



**STRATEGIES TO ESTABLISH AN OMNI-CHANNEL BUSINESS
CONCEPT FOR CLOTHING RETAILERS IN CAPE TOWN,
SOUTH AFRICA**

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Master of Retail Business Management
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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this research study was to establish omni-channel strategies to use when integrating online and offline channels in the retail apparel sector of Cape Town, South Africa.

Design/Methodology or approach: The research uses a Qualitative research approach from an interpretative perspective with exploratory design. Five (5) research participants were interviewed telephonically using a questionnaire.

Findings: Findings from the study pointed to the establishment of omni-channel fulfillment and capability strategies such as *Buy Online Return in Store (BORIS)*, *Click and Collect*, *Buy Online Ship from Store (BOSS)*, *Buy Online Pick-up in Store (BOPS)*. In addition, the use of *Information Technology (IT)* on digital platforms came out as a key driver for integrating offline and online channels in order to attain a seamless shopping experience for omni-shoppers. In addition, understanding the cross-channel behaviour of omni-shoppers became a key area for omni-channel.

Research limitations: The study was confined to the establishment of omni-channel strategies, which can be suggested for the apparel sector of Cape Metropolitan area of Western Cape Province of South Africa. However, the apparel sector is quite different to other sectors such as the Grocery sector because it does not require the omni-shopper to fit or try the product before purchasing whereas the grocery sector have challenges of product perishability and expiry. The findings seem to suggest that the Cape Metropolitan apparel sector has not yet fully integrated its online and offline channels in such a manner that omni-shoppers shop seamless.

Practical implications: The study has implications to both the academic sector and to retailers in that it endeavours to establish a basic omni-channel business model, which can be suggested for implementation in the apparel retail sector of Cape Metropolitan area of Western Cape Province.

Key Words: Online, Offline, Multi-channel, Cross-channel, Omni-channel

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this academic work to my late mother Jane, my siblings and most importantly, to my children, Deon and Shanice.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. **BOPS** Buy Online Pick in Store
2. **BODS** Buy Online Deliver from Store
3. **BOSTS** Buy Online Ship to Store
4. **BORIS** Buy Online Return in Store
5. **BRICS** Brazil Russia India China and South Africa
6. **CEO** Chief Executive Officer
7. **CPUT** Cape Peninsula University of Technology
8. **DC** Distribution Centre
9. **H&M** Hennes and Mauritz AB
10. **IT** Information Technology
11. **IoT** Internet of Things
12. **OCT** Organisational Change Theory
13. **TT** Transformational Theory
14. **TFG** The Foschini Group
15. **WHO** World Health Organisation
16. **W&RSETA** Wholesale Retail Sector Education and Training Authority
17. **UK** United Kingdom
18. **USA** United States of America

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1. **Showrooming:** It is a specific form of research shopping in which a shopper first searches offline and subsequently purchases online.
2. **Webrooming:** It is a behaviour where customers search for information online and then purchase products in physical or offline channels.
3. **Thematic Analysis:** It is a method in which numerous patterns from a data set are systematically organised and their insights are then developed into patterns of meaning.
4. **Utilitarian Shopping values:** It is the consumer's overall assessment of a product or service's functional benefits and drawbacks.
5. **Hedonic Shopping values:** These are non-instrumental, experimental, having a strong emotional attachment and are normally bound with non-tangible attributes of products or services.
6. **Methodology:** It is defined as the study of methods and the underpinning philosophical assumptions of the research process itself.
7. **Paradigm:** It is a basic belief system or world-view that guides the investigations.
8. **Qualitative research approach:** It is a systematic inquiry, which seeks to build a holistic, largely narrative, description to inform the researcher's understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon.
9. **Channels:** These are points of customer contacts in the retailing and marketing sector.
10. **Multi-channel:** It is a retail model in which channels operate in silos, meaning that channels exist independently without integrating.
11. **Omni:** The prefix "*omni*" means everything in Latin.
12. **Omni-channel:** It is defined as an approach, which aims to coordinate the fragmented service processes and technologies in the various channels in order to deliver a consistent and integrated cross-channel experience for customers.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

This section was dedicated to acquainting the reader with the required introduction to the study. The background of the study is the first section to be discussed followed by other sections. In the background of the study, the researcher provided an overview of the literature and theories underpinning the research study. Furthermore, the research background is structured in such a way that it links smoothly to the research questions and objectives of the study. The methodology of the study is presented in a brief discussion in terms of the methodology, population and sampling, data collection techniques and ethical considerations. Furthermore, data presentation, analysis and interpretation are covered extensively in chapter four. Research results and recommendation are covered in the last chapter.

The proceeding section covers the background of the research study. It covers a brief history about the clothing industry, its evolution and transformations and lastly, it focuses on the research problem.

1.2 Research background

The South African clothing sector is a diverse and mature sector, which plays a huge role in employment and in the creation of jobs. Makgopa (2018) posits that the sector employs more than five million retail employees and is highly dominated by retail players such as; Woolworths, Truworths, Miladys, Legit, Foschini, Edgars, Exact, Markhams, Ackermans, Identity, PEP and Mr Price (Makgopa, 2018). The majority of the retailers listed above have more than one retail channel or touch point for customers. For example, Woolworths customers can make use of both online and offline channels simultaneously when conducting their shopping. However, this study sought to establish strategies of integrating online and offline channels within the retail clothing sector of Cape Town, South Africa. Furthermore, the research study was developed because of the fundamental problems that most Cape Town clothing retailers face when it comes to integrating offline and online channels.

Liu *et al.* (2020) seem to support the idea of channel integration when they state that a number of retailers are exploring online and offline integration strategies to enrich customer value proposition. In supporting the views above, a study conducted in China by Digital Consumers as cited by, (Liu *et al.*, 2020) pointed out that the integration of offline and online channels perpetuate the mainstream consumption mode.

Validating the above assertions, another research study that was conducted by Weber (2021) to explore the agility of South African omni-channel retailers in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, revealed that a large number of consumers were migrating to online channels and this caused serious challenges to South African retailers in terms of handling the online traffic. In addition, the results seem to point to the paucity or absolute lack of omni-channel retail strategies, which is key to the advancement of omni-channel retailing in the clothing sector of Cape Town, South Africa.

Arguably, the retail industry has gone through phases of change starting with the conventional brick and mortar retail format, to the multi-channel and currently the omni-channel retailing format (Rosenmayer *et al.*, 2018). Davis-Sramek *et al.* (2020: 557) claim that, in the process of fundamental shift the traditional brick and mortar retailers entered into new structural transformations in operations and system. For example, the discovery of Information Technology (I.T) and computers has changed the way businesses conduct retailing with some retailers infusing I.T in stores to form multichannel and later, omni-channel retailing.

The completion of this research has aided in the establishment of a number of omni-channel retail strategies suitable for integrating online and offline channels for a seamless shopping experience within the clothing sector of Cape Town, South Africa. For example, the brick and mortar retailing strategy has been around for some time and is centred on allowing customers to touch and try the merchandise, and is regarded as good in fulfilling utilitarian shopping values (Prinsloo, 2015; Verhoef, Kannan and Inman, 2015). A case in point was when L'Oréal started to use technology such as virtual mirrors which allowed customers to virtually try make-up, which would have only been possible in the

conventional brick and mortar retailing format (Hilken *et al.*, 2018:509). In addition, the brick and mortar retail strategy is based on enabling customers to make purchases through the assistance of sales associates (Marmol & Fernandez, 2019: 57).

While it is true that retailing has gone through tremendous phases of change Verhoef *et al.* (2015: 01) pointed out that, in the last two decades, retailing has transformed drastically due to; customers developing access to the internet, mobile penetration and other smart mobile devices. In 2007, Apple introduced iPhone and by 2009, the smartphone with Android was widely adopted and the smartphone devices empowered consumers to shop anytime and anywhere (Grewal *et al.*, 2018: 87). To corroborate the views above, it is estimated that mobile penetration has reached 70% of its one billion people in Africa and such statistics are nowhere closer to other continents (Van Dyk & Van Belle, 2019: 02).

This demonstrates the potential opportunity for retailers to integrate their online and offline channels in order to tap into the vertical mobile penetration phase.

However, regarding the widespread pandemonium that the brick and mortar retail format is dying, technology is transforming the face of retailing through new and evolving ways which is aiding customers to make decisions on how they would like to be served by retailers (Marmol & Fernandez, 2019: 66). For example, the use of smartphones during the shopping journey is something that the retailers have no control over and yet its effects have transformed the retailing landscape.

As outlined from the onset, the researcher intended to establish retail strategies for both the online and the offline channels, which can be used when implementing a seamless shopping experience within the clothing sector in Cape Town. Studies in the areas of multichannel retailing are being spearheaded and propelled by rapid developments in e-commerce coupled by changes in consumer behavioural patterns (Hübner *et al.*, 2016: 564). A case in point is where shoppers conduct shopping in the comfort of their homes, offices or while travelling to work or back from work. Research results from the study pointed mobile devices such as smartphones as key antecedents of enhancing omni-

channel. The subject area of omni-channel retailing is particularly relevant as changes in technology continue to disrupt and cause headaches to many retail practitioners, more so regarding retail strategies to adopt in volatile markets (Simone & Sabbadin, 2018: 86). In today's age, shoppers are mobile, they value time as a precious commodity, and it is incumbent upon retailers to ensure that shoppers are afforded the option to conduct shopping during their own convenient time.

Moreover, demonstrating the importance of omni-channel in the present time, a research study that was conducted by the Aberdeen Group revealed that retail organisations using an omni-channel strategy retain 89% of their customers while 33% goes to the ones that do not use omni-channel retail format (Marmol and Fernandez, 2019). In addition, such findings present a strong argument for the transformation to omni-channel and zooming into the current state of consumer behaviour, it is feasible and ideal for retailers to implement omni-channel retailing. In addition, the study by the Aberdeen Group further corroborates that 15% to 30% of the United States of America (USA) dollar value is spent by shoppers who use omni-channel and such figures exhibit strong brand loyalty and has a direct brand influence on other retail customers (Jayashreeramanan and Ramanakumar, 2014). From the findings above, it can be stated categorically that omni-channel has a positive impact on turnover since by its very nature, omni-channel retailing involves more than two channels combined together to give customers a great shopping experience. While it is true that shoppers who use omni-channel exhibit positive brand loyalty, it could be argued that most of the research cited in the study is concentrated in Western countries with mature ecommerce while very few studies have been conducted in South Africa particularly in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town to attest to the above mentioned facts. In the South African retail sector, it is widely stated that there has not been a robust strategy in building a fortified retailing model comprising both offline and online channels as some retailers fear cannibalisation of their physical stores with some retailers only using the online platforms for limited or clearance out of merchandise (Watling & McCabe, 2020: 04). Briefly, the unavailability of robust omni-channel strategies within the South African retailing sector poses a serious research gap, which the study

sought to close through establishing a myriad of omni-channel strategies that can, integrate the online and offline channels.

An omni-channel evolution is the current paradigm in modern retailing and it is premised on locating the customer throughout the shopping journey using processes in which different channels participate simultaneously (Marmol & Fernandez, 2019: 59). As outlined earlier, the omni-channel concept traverses further to afford the customers the flexibility to commence shopping from any channel and end in another channel seamlessly (Jayashreeramanan & Ramanakumar, 2014: 33). Establishing an omni-channel retail strategy where online and offline channels are integrated, has the full potential of presenting a single face in front view of customers which will ultimately help in building up of a brand (Sarmah, 2015).

Woolworths poses as a typical example of a retailer in the midst of transitioning from multi-channel to omni-channel and this was made clear when they recently launched the Durbanville Food Store as a trial for *click-and-collect* during the Covid-19 lockdown (Mall *et al.*, 2020). The incorporation of an online channel and its myriad of other touch-points presented a host of trading benefits such as higher sales and a bigger market share within the retail industry. In a study that was done by Euromonitor International, its results projected that online sales is expected to grow by 19% between 2018 and 2023 in South Africa (Africa *et al.*, 2019). In the midst of such positive projections by Euromonitor International, retailers need to be proactive and be ready to seize the opportunity through ensuring that their omni-channel retail strategies are lined-up for the market share opportunities.

Based on the above views, it can be noted that retailing is undergoing major transformational changes, which are inspired, by the ever-changing consumer shopping behavior and preferences. In line with the above assertions, the research established a number of omni-channel strategies that can be implemented for a sustainable business model in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town.

The next section looks at the theoretical framework underpinning the evolution within the retail paradigm. Change theory and Transformational theory is discussed with a view to guiding the research study.

1.3 Theoretical Framework of the study

Two theoretical frameworks, underpin the study, providing the blueprint for the study, namely the *Organisational Change Theory* (O.C.T) and the *Transformational Theory* (T.T). In the academic environment, a theory is referred to as a model or framework and it seeks to explain, describe and forecast reality (Svensson, 2013).

1.3.1 Change Theory

Within the organisational change, theory leads to an explanation detailing why organisations change and the effects thereof of such changes (Barnett & Carroll, 1995: 217). There is a general assumption, which posits that an organisation changes because of changes in the macroenvironment (Barnette & Carroll, 1995: 217). In the past decade, there have been tremendous shifts when it comes to customer behavior, such shifts were attributed to digital technologies and these changes are compelling businesses to rapidly change inline so that they can remain relevant (Singh & Thirumoorthi, 2019: 1255). Moreover, changes in the way people communicate have been spearheaded by the massive adoption of smart phones, which fall broadly under technological change, a component of the macroenvironment. The prevailing point of view out there is that, retailers like businesses in general operate in ever-changing environments which are characterised by very tough competition (Matthysen *et al.*, 2019).

There are generally two types of changes, organisational improvement and organisational adaptation (Nilakant, 2018). Social change theorist, Kurt Lewin is the proponent and father of the theory of change and alluded that his theory can be applied to any organisation, hence its application to the retailing sector (Kaminski, 2011). Lewin's theory of change is guided by three stages, (unfreeze, change and refreeze) and it is referred to as a product of planned change (Kaminski, 2011). Nilakant (2018) expounds that, change as a result of changes in the environment is called adaptation and such change is aimed

at aligning the business to the turbulent changes of the environment. The alignment of the offline to the online channel is testament to the theory of change.

In a study that was conducted with Finland retailers to study the state of omni-channel developments, research results revealed that change in customer behaviour was responsible for the retailer's strategic changes (Peltola, Vainio and Nieminen, 2016). It is within this theoretical domain that the study seeks to influence fashion retailers offering the online and offline channels in the Cape Town geographical location to adapt to the omni-channel business concept.

1.3.2 Transformational Theory

As expounded above, changing the business strategy from the current default setting of multichannel strategy to the omni-channel business model calls upon transformational leaders because they are regarded as effective change catalysts and they embrace change as a process (Castiglione, 2006; Kuntz, Davies and Naswall, 2019). Part of the success of transformational leaders rests on their technique when it comes to instilling belief in their followers' ability that will ultimately generate positive emotions (Kurland *et al.*, 2010: 11). A case in point is the story of Best Buy Electronics Company. Best Buy implemented digital transformation when it was at the brink of bankruptcy (Morgan, 2020). Furthermore, in a way to reconnect with its customers, Best Buy reviewed their strategy both internally and externally and its transformation was led by their visionary Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Hubert Joy (Morgan, 2020). This illustrates that, for retailers to transform themselves successfully to an omni-channel retail model, visionary and transformational leaders should play a key role as torch bearers in the change process. The dominant paradigm in the complicated and dynamic business environment requires transformational leaders (Morgan, 2020: 48). In addition, the theoretical framework of transformational theory underpinning this study concurs with a study that was conducted in New California about the gender difference in leadership styles in a Mental Health Organisation (Guay, 2013).

The transformational theory views the world through subjective lenses, with its constructionism ontological paradigm and interpretivism epistemology tying in with the research methodology of this study. As expounded in the theoretical frameworks namely, change theory and transformational theory; much of the changes happening in the retail apparel sector are driven by changes in consumer behaviour which is in-turn driven by technological changes and they are never classified as planned changes. For example, many retailers have set-up websites and are present on a number of social media platforms.

Studies that were undertaken by Tauber in 1972 divulge that satisfaction obtained during the customer shopping journey supplant motivation of simply finding the products (Olsen, 2011). This seems to disapprove the views and assertion that seeks to make a general statement which expound that, all clients expect the same experience from their shopping journey, however, some seek fulfillment and others seek emotional satisfaction (Mosquera, Olarte Pascual and Juaneda Ayensa, 2017). Concisely, this brings us to the discussion of the two conceptual frameworks underlying this study namely: *Hedonic* and *Utilitarian* which are both underpinned by the change theory.

Hedonic consumers enjoy the shopping process and that is the main reason why they engage in the process (Olsen, 2011). Hedonic consumers are characterised by adopting experience values such as social, emotional and epistemic as their reflection and identity (Prebensen and Rosengren, 2016). On the other hand, continuum functional values and value for money are a good examples of utilitarian shopping values (Epuran, 2015; Kesari and Atulkar, 2016; Prebensen and Rosengren, 2016). Utilitarian shopping value is characterised by the consumer's assessment of a product or service functional benefits and drawbacks, in general the utilitarian shopper is referred to as being one who is transaction oriented (Ramlugun, 2014; Lee and Wu, 2017).

While it is true that there has been middling research studies conducted in single channel formats regarding hedonic and utilitarian values, the same can be said about the multi-

channel and omni-channel studies on hedonic and utilitarian shopping values (Noble, Griffith and Weinberger, 2005).

Consumer behavior literature though interested in the dimensionality of the value notion, has paid lip service to the effects of value dimensions as antecedents of behavioural consequences like customer contentment and customer allegiance (Gallarza, Ruiz-molina and Gil-saura, 2016). Utilitarian values are functional, instrumental, cognitive in nature and are a means to an end; they take consideration to issues of time, place and possession (Olsen, 2011). Given the nature of the various channels in retailing, more so in relation to product delivery, it can be argued that the timing of product possession varies across the channels (Noble, Griffith and Weinberger, 2005). It is therefore important to note that utilitarian consumers are not negatively affected by delayed product possession or immediate gratification.

Studies conducted in three grocery outlets in a Norwegian city revealed that unique store attributes such as personal interaction can relate negatively to the utilitarian shopping values and vice-versa to the hedonic shopping values (Olsen, 2011). In addition, the physical aspects of the store have a positive valence to the hedonic shopping value. In their findings, the studies revealed that, retailers can create specific retail outlets for shoppers to attend to their shopping values; a typical example is the Adidas brand Centre in Beijing China, which has a tunnel entry and team-rooms that are all congruent with the hedonic shopping orientation (Vieira, Santini and Araujo, 2018). In contrast, utilitarian shopping values are synonymous with consumers using the online channel since they value convenience and information attainment in making their purchases and are not worried about immediate product possession and gratification, respectively.

Furthermore, information attainment in the utilitarian value proposition refers to an increase in product or service information attained by customers as attributes; that is one of the reasons why the online channel has vast information at their disposal, augmented by peer reviews, graphics and product demonstrations on videos (Olsen, 2011).

In a nutshell, results from the Norwegian study pointed out that-, the physical layout of the store must make it easy for shoppers to navigate inside the store, particularly for customers exhibiting both utilitarian and hedonic orientation when they are carrying out their shopping process (Olsen, 2011). In a similar study carried out in Enugu, Nigeria, research results attested that, socio-personality transformation, aesthetics and architectural design, all representing the hedonic shopping values, dominated respondent's motivations for shopping as compared to the utilitarian need of satisfaction values (Chukwuemeka, Anayo and Ifesinachi, 2017).

Compounded by these challenges and opportunities, retailers and marketers closed ranks when they coined the omni-channel retailing channel as a means of consolidating all the various customer touch-points into one seamless process. Gulati and Garino cited by Simone and Sabbadin (2018: 87) posit that, retailers who will apply brick and click in their retail strategies in the current economic environment will reap successes in their retailing businesses. Hosseini *et al.* (2018: 74) support the assertion above when they postulate that, a number of retailers are struggling to implement an omni-channel strategic plan that meets their customers' channel preferences in-terms of shopping values as he alluded to earlier in this introduction. For example, in the financial year ending June 2018, Woolworths launched *in-app* shopping using its already integrated *lifestyle-app* and this resulted in a 34% growth in online sales and Woolworths realised that the mobile channel could lead the retailer to a successful omni-channel experience (Watling & McCabe, 2020: 10).

1.4 Problem statement

To begin with, shopping in both *brick-and-mortar* and online channels should be a seamless process which customers take as a journey from *brick-and-mortar* to online or vice versa without hassles. Moreover, the process should be anchored towards improving the overall customer value proposition across the different touch-points. However, in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town it is not as seamless as expected. Currently a number of fashion retailers are operating in one channel, namely brick-and-mortar, and they having not integrated into an online channel. Watling & McCabe, (2020: 06.) postulate

that, South African retailers have put their focus and resources into building their brick-and-mortar stores with little to no focus to adopting the online channels. A case in point is-, Pepkor, one of the fashion retailers that has not joined the online platform and are still trading using the brick-and-mortar format (Paelo, 2019: 11). On the other hand, retailers with ecommerce platforms such as the Edcon Group, are yet to consolidate the various channels so that customers can shop seamlessly between channels with no hassles ('Working Paper 2 / 2019 Online Retailing in South Africa: An overview March 2019 Abstract', 2019). While the Edcon Group has an online channel, the retail group has not been emphasising the importance of integrating online and offline channels, for a seamless customer experience, and this lays the background to this research problem.

