing knowledge base by providing empirical evidence and practical insights into the strategic significance of merchandise planning. It is our hope that these findings will inspire further research and inform the practices of organisations seeking to excel in demand management and merchandise planning.

According to Benner and Waldfogel (2020:3), management strategies are designed by retail companies to set their courses of action thereby identifying strategies that will be used to compete in the market as well as how it will organise its internal activities. There are several types of change management which include strategic, operational, transformational, structural and unplanned changes among others. Strategies determine the performance of an organisation both in the short and long-run. These according to Miller (2020) include environmental scanning, formulation of strategies, implementation of strategies, and evaluation and control. The next section presents the benefits of having efficient and effective merchandise plans.

5.4.3 What are the benefits of having an efficient and effective merchandise plan?

Effective merchandise planning necessitates collaboration among various stakeholders within the supply chain, including suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers. The research findings underscore the significance of collaborative demand planning and forecasting as a means to align the entire value chain and synchronise demand signals. This collaboration enables organisations to better respond to demand changes, mitigate risks, and improve overall supply chain efficiency which is also in support of *Proposition 3 (which states that “there are benefits to having an efficient and effective merchandise plan”)* from Chapter 1.

Findings from this study corroborate with various studies that acknowledges merchandise planning in different sectors. In the retail clothing sector, merchandise planning has always been a top priority and is considered to be more important than any other merchandising strategies. This is because merchandise planning involves establishing budgets, allocating budgets to each category for purchasing merchandise which all fall under financial planning. The clothing retailer, therefore, ought to carefully plan to order merchandise.

5.5 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The present study contributes significantly to the evaluation of existing theories and models in merchandise planning within the context of both South African and broader African clothing retail industries. It highlights how labour regimes, public governance

and geopolitical factors, influenced by 21st-century globalisation (Pasquali et al., 2021), affect the pressures on South Africa's retail value supply chains. The findings of this research underscore that effective supply chain management is a crucial component of a successful merchandise plan. Addressing this gap is vital for retail business management scholars, as well as policymakers at national, regional, and global levels (Muhwati and Salisbury, 2022). This study offers valuable insights from those directly impacted by inadequate legislation or perceived shortcomings in public governance.

The study also emphasises the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which exposed and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in supply chain management. Participants noted that legislative responses were sluggish, leading to a slower-than-expected recovery. Globally, the pre-pandemic consensus on merchandise planning was mixed, with Castañeda-Navarrete et al. (2021) highlighting how global lockdowns halted production and revealed a lack of redundancy in supply chains. This lack of preparedness had severe economic repercussions for the Southern African region (Anyanwu and Salami, 2021; Toth et al., 2022). Conversely, the pandemic also catalysed a shift towards e-commerce, as noted by Beckers et al. (2021), Cullen et al. (2022), and Makhitha and Mbedzi (2022). Mtotywa and Kekana (2023) further investigated how improved e-commerce systems enhance consumer satisfaction in South Africa, finding that efficiency, reliability, and responsiveness are key to customer contentment.

The practical implications of these findings suggest a heightened need for incorporating advanced technology into merchandise planning to adapt to demand fluctuations. Participants called for efficient operational systems to streamline supply chain management and engage stakeholders effectively. This sentiment is supported by other research, such as Mtotywa and Kekana (2023), indicating that technological integration is crucial for addressing demand changes and improving overall supply chain performance. Thus, both theoretical and practical perspectives converge on the necessity of enhancing technological tools and legislative frameworks to bolster merchandise planning and supply chain management in the face of global challenges

and evolving market dynamics. The next section presents the recommendations based on the research findings.

5.6 Recommendations

In this section, recommendations and suggestions as to the best course of action the selected clothing retailer may take are made, based on the findings.

5.6.1 How merchandise planning can be utilised as a change management strategy by a selected retail shop

To effectively use merchandise planning as a change management strategy, the selected retail shop should implement several key recommendations. First, the shop should invest in advanced data analytics tools to enhance forecasting accuracy. By leveraging real-time sales data, customer insights, and market trends, the shop can make informed decisions that align inventory with current consumer demand.

