

## DIFFERENCES IN MALE AND FEMALE CONSUMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTH AFRICAN CLOTHING RETAILERS' CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY INITIATIVES

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### ABSTRACT

This study explored gender differences in consumers' perceptions of South African clothing retailers' corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives based on the social, environmental and economic dimensions defined by the triple bottom line (TBL) framework. A cross-sectional survey research design with a structured online questionnaire was developed from established scales to gather reliable quantitative data that would enable exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Respondents from diverse demographic backgrounds, aged 18 and older, were recruited via time and cost-effective non-random sampling techniques. After splitting the data into gender-specific subsamples, EFA procedures were conducted on both datasets to compare the underlying factor structures. The results showed subtle differences in CSR perceptions: both genders valued quality services, fair pricing, and ethical stakeholder relationships, but had slightly different perceptions of social and environmental contributions. The five-factor structure for males revealed a distinct "Economic Performance" factor, while "Local Sourcing" was unique to the six-factor structure for females. The findings suggest that while both genders share some common priorities, retailers should pay attention to slight gender differences in their CSR efforts, particularly regarding social and environmental contributions. Theoretically, the study contextualises consumers' CSR perceptions in the local clothing retail sector and provides a gendered perspective, extending current research.

### KEYWORDS

consumer perceptions, corporate social responsibility, gender differentiation, triple bottom line, clothing retailers

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## INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) encompasses several dimensions, including environmental sustainability, legal compliance, community investment, philanthropy and corporate governance, all aimed at emphasising how businesses can address essential needs while upholding and respecting community values (Blowfield & Murray 2014:8, Jansen van Rensburg 2019:165). In general, CSR is mainly associated with responsible business conduct, extending legal compliance and social liability towards business' impact on society, the natural environment, and supply chain responsibility (Jansen van Rensburg 2016:149, 2019:165). With an estimated international trade of around US\$994 billion in 2021 and a 400% increase in global consumption over the last two decades, CSR initiatives are essential for the clothing industry (Jia *et al.* 2020, Grand View Research 2022), also considering that it is one of the most polluting industries worldwide (Nature Climate Change 2018, Saha, Dey & Papagiannaki 2021). Therefore, further growth of the clothing industry may have profound implications for society and the environment if CSR initiatives are not extensively implemented.

From a corporate viewpoint, sustainable development necessitates balancing the social, environmental, and financial performance domains (Henry, Buyl & Jansen 2019). Together, these three domains present the well-known triple bottom line (TBL) framework used to measure organisational performance in sustainability (Elkington 1997:74-92). TBL serves as a theoretical basis for many CSR studies, offering a framework to measure and report on an

organisation's sustainability performance and consumers' perceptions of an organisation (Wilson 2015, Alvarado-Herrera *et al.* 2017).

From a consumer's viewpoint, environmental and social criteria have gradually infiltrated purchasing decisions over the last two decades (Pérez 2009), with increasing awareness and support for products and services from socially and environmentally responsible organisations (Mohr & Webb 2005, Hilson 2012). This awareness forms the foundation of consumers' perceptions of CSR, which, in turn, influence their trust, purchase intentions, and attitudes towards the organisation (Kang & Hustvedt 2014). Numerous studies in various commercial sectors have focused on consumers' perceptions of CSR in Western countries, with only a few conducted in emerging markets and even fewer concentrated on the clothing industry (Oe & Yamaoka 2020, Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir 2020, Ugwuozor 2020, Dartey-Baah & Amoako 2021). However, Western notions of CSR do not necessarily account for the CSR ideologies in emerging markets (Frynas 2006, Dartey-Baah & Amoako 2021). Theories and assumptions developed in Western countries may, therefore, not necessarily apply to consumers' perceptions and behaviour in emerging countries (Burgess & Steenkamp 2006, Oe & Yamaoka 2020), especially South Africa, with its heterogeneous market. Therefore, context-specific research on emerging consumers' perceptions of clothing retailers' corporate social responsibilities is needed.