Rouquet Aurélien, Henriquez Tatiana, (2018) bemoaned the unavailability of viable and successful omni-channel strategies within the retailing sector of South Africa which has resulted in some retailers identifying ideal-type omni-channel strategies which are sometimes not relevant to the local retail market. Hosseini *et al.*, (2018: 75) concurred with the views above when they posit that, a number of studies tend to isolate omni-channel retailing by giving more detailed attention to single channels, thereby neglecting to provide sound strategic knowledge regarding the management of omni-channel as a whole. It could therefore be stated that, the absence of Cape Town clothing retailers on the omni-channel retail platforms might be highly blamed the dearth of studies around the area of omni-channel.

Furthermore, scholars are of the view that the prevailing point to the above problem is that, South African retailers operating in both the offline and online channels are still focusing solely on their brick-and-mortar stores (Watling & McCabe, 2020). For example, a study that was conducted by Accenture in 2017 on the hyper-relevance era, revealed that South African retailers lost R663 Billion due to customers switching to international competitors whom are perceived as advanced on ecommerce (Watling & McCabe, 2020). It is therefore imperative to point out that the opportunity cost of not integrating the brick-and-mortar to the online channels far outweighs the benefits one can imagine in the retail-clothing sector. It is therefore necessary for the local clothing retailers to tap into the

opportunity by ensuring that the right omni-channel strategies are put in place for a smooth omni-channel retail operation. Furthermore, the absence of clothing retailers could be because of the lack of omni-channel strategies to compete in the retail market.

To substantiate the research problem, studies from the past are of the view that there has not been a robust strategy in building both the offline and online channels in South Africa, as some retailers fear cannibalisation of their physical stores with some retailers only using the online platforms for clearance out purposes (Watling & McCabe, 2020: 04). The researcher is convinced that an omni-channel retailing model offers more value to both the shoppers and the retailers, hence the need to establish the different omni-channel strategies for a viable clothing sector in Cape Town. The next section looks at the research purpose.

1.5 Research purpose

The purpose of this study was to establish relevant omni-channel retail strategies that can be suggested for implementation in the clothing sector of Cape Town. In addition, the study intended to conduct in-depth telephonic interviews with the sampled population in Cape Town. In consequence, the interviews were meant to build a strong and well-researched thesis whose findings shall be added to the rich repository at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (C.P.U.T).

1.6 Research Questions and Objectives

1.6.1 Main question

- What strategies can be established to implement omni-channel model in the retail-clothing sector of Cape Town?

1.6.2 Supporting questions

- Which strategies can be established to integrate offline and online channels into a seamless shopping experience in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town?
- Why is it necessary to integrate offline and online channels when establishing omni-channel retailing?

- How important is establishment of omni-channel strategies for shoppers and retailers?

1.7 Main objectives

- To establish omni-channel strategies to implement in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town.

1.7.1 Supporting objectives

- To identify retail strategies that can be adopted to establish omni-channel retailing in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town.
- To evaluate the retail strategies suitable for integrating brick-and-mortar and online channels for omni-channel retailing in Cape Town clothing sector.
- To establish the advantages and disadvantages of omni-channel strategies to shoppers and retailers, respectively.
- To evaluate the importance of integrating the brick-and-mortar with online channels for the formation of omni-channel in Cape Town's clothing sector

1.8 Research methodology and design

The study used a Qualitative research approach in exploring the omni-channel retail strategies which are needed to bridge the gap between online and offline channels. Sampling for the study was confined to five (5) participants, and telephone interviews were used as a data collection technique with semi-structured questions. Data was analysed using the Thematic Analysis (TA).

1.8.1 Delimitation of the study

Since the purpose and focus of the study was the establishment of omni-channel retail strategies, the study zoomed in on its scope to focus on the retail clothing sector of Cape Town, South Africa. The sample of the study was largely drawn from Cape Town's retail clothing sector. Although it is widely acknowledged that omni-channel encompasses other areas such as: Marketing, Distribution and Warehousing, Advertisement and

Communication, the literature review underpinning this study focused solely on the retailing sector of omni-channel model.

In addition, the study deliberately took a stance to focus on a Qualitative research approach as its research design. The sample for the study was selected using the purposeful sampling method with semi-structured telephonic interviews.

1.8.2 Contribution of the Study

The study intended to contribute in four (4) ways, these are to provide understanding to retail personnel, retailers, and shoppers whom are interested in establishing omni-channel strategies that might be used in the clothing retail sector. Furthermore, the study intends to contribute significantly to creating awareness among retailers, retail personnel and shoppers regarding strategies for a successful omni-channel model. The study is significant as it forms part in meeting the requirement for the awarding of a Master's degree. Lastly, as is the norm with research studies, the completed research study will add to the already rich repository of knowledge at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).

1.9 Summary of chapters

Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter presented a general topic background on omni-channel within the clothing retailing industry. In addition, this chapter covered the statement of the problem, research aim and objectives, and went further to touch-base on the research methodology of the study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Chapter two comprises of the discussion around omni-channel retail strategies and the subsections that align its areas. In addition, omni-channel retailing strategies were discussed in various forms and shapes, and arguments were formulated to substantiate the research gap and answer the research problem. On top of that, a number of academic research findings were used to substantiate and argue for and against the discussions on

omni-channel strategies. The chapter ended with discussions around the clothing sector of South Africa.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

Chapter three focused on: research methodology, research design, and the appropriate research methods, which were adopted by the study. The study managed to guide the reader in navigating and understanding the philosophical position underpinning the study. Moreover, sampling of the study as well as the methods of data analysis were discussed and highlighted. In addition, discussions on ethical clearance were mentioned in chapter three.

Chapter 4 Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter is dedicated to the presentation, analysis and the discussion of the collected data in order to build credible research findings for the study. Additionally, the analysis of the study was inspired by a myriad of themes, which emerged during theme development, and was later interpreted in the building of the research results.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Findings

Chapter five covered and discussed some of the findings that came out of the study. The findings, which were discussed manifested from the themes.

Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendation

The study ended the discussion about the omni-channel retail strategies by proposing a number of recommendations. The chapter ended the work of the study by summarising the research findings. Moreover, research limitations as well as the recommendation from the study were outlined in chapter six.

The following section on the literature review will take a narrow focus into the literature section that was used to expand and amplify the study. Moreover, the study used the literature review section to demonstrate rigor and depth of the research process.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter covered the background of the study, problem statement, research questions and objectives. The introduction section went further to provide a synopsis of the study through the heading and summary of the study. Furthermore, chapter one was devoted to aligning the study to the theoretical foundations underpinning this study. As a result, Change and Transformation theories were highlighted as key theories in shaping and guiding the study.

The interface between the customer and the retailer has changed drastically. Moreover, changes in customer shopping behaviours, mobile penetration and the sharp increase in internet access has prompted retailers to restructure horizontally from multi-channel, cross channel to the current omni-channel. Omni-channel is a fairly new term in the retailing landscape, and at the epicenter of its operations resides its strength to allow hyper-connections of both offline and online channels into a seamless customer journey, (Mosquera, Olarte Pascual and Juaneda Ayensa, 2017: 64).

The literature of the study is situated upon three subject streams namely: multichannel, omni-channel and clothing retailing. Rouquet Aurélien, Henriquez Tatiana, (2018: 08) bemoan the lack of one best omni-channel strategy on a global scale and further states that retailers are identifying small ideal-types of omni-channel strategies. The above assertion bears testament because there have been few studies on omni-channel strategies in the clothing sector of South Africa. However, it is critical for this literature section to establish omni-channel strategies that can be adopted and implemented in the retail sector (Melacini *et al.*, 2018). The backdrop of the above assertions in citations was critical in further exposing the research gap that was mentioned in chapter one regarding omni-channel strategies within the clothing sector of Cape Town, South Africa.

The following section is devoted to exploring existing literature on omni-channel retailing and the literature is augmented by studies carried out from other parts of the world. In

addition, various definitions of omni-channel were looked at from different perspectives from which the model of omni-channel is driven.

2.2 Omni-channel

Hosseini *et al.* (2018: 74) postulate that, research on omni-channel is perceived as taking a descriptive perspective and is missing the prescriptive knowledge that is needed by retailers in operating a successful omni-channel model. The assertion seems to suggest that there is lack of knowledge when it comes to solving problems emanating from omni-channel. Hosseini *et al.* (2018: 74) further express the opinion that, there is vast and mature descriptive knowledge about the subject of omni-channel models, but hardly any prescriptive knowledge let alone studies that deal with appropriate omni-channel strategies. The study intends to provide a detailed prescriptive knowledge on what strategies to use in implementing a successful omni-channel business model within the retail-clothing sector of Cape Town, South Africa. As alluded before, the repetitiveness of the assertions regarding the lack of prescriptive knowledge was the key element which prompted the researcher to look into the knowledge gap as rightly pointed above.

Mosquera *et al.* (2017) postulate that, omni-channel is a new term in the retailing and marketing disciplines. Simone and Sabbadin,(2018:85) describe omni-channel as the integration of all available retail channels into a seamless customer journey that puts focus on ensuring that there is no distinction and blurring between the retail channels. The idea behind omni-channel is the advancement and reconstruction for removing any blurring between the offline and online retailing environment (Lynch and Barnes, 2020: 472).

Rajan *et al.* (2017) elaborate on the above assertion by stating that the boundaries of retailing are fast collapsing and eroding, and customers are now merging their shopping journey to involve both online and offline simultaneously. An interesting feature is that an omni-channel retailing model engages different channels such as: online stores, physical stores, web portals, e-catalogs, kiosks, network sites, Internet of Things (IoT) and smart devices (Sharma, Gupta and Joshi, 2019). Furthermore, the omni-channel retail model is

premised on the ability of retailers to integrate different customer touch-points in order to achieve a seamless customer value due to efficient and frictionless channel integrations (Larke *et al.*, 2018: 466). In support of a seamless and consistent experience Lynch and Barnes (2020: 478) posit that fashion shoppers value a seamless and consistent experience which is devoid of glitches that normally interrupt the flow of shopping between the offline and online channels.

In a narrow context, omni-channel encompasses the simultaneous use of two or more channels such as customers using their mobile phones while they are in-store. In addition, a true omni-channel transaction is believed to be a transaction that can take place on more than one channel in a simultaneous manner (Ishfaq *et al.*, 2016; Rajan, Swaminathan and Pavithra, 2017). For example, a customer can purchase a product from an online channel but within the same time decide to collect it from a physical store. In a study that was conducted in Manchester in the United Kingdom (UK) to examine the customer decision making journey of female fashion consumers, the results pointed out that, fashion consumers expect the seamless nature offered by the omni-channel model (Lynch and Barnes, 2020b). The results from the Manchester study seem to be congruent with the purpose of this study, which sought to establish omni-channel strategies that will ensure a seamless customer journey from online to offline or vice versa.

Furthermore, a fully successful omni-channel retailing strategy allows customers to make an order from a different touch point and finish it in a completely different channel; through omni-channel the customer journey is flexible and seamless across all the channels (Taylor *et al.*, 2019: 864). To corroborate the views above Jocevski *et al.*, (2019b: 82) assert that, within the omni-channel retailing concept, customers use data across different channels and the customer journey is perceived as flexible and seamless. In support of the above views, others corroborate that omni-channel business model allows for the uninterrupted movement of customers from online to offline or vice versa within a single transaction (Simone and Sabbadin, 2017; Lynch and Barnes, 2020b).

A good example is when a customer searches for product reviews while they are in a physical store. Simone & Sabbadin (2017: 86) contend that it is prudent to define the term

retail channel as a means or platform through which customers interact with the retailer. In a nutshell, it is important to state that, the model of omni-channel places much focus on integrating the online and offline channels in order to align these two dominant channels so that they can respond to how consumers shop (Ailawadi & Farris, 2017: 121). The following section looks at the definition and some explanations about retail channels. In the previous sections, the term channel featured prominently, and it is only justifiable to provide some definitions.

2.3 Channels

The term channel means a customer touch-point, or a means through which the retailer or enterprise can interact with the customer (Simone and Sabbadin, 2017). Channels can be looked at as mediums of the organisations for interacting with customers (Hosseini *et al.*, 2018). The definition by Verhoef, Kannan and Inman (2015) seems to summarise the assertions above when they state that, channels are customer touch points or mediums through which the firm and the customer interact. In the context and the environment shaping the; retailing sector, physical store, online store, catalogue retailing, direct selling, television home shopping and automated retailing are all classified under retail channels. However, this research study used online and offline channels as the dominant touch-points throughout the study. In addition, the offline and online channels are projected as the customer touch-points.

The objectives and aims of this study were to establish retail strategies that can be used to integrate the online and offline channels in order to establish a seamless customer shopping experience. The proceeding sections investigate a number of omni-channel retailing strategies, which can be used in the fashion-retailing sector of Cape Town, South Africa. An omni-channel strategy is a business strategy centred around customers and thrives to accord them a seamless shopping experience regardless of the channel selected, (Mosquera *et al.*, 2017: 74). The academic arguments advanced in the proceeding section deliberately adopted the customer-centric position and were validated by notable case studies from other countries.

2.4 Channel strategies

In general, every business whether successful or not, operates with a strategy and it is the strategy that gives direction and sets the standards against which measure can be evaluated (Nagel, 1972). In the retailing sector, rapid changes in; I.T, consumer behaviour, climate change and the recent announcement of Covid-19 by the World Health Organisation (W.H.O) has called upon businesses to adapt and change their operating strategies.

The choice of retail channel strategies continues to be a challenge to companies facing the pressure of developing a sustained competitive advantage, which endeavors to meet the difficulty in preserving product differentiation (De Faultrier *et al.*, 2014). Interviews that were conducted with Finnish retailers seem to concur with the above assertion that sees an omni-channel as a phenomenon meant to change the retail landscape in a more profound manner while giving retailers a competitive edge over their rival (Peltola, Vainio and Nieminen, 2016). In support of the above view, the results of H&M fashion retailer were mentioned as clear evidence, when it was revealed that H&M had put in place the best possible channel integration to secure a competitive edge ahead of its rival, Mango and Oasis (Silva, Duarte and Sundetova, 2020).

Retail channel strategy refers to the way the offer is made available to the consumer, (De Faultrier *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, changes in consumer behaviour and the rapid adoption of technology made the retailing sector transform to the new retailing landscape. However, the golden rush to retail transformation has been marred by serious challenges more so, when it comes to implementing retail strategies in omni-channel. Rouquet Aurélien, Henriquez Tatiana, (2018:08) bemoan the absence of one best omni-channel retail strategy as the reason some retailers end up opting for omni-channel strategies which does not support their retail model. In addition, the assertion on the lack of best omni-channel retail strategies prompted the study to look into omni-channel retail strategies that are applicable to the Cape Town clothing sector, in order to close the research gap.

Moreover, the study was solely focused on establishing omni-channel retail strategies that will ensure that the retail apparel sector of Cape Town wins in both online and offline worlds. However, an in-depth and longitudinal study that was conducted with Direct Optic in France, revealed that retailers transiting to omni-channel do so under a myriad of challenges and the process is not as smooth as anticipated (Picot-Coupey, Huré and Piveteau, 2016). Larke *et al.* (2018) concur with the longitudinal study of Direct Optic, revealing that some challenges experienced by retailers transiting to omni-channel emanate from the inability of retailers to unify customer experience across channels.

The following section discusses technology and Information systems in the omni-channel business model. The focus of channel integration is to ensure that customers are served to the fullest through leveraging all the available retail channels. In concurring with these views, (Larke, Kilgour and O'Connor, 2018a: 466) postulate that, the integration of channels ensures a seamless customer experience which can ultimately lead to an increase in sales.

2.4.1 Technology and Information Systems in omni-channel

Kembro & Norrman (2019: 387) assert that, the integration of information systems across the various channels should be right on top of the priorities, as customer migration across channels should be supported by flexible and consistent systems. In the fashion retailing sector of Spain, Zara was one of the retailers that implemented a successful omni-channel strategy by encouraging customers to use omni-channel technologies within physical stores (Mosquera *et al.*, 2017: 69). For example, one of the stores owned by Zara in the city of San Sebastian was fitted with tablets in their fitting rooms to allow customers to check for sizes while they are trying garments or perform an automatic checkout (Mosquera *et al.*, 2017: 69). Furthermore, the study that was conducted on Zara to look into the role of technology in an omni-channel physical store noted that, physical stores should adapt in order to survive in the new retailing environment (Mosquera *et al.*, 2017: 75).

Moreover, a study that was conducted with six hundred and twenty eight (628) Spanish omni-channel shoppers in an endeavor to analyse the different interactive technologies in the clothing sector, revealed that new technologies within the offline channel have a positive effect on purchase intention (Mosquera, Olarte Pascual and Juaneda Ayensa, 2017; Savastano *et al.*, 2019). However, in comparing and consolidating the above viewpoints from different authors, it can be noted that, the use of mobile devices or smartphones by shoppers gives retailers an added urge to develop mobile-based platforms and apps for shoppers to browse, purchase and order merchandise online within the omni-channel business model.

The assertion on new in-store technology seems to be in line with the results of this study which also revealed that the adoption of in-store technology such as tablets and Wi-Fi connections, allow shoppers to browse and place orders while in-store. Moreover, the availability of technology in the form of smartphones and tablets leads to the collapse of retail boundaries thereby allowing shoppers to obtain seamless shopping experiences across different channels. In support of the previous point, Larke, Kilgour and O'Connor (2018a) state that in order for omni-channel to be effective, information technology must be integrated across the varied retail channels. In addition, the previous viewpoint seems to support the need for pointing out that information and technology serves as a great building block for the establishment of omni-channel retail channels.

Larke *et al.* (2018: 468) further agree that Information Technology (I.T) is a critical component for the full working potential of omni-channel. Hilken *et al.* (2018) make a similar call when they postulate that technology is a driving force in the retail fashion sector. For example, L'Oréal's is using virtual mirrors which allow online customers to virtually try on make-up thereby integrating the fit and feel of the products (Hilken *et al.*, 2018). In corroborating the views above, Jang, Kim and Lee (2020) state that virtual fitting room mirrors have an effect on sales per customer. They also have been found to be helpful in reducing product returns rate by 27% through filtering out incorrect sizes and fit. Moreover, the results of the just mentioned study are crucial because they validate the

importance of information technology within the retailing sector and they point to the effect stated above.

Blom *et al.* (2017: 01) state that the availability of mobile broadband and easily accessible *Wi-Fi* services are at the forefront of digitalising consumers in physical stores to access other channels online. For example, a customer can use a mobile tablet to check for the product reviews and specs; smartphones can be used to check for price matching, and smart watches for checking out the product while in the store (Berman and Thelen, 2018). Based on the above example, it can be stated that a successful omni-channel strategy works hand in hand with technology. Berman & Thelen (2018: 598) offered a concealable opinion by stating that, changes in consumer behaviours and the rise in the adoption of newer technologies have necessitated the transition to omni-channel. Without technology, channel integration remains a daunting task and a pipe dream because technology is crucial for integrating the different touch points.

The next section discusses channel integration as a strategy within the omni-channel business model.

2.4.2 Channel Integration

In a study that was conducted in the Indian retail environment to look into the purchase intent of Indian consumers in omni-channel shopping, the results pointed that, there is a positive response if customers experience product information consistently across all the channels (Rajan, Swaminathan and Pavithra, 2017). Furthermore, the results speak loud and clear to the need to integrate all the channels available to shoppers. Lim & Srαι (2019: 32) argue for the use of the term channel synergy over channel integration in the implementation and execution of omni-channel customer experience because channel integration is attributed to rigidity and tardiness, a condition that results in failure to pace with the rapid changes in the retail environment. Lim & Srαι (2019: 32) elaborate by stating that when retailers opt for channel synergy, its functional areas and resources are harnessed to produce results that are greater than the individual parts. Lim & Srαι (2019) mention that Wal-Mart Stores Inc., uses channel synergy as an omni-channel strategy.

Shoppers can initiate channel integration. When it is initiated by a shopper it will involve searching for a retailer's online access while in store and this can be done to cross-check the product reviews left by other customers or to check for uniformity of the price of the products (Berman & Thelen, 2018: 605). Park & Kim (2019) presume that when adopting channel integration, retailers are encouraged to provide consistent service offering, in the form of price and product information across the channels. Furthermore, the integration of systems to the levels of blurring the lines between offline and online channels requires substantial resources and investment.

Starbucks coffee shop is one of the retailers that has integrated its offline and online channels in such a way that customers are able to check and re-load their Starbucks store-card balance using their mobile phones or through in-store service (Berman & Thelen, 2018: 608). However, a survey that was conducted on Amazon Mechanical Turk in which 86 responses were collected pointed out that 85% of the respondents had purchased a product online which appeared to be different and related to the one they had inspected in the physical store (Li, Zhang and Tayi, 2020). In addition, the results of the Amazon Mechanical Turk can be used to justify and strengthen the importance of channel integration as a strategy for omni-channel retailing.