Second, fostering cross-departmental collaboration is crucial. Regular meetings between merchandising, marketing, and sales teams will ensure that insights are shared, and strategies are cohesive, driving a unified approach to merchandise planning. This collaboration can also facilitate innovative solutions to emerging challenges. Third, the retail shop should actively seek and incorporate customer feedback into its merchandise planning processes. Utilising surveys and social media interactions can provide valuable insights into consumer preferences, enabling the shop to adapt its offerings accordingly. Lastly, ongoing training and development for staff involved in merchandise planning will ensure that the team remains agile and well-equipped to respond to changes in the retail environment. By following these recommendations, the retail shop can effectively leverage merchandise planning as a dynamic change management strategy, enhancing its resilience and competitiveness in the market.

5.6.2 Existence of major factors that cause demand changes in clothing retailers in Cape Town

The study found that there are major factors affecting the clothing retail industry in South Africa. Clothing retailers should invest in sound merchandise planning and

demand forecasting tools to contain the deleterious impacts of these challenges. Pandemics for example Covid-19 which are difficult, can be contained by counteracting through altering the operating behaviour of the clothing retailer. The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the fashion industry as a whole. Clothing retail companies should have emergency response business protocols so that the impact of pandemics and unforeseen events can be minimised. As revealed in this study, sound merchandise planning can be a management strategy that can help clothing retailers to forecast demand of the respective current period.

5.6.3 Strategies within merchandise planning that can be used to deal with demand changes in the retail clothing industry in Cape Town

This study revealed that technology, supply chain management, strategic management and communication were the main strategies used by the retail clothing industry as a strategy for merchandise planning. Retail clothing companies should continue to use comprehensive plans that guide the company to enhance customer satisfaction and maximisation of profits. Clothing retailers should invest in technological tools so that they market their products well to reach potential customers. Communication is key in the retail clothing industry both within the company and outside with suppliers and clients so that the right stock is available at the right time. Moreover, employees should periodically receive training on strategies the retail clothing company uses to address retail challenges. This must be a planned training that may be done at the beginning of every year and also as an orientation protocol for new employees.

5.6.4 Benefits of having an efficient and effective merchandise plan

Merchandise planning is an important management aspect that ensures the success of a retailer. This was revealed in this study as well as various studies conducted in South Africa and around the world. Sound merchandise planning enables fashion retail companies to efficiently make short and long-term plans as well as business decisions that maximises profits. Owing to the benefits of merchandise planning based on research findings from this study as well as supporting literature, retail companies should implement merchandise planning to assist retail companies to effectively allocate resources allowing customer demand to be met. This recommendation

extends to SMEs which often struggle with the dynamic retail industry and carefully planning could enable SMEs to thrive in this volatile economy.

Shortcomings of most merchandise plans or planners were mentioned in this study and these include lack of independence which led to supply chain deficiency. This is made worse by low quality goods and high prices due to factors such as load shedding and the economic shifts. Departmental managers should always verify information that they get from the general employees so that accurate merchandise decisions are made. Managers should also routinely inspect the quality of goods and prices so that future stocking of products is based on customer satisfaction towards the previous stock.

5.7 Directions for future research

This research was confined to investigating and subsequently developing an effective way of utilising merchandise planning as a change management strategy in a clothing retailer. Nonetheless, this study recognised that an effective merchandise planning strategy was not the only factor that impacted change management success and longevity within the retail environment. Future studies should incorporate several factors and not confine the research to only merchandise planning.

This study was only conducted in Cape Town and one clothing retail company was investigated. This might not reflect the situation in other retailers in South Africa. Comprehensive studies can be conducted that incorporates other retailers in different sectors and in different provinces. This is because geographical factors have also been shown to affect retailers to some extent. This study used a qualitative method as a methodological approach which has several limitations that may prevent the topic from being fully explored. To counter these methodological limitations, future studies should use mixed methods so that qualitative and quantitative approaches are intertwined to fully explore future similar topics in the field of retail management. Future studies could also incorporate components on customer views so that the topic is holistically unpacked. The next section reflects on the experience of this study as well as a general conclusion.