Previous studies have explored the differences concerning male and female consumers' CSR perceptions and broader business initiatives, revealing marginal yet meaningful distinctions (Dunlap 1983, Calabrese, Costa & Rosati 2016, Fatoki 2016, Hur, Kim & Jang 2016, Ugwuozor 2020). Fatoki (2016) and Ugwuozor (2020) both explored gender differences using student samples; however, while Ugwuozor examined

Nigerian students' perceptions of CSR in general, Fatoki focused on gender differences in South African students' entrepreneurial motives. Hur *et al.* (2016) study conducted in South Korea, found significant differences in male and female consumers' perceptions of CSR surrounding corporate marketing outcomes. Another study by Calabrese *et al.* (2016) in the context of the Italian banking sector suggests small but significant gender differences in consumers' perceptions of CSR, with female consumers showing more concern for social and environmental issues. The relevance of such findings in the local market, particularly the clothing retail sector, remains debatable as few studies have explored gender differences in consumers' CSR perceptions in the local context, pointing to a gap in current research. Therefore, the research question posed is: do male and female consumers differ in their perceptions of clothing retailers' CSR initiatives in the South African emerging market context? This question led to various research objectives, but within the scope of this paper, it is narrowed down to an exploration and comparison of male and female consumers' perceptions of local clothing retailers' CSR initiatives (including those that relate to economic, social and environmental dimensions) through an exploratory factor analysis of gender-specific sub-samples.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Academics and professionals have debated the conceptual meaning of the CSR construct over many years, spanning from the seminal work of Bowen (1953) to the 1990s (Carroll 1991, Russo & Perrini 2010). Bowen (1953) conceived the first definition of CSR, whereby businesspeople were obliged to pursue policies, make decisions, or follow tactics beneficial to the objectives and values of society. In the following years, the concept of CSR evolved into the notion that businesses

and society should function as one connected entity rather than operating separately (Wood 1991, Moir 2001). Foundational ideas proposed by authors such as Carroll (1991) helped shape the more recent corporate view that sustainable development is generally related to balancing the social, environmental, and economic domains (Carroll 1991, Henry *et al.* 2019). The following section provides a broader background and review of the literature surrounding CSR's social, environmental, and economic dimensions.

### The triple bottom line and CSR

The three CSR dimensions, social, environmental, and economic, form part of the TBL concept and are widely used to quantify organisational performance in sustainability (Elkington 1997:74-92). Researchers concluded that an organisation's ability to prioritise profitability and environmental and social responsibility could determine its future market success (Klassen & McLaughlin 1996, Wahba 2008, Brulhart, Gherra & Quelin 2019).

### Societal dimensions that apply to the clothing retail industry

The social aspect of CSR relates to companies' efforts to strengthen or assist their local communities, typically guided by ethical and moral principles (Schwartz & Carroll 2003, Öberseder *et al.* 2014). A socially sustainable organisation operates in a manner that encompasses fair business practices related to labour, community, human resources, and a commitment to social justice (Elkington 1997:74-92). A previous scale development and validation study by Öberseder *et al.* (2014) identified various dimensions of consumers' perceptions of the CSR societal domain factor, including employment of disabled people, employment of long-term unemployed people, donating to social facilities, supporting employees

involved in social projects during work hours, investing in the youth's education, and contributing to solving societal issues. Alvarado-Herrera *et al.* (2017) identified six additional societal domain dimensions in another CSR scale development study, including: funding educational programs, supporting public health initiatives, having a solid commitment to defined ethical values, supporting cultural programs, providing financial support to social causes, and working to enhance the quality of life in the local community.

Within the clothing retail industry, the dimensions of the societal factor are closely tied to paying fair wages to workers and raw material suppliers, ensuring safe and healthy working conditions, abolishment of child labour or sweatshops, promoting local production of clothing, and giving back to communities (Jägel *et al.* 2012, Park & Kim 2016). Studies in the South African context indicate much emphasis directed toward the social dimension compared to other CSR dimensions, which could be attributed to legal and regulatory measures such as Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) requirements imposed by the government on local organisations (Dawkins & Ngunjiri 2008, Mersham & Skinner 2016). In the second quarter of 2022, South Africa had an unemployment rate of 33.9%, one of the country's significant challenges (Statistics South Africa 2022), making the societal dimension all the more critical.

### **Economic dimensions that apply to the clothing retail industry**

The economic dimension refers to financial stability, encompassing competitiveness, job creation, and long-term profitability (Jamali 2006). Organisations can obtain these objectives by reducing operating expenses through efficient resource management or boosting productivity through a motivated workforce (Jamali 2006). Despite moving

towards a democratic dispensation in the mid-90s, South Africa's economy has seen little progress in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic, combined with political instability and other factors, severely impacted the economy as poverty soared to the highest level in over a decade and inflation reached a 13-year peak (The World Bank Group 2022). In February 2023, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) greylisted South Africa for inadequate safeguarding against money laundering and terrorist financing (Perumall 2023). It becomes apparent that the economic domain is very relevant to South Africans for these and many other reasons.