As correctly stated, channel integration creates positive opportunities and one being that, retailers will be able to foster a synergetic power balance that allows them to offer different services through a myriad of channels (Simone & Sabbadin, 2018: 86). As a matter of record, channel integration dates to the phase of multichannel, where purely online organisations like Amazon, Apple, Dell Computers, Bonobos and JustFab were considered the pioneers of clicks to bricks strategy (Simone & Sabbadin, 2018: 86). Most of the clicks to bricks retailing formats were enhanced by channel integration. An interesting feature of channel integration was revealed through a study that was conducted in Italy to look at how omni-channel strategies link to the digitalisation phenomenon within the retailing sector, the results indicated that the click and collect functionality represents the integration of the offline and online channels (Jocevski *et al.*,

2019a: 84). These results can be used to extrapolate the importance of channel integration as a strategy of omni-channel retailing. The next section looks at omni-channel fulfillment strategies.

2.5 Omni-channel fulfillment strategies

The previous section investigated channel integration where a number of case studies and literature were highlighted and discussed with a view to substantiate channel integration. The following section looked into the different strategies, which retailers and shoppers employ to fulfill omni-channel orders.

Omni-channel fulfillment strategies can be defined as, processes that enable a firm to meet customer demand through the flexible sharing of fulfillment links across any combination of channels with respect to purchase origination and purchase receipt, (Taylor *et al.*, 2019). While, fulfillment execution focuses on getting orders to the final destination in an efficient, but cost effective manner, (Riley and Klein, 2019). The omni-channel fulfillment strategies must aim to achieve cost efficiency and quality customer service to enhance sustainability and a seamless customer experience, respectively. However, Taylor *et al.* (2019: 869) cited six distinct omni-channel order fulfillment strategies and these include: Buy Online Return In Store (BORIS), Click and Collect, Buy Online Ship to Store, Omni-channel distribution centres, Omni-channel drop shipping and Buy Online Ship to Store. Throughout this study, Click and Collect, Buy Online Return to Stores and Buy Online Pick in Store are highlighted and discussed as the relevant omni-channel strategies, which enhance a seamless customer experience.

2.5.1 Buy Online Pick in Store (BOPIS or Click and Collect)

To begin with, the term omni-channel fulfillment strategy falls under a body or system of names driven from different fields within the commerce industry. In addition, Taylor *et al.* (2019: 882) defined omni-channel fulfillment strategies as a nomenclature in which inventory, personnel and fulfillment assets are flexibly shared among channels to fulfill omni-shopper orders regardless of their originations. The practice of buying online and

collecting offline is termed, Click and Collect or Buy Online Pick in Store (BOPS), (Rai *et al.*, 2019).

However, deliveries of omni-channel orders are carried out through two main categories, home delivery and customer pick-up. Customer pick-up for omni-channel orders is normally done at store and this category uses the store for, click and collect or click and reserve strategies (Buldeo Rai *et al.*, 2019: 271). In the omni-channel business model, store networks are used as the collection points. Davies, Dolega and Arribas-Bel (2019) assert that, retail strategies such as click and collect are multifaceted because they include convenience and a great level of propensity in serving customers who prefer to start their shopping journey with an online channel and traverse to an offline channel seamlessly.

According to the Integrated Report of Mr Price (2020), their click and collect fulfillment strategy contributed more than 65% towards all online sales. In addition, it was stated that 17% of shoppers who visit Mr. Price to collect their online order end up purchasing other items while collecting their omni-channel order (Integrated Report Mr Price, 2020). The statistics of Mr. Price confirm that when omni-shoppers visit offline channels to collect their orders, they end up buying other items and inversely contributing to the business turnover. Taylor *et al.* (2019) seemed to refute the assertion above when they suggested that more empirical research needs to be conducted into how omni-channel fulfillment strategies such as click and collect benefit sales and reduce costs.

In concurring with the percentage of online sales, the African Digital Customer Experience Report (2022: 15) asserts that, over 60% of Woolworths online browsers end up making purchases in store. The assertion above seems to suggest that, in the omni-channel retailing landscape, shoppers are free to start their journey from either end and move seamlessly as attested to in the case of Woolworths. In addition, the click and collect strategy is premised on allowing customers to make orders online and to have them collected in a physical store. The rationale of click and collect or BOPS are premised to some extent on shopping values. For example, positive lead times have the potential of

enhancing hedonic shopping values especially the immediate gratification and possession of the product. However, the implementation of BOPS and Click and Collect keeps physical stores attractive as great customer destinations because they bring foot traffic when omni-shoppers visit offline channels to have their order collected (Taylor *et al.*, 2019: 881). In analysing the value of online research in encouraging shoppers to buy offline, the study by the African Digital Customer Experience Report of 2021 revealed that, 42% of online shoppers do click and collect.

In addition, Zhang *et al.* (2020) posit that retailers are rethinking their operations with a view of integrating their offline and online channels, thereby inspiring the birth of the omni-channel's Buy Online and Pick in Store (BOPS) strategy. In validating the assertion above, a study by Jocevski *et al.* (2019a: 84) which was conducted in Italy to provide a deeper understanding of how omni-channel strategies link with digitalisation, inferred that the click and collect functionality was poised as a good example of channel integration strategy within the omni-channel retailing model.

The strategy of BOPS is similar to Click and Collect in form because both strategies involve customer orders starting online and fulfillment being done at store level. Moreover, Zhang *et al.* (2020) posit that the BOPS strategy allows omni-shoppers to view the retailer's website first and confirm the availability of merchandise before they go to the physical store and through this process, shoppers save transportation and time cost respectively. In validating the above point Cabigiosu, (2020) state that from both a retailer and customer perspective, BOPS and Click and Collect pose great advantages in that they eliminate: shipping costs, delivery mistakes and delays of the order. In addition, the implementation of click and collect and BOPS omni-channel fulfillment strategies has the potential of reducing outbound transportation, since the onus will be on the customer to travel and collect their order, (Chopra, 2016). Furthermore, click and collect and BOPS have the potential to inflate both offline and online spending by customers, (Song *et al.*, 2019: 15). Expanding on the previous assertion, Zhang *et al.* (2020) posit that, when omni-shoppers visit the physical store to collect their omni-channel order, they are more likely to be sold to other merchandise within the physical store. Moreover, some retailers

are opting to use click and collect for handling product returns as compared to sending a courier to collect the unwanted item, (African Digital Customer Experience Report, 2021). In the following section, another omni-channel strategy, Buy Online Return in Store (BORIS) is discussed.

2.5.2 Buy Online Return in Store (BORIS)

The implementation of new omni-channel fulfillment strategies has the greatest advantage to offer omni-shoppers convenient pick-up and drop-in, which translate into making a seamless customer journey. Customers can gain additional confidence in their purchasing decisions in the knowledge that they have a wider range of options when it comes to returning purchased products (Bernon, Cullen and Gorst, 2016: 587).

Contrary to the views above, the online channel has two critical issues and these are high product return rates and high hesitation rate purchasing clothing online, (Jang, Kim and Lee, 2020). However, product return can be both a huge headache to retailers as well as a big drain to retail profitability if not managed well, (Cabigiosu, 2020; Yang, 2019). In reducing and eradicating the impact of product returns, retailers resorted to setting up technology such as Virtual Mirrors to eliminate the possibility of product returns, (Cabigiosu, 2020). In validating the views on virtual mirrors, a study that was conducted by Jang, Kim and Lee (2020), revealed that virtual mirrors have an effect on sales per customer and it helps to reduce product return rates by a whopping 27% through filtering out incorrect sizes and fit. As a result of the inability to assess the quality of goods, pre-purchasing online still keeps some consumers away from online purchases: a typical example is a segment of the adult conservative generation in Russia that avoids online purchases in the fashion segment because they fear that goods will not fit and they will encounter difficulties in returning them, (Beloborodova and Martynova, 2016). A study that was conducted by Gelbrich, Gäthke and Hübner (2017) revealed that, in trying to mitigate the volumes of online returns, lenient return policies were augmented by the “*keep reward promotion*”, which entails keeping the online purchase for a rebate or discount for the next purchase. Moreover, the “*keep reward promotion*” combined with the lenient return policy, ensures that retailers realise high turnover and a low cost in-

terms of product return handling procedures, (Gelbrich *et al.*, 2017: 864). In addition to the previous assertion, customers can gain additional confidence in their purchase decisions in the knowledge that they have a wider range of options when it comes to returning purchased products, (Bernon *et al.*, 2016: 587).

The purpose of implementing a seamless omni-channel retailing model is to afford omni-shoppers the opportunity to choose the most convenient channel of purchase without fearing about the returns and its processes. Moreover, the adoption of omni-channel fulfillment strategies affords omni-shoppers the ability to shop the way they wish, fully supported by store resources and inventory, (Taylor *et al.*, 2019: 865).

The next section looks at the clothing sector of South Africa.

2.6 Clothing retailers in South Africa

The clothing sector of South Africa is viewed as a key driving component within government's economic development and job creation mantra (Vlok, 2020). However, like many other sectors, the clothing sector of South Africa suffered great setbacks emanating from massive floods of imports from Asia and other continents. Concurring with the challenges facing the clothing sector, Katemauswa and Naude (2020) posit that the South African clothing sector is struggling to remain strong within the volatile clothing sector.

The clothing sector of South Africa has been placed under massive constraints due to the decline in local production of clothing and footwear, (Promozionale and Secundario, 2013). In addition, an increase in demand by consumers for a wider range of styles, colours and international brands have all led to the sector resorting to imports to supplement local production, (Promozionale and Secundario, 2013). In a case study that was written about Yuppiechef detailing its transition from clicks to bricks, pointed that out that the online retail clothing category was booming (Reyneke and Barnardo, 2019: 03). It is through such case studies that many investors in the retailing sector find the industry attractive for investment.

The South African clothing retail sector is dominated by national retail chains such as: Woolworths, Mr. Price Group Limited, The Foschini Group (T.F.G), Edcon, Truworths and Pepkor (Promozionale & Secondario, 2013). Among the retailers stated above, there are a number that are already implementing e-commerce, for example, Truworths was able to launch a successful omni-channel concept and part of its successes is attributed to its exposure in leveraging international experience through its ownership of an Office London retailer in the United Kingdom (U.K), (Goga & Paelo, 2019). However, although Edcon was among the first pioneers of online platform some years back, it is widely stated that the group devoted less time and attention to e-commerce. This is one of the reasons why this study sought to inspire retailers to consistently implement omni-channel retailing considering the many opportunities laying ahead, (Goga & Paelo, 2019). In the following section, the theoretical framework of the study is discussed and pointed out in detail.

2.7 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The study is underpinned by two theoretical frameworks, Organisational Change Theory (O.C.T) and Transformational Theory (T.T) which provided the road map to the study. In the academic environment, theory is referred to as a model or framework and seeks to explain, describe and forecast reality (Svensson, 2013). The following section outlines Change Theory in relation to this study.

2.7.1 Change Theory

Within the framework of organisational change theory resides an explanation detailing why organisations change and the effects thereof of such changes (Barnett & Carroll, 1995: 217). There is a general assumption which posits that an organisation changes in response to changes in the macroenvironment (Barnette & Carroll, 1995: 217). In the past decade, there have been tremendous shifts when it comes to customer behaviour and such shifts are attributed to digital technologies: such changes are compelling businesses to rapidly align and be agile (Singh & Thirumoorthi, 2019: 1255). Moreover, changes in the way people communicate have been largely driven by the massive adoption of mobile devices, and these falls broadly under technological change, a component of the macroenvironment. The prevailing point of view out there is that retailers operate in ever-

changing environments which are characterised by very tough competition (Matthysen *et al.*, 2019).

There are generally two types of changes, organisational improvement and organisational adaptation (Nilakant, 2018). Social change theorist, Kurt Lewin is the proponent and father of the theory of change and alluded that his theory can be applied to any organisation, hence its application to the retailing sector (Kaminski, 2011). In addition, Lewin's theory of change, also referred as a product of planned change guided by three stages, (unfreeze, change and refreeze) (Kaminski, 2011). Nilakant (2018) expounds that change, in response to changes in the environment is called adaptation and such change is aimed at aligning the business to the turbulent changes of the environment. The alignment of both offline and online retail business channels to the omni-channel business concept is driven by changes in technology and consumer behaviour respectively. Lorenzo-Romero (2020:03) agree with the theory of change when positing that the retail industry is going through transformation and suggesting that the changes were driven by digitalisation.

A study that was conducted among Finnish retailers to study the state of omni-channel developments, revealed that changes in customer behaviour were responsible for the retailer's strategic changes (Peltola, Vainio and Nieminen, 2016). It is within this theoretical domain that the study sought to influence fashion retailers offering online and offline channels to adapt to the omni-channel business model. Corroborating the views on change, retail companies have started to admit that markets have changed and part of the changes are witnessed through customers especially when they start to access retailers through omni-channel, (Lorenzo-romero, 2020).

Moreover, change in consumer behaviour is viewed as the dominant variable that has pushed the study to look into strategies of establishing a homogeneous shopping experience as well as a seamless customer journey. Historically, shoppers were viewed as merely buyers and retailers were largely active in providing value to products and services, however, the changes in consumer behaviour have led to the concept of co-creation of values between the retailer and consumers, (Lorenzo-Romero, 2020). In

addition, shoppers are very active on different social forums and platforms where information such as product reviews are shared; some retailers are starting to take product reviews seriously as valuable information which can be used in their retail strategies for the process of creating and developing products and services, (Lorenzo-romero, 2020). The changes from multi-channel to omni-channel have provided retailers with difficult tasks of establishing omni-channel strategies, which can integrate the various channels into a seamless and homogeneous shopping experience.

In the next section, Transformational Theory (T.T) is discussed with a view to aligning it to the theoretical framework of the study.

2.7.2 Transformational Theory

As expounded above, changing the business strategy from the current default of multichannel strategy to the omni-channel business model calls upon transformational leaders because transformational leaders are generally regarded as effective change catalysts and they embrace change as a process (Castiglione, 2006; Kuntz, Davies and Naswall, 2019). Part of the success of transformational leaders resides in their technique to instill belief in their followers' ability which will ultimately generate positive emotions (Kurland *et al.*, 2010: 11). A case in point is the story of Best Buy Electronics Company. Best Buy was one of the retail companies that implemented digital transformation when it was at the brink of bankruptcy (Morgan, 2020).

In a way to reconnect with its customers, Best Buy reviewed their strategy both internally and externally. It's transformation was led by their visionary Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Hubert Joy (Morgan, 2020). It follows then that, for retailers to transform successfully to the omni-channel retail model, visionary and transformational leaders must play a key role as torchbearers in the change process. The dominant paradigm in the complicated and dynamic business environment requires transformational leaders (Morgan, 2020: 48). In addition, the theoretical framework of transformation underpinning this study concurs with a study that was conducted in New California about the gender difference in leadership styles in a Mental Health Organisation (Guay, 2013).

The transformational theory views the world using subjective lenses and its constructionism ontological paradigm and interpretivism epistemology ties fitting with this research methodology. As expounded in the theoretical frameworks of Change Theory and Transformational Theory, much of the changes happening in the retail apparel sector are largely driven by changes in consumer behaviour which is in-turn driven by technological changes. They are never classified as planned changes. Lynch and Barnes (2020a: 472) state that, technological development amongst the fashion consumers has necessitated a need for research to look into how shoppers interact and engage with various channels as part of their purchase decision. For example, many retailers have set up websites as a response to changes in consumer behaviour and to date, a number of retailers are on many selling platforms.

Studies that were undertaken by Tauber in 1972 revealed that satisfaction obtained during the customer shopping journey supplant the motivation of simply finding the products (Olsen, 2011). This seems to disprove the views and assertions that seeks to make a general statement that all clients expect the same experience from their shopping journey. However, some seek fulfillment and others seek emotional satisfaction (Mosquera, Olarte Pascual and Juaneda Ayensa, 2017). Concisely, this brings us to discuss the two conceptual frameworks underpinning this study namely, *Hedonic* and *Utilitarian* and the Change Theory (C.T) that underpins them both.

2.8 Conceptual Framework of the study

The conceptual framework of this study was developed from two theories, namely, Change Theory (C.T) and Transformational Theory (T.T). In the proceeding section, hedonic and utilitarian shopping values were highlighted with a view to supporting the conceptual framework of the study.

2.8.1 Hedonic and Utilitarian Shopping Values

Hedonic consumers enjoy the shopping process and that is the main reason why they engage in the process (Olsen, 2011). Hedonic consumers are characterized as adopting experience values such as social, emotional and epistemic as their reflection and identity

(Prebensen and Rosengren, 2016). On the other continuum, functional values and value for money exemplifies utilitarian shopping values (Epuran, 2015; Kesari and Atulkar, 2016; Prebensen and Rosengren, 2016). Utilitarian shopping value is characterised by the consumer's assessment of a product or service functional benefits and drawbacks; in general, the utilitarian shopper is referred to as being one who is transaction oriented (Ramlugun, 2014; Lee and Wu, 2017).

While it is true that there has been middling research studies in single channels regarding hedonic and utilitarian values, the same can be said about the multi-channel and omni-channel studies on hedonic and utilitarian shopping values (Noble, Griffith and Weinberger, 2005).

Consumer behaviour literature though interested in the dimensionality of the value notion has paid lip service to the effects of value dimensions as antecedents of behavioural consequences like customer contentment and customer allegiance (Gallarza, Ruiz-molina and Gil-saura, 2016). Utilitarian values are functional, instrumental and cognitive in nature and are a means to an end, they take considerations to issues of time, place and possession (Olsen, 2011). Given the nature of the various channels in retailing, more so in relation to product delivery, it can be argued that the timing of product possession varies across the channels (Noble, Griffith and Weinberger, 2005). It is therefore important to note that utilitarian consumers are not negatively affected by delayed product possession or immediate gratification.

Studies conducted in three grocery outlets in a Norwegian city revealed that unique store attributes such as personal interaction can relate negatively to utilitarian shopping values and vice-versa to hedonic shopping values (Olsen, 2011). In addition, the physical aspects of the store have a positive valence towards the hedonic shopping value. In their findings, the studies revealed that, retailers can create specific retail outlets for shoppers to attend to their shopping values. A typical example is the Adidas brand Centre in Beijing China which has a tunnel entry and team-rooms which are all congruent with the hedonic shopping orientation (Vieira, Santini and Araujo, 2018). In contrast, utilitarian shopping

values are synonymous with consumers using the online channel since they value convenience and information attainment in making their purchases and are not worried about immediate product possession and gratification, respectively.

Furthermore, information attainment in the utilitarian value proposition refers to an increase in product or service information attained by customers as attributes, and that is one of the reasons why the online channel has vast information at their disposal, augmented by peer reviews, graphics and product demonstrations videos (Olsen, 2011). In a nutshell, the results from a Norwegian study pointed out that the physical layout of the store must make it easy for shoppers to navigate inside the store for customers exhibiting both the utilitarian and hedonic orientation when they are carrying out their shopping process (Olsen, 2011). In a more similar study carried out in Enugu, Nigeria, research results attested that socio-personality transformation, aesthetics and architectural design, all representing the hedonic shopping values, dominated the respondent's motivations for shopping as compared to the utilitarian need for satisfaction values (Chukwuemeka, Anayo and Ifesinachi, 2017).

Compounded by these challenges and opportunities, retailers and marketers closed ranks when they coined the omni-channel retailing channel as a means of consolidating all the various customer touch-points into one seamless process, thereby bringing together hedonic and utilitarian shopping values under one roof. Gulati and Garino cited by Simone and Sabbadin (2018: 87) posit that retailers that will apply brick and click in their retail strategies in the current economic environment will reap successes in their retailing businesses. Hosseini *et al.* (2018: 74) support the assertion above when they postulate that, a number of retailers are struggling to implement an omni-channel strategic plan that meets their customers' channel preferences in-terms of shopping values, as alluded to earlier in this introduction. For example, in the financial year ending June 2018, Woolworths launched *in-app* shopping using its already integrated *lifestyle-app* and this resulted in a 34% growth in online sales and Woolworths realised that the mobile channel could lead the retailer to a successful omni-channel experience (Watling & McCabe, 2020: 10). The next section looks at the gaps with in the omni-channel literature.

2.9 Gaps in the literature

In the current retail paradigm, there is no mature model for omni-channel developed for, brands, retailers and marketers; this poses a great research gap in the retailing academic discourse, (Shetty and Jeevananda, 2018). The above views were echoed by Hosseini *et al.* (2018: 74) when they posit that omni-channel management take the descriptive approach as opposed to prescriptive knowledge which guides the retailers in formulating appropriate omni-channel strategies. In addition, most studies of omni-channel seem to investigate single facets of the omni-channel concept and negate the bigger picture which is the omni-channel strategies, (Hosseini *et al.*, 2018: 74). However, the study sought to among other things, close the above-mentioned gap by establishing omni-channel strategies which can be suggested for implementation in the retail-clothing sector of Cape Metropolitan area of Western Cape, South Africa.