5.8 Reflections and concluding remarks

This study managed to achieve the set objectives that were presented in Chapter 1. The researcher's experience in conducting this research revealed that clothing retailers like other industries face various challenges in their operating environment. It is up to each retailer to implement change management strategies for them to thrive in a volatile economy. As proposed by this study, merchandise planning helps companies to effectively allocate resources allowing customer demand to be met. The findings that the studied clothing retail company uses merchandise planning in its operations is a commendable management practice which should be a basic practice for all retailers. The development of an effective and sustainable change management strategy by retail companies represents the most valued input from esteemed and experienced merchandise planners, merchandise buyers, and other industry stakeholders in Cape Town.

This study makes substantial contributions to the field of retail business management particularly the field of clothing retailing where there is not much literature available. Information generated by this study may be used for future references. In the future, researchers might be interested in investigating the progress with regards to the implementation of merchandise planning in clothing retail companies in South Africa. This study will assist future researchers as it will function as a reference point which will be useful for study comparisons and establishing trends.

This research identified that the utilisation of merchandise planning as a change management strategy helps retailers to make more accurate forecasts by being able to precisely plan quantities and goods to manufacture according to market changes. Data collection for this study was initially affected by the attitudes of the potential participants who suspected that this study was meant to provide information to the superior management and that the researcher was secretly spying. A communication was circulated by the management to potential respondents to voluntarily assist the researcher as the study was for academic purposes only. The various sources used for this study are listed in the next section.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

 Cape Peninsula University of Technology	P.O. Box 1906 Bellville 7535 Symphony Road Bellville 7535 South Africa Tel: +27 21 4603291 Email: fbmsethics@cput.ac.za
Office of the Chairperson Research Ethics Committee	FACULTY: BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES
<p>The Faculty's Research Ethics Committee (FREC) on 16 November 2021, ethics APPROVAL was granted to Tumelo Innocent Ntuli (219043124) for a research activity for Master of Retail Business Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.</p>	
Title of project:	<p>The effectiveness of utilizing merchandise planning as a change management strategy in the Cape Town clothing retail industry</p> <p>Researcher (s): Dr V Mugobo / Mr M Malgas</p>
<p>Decision: APPROVED</p>	
 Signed: Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee	23 November 2021 Date
<p>The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the CPUT Policy on Research Ethics.2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study requires that the researcher stops the study and immediately informs the chairperson of the relevant Faculty Ethics Committee.3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing accompanied by a progress report.5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines, and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, notably compliance with the Bill of Rights as provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (the Constitution) and where applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003 and/or other legislations that is relevant.6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.7. No field work activities may continue after two (2) years for Masters and Doctorate research project from the date of issue of the Ethics Certificate. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report (REC 6) will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.	
Clearance Certificate No 2021_FBMSREC 091	

Appendix 2: Consent form to participate in this research study



Faculty of Business and Management Sciences
Department of Retail Business Management
Engineering Building, 4th Floor
District Six Campus, Cape Town
021 460 3028

PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY IS VOLUNTARY

I _____ am over the age of 18 and voluntarily agreed to participate in the research study titled **“The effectiveness of e-marketplaces for small and medium retailers in Cape Town”**.

To comply with the various Covid-19 regulations (South African Government, 2020) and to safeguard the researcher and participants, a semi-structured interview will be conducted by means of Google-Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or any digital platform suitable for the participant. Upon the request of the participant, physical meetings can be arranged whilst adhering to strict social distancing protocols.