From the consumers' perspective, the economic domain is more specifically associated with product quality and their financial well-being (Fulton & Lee 2013, Gruber, Schlegelmilch & Houston 2014). Alvarado-Herrera *et al.* (2017) identified six dimensions of the economic domain, including maximising profits to ensure sustainability, fostering strong customer relationships, constantly enhancing service quality, employing a competitive pricing strategy, improving financial performance, and increasing productivity. In the clothing retail industry, the economic domain dimensions, among other things, encompass well-designed, functional, and durable clothing constructed using high-quality materials and stitching (Jägel *et al.* 2012, Park & Kim 2016).

### **Environmental dimensions that apply to the clothing retail industry**

The environmental CSR dimension focuses on a company's ethical use of resources and efforts to minimise its negative ecological impact (Alhaddi 2015). Prior empirical evidence suggests this may include conserving energy, managing waste and emissions, using resources efficiently, and promoting environmentally friendly products or sourcing locally produced goods (Goel 2010). The environmental domain, as described in

previous studies, focuses on an organisation's business conduct in an environmentally responsible manner, including reducing energy usage and emissions, properly managing waste, promoting recycling, investing in environmental protection research and development, sponsoring ecologically friendly programs, and using only the necessary natural resources (Öberseder *et al.* 2014, Alvarado-Herrera *et al.* 2017). The clothing retail industry's adoption of the environmental dimensions is demonstrated in practices such as promoting products with a low environmental impact that are made from sustainable materials like organic cotton, employing environmentally sustainable production methods, avoiding the use of hazardous chemicals, and preventing harm to animals (Jägel *et al.* 2012, Park & Kim 2016). All of these practices are also relevant within the local South African context, as emerging markets are not exempt from the repercussions of environmental degradation and climate change, respectively (Ayanlade *et al.* 2023).

Hur *et al.* (2016) provide evidence of a connection between gender and consumers' perceptions of CSR, as attitudes and actions towards environmental and social issues vary between men and women. A more in-depth understanding of male and female consumers' perceptions of corporate social responsibility is needed as they may have distinct attitudes towards ethical issues (Gilligan 2003, Panwar, Han & Hansen 2010).

### **The influence of gender on consumers' perceptions of CSR**

Researchers widely acknowledge differences in male and female viewpoints based on biological factors and socially and psychologically constructed gender roles and attributes. People's indirect experiences and understanding of gender characteristics and roles may influence perceptions of gender-

appropriate behaviour (Bussey & Bandura 1999, West 2015). For example, females are stereotypically perceived as compassionate and socially inclined, while males are perceived as task-oriented and tend to process information differently (Walsh *et al.* 2001, Bakshi 2012, Roberts-Lombard & Parumasur 2014:72-137). However, societal perspectives may vary due to cultural differences and variations in laws and regulations (Andersson *et al.* 2022).

Gender difference in perception extends to shopping behaviour and product preferences. Females tend to view shopping as a social activity, visiting more shops per shopping trip and shopping to express affection towards others (Hart *et al.* 2007). In contrast, males perceive themselves as competent shoppers, but do not necessarily enjoy the experience (Bakewell & Mitchell 2006). Males who enjoy shopping tend to be brand- and fashion conscious and make impulsive purchases without monitoring their spending (Bakewell & Mitchell 2006, Kotzé *et al.* 2012). Also, males and females tend to process product information differently and prefer different products (Roberts-Lombard & Parumasur 2014:72-137, Hoyer, MacInnis & Pieters 2018:329-330). Based on the above, it would seem that retailers' promotional strategies might benefit from an approach tailored according to the differing interests and preferences of males and females. However, these studies remain dispersed among various retail contexts, focusing on shopping behaviour and product preferences in general, with comparatively limited insight into potential gender differences in the local clothing retail sector.

An early study by Burton and Hegarty (1999) found that females have higher expectations of organisations' CSR and are more concerned about ethical issues, resulting in more engagement in pro-environmental behaviour. Females are also more inclined to

engage in voluntary charity behaviour, whereas males are more concerned about the organisation's economic interests (Ibrahim & Angelidis 1994, Smith *et al.* 2001). More recently, Fatoki (2016) concluded that significant differences existed in male and female university students' perceptions of CSR. Similarly, Hur *et al.* (2016) conducted a study in South Korea and found significant differences in male and female consumers' perceptions of CSR in corporate marketing outcomes. Conversely, Calabrese *et al.* (2016) found no significant gender differences in CSR perceptions within the Italian mobile phone industry.