2.10 Summary

The sections above outlined a myriad of theoretical arguments of the study through dedicating a number of subsections to discussing omni-channel strategies. In addition, the definitions of channel and omni-channel were covered. Channel integration was looked at as a means to consolidate the online and offline channels. Moreover, various order fulfillment strategies were discussed and supported by similar case studies. The academic discussion roped in *Change Theory and Transformational Theory*, and they were discussed as the core theories of the study. In addition, the study proffered *hedonic* and *utilitarian* theoretical framework. Lastly, the study looked at the gaps in omni-channel literature.

The following chapter (three) looks at Research Methodology and Design. In addition, chapter three discusses the theoretical paradigm and the philosophical stance underpinning the study. Furthermore, as outlined in the abstract, the chapter discusses: research methods, sampling, data collection and data analysis methods.

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was a critical review and analysis of existing literature. This chapter describes the processes and procedures that were employed to collect data. In addition, the target sample size and sampling techniques were also discussed in this chapter. The chapter concludes by detailing how the data was captured and analysed.

Research methodology can be viewed as an academic technique used by researchers to get to a point where research objectives and questions are answered (Winit-watjana, 2016). The study intended to employ a Qualitative Research Approach to study the phenomenon of omni-channel. In addition, research methodology intended to demonstrate unambiguous position when constructionism and interpretivism paradigms were set right from the beginning as the demarcating parameters for the philosophical position of the researcher.

Mackenzie & Knipe (2006) highlights that defining the philosophical stance is crucial because without defining the research paradigm there is no reasonable reason for the selection of research methodology, research methods and the research design. In the following sections, research methodology is discussed followed by research methodology.

3.2 Research methodology

The mere listing of methods or procedures in collecting data and analysing it in a research study does not satisfy a complete description of research methodology; however, the approaches in determining which particular techniques are to be used defines research methodology holistically (Casanave and Li, 2015). Methodology places more prominence on how comprehension is mastered, described, explained, checked, judged, evaluated, tested, explored, investigated and interpreted (Ngulube, 2015). In addition, it is central to the research process because it is viewed as a lens through which a researcher generalises and conceptualises ideas when obtaining knowledge about social

phenomenon and obtaining answers for the research question (Ngulube, 2015). In the current study, the research sought to establish omni-channel retail strategies within phenomenon that was relatively new. In the proceeding section, the research philosophy is discussed with a view to locating the researcher’s philosophical beliefs towards knowledge and reality.

3.3 Research philosophy

The lens through which one views the world is referred to as the philosophical approach (Morgan, 2017). Saunders *et al.* (2019) expounds on the above assertion by referring to research philosophy as a system of beliefs and assumptions in the development of knowledge. There are basically three types of research assumptions within the research philosophy domain and these are ontology, epistemology and axiology (Saunders *et al.*, 2019: 133). Winit-watjana (2016) further mentions ontology, epistemology and axiology as the three dominant philosophical realms within the research field. The research onion developed by Saunders will guide the study.

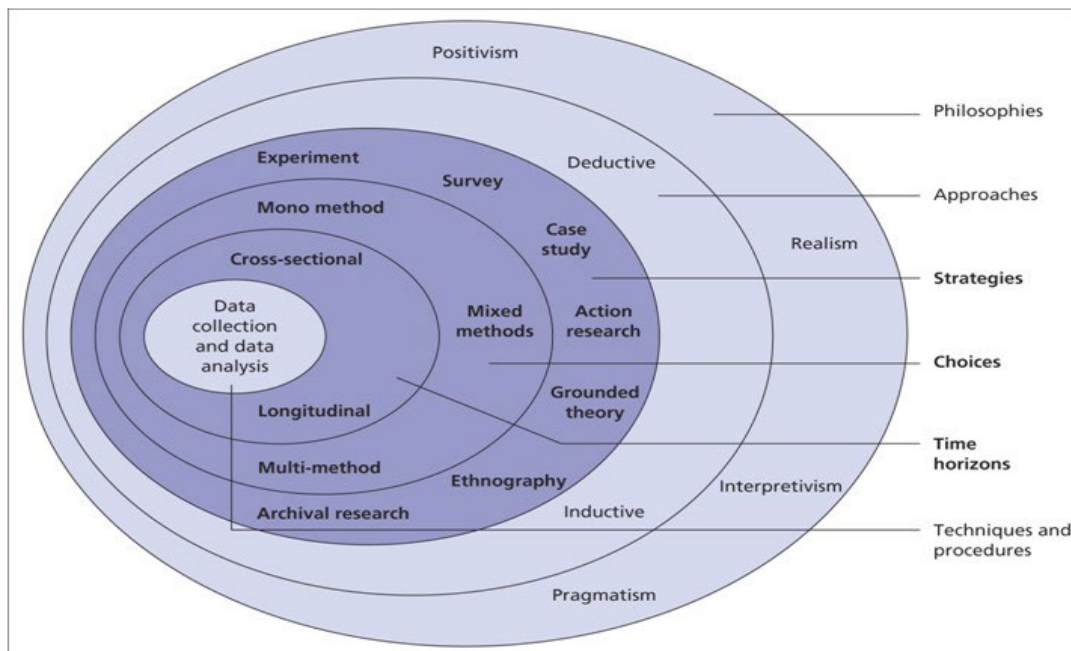


Figure 3.1: The research onion (Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis & Adrian Thornhill, 2018).

Winit-watjana, (2016) contents that understanding research philosophy is particularly important because it helps researchers to align themselves with the selection of the research methodology and data collection. The following paragraphs will give a brief explanation of the major research philosophies.

Epistemology relates to how a researcher understands the reality of knowledge driven from two fundamental school of thoughts which are positivism and constructionism (Pathirage, Amaratunga and Haigh, 2008). The positivism paradigm views knowledge as detached and value-free from the researcher (Winit-watjana, 2016). However constructionism school of thought is covered extensively in the coming section as it formed the cornerstone for this study. Ontology refers to the researcher's assumption about the nature of reality, whether it is objectivism or subjectivism (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). In simpler terms, ontology is related to epistemology and in turn, the latter is used to explain the researcher's view of the reality of knowledge.

Axiology assumptions are pinned on the value system of the researcher (Pathirage, Amaratunga and Haigh, 2008). The study adopted a value-laden approach where the researcher was part of what was researched (Winit-watjana, 2016).

In order to use the research technique successfully, it is indispensable to ensure that a viable epistemology is valid and in-support of the researcher's actions throughout the whole process (Edwards, 2012). As partially mentioned in the opening paragraphs above, the researcher identified constructionism and interpretivism as the paradigms underpinning the study and the following section discusses the constructionism paradigm in depth.

3.3.1 Constructionism

The study purposefully assumed the constructionism stance concerning how reality was obtained. The philosophical assumption under constructionism considers research as a social practice whose knowledge production is considered to be social, historical and culturally situated inspired by the researcher's subjective stance (Paula-Ravagnani, Guanaes-Lorenzi & Rasera, 2017). Moreover, the constructionist approach regards

individualistic accounts of meaning and experiences which are socially constructed, reflecting socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions rather than the use of a straightforward report (Kerr, Nixon and Wild, 2010). Reflecting on the study, the interviews of the participants and their responses were used to construct meaning, which was vital in answering the research questions at hand and meeting the objectives of the study. In addition, a number of themes, which emerged out of the data, were all constructed socially through the accounts of research participants, through interviews.

Contrary to the belief by positivists that people are brought into the universe where meaning exists independent of their consciousness and experience, the constructionism paradigm underpinning this study was inspired by the collective participation of the researcher and the participants in the construction of knowledge (Rasmussen, Muir-Cochrane and Henderson, 2015). In support of this paradigm, proponents of constructionism raise the notion that, reality is subjective and is a social phenomenon; meanings are produced through social interactions, and they are forever evolving. People's subjective perception and experiences fall broadly under the constructivism epistemological paradigm and are synonymous to qualitative methods (Barnes, 2019: 304). The interactions, which took place between the researcher and the research participants during the interviewing process, are testament in validating the notion of the constructionism paradigm. For example, a study that was conducted in the United Kingdom (U.K) with high-involvement fashion consumers of Manchester University to look into their high involvement in the context of omni-channel retailing, adopted the constructionism paradigm (Lynch and Barnes, 2020a: 477). In addition, the experiences of Manchester University's high-involvement female consumers in the study were used to construct knowledge through interpretation and reflections. The following section covers the philosophical stance of interpretivism.

3.3.2 Interpretivism

As stated in one of the opening paragraphs, the study adopted the interpretivism philosophical stance. The interpretivism paradigm can be traced as far back as the classical Greek antiquity which held the view that human deeds can be explained by

interpreting their actions which translates into giving meaning (Young, 2009). In a nutshell, the study of social science requires techniques and processes which are fundamentally different from those found within the natural sciences, and this justifies the philosophical research positions and their underlying assumptions adopted for this study (Young, 2009). In addition, the methodology of interpretative selected for the study is in line with social constructionism, given that interpretation was an important aspect for this study (Rasmussen, Muir-Cochrane and Henderson, 2015).

In a similar study that was conducted on company Z (*name withheld*) which has its Head Offices in Cape Town, the study adopted an exploratory approach into the phenomenon of learning the best practices and failures in ecommerce within different African countries (Mthembu, no date). In addition, an interpretivism philosophical approach was adopted in order to understand the rationale of decision making by management at company Z (*name withheld*) (Mthembu, n.d.). Furthermore, the same study used interpretivism in the example because it afforded the researcher an opportunity to understand the natural environment and the point of views of the people involved in the research (Mthembu, no date). Reflecting on the study at hand, the researcher found it fit and appropriate to adopt the interpretivism philosophy because of its ability and clarity in explaining and drawing meanings out of people's actions and responses. A case in point is the responses, which came out of the research participants, various meanings from interviews were drawn through a process of thematic analysis as outlined in the following chapter.

The proceeding section discusses the research approach in-depth, and it conferred on other approaches within the research community.

3.4 Research approach

There are three methods used in research methodology, these are: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Research approaches. The quantitative purists believe and support the views that the scientific study of human society and social relationships inquiries should be objective (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, qualitative purists contend that an array of constructed realities abound, and therefore proponents

of the qualitative research approach are not fazed by the generalisability of results, strongly believing that the knower and the unknown cannot be detached from each other because the subjective knower is the only source of reality (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 14). Moreover, qualitative research is a methodical scientific approach focusing on building a complete and vast narrative and understanding of a social or cultural phenomenon by the researcher (Astalin, 2013). In addition, the study sought to establish omni-channel retail strategies, which can be suggested in the clothing-retailing sector and for such strategies to be brought to the fore, a complete understanding of the changes in consumer behaviour, was established through the interview process and the discussions that followed.

Furthermore, qualitative research techniques are important in generating seminal content and stimulating new ideas or building new theories (Peters, 2010). In addition, qualitative research techniques use the inductive method in generating knowledge or theories (Schultz, Bottorff and Mckeown, no date; Ngulube, 2015).

In sum, the choice of qualitative research approach was driven by the research aim, research objectives and the nature of the topic as well as the research questions. As already been articulated, the qualitative research approach is suitable for investigating deep-seated realities or phenomenon. The next section discusses the rationale for choosing the qualitative research approach.

3.4.1 Rationale for choosing Qualitative research approach

Choosing the right research approach for a study is a daunting task and sometimes it calls upon novice researchers to consult a plethora of academic literature on the broader topic of research methodology. Zooming into the methodological perspective, it can be noted with no argument nor doubt that choosing a qualitative research approach was driven by the researcher's position of reality and the consideration of acceptable knowledge. In addition, the choice of a qualitative approach was motivated by the method's ability in both form and shape to describe phenomenon and assess their

meaning which could have been harder with the quantitative research method (Petrescu and Lauer, 2017).

The context and intentions of consumer behaviour changes revealed by the study would not have been explained any better without the use of the qualitative method because by its nature, shape and form, the qualitative research approach provides better insights to the phenomenon underpinning this study. To validate the study's rationale for using a qualitative research approach, a study that was conducted in Australia's Queensland involving nurses, doctors, allied health professionals and non-clinician administrators, employed the qualitative research approach to explore the status and needs of business acumen of nurse leaders (Raftery and Hsm, 2022). In the example of the study given above, the choice of a qualitative research approach was considered because a qualitative research approach with its array of interpretative techniques is beneficial in describing phenomenon and assessing their meaning, which is harder to do with the quantitative research approach (Peters, 2010; Petrescu and Lauer, 2017).

However, scholars who do not ascribe to the qualitative research approach hold the view that, the method falls short when it comes to generalisability of research results since it involves a smaller sample. In this study, the issues of generalisability were not a deterrent to choosing the qualitative research approach because the study was interested in uncovering deep-seated insights on how online and offline channels can be integrated for a seamless customer experience within the omni-channel model. The proceeding section discusses the exploratory design of the study.

3.5 Exploratory design

The process of exploratory sequential design is carried out in two separate phases depending on whether it is a sequential exploratory design or an explanatory sequential design which are both linked to qualitative and quantitative research methods (Green *et al.*, 2015). However, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009: 171) state that, exploratory designs are flexible and tend to allow researchers to change research directions in the event of new data and insights emerging. This seems to corroborate well with the study

particularly in the section of theme development where a number of insights started to emerge. In the study, the issues of omni-channel strategies were explored to a point where new insights such as the rapid adaptation to mobile devices, provision of free in-store Wi-Fi services and the use of online virtual mirrors were proffered as enablers of smooth integration of online and offline channels within the omni-channel business model. However, the research started with a broader focus on omni-channel strategies, and it was narrowed to fulfillment omni-channel strategies, which ensured the integration of offline and online channels for a smooth customer shopping experience. Exploratory designs tend to start with a broader focus and traverse progressively to a narrow focus as the research progresses, (Lewis *et al.*, 2009: 171).

Moreover, the exploratory design is characterised by the use of the qualitative phase (Doyle, Brady and Byrne, 2016). To validate the rationale of choosing an exploratory design, a similar study that was conducted on Australian universities to investigate the relationship between talent management process and knowledge creation, used an exploratory design (Mohammed, Baig and Gururajan, 2019). In the following section, the delimitation of the study is discussed.

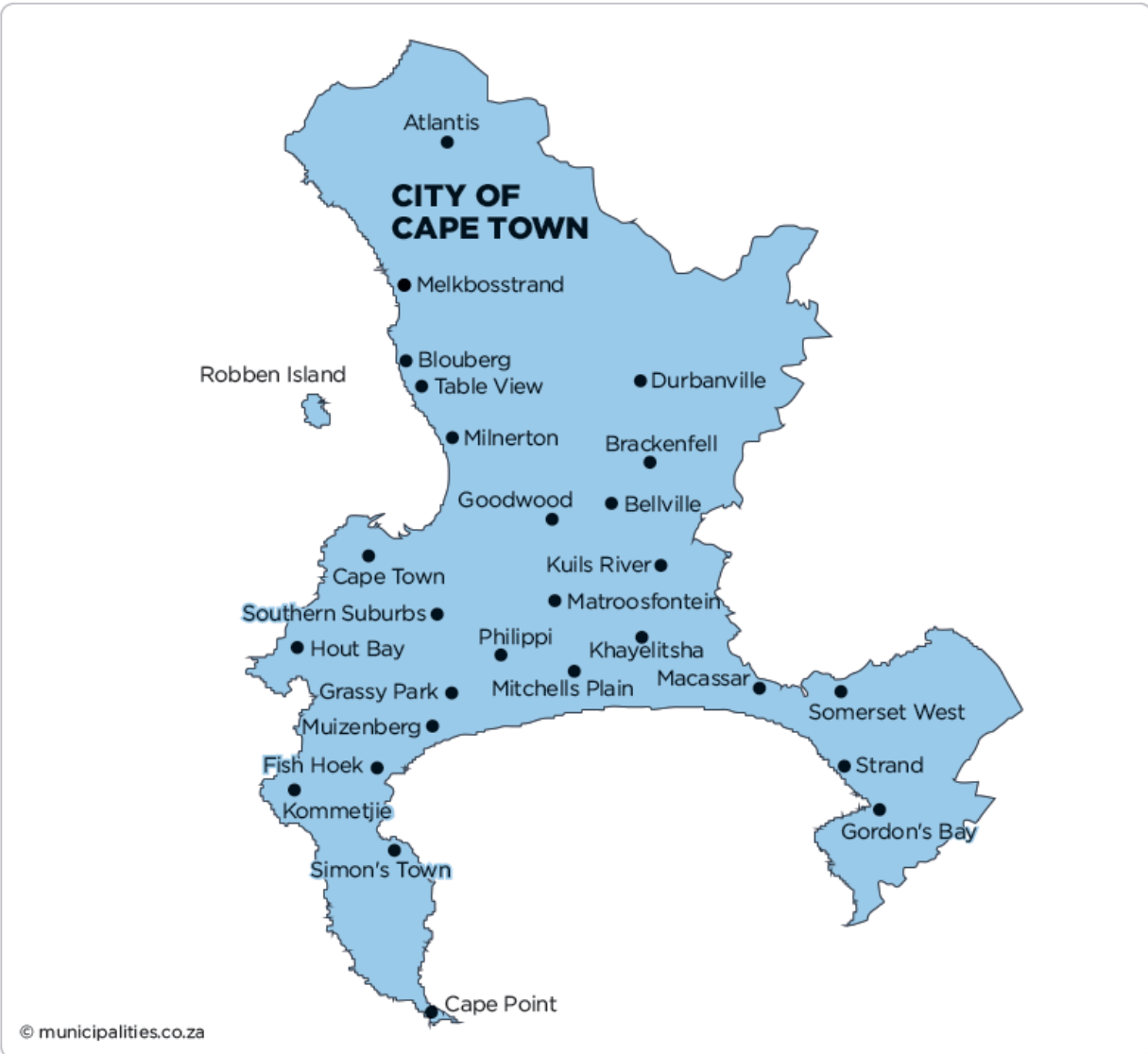
3.6 Delimitation of the study

The study was conducted in Cape Town, a smaller geographical area in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The study intended to establish omni-channel strategies that could be used in the retail-clothing sector within the Cape Metropole region. The selection of the qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to resort to a small sample of population. However, five (5) participants were interviewed as shown in the below Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Participants

Participant 1	Store Manager
Participant 2	Marketing Manager
Participant 3	Senior Marketing Manager
Participant 4	Store Manager
Participant 5	Assistant Manager

A geographical map of the delimited area is shown in [Figure 3.2](#)



Adapted from City of Cape Town Municipality

Figure 3.2: City of Cape Town Municipality Map

In the following section, the population sample of the study is highlighted and discussed in detail.

3.7 Population and sampling

In its broadest terms, sampling is defined as the selection of participants from a sample population. The intention of sampling is the collection of data to be used in answering the research objectives (Gentles *et al.*, 2016). The researcher used a homogeneous population, that was obtained from the retail apparel sector in Cape Town. Generally, qualitative studies tend to enjoy smaller sample sizes than those selected quantitative research methods (Dworkin, 2012; Henry, Fok and Allen, 2015; Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018). Sampling for the study was guided by data saturation. Data saturation is defined as the point at which the data collection process ceases to offer any new insights about the phenomenon under study (Dworkin, 2012; Kruth, 2015).

In support of the choice of a smaller sample size, a study which was conducted to explore the advantages and disadvantages faced by retailers when using technology in their customer service delivery process on an omni-channel level used 13 participants and semi-structured interviews respectively (Mugobo and Baschiera, 2015). As explicated in one of the sections above, the study did not intend to place more emphasis on the generalisation of research results to a larger population and that is the sole reason the study resorted to a smaller sample population. The next section discusses the sampling strategy that was used for the study.

3.8 Purposive Sampling Technique

Selecting a study sample from the universal population is the most salient step in any research study since it is not possible and practical to study the whole population (Marshall, 1996). The study drew its sample from a target population of store leaders, marketing personnel and users of omni-channel in the retail clothing sector, using a purposive sampling method.

In a broader sense, purposive sampling is a strategy that allows for the selection of a sampling frame that may be the most affected by a specific issue (Valerio *et al.*, 2016). In addition, purposive sampling falls under the non-probability sampling method and it is best suited for qualitative research designs. As alluded to above, qualitative research

uses purposive sampling extensively for the identification and selection of information rich cases which are related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). The subject concerning the establishment of omni-channel strategies for clothing retailers was a new terrain that needed reach information.

To corroborate the above views, the purposive sampling technique involves the researcher actively selecting the most productive sample to answer the research questions (Marshall, 1996). Within the purposive sampling, the range of the variation in a sample is not known from the onset of the study (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). The researcher had no prior relationship with the people who later became respondents in this study.

Moreover, purposive sampling maintains rigour and it identifies a sampling frame based on specific study driven variables or characteristics (Valerio *et al.*, 2016). As alluded above, the selected sample was chosen based on the expertise and exposure of the participants to retail industry. The issue of omni-channel retail strategies warranted detailed and in-depth interviews, which were only feasible with a sizeable sample. Initially the study wanted to interview eight participants but because of data saturation, it ended once five participants had been interviewed. In other words, data saturation was reached once the researcher had gathered data to the point of diminishing returns with nothing new was coming out of the interviews after the fifth participant was interviewed. The following steps guided the researcher in carrying out the purposive sampling technique.