Statement	Please tick the box
1. I understand the purpose of the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand what the research requires of me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I volunteer to take part in the research.	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Effectiveness Of Utilising Merchandise Planning As A Change Management Strategy In The Clothing Retail Industry In Cape Town

4. I know that I can withdraw at any time.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that there will not be any form of discrimination against me as a result of my participation or non-participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I understand that the interview will be recorded solely for the researcher to analyse the feedback given.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I understand that the information I provide will be used for the sole purpose of the research study and that the information will be anonymised.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please retain a copy of this consent form for future reference.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date _____

Researcher's Name: **Innocent Tumelo Ntuli**

Contact: **0681054356**

Signature: _____

Date _____

Appendix 3: Interview Question

1. What is your job title in the company, and can you explain your role in the business?

Answer:

2. What type of retailer do you work for?

Clothing Retailer ☐

Grocery Retailer ☐

Home Furnishing retailer ☐

Hypermarket ☐

Other_____

3. How does your role directly or indirectly work with merchandise planning?

Answer:

4. How many retail stores does your business have in South Africa?

Answer:

Probe: Does your business have the capacity for additional retail stores?

Answer:

5. What are some of the changes that directly or indirectly affect your business? It can be economic changes, consumer demand changes, geographical changes, supply chains, social and political changes as well as global changes.

Answer:

Probe: What is the biggest change that has affected the business recently?

Answer:

6. What are the major factors that cause demand changes in clothing retailers in South Africa?

Answer:

The Effectiveness Of Utilising Merchandise Planning As A Change Management Strategy In The Clothing Retail Industry In Cape Town

Probe: What has been the most recent factor in your business to influence customers to change their buying patterns?

Answer:

Objective 1: To determine the factors causing demand change in the retail industry.

7. What has been the strategy to deal with this recent factor that caused demand change?

Answer:

Probe: How long did it take to identify the solution to this change and how effective was it?

Answer:

8. What other strategies does the organisation use to deal with factors that cause a change in customer demand and how does your role specifically contribute to the strategy?

Answer:

Probe: How many individuals(roles) does it require to execute some of the strategies you mentioned?

Answer:

9. How is merchandise planning being implemented as a change management strategy in the business?

Answer:

10. What resources does the business consistently require to implement the change management strategy in the business? It can internal or external resources

Answer:

Probe: In your role, which resources do you require to optimally contribute to the strategy?

Answer:

Objective 2: To determine the strategies within merchandise planning that can be used to deal with demand changes in the retail clothing industry in South Africa

11. How does your role improve the implementation of the change management strategy?

Answer:

12. What are the benefits of having an efficient and effective merchandise plan?

Answer:

13. What in your opinion are the strongest competencies of merchandise planning?

Answer:

14. What in your opinion are the weaknesses and shortcomings of South African retailers currently?

Answer:

Objective 3: To identify the benefits of having efficient and effective merchandise planning strategies

Closing Questions

15. What would you like to add, contribute and/or propose to the development of an effective and sustainable change management strategy for South African retailers?

Answer:

Appendix 4: Editing certificate

NERESHNEE GOVENDER COMMUNICATIONS (PTY) LTD

REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2016/369223/07

DR NERESHNEE GOVENDER (PhD)

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WRITING PRACTITIONER • EDITOR • COPYWRITER • TRAINER

PhD-Management Sciences: Marketing (gender and media); PG DIP - Higher Education - Academic Developers (Cum laude); M-Tech Public Relations; B-Tech Public Relations (Cum laude); B-Tech Journalism (Cum laude); N-Dip Journalism

27/11/2024

Tumelo Innocent Ntuli

Business and Management Sciences

Master of Retail Business Management

219043124

Supervisor: Prof Mugobo

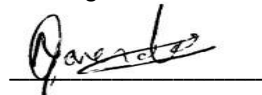
RE: EDITING CERTIFICATE

FOCUS AREA: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF UTILISING MERCHANDISE PLANNING AS A CHANGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN THE CLOTHING RETAIL INDUSTRY IN CAPE TOWN

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
Master in Retail Business Management in the Faculty of Business and Management
Sciences at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

This serves to confirm that this research has been edited for clarity, language and layout.

Kind regards,



Nereshnee Govender (PhD)