While the above highlights various studies (spanning over a few decades) on the influence of gender on consumers' perceptions of CSR in diverse industries, results are inconclusive, and researchers disagree about the significance of gender differences (Singhapakdi *et al.* 2001, McCabe, Ingram & Dato-On 2006, Jones *et al.* 2017, Ugwuozor 2020). However, Butt (2016) believes that it is essential to continue exploring this topic, especially in emerging economies where a limited understanding of the role of gender in consumer behaviour, including CSR perceptions, exists. In searching for relevant literature, no studies could be found that specifically highlight gender influences and potential differences in consumers' perceptions of local clothing retailers' CSR initiatives. Meanwhile, clothing retailers are confronted with mounting pressure to align their operations with consumers' expectations surrounding economic, environmental and social CSR dimensions, which may differ among males and females (Muller, Sonnenberg & Donoghue 2024). Delivering insight surrounding gender influences could assist local clothing retailers in refining their CSR initiatives and, ultimately, contribute to male and female consumers' support of sustainable initiatives in the local clothing and textile industry.

## METHODOLOGY

This exploratory-descriptive, survey-based study employed a structured, self-administered online questionnaire to collect quantitative data. Online survey-based questionnaires offer several benefits, among others, cheaper and faster data collection, reaching respondents in a broader geographical scope, and producing more accurate numerical data that is easily transferred to statistical software for analysis (Evans & Mathur 2005). Qualtrics software was used to develop the questionnaire, which included pre-existing scales that were modified to be context-specific to the local clothing retail sector. Initially developed by Öberseder *et al.* (2014), these scale items measure consumers' CSR perceptions based on seven dimensions, including the customer, employee, environmental, supplier, local community, societal, and shareholder domains. In following the recommendations of Alvarado-Herrera *et al.* (2017), the researchers regrouped the scale items into the social, economic, and environmental components of the TBL. Having adapted the scale items to reflect CSR initiatives in the local clothing sector, the questionnaire was pre-tested among 40 final-year Consumer Science Clothing Retail Management students. The pre-test was accessed via a WhatsApp link and completed online, simulating the same procedures as would be used for the main data collection process. Based on feedback received from the pre-test, ambiguous wording was eliminated, resulting in a refined version of 53 items. Of these, 37 items were related to the social dimension, linked with employees, customers, local community, societal, and supplier relationships. A further seven items were associated with the economic dimension, focusing on shareholders, and nine items were related to the environmental dimension. The five-point Likert-type scale with response options ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) allowed for reliable and

appropriate measurement of consumers' CSR perceptions of local clothing retailers' CSR initiatives.

Following questionnaire development and ethics approval, non-probability convenience, snowball- and purposive sampling techniques were used to recruit respondents. The fieldworkers distributed the online questionnaire electronically via SMS, WhatsApp, email, and social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) given that approximately 70% of the South African population are internet users, with around 40% actively engaging in social media (Statistics South Africa 2024). Before participating in the survey, respondents had to complete the consent form, which explained the purpose of the study, the respondents' right to withdraw, the time required to complete the questionnaire (Salkind 2012), and assured respondents' anonymity and confidentiality of their information (Strydom 2011). Fieldworkers purposively targeted respondents aged 18 and older, as they are potentially more inclined to purchase clothing and, therefore, more likely to be exposed to clothing retailers' CSR initiatives. While it may not fully represent the population, purposive sampling ensures participants have relevant knowledge or experience (Kothari 2004). In addition, convenience sampling selects easily accessible individuals (Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger 2005:83), and snowball sampling involves respondents recommending others from the population (Babbie 2001:180). Given the lack of a sampling frame to enable random probability sampling, these purposive, convenience and snowball sampling methods were deemed the most time and cost-effective approach to follow, but, simultaneously, impose limitations on the generalisability of the study's findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although the intention was to gather an equal number of responses from each gender group, the final sample (N=1293) included 35% (n=459) male responses and 65% (n=834) female responses. The South African population comprises approximately 50.7% females and 49.3% males (The World Bank Group 2022). Therefore, the study's sample did not reflect the larger population. The convenience and snowball sampling methods used by mostly female fieldworkers may have unintentionally led to more female participants in the sample. Yet, higher response rates among women are attributed to their stronger social network ties with other female friends, family members, or colleagues (Becker 2022), resulting in a greater likelihood of recruiting female participants. Females also seem more inclined to participate in online activities such as communicating and exchanging information than their male counterparts, who instead engage in online information seeking (Jackson *et al.* 2001).