- Identify the problem as articulated in the research question.
- Determine what kind of information was needed as reflected in the research objectives.

Participants were:

- Residents in Cape Town.
- End users of omni-channel, marketing personnel and store leaders in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town.
- Work in the retail-clothing sector.
- Shopped once or twice using either online or offline channels.

The participants were selected based on their occupation and omni-channel usability within the retailing industry. In addition, the Marketing personnel were selected through referrals. The proceeding section will address the issue of the data collection instrument that was used in this study.

3.9 Qualitative data collection instrument

Qualitative research entails collecting data that appears in the form of words as opposed to numbers. There are a number of qualitative data collection tools such as focus groups, interviews and observation. In line with the exploratory design of the study, interviews work effectively in exploring what participants have to say and tend to uncover new details that were not anticipated at the onset of the study, (Britten, 1995). Owing to the nature of the research design underpinning the study, the researcher saw it appropriate to use interview for data collection. Furthermore, exploratory designs make use of interviews, (Lewis *et al.*, 2009: 354). Interviews are effective when it comes to gathering valid and reliable data which is appropriate for the answering of research questions and research objectives, (Lewis *et al.*, 2009: 349). The following section compares and contrast the various forms of interviews, motivating the choice of a semi-structured interview technique.

3.9.1 Semi-structured Interviews

There are generally three types of interviews used in qualitative research namely, structured, un-structured and semi-structured interviews (Britten, 1995; Gill *et al.*, 2008; Cachia and Millward, 2011). The structured interview is characterised by a pre-determined list or set of interview questions presented in a numerical format and are not suitable for the inductive approach (Cachia and Millward, 2011). However, in the un-structured interview the questions evolve as the interview takes place, commencing with broad open-ended questions (Cachia and Millward, 2011). The elements from structured and un-structured interviews form part of the semi-structured interview (Cachia & Millward, 2011: 268). The study followed the semi-structured interview method where questions emerged because of the information gathered.

In justifying the choice of semi-structured interviews, the researcher presented a myriad of benefits such as flexibility of the method in probing deep seated insights, the ability to discover information that is important to participants which may not have been thought of (Gill *et al.*, 2008).

Green *et al.* (2015: 510) expound that, semi-structured interviews are normally exploratory and synonymously linked to qualitative research, while structured interviews are explanatory in nature and more suitable to quantitative methods. The choice of the semi-structured interview was in-line with the exploratory nature of this study, and it fitted tightly to the methodology of the study. In addition, a study that was conducted in Belgium on how consumer's omni-channel shopping translate into travel and transport impacts, the semi-structured interview method was used on Logistic and Sales Managers respectively (Rai *et al.*, 2019: 06). The next section discusses the telephone interviews.

3.9.2 Telephone interviews

Due to the social distance protocols as outline by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to combat the spread of Covid-19, the researcher used the telephone interview method as a tool for data collection. In addition, the researcher opted for telephone interviews because the study did not warrant contextual data such as that found in observation (Farooq and De Villiers, 2017).

Proponents of telephone interviews argue that the use of the telephone interview method is on par with face-to-face interviews (Cachia and Millward, 2011; Farooq and De Villiers, 2017). One of the arguments for the telephone interview method is that it encourages interviewees to speak freely into the areas they regard as important (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017:295). In addition, the lack of visual cues during the telephone interview gives the interviewer time to unobtrusively notate follow-up questions while the interviewee is still responding (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017: 295). However, Lord *et al.* (2016: 794) argue that, the absence of visual cues presents can provide some disadvantages for the telephone interview method as some meaning can be lost.

Additional advantages of the telephone interview is that interviewees feel more comfortable and less embarrassed to reschedule the interview considering that the interviewer has not travelled to the interviewee (Farooq and De Villiers, 2017). During the interviewing phase of the study, a sizable number of interviewees re-scheduled their times and that did not present any challenges to the quality of the study. Lord *et al.* (2016: 786) state that during one of the market segment analyses by Sport Wales which included 85 interviewees in 2010, the anonymity of the telephone interviews offered a conducive environment for participants to discuss sensitive issues. To augment the views of the example above, one of the respondents was at liberty to mention his business relationship with his aunt, a situation which could not have been possible with any other method.

The researcher was aware that the use of face to face semi-structured interviews has the potential to invoke a sense of embarrassment to respondents more so when they are faced with a scenario of admitting socially undesirable opinions or behaviours in person (Schober, 2018: 292).

The following steps guided the researcher:

- In designing the interview schedule, the researcher intended to enquire through asking questions, which were likely to result in much information about the research area of omni-channel, and such information was used to address the aims and objectives of the study.
- The researcher informed and briefed the respondents on the details of the study and assurance was sought regarding ethical principles such as anonymity and confidentiality (Gill *et al.*, 2008).
- Five respondents were used for piloting purposes prior to conducting the actual interviews of the study.
- At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time, and they were asked if there was anything they wanted to add.

3.10 Pilot study

It is widely assumed that conducting a pilot study has the greatest advantage when it comes to giving advance warnings about where the main study might fail (Teijlingen, 2014). However, in this study, the researcher administered five (5) randomly selected interviews to Post-Graduate students at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) participants in an effort to establish research-based errors to be addressed in the mainstream questionnaire survey. Resultantly, a few issues were pointed out and changed after the pilot testing. For example, one of these issues was the inclusion of the term, “omni-channel” which helped the researcher make some modifications to the questionnaire. A number of research participants seemed confused whenever the term was mentioned during the interviewing process. The following section discusses the significance of the study to the academic institution and business entities.

3.10 Significance of the study

The significance of this study will be looked at from two broad perspectives namely, the business and the academic domain. Omni-channel is still lagging in South Africa; however, there are promising signs of growth in the future. This research study aims to establish omni-channel retail strategies, which might be considered for integrating online and offline channels in the retail clothing sector of the Cape Metropolitan area. Findings of the research study should assist retailers to adopt the best and suitable strategies for integrating online and offline channels for a successful implementation of the omni-channel retail model. In addition, the research study is also a resource to the body of knowledge in academia. Moreover, findings of the study will most likely stimulate new interest for retailers to venture into the new territory called omni-channel. Over and above that, the study was also carried out in order to fulfil the requirements of a Master’s degree at Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Limitations of the study are covered in the proceeding section.

3.11 Limitation of the study

The study faced both internal and external challenges, which were unforeseen during the course of the proposed study. Due to time constraints, the researcher used the Project

Management and Timelines model as a tool to ensure that the study was completed within the envisaged time period. Travelling, printing, and computer software costs were mitigated through funding from Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA). The global outbreak of Covid-19 presented a serious challenge to this study as the researcher was forced to revert to telephone interviews in line with the government requirements for social distancing. The study was initially scheduled to be conducted face to face with respondents but that ended up being changed to accommodate the new norm. Unlike validity in quantitative studies, qualitative research is not a watertight product or a set measure that can ensure the validity of the research, (Hayashi, Abib and Hoppen, 2019: 99). To ensure validity and reliability of the questionnaire, the researcher subjected it to pilot testing to ensure that systematic errors were detected and corrected. Looking at the reliability of the study, it is a huge limitation to ensure reliability of results because the study of a phenomenon happens in a natural setting. Reliability maintains the stability and consistency of results over a period of time, (Hayashi *et al.*, 2019: 99). Data analysis is the next phase to be discussed.

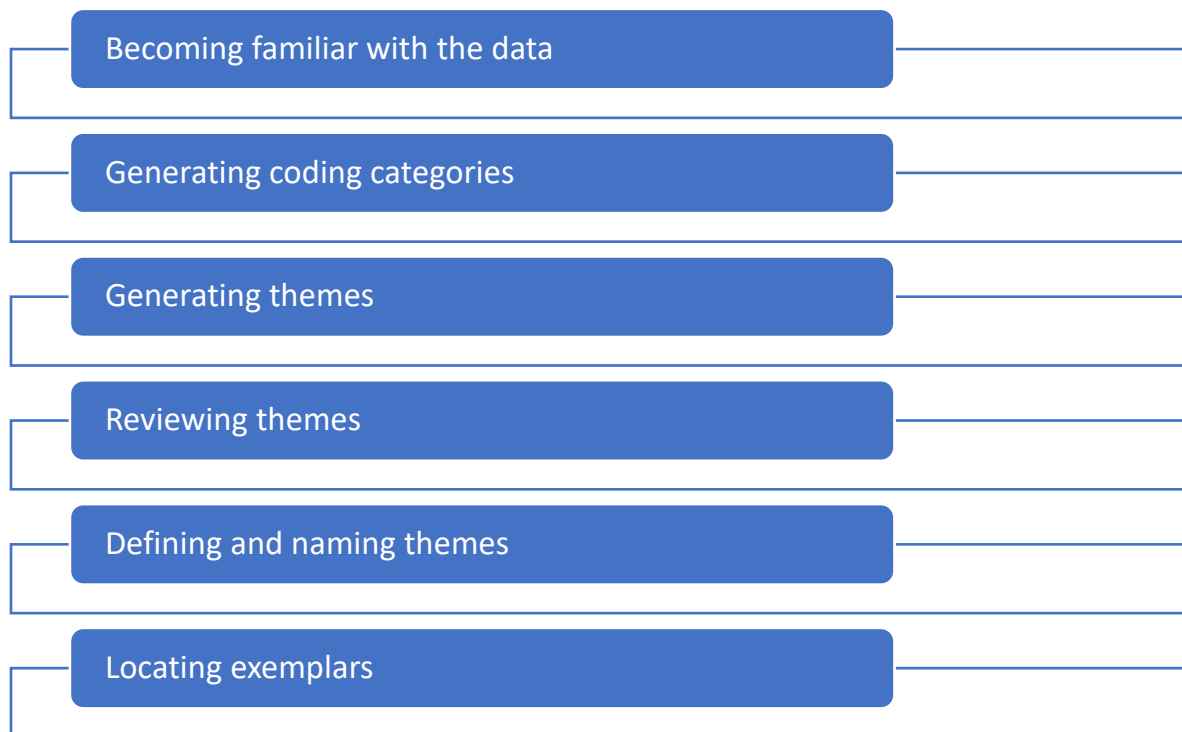
3.12 Data analysis

The researcher used Thematic Analysis (TA) as a distinctive approach to data analysis. Thematic analysis is regarded as a qualitative technique used to identify, analyse and report patterns within a collection of written texts, (Scharp and Sanders, 2018: 01). Braun and Clarke (2012: 57) define thematic analysis as a method in which numerous patterns from a data set are identified systematically, organised and their insights developed into patterns of meaning. Guest, Macqueen and Namey (2019) share the same views when they describe thematic analysis as a method that is highly involved in the identification and describing of implicit and explicit ideas within the collected data to develop themes. In a nutshell, themes are perceived as capturing the underlining meaning of the data. In very simple terms, thematic analysis begins with data and endeavors to organise such data into meanings so that patterns and themes will be formed respectively (Lindberg, Nilsson and Palmér, 2019). However, thematic analysis is not a method for data description or data reduction only but it goes beyond, to interpret or tell the story about the collected data, (Clarke and Braun, 2018).

Thematic analysis is a relatively new method of data analysis and it seems to be gaining some traction as the preferred method of data analysis. A case in point is a study that was conducted in India to look into the housing policy of the government, the researcher used thematic analysis from 108 articles (Khaire, 2021). In addition, in an exploratory study that was conducted involving twenty-four (24) organisational leaders to discuss environmental sustainability, the researcher employed thematic analysis as the method of choice for data analysis (Crumley, Grandy and Roy, 2021). The two examples of case studies mentioned above justify the incorporation of thematic data analysis in this study. The six phase approach to Thematic Analysis as advanced and proffered by Braun and Clarke (2012) in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Braun and Clarke’s Six Phases Approach to Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke, (2012)’s six phases approach to Thematic Analysis



The research was guided by the above stages when conducting data analysis for qualitative.

3.13 Ethical considerations

It is important to concede that qualitative research methods raise some distinctive challenges considering the fact that often intense, personal and extended interaction with participants takes place in their own personal space (Ponterotto, 2010: 587). In addition, ethical consideration and awareness is needed throughout the research process, starting with planning right through to the end (Jeanpert & Paché, 2016: 383). This is warranted because participants contribute time and effort and sometimes they divulge their inner most secrets and in the end they gain very little reward for their effort (Jeanpert & Paché, 2016: 383).

In a nutshell, any research that is not carried out using the most robust ethical principles and guidelines as prescribed by the institutions and research database organization is simply not worthy and definitely not suitable for publication (Strous, 2011: 417). This study strived to meet the maximum requirements of research ethics as reflected by the issuing of the ethical clearance letter.

3.13.1 Confidentiality

To maintain confidentiality, no participant was mentioned by their name throughout the course of the study (Pillay, 2014). Information about the participants such as, where they live, where they work, and their career were not made public and the researcher kept such information out of reach to the public for purposes of confidentiality. In addition, the researcher used personal information of participants only for the purpose of the study.

3.13.2 Informed consent

It is important for the researcher to seek informed consent for any research undertaking. Regarding informed consent for this study, neither the researcher nor the participants knew where the personal interviews were leading to as the interview protocol was continuously changed in search of data saturation (Ponterotto, 2010: 587). In addition, participants were provided with explicit rights to withdraw at any given stage of the process (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018: 219). Considering the nature of this study, it was

difficult to prepare participants concerning what was discussed, because some questions evolved and came up as follow up questions.

3.13.3 Anonymity

Anonymity means that the identity of the participant is unknown to the researcher (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018: 219). In addition, participants information should be kept confidential and it includes avoiding self-identifying statements and information (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018: 219). The researcher ensured that no names were used in referring to participants and that of their responses.

3.13.4 Conflict of interest

Researchers must guard jealously against conflict of interest mainly in the form of existing relationships or prior activities by the researcher as this has a huge potential to negate the research findings (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018: 219). In research, conflict of interest is the situation in which the researcher has private or other interests that appear to influence his or her research or the duties of others (Duong, 2015: 180). The researcher practiced maximum restraint to conflict of interest whenever conflict of issues arose. In addition, the researcher avoided conducting telephone interviews with friends, relatives and other close acquaintances.

3.13.5 Harm towards participants

One of the guiding principle when conducting research that involves human subjects is, "*Do no harm to participants*" (Duong, 2015: 176). The researcher did whatever was in his control to minimise possible risks to participants and avoided undertaking any interview that could make participants worse either in the short term or long term (Duong, 2015:176). For the purpose of the study, the qualitative research method was conducted using the telephone interviews questionnaire.

3.13.6 Voluntary participation

Participants in the research study were not coerced or deceived into participating in the study but their participation was based solely on voluntary terms. In addition, refusal by

participants to take part in the research did not invoke penalties (Duong, 2015:177). The researcher ensured that participants gave consent to undertake or participate in the study.

3.13.7 Plagiarism

Plagiarism constitutes the use and misrepresentation of another person's thoughts, works or ideas without clear acknowledgement to their original source (Ismail, 2018: 196). In this research study, work, ideas and thoughts of other authors were cited accordingly using the Harvard referencing style as required by the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (C.P.U.T).

3.13.8 Institutional ethical clearance

The researcher provided a guarantee in the form of a declaration that the work produced was in line with the ethical guidelines governing the rules and regulations of research at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (C.P.U.T). Furthermore, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (C.P.U.T) issued the study with an ethical clearance certificate.

3.14 Chapter summary

The chapter, Research Methodology and Design covered the philosophical stance, research paradigms and the research design of the study. Interpretivism and constructivism were covered with relevant case studies provided as examples for justifying their choice. In addition, the chapter covered population, sampling procedures and the questionnaire instrument, which was used to collect data for the study. In addition, the chapter discussed the qualitative research approach, and managed to discuss the rationale of choosing the method used for this study. However, the study used purposive sampling to select research participants with data analysis carried out using the Thematic Analysis techniques. The following chapter covers data presentation, analysis and interpretation.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed research methodology, research philosophy and the research methods underpinning this study. This chapter provides the connection between the methodology and the data presentation, analysis and interpretation in line with the outlined research problem. Moreover, the objective of this chapter is to analyse, interpret and present the results derived from the data. The study looked into the strategies of establishing an omni channel business model for clothing retailers in Cape Town, South Africa. Qualitative data was utilised in addressing the following objectives:

4.1.1 Research objectives revisited

- To identify retail strategies that can be adopted to establish omni-channel retailing in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town.
- To evaluate the retail strategies suitable for integrating brick-and-mortar and online channels for omni-channel retailing in Cape Town clothing sector.
- To establish the advantages and disadvantages of omni-channel strategies to shoppers and retailers, respectively.
- To evaluate the importance of integrating the brick-and-mortar with online channels for the formation of omni-channel in Cape Town's clothing sector

As outlined in the previous chapter, various strategies and techniques were devised to aid with the collection of data for this research study. The qualitative research approach was selected as the most appropriate research method for addressing the research problem. In addition, qualitative data was collected from online users, Marketing personnel and retail managers in the retail sector of Cape Town. The study adopted a smaller sample with in-depth telephone interviews to exploit the phenomenon.

In the following passage, research results pertaining the establishment of omni-channel retail strategies for clothing retailers in Cape Town, South Africa will be presented and

discussed extensively. As alluded to in the previous chapter, the researcher used the purposive sampling technique.

The questionnaires covered aspects of the customer journey and satisfaction, last-mile delivery, mobile technologies, digital platforms, communication and pricing of products across channels, and online delivery options.

4.2 Data analysis and presentation outline



Figure 4.1: Data Analysis and Presentation Outline

Source: Researcher

As shown in the Data Analysis and Presentation diagram (See Figure 4.1), the first step was to describe the response rate from the questionnaires in order to ascertain if the responses were sufficient for the analysis to continue.

4.2.1 Response rate

The telephone interview survey still provides accurate data though it has some weaknesses, (Keeter *et al.*, 2017). In the simplest form, the response rate refers to the extent of feedback, or the number of participants agreeing to answer some research

questions and that number is in percentage format. The researcher intended to interview eight (8) participants using the telephone interview method. However, because of data saturation, the number of participants dropped to five (5). Table 4.1 below details the response rate that was obtained from the telephone interviews.

Selected Participants	Planned Sample	Achieved Sample	Response Rate
<i>Retail Employees</i>	<i>8 Participants</i>	<i>5 Participants</i>	<i>63%</i>

Table 4.1: Response Rate Table

Sources: Author's Own

4.2.2 Demographic profile of respondents

As outlined above, the study sought to interview eight (8) participants and due to data saturation, the number came down to five (5). In addition, out of the five (5) interviewed, four were males (4) in the age range of 25years to 35 years. All four work in the retailing industry at various positions. The female interviewed works as a Marketing Manager at one of the leading Advertising and Consulting Companies, which focuses on Marketing and Retailing. All respondents live and work in Cape Town.

4.2.3 Customer journey

In the modern retailing landscape, changes in consumer behaviour have created a vastly different path for consumers and the journey to customer satisfaction is no longer linear nor straightforward. Omni-shoppers are now able to initiate interactions with the retailers and are now pacesetters in the omni-channel retail journey. In the study, the customer journey was the ultimate destination sought to be achieved through creating or establishing omni-channel retail strategies. Moreover, the customer journey must be smooth, hassle free and seamless in nature and form.

The next section produced themes, sub-themes and concept that ended up providing the cornerstone for the development of omni-channel strategies.

Table 4.2: Theme Development Table: Shopping goal congruent promotions for omni-shoppers

Source: (Own source)

Item No	Quotation from interview transcript	Sub-themes	Concepts
1	“The challenge that I notice when you shop online, the size will become a problem, but the prices is better by comparison, so they offer the items.”	Online channel is cheaper than offline	Price disparity occurs across channels in omni-channel retailers.
2	“They put stock online to get rid of them.”	Online channel used as a clearance channel	Better deals are synonymous with online channel.
3	“Uhm, the information that they provide they kind of give you because now we gonna see the shoe for R1800 right but now you gonna go and look for the sizes for yourself they do not show that outside of a catalog.”	Online channel used to provide false information	Retailers use price, a key strategy to woo customers to omni-channel
4	“The first factor is price competitive, yeah, because now you need to drive to different shopping malls to see which one is better you go	Customers driving around to get better deals	Price sensitive customers prefer to buy online as a way of serving time, transport

	Access Park in Kenilworth and Access City in Bellville and they are cheap, it is costing money and time and by the time, you decide you could have gone online and purchase the item.”		costs and prices are sometimes cheaper online.
5	“Because we are thinking this is the underprivileged area the items will be cheaper when you get there but they are still the same as maybe when you find them in Cape Town, Bellville or Century City and you feel like I wasted money and I thought it was going to be cheaper there. Now that you have both option you are quicker to take a decision than you normally take, you know, so you are delighted.”	Prices of offline channel (same retailer) is the same across all geographical areas in Cape Town and beyond.	Offline clothing does not differ across geographical areas of South Africa. For example, retailer X in Gauteng will have the same price as its sister retailer in Cape Town.
6	“In addition, many times online they only just for convenience so when I do not feel like driving to the shop and lots of online stores there is promotions that pop up. Like one day deals which last for 24 hours which the in-store does not have.”	Online channels of the same retailers have better deals than their offline channels	Omni-channel shoppers perceive better prices and promotions are located on online channels.

Table 4.3: Theme Development Table: Cross-channel Shopping using smart-phones and mobile devices by omni-shopper

Source: (Own source)

Item No	Quotation from interview transcript	Sub-themes	Concepts
1	“I purchase item more offline, but I do look at items online do not necessarily buy.”	Shoppers using different combinations of channels at each stage of their shopping journey	Mobile devices allow shoppers a seamless shopping experience across all channels
2	“Yes, I like to research, but generally, when I go offline, I just look in the shop and see what they have.”	Shoppers use mobile devices to access product information	Technology is making it easier for omni channels shoppers to acquire addition product-based information.
3	“Uh, yeah, and in terms of online, I think it is just convenient. Often when I am like on my phone on social media and I get an ad, I click on it and then it happens so quickly. Moreover, I do not need to think about it, and I say, oh, that is a nice pair of shoes and I click on it, and it is done, it is more impulse decision for me.”	The inception of mobile devices within the shopping journey has made shopping convenient	Online shoppers’ value convenience and information attainment and they are good in fulfilling utilitarian shopping values.

3	Interviewer: 3.3 “Do you check prices of clothing online and make a purchase from a physical store?” Interviewee: “Yes”	Omni-shoppers check prices online and use stores to fit or try apparel before purchasing.	Omni-shoppers use utilitarian and hedonic shopping values for shopping.
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Table 4.4: Theme Development Table: Shopping Values of omni-shopper (Hedonic and Utilitarian)

Source: (Own source)

Item No	Quotation from interview transcript	Sub-themes	Concepts
1	“Uh, so I think offline brings like the human element to the clothing piece like the touching and the texture and you cannot see the item 100% online versus the offline.”	Shoppers prefer to shop online but collect their orders from a physical store.	Omni-channel are comfortable to use offline for order fulfillment.
2	“Uhm; Yes. Yes, definitely there's some items where I bought online somewhere I bought offline and there's also some Items that I'll never buy online because to my previous point, you can't feel it, in-terms of texture, so there is certain products I buy online and some offline.”	Omni-channel shoppers feel that online products are not in a position to be fitted on.	Product try-ons can be enhanced by the use of technology within the Omni channel business concept.
3	“Uhm yes. However, I only buy it offline if I saw it online when I am not sure about the texture and how it looks. It is not as if I will not pay that money online. It is not as if I am scared of fraud or	Customers feels uncertain to buy clothing online because of several reasons.	Omni-channel shoppers fear to buy clothing online due to uncertainty about the texture and fit of the clothing.

	whatever. I am only hesitant because I do not know how it looks like in real life.”		
	<p>Researcher: “So you prefer to see it to check the product online and then purchase from a physical store when you have touched and tried the item?”</p> <p>Interviewee: “Yes, correct, yeah.”</p>	Omi-channel shoppers like to touch and feel the product before they purchase.	Omni-channel shoppers use a combination of channels and they prefer to try clothes before purchasing them.
4	<p>Researcher: “Then 3.5 have you ordered an item through a store for delivery at your home or office.”</p> <p>Interviewee: “Yes”</p>	Omni channel shoppers prefer to fit clothes before they purchase, and they do not mind which channel to use for fulfillment.	Order fulfillment can be done from either offline or online channels but trying on of clothes should be done first.

Table 4.5: Theme Development Table: Omni channel Fulfillment and Capability strategies

Source: (Own source)

Item No	Quotation from interview transcript	Sub-themes	Concepts
1	<p>Interviewer: “Then 3.5 have you ordered an item through a store for delivery at your home or office.”</p> <p>Interviewee: “Yes”</p>	<p>Omni shoppers use a combination of channels for order fulfillment.</p>	<p>Omni shoppers prefer to use Click and Collect or Buy Online and Collect in Store (BOPS) functions.</p>
2	<p>Interviewer: “Okay Alright, thank you. Then we look at 3.6. How would you return incorrect or a damaged online order for either a refund or a replacement? The first part says Store; the second one says Pick up point; the third one says Post Office; then the last one say Other.”</p> <p>Interviewee: “Again, I think it depends on where I buy so Superbalist they come and fetch the item themselves whereas Mr. Price I think you must go into store to return it so if I can pick two, I would say Store and other means they fetch the item themselves.”</p>	<p>Shoppers are comfortable to drop refund or exchanges to a physical store (Offline).</p>	<p>Buy Online and Return In store (BORIS)`.</p>

3	<p>Interviewer: “How would you return incorrect or damaged online order for either a refund or a replacement? The first option is our Go to a Store; Drop it at a Pick up point Drop it in Post office or; Other.”</p> <p>Interviewee: “<i>I would prefer if the Courier service picked it up at the same place where they were delivered it for the exchange.</i>”</p>	For a refund, Omni shoppers prefer the refunded item to be collected the same way it was delivered.	Omni shoppers prefer to use BORIS function as a reverse logistics for online order refunds.
Item No	Quotation from Interview transcript	Sub-themes	Concept
1	<p>Interviewee: “Uhm, I use, uh, I prefer walking because I prefer looking at something physically before I buy it. I use online for convenience and to save time as well.”</p>	Shoppers prefer to inspect the non-digital products physically and then proceed to buy them online for convenience purposes.	For non-digital products, Omni-shoppers prefer to go into a physical store and try items.

4.3 Data analysis and discussion

The previous sections provided a tabularised presentation of the empirical results of data as it emerged. This section will give an interpretation of the findings from the interview responses that were analysed from the interview transcripts. The analysis of the interview transcript from all the five (5) telephonic interviews brought out four key themes with regards to establishing omni-channel business strategies in the clothing or apparel sector of Cape Town, South Africa. The results of the qualitative analysis were placed into four themes as listed below.

1. Shopping goal congruent for omni-shoppers
2. Cross-channel Shopping using smart-phones and mobile devices by omni-shopper.
3. Cross-channel behaviour by omni-shopper.
4. Omni channel Fulfillment and Capability strategies.

4.4 Theme 1: Shopping Goal Congruent for omni-shoppers

The interview transcripts that were analysed managed to portray shopping goal congruent with promotion as one of the salient strategies within an omni-channel business model. Interview transcripts from one of the research participant pointed that, *“The first factor is price competitive, yeah, because now you need to drive to different shopping malls to see which one is better you go to Access Park in Kenilworth and Access City in Bellville and they are cheap, it is costing money and time to drive around and by the time, you decide you could have gone online and purchase the item”*. One of the noticeable aspects of goal congruent promotions on consumer responses is to ascertain whether the promotion is congruent to the consumer’s shopping values or not, (Blom, Lange and Hess, 2021). To elaborate, if the shopper is engaged in shopping for the best price, as is the case with the interview transcript, such a shopper is involved in value shopping. It is therefore important for retailers to understand that price-promotional shoppers are highly motivated and driven by the value they get out of promotions.

The goal congruent theme is present in table 1, and based on the responses from the transcripts, price sensitivity was widely pointed as the most salient factor for choosing touch points.

For example, one of the interviewees pointed out that they are willing to drive to different shops in and around Cape Town in search of cheaper products. Moreover, when a shopper is willing to drive in and around for cheaper products, such shopper's response to promotions is behaviour oriented and therefore, it falls squarely under utilitarian shopping values. In addition, a shopper who drives in and around for promotions is more goal oriented and is only satisfied once the shopping goal has been achieved. With that being stated, goal congruity promotions were widely pointed and they led to omni-shoppers engaging in the shopping in order to get better deals across different channels.

Price disparity was highlighted as one of the concepts under the major theme of goal congruence for omni-shoppers. The fact that prices are different for each customer touch-point presents challenges to omni-shoppers, which will ultimately push them to look for better deals in other touch-points or channels. It is therefore important for omni-channel retailers to consider using standard pricing across all channels so that omni-shoppers can shop from either channel without noticing price disparities. In addition, the strategy of uniform pricing will most likely drive effective implementation of the omni-channel retail model because shoppers look at pricing as a key aspect when engaging in omni-shopping.

Another interviewee states, *"In addition, many times online they only just for convenience so when I do not feel like driving to the shop and lots of online stores there is promotions that pop up. Like one day deals which last for 24 hours which the in-store does not have"* The interview transcript aligns quite well with the previous concept of price disparity on omni-channels. The idea of omni-channel was to create an overall retail experience that is uniform across all channels. Zooming into the previously mentioned interview transcripts, it can be noted unequivocally that better deals as pointed by different interviewees produce shopper perceptions of certain promotional benefits such as saving. In addition, in such context, omni-shoppers are more than willing to trail all customer touch-points in search of better deals.

Another interviewee states, *"They put stock online to get rid of it."* The assertion was made based on the view and perception that online channels are generally cheaper compared to their counterparts. In addition, the interviewee was of the opinion that,

retailers use online to get rid of obsolete and out of fashion stock and normally such stock is ridiculously marked down. Having looked at the previous transcript, one is left with one view that, better deals or promotions are normally put in online channels. Within the omni-channel retailing environment, information about better pricing or deals may well steer omni-shoppers to promotions that are goal congruent to them.

As alluded to in one of the paragraphs above, omni-shoppers are more likely to respond positively to shopping goal congruent promotions that are aligned to their shopping values and that is the reason why a number of research participants opted to driving in and around Cape Town in search of products that are relevant and aligned to their shopping goals. In addition, better deals or promotions have a greater appeal to omni-shoppers. The next section will cover cross-channel shopping using smart phones and mobile devices.

4.5 Theme 2: Cross-channel Shopping (Smart-phones and mobile devices) by omni shopper

The integration of the different channels is the most significant transformational change to ever happen in the modern retailing industry. In addition, retailers are now in a position of providing different channel services such as *Click and Collect*; Order in-store deliver at home; order online return in-store, and through such services to omni-shoppers seamlessly. During the telephone interview process, one of the interviewee participants said, “*I purchase items more offline, but I do look at items online and do not necessarily buy.*” In the modern retailing context, the omni-shopper is involved in webrooming. As alluded above, the participant pointed to the fact that their shopping starts from online channels, and it moves swiftly and seamlessly to the offline channels.

Based on the above interviewee’s response, webrooming can be viewed as a retail phenomenon that can be used to foster strong channel integration with a focus on increasing research shopping. Shoppers who exhibit shopping behaviours of webrooming are largely driven by the need to touch and feel products with non-digital attributes. Moreover, omni-shoppers who manifest webrooming behaviours are largely driven by a strong sense of touch and motivated by uncertainty when it comes to the quality and fit of the product.

Omni-shoppers who are involved in webrooming can be interpreted as shoppers who value immediate gratification and possession, based on their shopping values, they are hedonic in nature. Moreover, another interviewee stated that, “*Yes, I like to research, but generally, when I go offline, I just look in the shop and see what they have.*” As alluded above, channel integration may stimulate research shopping or the propensity of omni-shoppers to search from one channel and then make a purchase in another channel. However, webrooming has some serious implications to retailers yearning to be omni-channel yet not fully integrated because it can divert more traffic to stores and less to online channels thereby causing one channel to cannibalise more sales than the other channel.

The availability of information across channels and the ease of accessing such information might pose as a key driver to research shopping. Consumers research the products to get more information about the quality and origin of the product, and about influencers; all these activities happen simultaneously during the shopping experience. However, before the transformative phase of retailing, gathering of information and the subsequent investigation of the products used to happen in offline channels.

In analysing the interview transcript, the sub-theme, “*shoppers use mobile devices to access product information,*” came out quite clear and prominently. Mobile devices in the form of smartphones appear to be the fundamental drivers of both research shopping and webrooming. In some retailers, mobile devices such as tablets have been placed at the kiosks or customer pay-points for customers to access information necessary to enhance shopping across the channels and enrich customer value proposition. Post millennium, shoppers appear to be making the most out of mobile and smartphones in terms of obtaining a wealth of information, which is abundantly available online for example, product reviews, user testimonials, stock location details, stock on hand details and pricing information.

In the same vein, one of the concepts to emerge when analysing the theme, cross shopping was, “*mobile devices allows shoppers a seamless shopping experience across all channels.*” During the data analysis process, mobile devices were portrayed as key devices for the efficient and frictionless integration of multiple touch points.

Moreover, for shoppers to interact with a brand, buy the product or provide feedback, they use mobile devices in the form of smartphones or tablets. It is therefore important to point out that without mobile devices and smartphones, cross-channel shopping strategy remains a pipe dream.

Another quotation from the interview transcript states, *“Uh, yeah, and in terms of online, I think it is just convenient. Often when I am like on my phone on social media and I get an ad, I click on it and then it happens so quickly. Moreover, I do not need to think about it, and I say, oh, that is a nice pair of shoes and I click on it and it is done, it is more of impulse decision for me”*. Buldeo Rai *et al.*, (2019) posit that, the use of mobile devices by omni-shoppers allows them to obtain pricing, and product information conveniently. However, in a sector such as apparel, non-digital attributes such as the feel of the clothes and the fit of footwear, it is offline channels that will have a competitive edge in terms of displaying non-digital attributes.

Based on the above interview transcript, it can be argued that online channels have the ability to provide real time information about the product and subsequent stock on hand information. As elaborated in one of the paragraphs above, the interview transcript pointed out above speaks in tandem to the strategy of webrooming. Moreover, the analysis of the interview pointed to a sub-theme, *the inception of mobile devices within the shopping journey has made shopping convenient*. Based on the stated theme, it is clear that the modern shopper likes convenience and exhibits utilitarian shopping values while engaging in cross channel shopping behaviours. Moreover, the shopping values of utilitarians seem to be congruent with the theoretical concept of the study.

In addition, the concept that came out of the thematic analysis pointed to *“online shoppers’ valuing convenience and information attainment and they are good in fulfilling utilitarian shopping values.”* The concept reinforced an earlier sub-theme and pointed to convenience shopping which is largely driven by mobile and smart phones adoptions. The next section discusses omni-channel fulfillment and capability strategies.

4.6 Theme 3: Omni-channel Fulfillment and Capability strategies

The adoption of the omni-channel business model has caused shoppers to order from multiple channels or retail touch-points and the order can be fulfilled from any location-using inventory. As will be demonstrated in the following thematic analysis discussions, order fulfillment is flexible in that it allows omni-shoppers to order from multiple channels and have their order fulfilled from any location. It is therefore envisaged that the entire shopping experience will be as seamless as possible.

During the interview process, the interviewer posed a question, *“Have you ordered an item through a store for delivery at your home or office, and the answer was a yes.”* In the current retail discourse, the response given by the interviewee can be interpreted as meaning that the store (offline) channel was used as a channel facility to order an item that was later delivered to the customer’s home or office. With the above omni-channel strategy, the retailer makes use of its personnel and other assets to fulfill the order created in-store. Moreover, a sub-theme, *“omni shoppers use a combination of channels for order fulfillment,”* emerged from the interview transcript and it has prompted the researcher to review a number of fulfillment strategies available for omni-shoppers. Among the available fulfillment strategies there is: Buy Online Pick in Store (BOPIS), Click and Collect, Buy Online Deliver from Store (BODS), Buy Online Ship to Store (BOSTS) and Buy Online Ship to Store (BOSS). As articulated in the subtheme, omni-shoppers who were interviewed pointed out that they were flexible to use any of the above fulfillment strategies.

During the interview process, regarding the online channel returns, the interviewer asked, “How would you return incorrect or a damaged online order for either a refund or a replacement? The first part says **Store**; the second one says **Pick up** point; the third one says **Post Office**; then the last one says **Other**. **Interviewee:** Again, I think it depends on where I buy so Superbalist they come and fetch the item themselves whereas **Mr. Price** I think you must go into store to return it so if I can pick two, I would say **Store** and other means they fetch the item themselves”. The key aspect of the interview transcript suggests that the returned merchandise cross from the online to the offline channel where they will be stored for resell or disposal. The strategy that can be envisaged in the online returns to stores is Buy Online Return in Store (BORIS). Products that are returned by omni-shoppers play a huge role in the management of

the different channels within the omni-channel business model. The problem of product returns is prevalent to apparel because when customers order apparel online, they forego the need to touch, feel and fit the non-digital attributes of the apparel, which are difficult to communicate electronically.

In the Logistic and Supply Chain Management sector, BORIS is regarded as a reverse logistic strategy. However, in the retailing sector, omni-shoppers use it for returning or refunding un-wanted or damaged apparel. Though BORIS is portrayed as a reverse logistics strategy, it has found relevance as a super strategy within the omni-channel business model because it gives omni-shoppers the freedom and comfort to purchase clothing online knowing of the assurance of the strategy of unwanted apparel.

One of the sub-themes state the following, *“For a refund, omni shopper prefer the refunded item to be collected the same way it was delivered.”* The sub-theme developed from one of the interview transcripts and here the omni-shoppers were stating their preferred way of returning online purchases. When retailers engage the services of courier companies to collect customer returns, there are serious financial and cost implications, which can cripple the retailer if not managed efficiently. Furthermore, during product returns, retailers incur costs that include processing expenses and general loss when the returned apparel is sold for salvage value in secondary markets. It is therefore clear in the analysis that product returns are prevalent to items purchased online and delivered straight to customers because consumers cannot physically inspect or try apparel prior to purchasing.

During online shopping, omni-shoppers are exposed to stock location of offline channels and retailers have given shoppers the flexibility to purchase clothing items online and pickup in store, (BOPIS). During thematic analysis the concept, *“Omni shoppers prefer to use Click and Collect or Buy Online and Collect in Store (BOPIS) functions”* featured prominently. With the BOPIS functionality, shoppers first view the product information online and then based on stock availability in physical stores, they place an order and proceed to collect their order in-stores. BOPIS offers retailers the benefit of saving on delivery costs since the customer will pick the order himself or herself. In addition, BOPS usage can motivate customers to learn more about pricing information on all channels offered by the retailer.

As an omni-channel strategy, BOPIS promotes consumer-shopping satisfaction through affording great opportunity to feel, smell, and try displayed products in-store while picking their order. To the retailer, BOPIS exposes shopper's product visibility, which can induce un-planned purchases.

However, if BOPS is not managed properly, it may lead to channel conflicts and free riding tendencies. Therefore, both offline and online channels should come to a mutual agreement on how *BOPIS* will work. The conceptual framework of the study namely, hedonic and utilitarian shopping values are discussed in the next section.

4.7 Theme 4: Shopping Values (Hedonic and Utilitarian)

A clear and concise understanding of shopping values plays a pivotal role in the success of retail business. The ability of a retailer to generate and deliver consumer-shopping value across all the available retail channels is a pre-requisite for its survival. Shoppers who love the fun and enjoyment of the complete shopping experience have hedonic shopping values. By their own admission through the interview process, one of the interviewees had this to say, "*Uh, so I think offline brings like the human element to the clothing piece like the touching and the texture and you cannot see the item 100% online versus the offline*". The interpretation can mean that shoppers prefer to go into a physical store, try the merchandise and most probably buy it. Store attributes seem to be playing a big role in driving shoppers to offline channels. It is important for retailers to produce attributes that appeal to both utilitarian and hedonic shopping values. In addition, retailers need to understand the rationale behind shoppers' preference for offline so that they can come up with a strategy of providing or improving shopper attributes across all channels which appeal to both hedonic and utilitarian shopping values.

As articulated in the above interview transcript, shoppers are not only interested in finding the products they are looking for; however, great satisfaction seems to be the driving force during the shopping experience. It is therefore imperative for retailers to acquaint themselves with the shopping values and channel attributes. In addition, the above interview transcript generated the following sub-theme, "*Shoppers prefer to shop online but collect their orders from a physical store.*" Moreover, the interpretation

of choosing the store for online order collection means that the shoppers prefer to either socialise, try or feel the texture of the item they are intending to purchase, and such an experience represents the emotional worthy of the shopping experience within the omni-channel retailing context. Furthermore, personal interactions which happens in the offline channels between retail employees and the accessibility of products tend to activate shoppers' feelings about the shopping experience.

Moreover, as alluded to in the above paragraphs, such shoppers opt to use the offline channels as a means to get emotional satisfaction and exploration. Moreover, sensual pleasures and experiences, which are obtained because of fitting apparel, feeling the texture of apparel, and socialisation enhances positive shopping behaviours of consumers. Therefore, a detailed understanding of both hedonic and utilitarian shopping values perceived by shoppers will aide retailers in developing the retailing environment that will ultimately deliver value propositions that are appealing to omni-shoppers across all channels or customer touch-points. Furthermore, it is important that retailers offer environments that satisfy omni-shoppers across a myriad of touch points within the omni-channel business model.

Concisely, the complete layout of the different channels within the omni-channel business model should make it easy for omni-shoppers to traverse a myriad of touch-points with a utilitarian orientation simultaneously while evoking hedonic orientations. In the following section, the chapter summary seals the discussions of the chapter.