Most respondents (72.3% males and 66.9% females) resided in Gauteng, the most densely populated province and economic hub of South Africa (Cowling 2023). It is noted that clothing retailers intensify their operations with more prominent retail outlets and greater diversity in product assortments in Gauteng (Fraser 2023). Given the multicultural population of Gauteng and other regions in South Africa, it was essential to ensure the participation of respondents from various population groups. However, most respondents belonged to the white population group (69.7% males and 77.1% females), possibly attributed to convenience sampling, posing a limitation of this study. In both the female and male sub-samples, most respondents had some form of tertiary education (78% males and 79.5% females). Calabrese *et al.* (2016) and Ugwuozor (2020) suggested that education enhances a

consumer's level of CSR consciousness, while Koirala and Charoensukmongkol (2020) findings show a direct relationship between income level and CSR perception. The distribution of individual monthly income was quite diverse across the different income categories, which reflects some of the income diversity in the larger South African population. Although the overall demographic profile of the sample limits the generalisability of the research results, the resulting data was deemed appropriate for the exploratory purposes of this study.

Based on a Partial Least Squares (PLS) SEM multigroup analysis that was conducted on the combined dataset, certain differences were observed between the male and female respondents' perceptions of the CSR dimensions. While the results relating to this prior analysis extend beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that the multigroup analysis could only be completed based on partial measurement invariance (Henseler, Ringle & Sarstedt 2016) and it was therefore deemed important to conduct further exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to determine whether the underlying factor structure of the male and female sub-samples differ. Subsequently, the combined dataset was divided based on respondents' gender affiliation, and separate EFA was conducted on each sub-sample using SPSS software. Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization was employed, and the Kaiser Criterion was considered to identify and retain factors with eigenvalues  $\geq 1$ . A threshold of 0.35 was used to identify items for interpretation and items with cross-loadings  $\geq 0.35$  on two or more factors were eliminated to obtain a distinct factor solution. With the female dataset, this led to the elimination of 14 items, whereas with the male dataset, it led to the elimination of 17 items.

As shown in Table 1, the EFA of the female dataset revealed a five-factor solution, cumulatively explaining 43% of the total

variance.

In the female dataset, 14 items loaded under the first factor labelled "Support for Social and Environmental Causes" (SSEC). These items relate to retailers' contribution to societal and environmental causes. For this factor, reliability analysis showed excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ). The mean ( $M = 3.28$ ) indicates female respondents' slight agreement with clothing retailers' support of societal and environmental causes, thus revealing the scope for further elevating perceptions surrounding local retailers' contribution to such causes. Existing literature suggests there has been an increase in consumers' pro-environmental views, such as the importance of safeguarding natural resources (Kraus, Cane & Ribeiro-Soriano 2021), as well as consumers' expectations of companies' social and environmental responsibilities (Min *et al.* 2012, Dapi & Phiri 2015). Yet, in the original CSR scale development study (Öberseder *et al.* 2014), environmental and societal domains were deemed less important than CSR's customer and employee domains. Similarly, the results of this study also seem to indicate that the environmental and societal domains were not as prominent in female respondents' perceptions of clothing retailers' CSR initiatives, compared to some of the other identified factors.

The second factor, labelled "Ethical Stakeholders" (ES), also included 14 items focused on retailers' relationships with their shareholders, suppliers and employees. A high level of internal consistency in responses ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) was observed for this factor. The mean for this factor ( $M = 3.36$ ) further indicates female respondents' slight agreement with statements relating to retailers' positive relations with their shareholders, suppliers and employees. In the original scale development study, supplier, employee and shareholder domains were of little importance in shaping consumers'