4.8 Chapter summary

This chapter managed to develop, discuss and interpret various themes, which came out from the data. To note, the chapter started by discussing theme development using tables and proceeded to cover individual themes, which came out of theme development tables. Shopping goal congruent for omni-shoppers featured quite prominently and it was discussed as a theme on its own. Moreover, cross-channel shopping using smartphones and mobile devices was mentioned, discussed and interpreted in an endeavor to proffer it as one theme which would cascade into an omni-channel strategy. The cross-channel behaviour together with order fulfillment and capability strategies were put forward within the omni-channel business model.

The following chapter will discuss the findings that came out of this chapter and the focus is on interpreting them.

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter covered data presentation, analysis and interpretation and went further to develop themes. The themes were given meaning through data interpretation. However, this chapter presents a discussion of the findings, which were all drawn from thematic analysis conducted on the interview transcripts. In addition, this chapter discusses the findings from chapter four (4) in relation to the research objectives and the literature review that was outlined in chapter two (2). Moreover, to add sense to the findings, an interpretation of the thematic analysis findings was conducted towards the development of omni-channel retail strategies, that guide the adoption of omni-channel retailing in the Cape Town's retail apparel sector.

The research problem presented in Chapter one (1) outlined the challenges faced by retailers in rolling out an omni-channel business model in the apparel sector of Cape Town. Because of the stated research problem, the research study sought to answer the main questions: *What strategies can be established to implement omni-channel concept in the retail-clothing sector of Cape Town?* Subsequently, the main research objective was formulated to identify retail strategies that can be adopted to establish omni-channel retailing in the retail-clothing sector of Cape Town.

In answering the main research question of the study, a number of supporting objectives were formulated.

5.2 Objective 1: To identify retail strategies that can be adopted to establish omni-channel retailing in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town.

Objective one aimed to answer the questions dealing with the establishment of omni-channel strategies in the clothing apparel sector of Cape Town. The research problem was premised on the idea that prescriptive knowledge that guides retailers in the selection of the best omni-channel strategy was minimal to absent in Cape Town apparel retailers. However, findings from the study pointed to a couple of order fulfillment strategies, that were envisaged as having a cumulative effect in the establishment of strategies that integrate online and offline channels, respectively.

5.2.1 Omni channel Fulfillment and Capability strategies

The establishment of order fulfillment strategies is to provide shoppers with a seamless shopping experience through all available channels. However, the issue of order fulfillment is a dynamic phenomenon that sometimes requires continuous investigation so that events in the retail landscape do not overtake it. The following sections will identify and discuss the various order fulfillment strategies that came out of the study.

5.2.2 Buy Online Return In-Store (BORIS) strategy

The strategy of BORIS emanated from the major theme; Omni-channel and Fulfillment capabilities, the theme, and the BORIS strategy came because of the question that was asked to the interviewees. Question, how would you return incorrect or damaged online purchases for either a refund or replacement? In answering the question as outlined in the questionnaire, BORIS strategy featured prominently as the answer of choice.

Moreover, the findings from the study confirmed that omni-shoppers prefer to return online purchases to offline channels or physical stores. In addition, an in-depth analysis of the BORIS strategy as envisaged by shoppers seems to point to the myriad of challenges they face when trying to return unwanted online purchases. In addition, it was also found that a number of omni-shoppers tend to avoid purchasing apparel online because of the hassles they will have to go through in returning online purchases.

A study that was conducted to explore the impact of online returns by consumers had similar findings when it posited that, the management of a seamless solution in the return process has not yet fully matured because of the glitches and challenges in network designs (Bernon *et al.*, 2016). During interview process one of the interviewees had this to say, "I think it depends on where one buys, so Superbalist they come and collect the items themselves whereas Mr. Price, you have to go to the store physically. I would prefer to drop the unwanted online purchase to a physical store."

The strategy of BORIS warrants closer attention to retailers because of the general upsurge of sales originating from online channels which are mainly prompted by consumers self-assured stance when it comes to utilising electronic devices, (Bernon, Cullen and Gorst, 2016). The strategy of BORIS presents both benefits and challenges to the retailers. By nature, returns eat into profits and they can present serious challenges when it comes to their handling. On the other hand, returning merchandise to stores can present opportunities for sales assistants to up-sell and cross-sell merchandise to customer.

Furthermore, Bernon *et al.* (2016) assert in their research findings that, return levels from online apparel purchases are higher compared to home product categories. Such assertion reveals the risk of buying apparel online where the value proposition of “*try before you buy*” is absent. Retailers offering an omni-channel business model must brace themselves for more product returns from online customers. One of the interviewees was asked about the channels they use the most when shopping for clothing and they had this to say, “I use offline channel the most because I feel like looking at something and having it in my hand before I buy helps me a little bit better If I want it”. From the above interviewee response, it can be ascertained that omni-shoppers are a bit hesitant to buy apparel online. One of the intervention retailers can have is to develop virtual fitting rooms as a way of reducing online returns, (Bell *et al.*, 2014). Results of a study conducted by Bell *et al.* (2014) with the assistance of a leading fitting-room technology company, Metail, pointed out that shoppers who were exposed to virtual fitting room tools had higher sales conversion and lower product returns as compared to their counterparts who were not exposed to such technology.

Product returns have always been part of the normal day-to-day operations in the traditional retail landscape; however, the introduction of the online component and the revolution of the omni-channel business model has prompted retailers to converting return policy into strategies such as BORIS.

The next section discusses the order fulfillment strategy of Click and Collect and provides some insights on this strategy.

5.2.3 Click and Collect

Click and Collect is one of the fulfilment and capability strategies used in omni-channel retailing, and it entails starting a transaction online and collecting the order in a physical store. During the interview process, the interviewer asked a follow-up question to one of the interviewees and their response was, “I would look for online and then go to the physical stores to purchase because it saves me time and hours to spend in a shopping mall on something. I would first check online where I could find the item and then I will go to that store to get the item.” Another interviewee said, “I only buy clothes offline after seeing them online, it is not like I will not pay that money online or I am scared of fraud or whatever. I am only hesitant because I do not know how the clothes looks like in real life” Based on the above responses, the answers seem to suggest that the interviewees are aware of the seamless process of using two channels simultaneously when conducting shopping.

The strategy of buying online and collecting their order in store affords the shoppers a compelling value proposition in that shoppers had to first get accurate information about the prices and stock availability online before making an order for collection in a physical store. Moreover, the implementation of the Click and Collect functionality has the potential of adding foot traffic to stores and additional store sales due to cross selling.

As alluded to in the above paragraphs, one of the interviewees responded by stating that they would look for product information online before they go to the store to purchase. However, what is lacking from the respondents is the exposure and understanding of the cross-selling function of Click and Collect or Buy Online Pick in Store (BOPS). In addition, what became evident through the research results was that shoppers are not hesitant to make purchases online. However, the issue of fitting clothes before purchasing seems to be the key driving force for customers to make purchases in physical stores. The results seem to point that, if shoppers are exposed or introduced to the Click and Collect strategy, they will use that function knowing that if there are issues with the fit and size of clothing, it would be easy to return the wrong sizes upon collecting their online order in-store.

Furthermore, the omni-channel fulfillment strategy of Click and Collect allows shoppers to pick their order in a store the same day thereby eliminating the scenario of order waiting and provides immediate gratification. To augment the notion of immediate gratification, one of the interviewees states that, "I would first check online where I could find the item and I would go to that store to get it." What is becoming clear in the responses given by the interviewees is that customers prefer same-day service unlike in the past where they would order something online and it will take days or weeks before they can receive their order.

However, Click and Collect is a viable strategy from a business perspective because it eliminates transport cost from the retailer's side since the customer has to collect their order in person. In addition, retailers who opt to use the Click and Collect function within their omni-channel business model are highly involved in saving costs which has to do with infrastructural investments such as building warehouses, but they use their own brick and mortar stores to fulfil online orders, a strategy that is viewed as good for optimising brick-and-mortar structures. In some instances, other retailers collaborate in cases where they do not have high store densities. However, Larke, Kilgour and O'Connor (2018a) seem to be holding a neutral view to the point put forward in this study when they state that in-terms of order fulfillment, retailers are faced with a difficult choice of whether to invest in a Distribution Centre (DC) or store depending on which one provides the best value. The next section discusses investment in store infrastructure such as technologies.

5.3 Invest in omni-channel enabling technologies and devices

Omni-channel devices are essential customer engagement tools, and they include smartphones, tablets and Wi-Fi connections. During the interview process, the researcher asked the question; "Do you use your mobile smartphone when shopping for clothing?" All the respondents revealed that they use their mobile smartphones for shopping. The findings mean that retailers venturing into omni-channel business models should align their operations to suit and serve the mobile customer demands in a seamless manner. Transformational changes in consumer behaviour and digital acceptance is the new norm for digital natives. The following section will discuss the enabling technologies and devices, that are needed for shaping omni-channel strategies.

This research study was framed under the theoretical assumption of Change Theory. In the past decade, there have been tremendous shifts when it comes to customer behaviour and such shifts are attributed to digital technologies; these changes are compelling businesses to rapidly change inline so that they can remain agile (Singh & Thirumoorthi, 2019: 1255). Moreover, changes in the way people communicate have been spearheaded by the massive adoption of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets that fall broadly under technological change, a component of the macroenvironment. The prevailing point of view out there is that retailers similar to businesses in general, operate in an ever-changing environment which is characterised by very tough competition (Matthysen *et al.*, 2019).

The following section discusses the study findings based on the theoretical framework of the Change Theory. In addition, the discussion and the findings are a mirror of the Change Theory.

5.3.1 Mobile devices

One of the omni-channel's overarching strategies is to maximise customer satisfaction through the creation of a seamless shopping experience (De Faultrier *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, expanding on the research findings, the adoption of innovation during the shopping journey was enhanced by technological investment in mobile and smartphones. In analysing the interview transcript, the sub-theme, "shoppers use mobile devices to access product information," came out quite clearly and more frequently. Mobile devices in the form of smartphones appear to be the fundamental drivers of both research shopping and webrooming. For example, a customer can use a mobile device such as a smartphone or tablet to perform product searches, seek product advice, and compare the products quality or price within a single customer journey.

The findings of this study are further corroborated by the assertion made by Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson (2014) when they posit that, cross-channel integration is more prevalent when mobile devices and smartphones are used by shoppers. In some retailers, mobile devices such as tablets have been placed at the kiosks or customer pay-points for customers to access information necessary to enhance shopping across the channels and enrich customer value proposition. A case in point is that of Topshop

and that of Marks & Spencer who have improved their in-store customer experiences tremendously through equipping their retail associates with devices such as mobile smartphones and tablets so that employees can be service oriented (Alexander and Blazquez, 2019). To expound on the case study given about Topshop, Marks and Spencer, Prinsloo (2015) posit that in the United Kingdom's fashion sector, Oasis has given their sales associates iPads so that they can check product information for customers, process transactions from anywhere within the store. In addition, the strategy by the above retailers seem to align well with the research discussion and findings of this study.

As indicated by the research findings obtained in this study, in order for omni-channel to be effective, Information Technology (I.T) should be integrated across all customer touch-points. A case in point is the huge investment in Wi-Fi connection undertaken by shopping malls and retailers in particular. Moreover, such investment allows shoppers to connect to the internet anytime whenever they are closer to Wi-Fi signals thereby presenting retailers with an opportunity of obtaining valuable data, which enhances a more personalised customer experience. Furthermore, increases in the use and exposure to in-store based technologies such as smartphones, tablets, free in-store Wi-Fi can result in more shoppers interacting with retailers through a myriad of touch points thereby enhancing the complete integration of the channels with high possibility of creating a positive customer value proposition.

It is therefore important for omni-channel retailers to invest in technology and devices, which are essential for customer engagement and service, respectively. Van Dyk and Van Belle (2019) contend that there is paucity of information around digital transformation and as a result, consumers' perceptions on digital transformation is negative with in the South African retail industry.

This study through its findings endeavors to prescribe investment in mobile technology as one of the strategies for running an omni-channel business model. Larke *et al.* (2018) recommend that, in-order for the omni-channel to be effective, IT needs to be the enabler of channel integration. In support of the above assertion, the study through its findings supports the use and adoption of mobile devices because they enhance

store experience and places the retailer at the forefront in-terms of providing or introducing new services to omni-shoppers.

Furthermore, the use of mobile devices is critical in that they allow the omni-shoppers to search for product information in one channel, and meanwhile complete the transaction in another channel. To expand on the above opinion, retailers venturing into omni-channel should invest in enabling devices and technologies that support and encourage shoppers to shop anywhere and anytime. This is so because the fundamental role of the mobile smartphone has changed from a mere communication device to being a tool of accessing information. Reflecting on the statistical figures presented by Van Dyk and Van Belle (2019) there has been a gradual increase of mobile smartphone penetration pegged at 70% of the one billion population in Africa and such statistical data presents opportunities for retailers to implement effective and efficient omni-channel business model. To augment the above assertion, changes in consumer behaviours as correctly substantiated by the Change Theory, pose as the central tenet to retail transformation, which aligns well with the study. Therefore, the use of mobile devices during the shopping journey as envisaged and revealed during the interview process can be viewed as an evolution of a complete omni-channel business model.

Moreover, results of the Omnichannel Leadership Report (2020) seem to tie in with the research findings of this study when they posit that, modern consumers are attached to their mobile devices and shoppers believe that their tie to smartphones should be matched by retailers. In support of the strategy of investment in mobile devices Omnichannel Leadership Report, (2020) states that, Tiffany and Co an American jewelry retailer embarked on a massive roll-out of technology by giving their store associates tablets to use when serving customers. In corroborating the views above, a response that came out of the interview pointed out that, “Yes, I like to research, but generally, when I go offline, I just look in the shop and see what they have.” This research finding reveals the missing role of retailers in terms of innovation and technology investment. From the research findings, there is huge drive for investment, innovation effort and technological drive from the customer’s side in terms of omni-channel enabling devices.

In addition, from the research findings it can be argued that omni-shoppers are taking a strategic stance when it comes to driving the use of smartphone devices during shopping. In strengthening the point above, a study that was conducted with 628 Spanish omni-channel customers in the clothing sector, the results confirmed that investment in new technologies within the offline channel has a positive effect on purchase intention (Mosquera *et al.*, 2018). Another similar study that was conducted by Savastano *et al.* (2019) to explore store technology and its subsequent effect towards customer experience within the omni-channel retailing environment; the study's results concurred to this study's results when it pointed that shoppers are more than willing to use in-store innovation in-order to obtain a seamless shopping experience. To substantiate the research findings, a similar study that was conducted in the United States by the Walmart retailing company where an artificial intelligence application called Eden was used to enable retail employees gauge the freshness levels of fruits and vegetables before they deteriorate (Weber and Schütte, 2019). The above study in the United States of America bears more testimony to the importance of I.T investment and the positive spin-offs it can bring to the overall business.

The findings of this study are valuable for retailers looking to venturing into omni-channel retailing because they outline a clear roadmap of what shoppers want and also what retailers need to do. In addition, it is imperative that retailers looking into incorporating the omni-channel business model within their structures consider investment in mobile devices as a great enabler for channel integration.

In support of the findings and their positive contribution to the omni-channel business model, Piotrowicz and Cuthbertson (2014) expound that, the surge in the use of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets makes the traditional offline-online dichotomy obsolete and blurry. Based on a number of examples given in the above discussion, the adoption of mobile devices as a strategy within the omni-channel is crucial for both customers and retailers. It is therefore important for omni-channel retailers to reach their shoppers through the right devices.

The next section discusses the technological innovation of the Virtual Fitting Mirror and its effect on customer service within the omni-channel business concept.

5.3.2 Virtual Fitting Mirrors

Product returns and the BORIS strategy were discussed in the previous paragraph. The adoption of technology in the form of Virtual Fitting Mirrors seems to be a game changer to the perennial problem caused by the strategy of BORIS. Shankar (2018) describe a Virtual Fitting Mirror as a tool which allows shoppers to try-out multiple outfits without having to wear the clothes to determine which apparel fits them best and what other accessories go with the outfit. However, during the data analysis stage, the issue of trying-on featured quite prominently and it was emanating from the responses given during the interview process.

For example, one of the interviewees said, “Uh, so I think offline brings like the human element to the clothing piece like the touching and the texture and you cannot see the item 100% online versus the offline”. In addition, the findings from the study seem to be pointing to the emergence of a new shopping behavior called webrooming. The response given by the interview respondent seems to suggest that shoppers check for product information online and ultimately make a purchase from a physical store because they fear the uncertainty of the wrong fit. Over and above that, shoppers who engage in the process of webrooming could be interpreted as shoppers seeking the emotional satisfaction and enjoyment that results from trying the product. Moreover, sensual pleasures and experiences, which are obtained because of fitting apparel, feeling the texture of apparels, and socialisation enhances positive shopping behaviours of shoppers.

To counter the challenge of webrooming, retailers can invest in Virtual Fitting Mirrors as a means of compensating for missing offline shopping behaviours of omni-shoppers. In support of the Virtual Fitting Room technology, one of the interviewees said, “I prefer looking at something physically before I buy. I use online channel for convenience to save time” The interviewee went further to state that, “I would say that physical store is successful and online for me personally is not good because of the issues I had with them such as when the product arrives it does not necessarily look the same as the picture or the quality expected”. The research findings assert that retailers looking into venturing or adopting full omni-channel business models should realise that changes in consumer behaviours have fundamentally shifted the retailing sector into making structural transformation that require some investments and

innovations such as Virtual Fitting Rooms. These transformational changes are already in place in developed continents such as Europe, Asia and America. However, shoppers expect the same benefits and features across all the channels and that is the reason a number of interviewees stated that they would still come on as this can not be achieved when shopping online. The above point further strengthens and justifies the need to transform the operations of the apparel-retailing sector to fulfill customers' expectations.

Jang, Kim and Lee (2020) have shown in a recent study that Virtual Fitting Mirrors influence sales per customer and have helped to reduce product return rates by 27% through fitting out correct sizes and fit. The research findings seem to indicate that when shoppers are provided with digital tools such as Virtual Fitting Mirrors, they tend to reduce the shopping behaviour of webrooming and are likely to make purchases online with certainty.

The use of Virtual Fitting Mirrors provides convenience, enjoyment and new customer experiences which have a positive affect on sales in general (Jang, Kim and Lee, 2020). For example, Sephora a beauty retailer offers magic mirrors in its stores to help consumers visualise different make-up treatments (Dekimpe, Geyskens and Gielens, 2019). Concisely, investment in technology such as Virtual Fitting Mirrors has proven to be a core strategy considering the uncertainty of omni-channel shoppers to purchase clothing or apparel online.

As alluded to in one of the strategies, handling online product returns can present financial challenges such as selling the refunded products at a salvage fee as opposed to selling at full price. Moreover, product returns add significant operations cost and have the potential of diminishing profits. However, an investment in Virtual Fitting Mirrors has a positive effect in minimising unnecessary product returns. In addition, an investment in Virtual Fitting Mirrors presents a consolidated approach for hedonic and utilitarian shopping values in that, shoppers will receive enjoyment, convenience, and personal satisfaction while trying clothes on Virtual Fitting Mirrors.

Therefore, investment in technologies such as Virtual Fitting Mirrors has the potential in assisting shoppers to choose and fit the right clothes and this has a positive effect

on product returns. In addition, the change in consumer behaviour compounded by digital transformation seems to be the driving force in mobile device usage. Investment in Virtual Fitting Mirrors presents a competitive edge in the retailing sector in South Africa since the technology is still rarely available. The following section will discuss investment in free *Wi-Fi*.

5.3.3 Investing in in-store Wi-Fi connection

One of the findings of the research study pointed to the fact that shoppers connect to their mobile data whilst they are shopping in physical stores. The overwhelming responses given about the means and ways of connecting to the internet seem to indicate that retailers have not yet taken the initiative to invest in enabling technologies such as free *Wi-Fi*. Furthermore, research results are pointing in the direction of shoppers using their mobile data to connect to the internet for research shopping or cross channel shopping. In addition, the findings are two-fold; the inability by shoppers to connect to *Wi-Fi* services can be interpreted as meaning that the service is not available in most of the offline channels. On the contrary, the use of mobile data as revealed by the research findings can also be seen and interpreted alongside consumer inability to connect to free *Wi-Fi*. Given the huge costs of mobile data in South Africa, shoppers will not hesitate to connect to free *Wi-Fi* services when the service is made available to them. Investment in product capability in the form of in-store *Wi-Fi* makes it easier for shoppers and customer service agents to obtain additional product information which might be essential to serve the customers.

The use of free in-store *Wi-Fi* services by shoppers allows retailers to engage in meaningful dialogues that translate into observing consumer behaviours such as buying patterns. This is so because most if not all of the *Wi-Fi* services provided by retailers request shoppers to register their personal information in order for them to access the services. An example is Woolworths in South Africa, shoppers who intend on using their services have to register their details through pop-up messages on their connecting mobile devices. Moreover, through the provision of advanced software technologies such as Location Analysis Software, Woolworths is better equipped to understand dwell time, repeat purchase and customer conversion rates using the services of their Data Analytics personnel and Business Intelligence personnel, respectively.

The results of this research study seem to suggest that the majority of shoppers always carry their smartphones even during an offline shopping trip. Moreover, the results seem to suggest that offline channels are now places of interaction where omni-shoppers interact with different channels and touch-points whilst they are in a physical store. In addition, such interactions can lead to cross selling. Offering free in-store *Wi-Fi* services as a complementary service has a positive effect on the business sales, an example would be coffee shops where customers come to the shop browse and in the meantime buy coffee or other products. However, provision of free in-store *Wi-Fi* services comes with some costs, and this might be the reason causing some retailers to put a hold on free *Wi-Fi* services investments in their retail shops.

Briefly, investment in free *Wi-Fi* is key to uncapping the full potential and benefits of omni-channel. Free *Wi-Fi* services allow shoppers to connect and enjoy the benefits of both worlds while shopping in the physical space. It is therefore imperative that retailers take the initiative to connect shoppers so that they can understand their buying patterns, offer the right products and for retailers to provide the right information on their digital platforms.

The next section discusses the price and service consistency across a myriad of touch-points.

5.3 Integrating channels for pricing and service consistency

The rapid adoption of mobile devices as envisaged during one of the discussions above seems to be the solution for blurring the different channels so that a holistic and seamless customer experience can be achieved within the omni-channel retail landscape. During the phase of theme development in the previous chapter, a number of participants pointed to price disparity as one of the serious challenges when it comes to channels integration within the omni-channel retailing operation. One of the participants had this to say, “I went to Total Sports in Menlyn Pretoria, they did not have the shoe that I was looking for. They told me that it is not on the system yet, but it was on their back stockroom and I said the shoe is advertised for R1800 and yet in the store it was retailing for R2200”. The above response forms part of the evidence used to construct the strategy, “channel integration for standard pricing and service across all touch-points.”

In addition, the interviewee was asked whether customers pay less when they decide to shop online, and the answer was yes. The participant's responses seem to suggest that online channels are cheaper than offline channels. However, for the omni-channel to succeed, price and services ought to be standard across the channels. In today's transforming retail landscape, channel boundaries within the retail landscape are eroding, shoppers are not just shopping online, but are integrating online and offline channels during their shopping journeys (Rajan, Swaminathan and Pavithra, 2017). In addition, the rapid transformation in the digital environment through the provision of the internet, smartphones and other mobile devices has necessitated rapid changes in consumer behaviour where for instance, a transaction can span over many channels. Therefore, it is equally important for retailers to offer uniform prices and services across all channels.

Furthermore, the research results seem to suggest that retailers are not ready to integrate their different channels to allow a seamless customer experience that offers a single and unified shopping experience spanning many touch-points. For example, shoppers walking into a physical store connect to *Wi-Fi* services or use their own mobile data to compare the prices of products whilst they are standing in the store. It is therefore critical and important for retailers to transform their strategies in line with changes in consumer behaviours. The following section discusses the many aspects which were covered in this chapter.

5.4 Chapter summary

The discussion and findings laid bare the results of the study and a number of strategies were proffered. For example, during the discussion, omni-channel fulfillment strategies were put forward as strategies, which can ultimately be used by retailers in integrating offline and online channels for smooth and seamless customer journeys. In particular, *Click and Collect* and *BORIS*, were the dominant omni-channel strategies, which were discussed at great length. For an omni-channel business model to be achieved holistically, the study's results encouraged through the discussion and findings chapter that, retailers invest in enabling technologies such as mobile devices, in-store Wi-Fi and Virtual Fitting Mirrors.

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter covered various omni-channel retail strategies, which might possibly be implemented for integrating online and offline channels for a seamless customer experience. In this chapter, the study seeks to conclude and provide recommendations for possible consideration by retailers and other interested bodies. The study sought out to establish omni-channel strategies, which might possibly be recommended to the clothing retail sector. In making this possible, the study used qualitative data, which was obtained from retail personnel and consumers. In addition, the qualitative data was analysed through thematic content analysis, where themes emerged out of the raw data which was collected from interviewees. Moreover, following thematic analysis, a discussion was initiated with a vision of highlighting the omni-channel retail strategies that can be implemented in the clothing and apparel sector of Cape Town, South Africa.

The conclusion and recommendation chapter draws its conclusion based on the findings and the discussion that precede it. Furthermore, this chapter also proposes future research areas that can further expand this important discipline of omni-channel retail strategies within the clothing sector of Cape Town.

6.2 Conclusion

This research study was developed because of the fundamental problem that most clothing retailers are facing regarding finding the right and appropriate omni-channel strategies for integrating online and offline channels. This study went on to discover that the integration of channels requires a number of omni-channel strategies, which the study proposed in the results chapter. Furthermore, the study highlighted key strategies, which came out of the study, and those key strategies were availed as fundamental building blocks for a seamless customer journey in the omni-channel retailing model.

In line with its research problem, this study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify retail strategies that can be adopted to establish omni-channel retailing in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town.
- To evaluate the retail strategies suitable for integrating brick-and-mortar and online channels for omni-channel retailing in Cape Town clothing sector.
- To establish the advantages and disadvantages of omni-channel strategies to shoppers and retailers, respectively.
- To evaluate the importance of integrating the brick-and-mortar with online channels for the formation of omni-channel in Cape Town's clothing sector

The study commenced with the introduction chapter, which focused solely on laying a clear and stable fortress for conceptualisation of the problem, followed by stating the theoretical framework underpinning the study and lastly asserting the research questions and objectives. During the conceptualisation of the research problem, theoretical assumptions emerged, and they were used as channels in guiding the study. Furthermore, *Change Theory and Transformational* theories passively featured predominantly throughout the study, though they were clearly articulated extensively and clearly in the introduction section of the study.

The literature review chapter provided an in-depth and extensive overview of the study and that was where some of the omni-channel retail strategies were discussed. In addition, the literature review section was so important because it presented a robust blueprint containing some of the strategies that later became the subjects of the discussions and findings in the discussion and findings chapter.

As outlined from the beginning of this chapter, the ultimate aim of this study was to establish omni-channel strategies that can be used within the clothing sector of Cape Town, South Africa. The study provided evidence, which is aligned to the discussion contained in the literature review chapter. Moreover, the study revealed the following results.

- Omni-channel fulfilment and capability strategies such as, Buy Online Return in Store (BORIS), Click and Collect.

- Investment in omni-channel enabling technologies and devices such as smartphones and in-store tablets, Virtual Fitting room Mirrors, and free in-store Wi-Fi connection for shoppers.
- Integration of channels for consistency in pricing and services across channels.

Omni-channel operation issues and opportunities outlined in the study provide a detailed and clear understanding around omni-channel retail strategies to be applied in the clothing sector of Cape Town. Besides the study having territorial delimitations such as that of geographical jurisdiction, the findings of the study might be relevant to other geographical locations outside Cape Town's clothing retailing sector.

Concerning establishing omni-channel retailing strategies for clothing retailers, an understanding of consumer behaviour is needed so that the right strategies are put in place, for both the consumers and the retailers at large. For example, the Click and Collect fulfillment strategy is an ideal strategy for customers who are pressed with time and who sometimes are pre-occupied with work or other career commitments. Such shoppers are said to possess utilitarian shopping values because they value convenience as opposed to shopping for enjoyment.

Within the Cape Town retail landscape, the study sought to suggest that there was no solid and viable omni-channel model in place for retailers to base their operations on, and this study seem to have filled some of the gaps caused as a result of the dearth of omni-channel retail strategies. Huge costs in setting up omni-channel operations and structures might be of many reasons why retailers are hesitant to partake in an omni-channel business model. In and With (2019) states that many retailers have been talking about omni-channels for over a decade and yet still seem to have no basic strategies in place for that to take place.

However, some retailers are starting to make inroads in the area of omni-channel although they tend to be implementing piece-meal type strategies. In addition, such retailers would have a dedicated section within their business such as the Click and Collect, though they are not in a position to handle product returns either at their

counter or within their retail space because of their stringent returns policies. The point of investment in basic omni-channel strategies such as Click and Collect, Buy Online and Collect in Store was mentioned in a study that was carried out by In and With (2019), to look into the state of retailing online.

Another problem, which the study revealed, was the fact that certain omni-channel strategies were more applicable to the clothing and apparel sector than other retailers. For example, the strategy of BORIS might pose some challenges to the grocery sector because handling fresh products requires certain investments in vehicles and machinery with refrigerators. Furthermore, such differences therefore make it difficult for retailers in general to undertake a generally acceptable omni-channel strategy, which can be applied across the board within the retail landscape.

On the contrary, the study aided into building a solid understanding that changes in the retailing landscape is largely caused by changes in consumer behaviour and lifestyles. In addition, such changes have driven many retailers into formulating their omni-channel strategies in line with changes in consumer behaviours. In South Africa, Checkers Supermarket introduced the *Sixty-sixty* strategy in response to utilitarian shopping values and such strategies are as a result of what the study discussed in the introduction section when it discussed the *Change Theory*.

The study through its results provided new insights into some areas of omni-channel retailing, more so in the area and sector of clothing and apparel. Technology in the form of Virtual Fitting Mirrors is something which is relatively novice and that can be seen in a very few retailers in Cape Town, though as a strategy, it can eliminate a lot of BORIS challenges.

The study managed to provide retailers with a number of omni-channel strategies, which might be used to bridge the two major and dominating channels, online and offline channels, respectively. The proceeding section discusses the recommendation of the study.

6.3 Recommendations

As alluded to above, the study was successful in achieving its intended objectives and through the results, the study endeavors to proffer some recommendations in the subject area of omni-channel retailing. To begin with, retailers endeavoring to venture into omni-channel retailing should make concerted effort in ensuring that inventory visibility and accuracy is prevalent. During the interview process, a participant mentioned that he drove to a store for a pair of takkies only to be informed upon arrival that the size he was looking for was not available in store. The study seeks to recommend that retailers need to ensure that shoppers and store employees are knowledgeable when it comes to stock holding and merchandise availability, respectively.

Moreover, for successful and efficient omni-channel operations, retailers need to avail space to handle omni-channel pick-ups and to handle fundamental omni-channel offerings such as online returns. As alluded to during the discussions of results, BOPS put retailers in a quagmire situation where offline channels are not ready to handle return orders emanating from online. Therefore, in such a scenario, retailers should put in place systems and policies which endeavor to achieve customer value through efficient and frictionless integration of different touch-points. For omni-channel retailing to work effectively and efficiently, retailers need to invest in critical drivers of omni-channel such as Information Technology (IT).

A large chunk of the discussions was allocated towards mobile devices and the investments that come with such, as a strategy. Through the discussions and results, the study recommends that omni-channel retailers put more emphasis on the adoption and implementation of mobile devices within their offline channels. What also became clear was the fact that shoppers are mobile, which might be a good indication that omni-channel retailers need to be mobile in-terms of how they communicate and transact with omni-channel shoppers.

In addition, the adoption and later implementation of mobile devices such as in-store tablets presents a dual function such as: providing information to shoppers and retail employees, and assisting of in-store staff. Customers might also end up browsing products online and making the purchase in store. Moreover, in such scenarios,

showrooming behaviour will be eliminated and depending on how well and good the retail employees are, cross-selling will increase turnover. To strengthen this recommendation, retailers offering mobile devices within their store for an omni-channel customer experience will achieve the two dominating shopping values of hedonic and utilitarian in line with the study's theoretical framework, since shoppers will take shopping as an enjoyment activity that offers convenience through mobile device usage.

Investment in digital technologies will enable omni-channel retailers to make use of customer mobility and ubiquitous connectivity. Ultimately placing them in a strategic position to deliver unique and integrated business capabilities. Moreover, the study sought to expand the discussion under recommendation by stressing the point that, when retailers invest in in-store mobile devices such as tablets, they will place themselves in a strategic position to interact with shoppers through sending the right marketing messages. In addition, shoppers are inseparable from their mobile phones, and they seem to expect retailers to match their mobility. The study recommends that omni-channel retailers take full advantage of the great engagement tools which are brought by the use of technology so that they can enhance effective communication and adopt customer centric approach within their business model.

The use of mobile devices or digital technologies within the omni-channel retailing landscape seems to be re-shaping shopping experiences in line with the changes in consumer behaviour as well articulated by the *Change Theory*. In addition, technology seems to be the key driver in the modern shopping environment because it is used to invigorate customers' shopping convenience with a mobile device.

The study recommends the use of Virtual Fitting Rooms within the omni-channel retailing landscape because strategically and operationally, Virtual Fitting Rooms have the potential to help reduce perceived risk of buying clothes without fitting them and it can boost online shopping enjoyment thereby aligning well with one of the study's theoretical framework called hedonic shopping value. In addition, with the use of Virtual Fitting Rooms, omni-shoppers are likely to notice smaller post-purchase differences between the expectation and actual product outlook; this will result in customer satisfaction and the complete elimination of online product returns.

The study further recommends the implementation of free *Wi-Fi* services in physical stores. With the implementation and introduction of free in-store *Wi-Fi* services, retailers will see a surge in dwell time from customers and that can easily translate into more sales especially if retail staff are more trained and equipped to engage in active selling. The introduction of free in-store *Wi-Fi* can present some great benefits, especially in the areas of Data Analytics and Business Intelligence since retailers will be in a position to track customers as soon as they come closer to their *Wi-Fi*. The introduction of free *Wi-Fi* services allows retailers a great opportunity to pull large crowds into their retail establishments and that can present fertile ground for omni-channel retailing to take place, for example webrooming and showrooming.

In addition, management of pricing across channels can present some challenges within the omni-channel retailing landscape. The study further recommends that omni-channel retailers adopt a singular pricing strategy across their varied channels so that the walls separating the channels are blurred. A singular pricing approach that is consistent across all channels comes with some challenges but is important for retailers to aim for a seamless customer experience at the expense of channel cost.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

The study used a qualitative research approach with a smaller sample. However, further studies are encouraged to use other methods such as quantitative, which normally involves large samples with generalised results. In addition, further studies similar to this, can also be carried out in the grocery sector since a majority of South African grocery supermarkets have added an online channel to their retail mix. The research study also focused on closing the gap in the retailer's perspective, through establishing omni-channel strategies which apparel retailers can use. However, further studies should focus on establishing consumer-based omni-channel strategies for the clothing sector.

Further studies can also focus on the many challenges omni-shoppers face when trying to shop seamlessly within the omni-channel.

6.5 Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to establish omni-channel retail strategies, which can be recommended for use in the Cape Metropolitan's clothing retail sector. Furthermore, the dearth of viable omni-channel strategies within the clothing sector was proffered as the reason for the study to commence. The literature review chapter discussed a number of omni-channel strategies and much of the discussions in the literature review section was substantiated by similar studies, which were conducted in other parts of the world. Chapter three focused on the research methodology and design. Constructivism and interpretivism were the major research philosophies underpinning the whole research study. The geographical demarcation of the study and the population sampling, as well as the method of data collection were discussed in chapter three. For clarity purposes, the research followed the qualitative approach with a sizeable population. Thematic analysis was used as a method for data analysis in chapter four. In addition, the themes, which emerged in the data analysis and interpretation section, gave some green light for the manifestation of omni-channel retail strategies.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire Survey

Strategies to establish an omni-channel business model for clothing retailers in Cape Town, South Africa

Date: _____

Store Name (Optional) _____

Participant Designation: -----

- Introduction and explanation of the interview.

Objectives

Main Objectives

- To establish omni channel strategies to implement in the retail apparel sector of Cape Town.

Supporting Objectives

- To identify retail strategies that can be adopted to establish omni-channel retailing in the retail clothing sector of Cape Town.
- To evaluate the retail strategies suitable for integrating brick-and-mortar and online channels for omni-channel retailing in Cape Town clothing sector.
- To establish the advantages and disadvantages of omni-channel strategies to shoppers and retailers, respectively.
- To evaluate the importance of integrating the brick-and-mortar with online channels for the formation of omni-channel in Cape Town's clothing sector

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Do you use both online and offline channels for clothing shopping purposes?

If No 1.1 Are there any reasons why you do not use both online and offline channels simultaneously when shopping for clothing?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

1.2 What are the reasons that prevent you from using both online and offline channels simultaneously when shopping for clothing?

1.3 Have you tried to use both online and offline channels simultaneously when shopping for clothing?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

1.4 .1 If **yes**, what were your challenges, and if it's,

1.4.2 If **No**, what did you not like about using the online and offline channels simultaneously when shopping for clothing?

1.5 If these challenges were absent, would you say you would have continued using the online and offline channel simultaneously?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

1.6 Are there any factors that would convince you to use both online and offline channels simultaneously (**omni channel**) for clothing shopping purposes?

1.7 Would you consider using both online and offline channels simultaneously when shopping for clothing in the future?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

1.8 Which other shopping channels would you use when shopping for clothes?

1.9 How are the other channels appealing to you?

1.10 How effective are these channels in satisfying and enhancing your shopping experience across the channels?

1.11 How would you rate service offered by retailers operating in both online and offline (**omni channel**) channels?

Delighted	Satisfied	Frustrated

1.13 Have you visited the other clothing stores' digital platforms such as websites and social media pages?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

1.14 What were your thoughts on viewing their digital platforms?

1.15 Have you checked if the products displayed online are similar to the ones in the stores?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

1.16 How would you rate their marketing communications across channels?

Very Bad	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent

1.17 Do you think there is consistent marketing message between the online platforms to that of offline channels owned by the same retailer?

YES		YES	
-----	--	-----	--

1.18 Do you think online customers pay less for the same item that can also be readily available in-store?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

2: If Yes

2.1 Which channels do use when shopping for clothing?

2.2 Why did you use the above channels for clothing?

2.3 How often do you use these selected channels when conducting your shopping for clothing?

2.4 How has the selected channels been effective in providing successful shopping experience to you?

2.5 The online store checkout process is straightforward.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2.6 What role does online and offline channels play combinable when

you are shopping for clothing?

2.7 Have your shopping goals been achieved when using Omni channel (online and offline) channels for shopping for clothing?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

2.8 Which shopping channels do you use the most when shopping for clothing?

3.0 Do you use your mobile smart phone when shopping for clothing?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

3.1 How often do you use your mobile phone for shopping?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always

3.2 How do you connect to the internet whilst shopping in physical store?

Store Wi-Fi	Network Data	Use store Tablet	Never Connect

3.3 Do you check prices of clothing online and make a purchase from a physical store?

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

3.4 Have you fitted clothing from a physical store and then proceeded to purchase online?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

3.5 Have you ordered an item through a store for delivery at your home or office?

YES		NO	
-----	--	----	--

3.6 How would you return incorrect/ damaged online order for either a refund or replacement?

Store	Pick-Up Point	Post Office	Other

Appendix B: Ethical Certificate




P.O. Box 1906 ☐☐Bellville 7535 South Africa ☐Tel: +27 21 4603291 ☐☐Email:
fbmsethics@cput.ac.za Symphony Road Bellville 7535

Office of the Chairperson Research Ethics Committee	FACULTY: BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES
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The Faculty's Research Ethics Committee (FREC) on 9 June 2020, ethics Approval was granted to Posa Sanders (217019005) for a research activity for Master of Retail Business Management at Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Title of dissertation/thesis/project:	Strategies to establish an Omnichannel business model for clothing retailers in Cape Town, South Africa Lead Supervisor (s): Dr V. V. Mugobo
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Comments: Decision: Approved

 <hr/> Signed: Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee Clearance Certificate No 2020FOBREC775	4 August 2020 <hr/> Date
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Appendix C: Letter of Support

TRUWORTHS

1 Mostert St,
Cape Town City Centre,
Cape Town,
8000

To whom It May Concern

RE: TRUWORTHS LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR SANDERS POSA'S RESEARCH STUDY

As the International Sourcing Product Executive for Truworths, I support Sanders Posa's research study focusing on the development and enhancement of knowledge with regards to strategies in establishing a successful omni-channel business model for clothing retailers in Cape Town, South Africa.

This study could potentially benefit the retail apparel sector through its in-depth study around ecommerce particularly, Omni channel thereby inversely benefiting retailers aspiring to grow their retail landscape into the e-commerce domain. In return for the support of the proposed study, Truworths would appreciate first-hand access to the findings of the research study, in-order to obtain in-depth insight into the study.

For further information regarding Truworths and the support of Sanders Posa's research study, please contact me using the below details as shown.

Kind regards,



Lauren Dreyer
International Sourcing Product Executive

lauren.dreyer@truworths.co.za

Appendix D: Editing Certificate

NERESHNEE GOVENDER COMMUNICATIONS (PTY) LTD

REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2016/369223/07

DR NERESHNEE GOVENDER (PhD)

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0847022553

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

03/09/2023

SANDERS POSA

217019005

CPUT

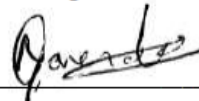
RE: EDITING CERTIFICATE

FOCUS AREA: STRATEGIES TO ESTABLISH AN OMNI-CHANNEL BUSINESS CONCEPT FOR CLOTHING RETAILERS IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Retail Business Management In the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences.

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

Kind regards,



Nereshnee Govender (PhD)