**TABLE 1: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF THE FEMALE DATASET (N=834)**

Clothing retailers' CSR:	Factors				
	1 SSEC	2 ES	3 QS	4 LS	5 PP
supports social causes	<b>0,69</b>	0,19	0,19	-0,07	0,00
sponsors pro-environmental causes	<b>0,64</b>	0,15	0,19	0,10	-0,07
tries to protect the environment	<b>0,63</b>	0,23	0,34	0,19	-0,05
invests in research regarding the environment	<b>0,62</b>	0,22	0,28	0,11	-0,06
sponsors cultural programmes in the local community	<b>0,61</b>	0,26	0,08	0,03	0,16
sponsors art and cultural programmes	<b>0,60</b>	0,28	0,01	0,04	0,06
invests in the education of young people	<b>0,59</b>	0,25	0,15	0,03	0,03
promotes recycling	<b>0,59</b>	0,08	0,21	0,24	-0,06
contributes to solving problems in society	<b>0,59</b>	0,24	0,14	0,02	0,10
sponsors public health programmes	<b>0,58</b>	0,24	0,06	0,10	0,21
sells products made from recycled materials	<b>0,54</b>	0,01	0,24	0,31	0,01
sponsors sports development programmes	<b>0,47</b>	0,22	-0,01	0,09	0,25
employs people with disabilities	<b>0,47</b>	0,10	0,21	0,14	-0,03
reduces pollution	<b>0,45</b>	0,23	0,26	0,29	-0,01
communicates honestly with shareholders	0,23	<b>0,66</b>	0,14	-0,01	0,08
respects the rights of employees	0,14	<b>0,64</b>	0,25	0,02	0,06
buys from suppliers that implement fair working conditions	0,21	<b>0,62</b>	0,16	0,24	-0,08
buys from suppliers that protect the rights of their workers	0,25	<b>0,61</b>	0,11	0,16	0,04
communicates honestly with their suppliers	0,17	<b>0,60</b>	0,12	0,12	0,07
communicates honestly with employees	0,12	<b>0,59</b>	0,20	-0,01	0,10
has transparent audit practices	0,18	<b>0,58</b>	0,14	0,02	0,08
negotiates fairly with their suppliers	0,18	<b>0,57</b>	0,11	0,10	0,14
buys from suppliers that pay decent living wages	0,23	<b>0,56</b>	0,09	0,21	0,09
treats employees equally	0,08	<b>0,53</b>	0,23	0,10	0,11
invests capital of shareholders responsibly	0,29	<b>0,50</b>	0,18	0,01	0,04
provides decent working conditions for employees	0,14	<b>0,49</b>	0,30	0,04	0,10
respects the cultures of the local community	0,28	<b>0,46</b>	0,27	0,13	0,15
buys from suppliers that do not use child labour	0,27	<b>0,42</b>	0,19	0,21	-0,09
offers quality service	0,18	0,16	<b>0,66</b>	0,07	0,11
meets clothing quality standards	0,16	0,17	<b>0,56</b>	0,12	0,18
implements fair return policies	0,09	0,17	<b>0,55</b>	-0,00	0,07
builds loyal relations with their customers	0,27	0,26	<b>0,52</b>	0,01	0,07
offers the possibility to file complaints	0,22	0,23	<b>0,50</b>	-0,04	0,06
sells clothing that meets safety standards	0,23	0,22	<b>0,48</b>	0,10	0,02
labels clothing in an understandable way	0,12	0,17	<b>0,45</b>	0,09	0,11
sources clothing products and raw materials locally	0,33	0,26	0,13	<b>0,55</b>	0,14
buys from local clothing suppliers	0,21	0,25	0,09	<b>0,50</b>	0,10
sets fair clothing prices	0,05	0,13	0,23	0,08	<b>0,68</b>
has a competitive pricing policy	0,02	0,20	0,26	0,06	<b>0,51</b>
Mean	3,28	3,36	3,96	3,15	3,56
Standard deviation	0,53	0,41	0,48	0,67	0,75
Cumulative % variance explained	14,7	28,8	36,9	39,9	42,8
Cronbach $\alpha$	0,91	0,90	0,80	-	-
r <sup>2</sup>	-	-	-	0,26	0,25

Factor loadings  $\geq 0.35$  in bold  
 SSEC = Support for Social and Environmental Causes, ES = Ethical Stakeholders,  
 QS = Quality Services; LS = Local Sourcing, PP = Pricing Policies.

perceptions of CSR initiatives (Öberseder *et al.* 2014). However, in this study, the supplier, shareholder and employee domains featured more prominently among female respondents.

Insofar as employee relations are concerned, ethically and socially responsible labour practices significantly impact the local context. South Africa has a large union presence with

substantial employee membership that may play an essential role in how businesses portray their CSR involvement (Dawkins & Ngunjiri 2008).

Seven items loaded under the third factor labelled “Quality Service” (QS). QS, as the label suggests, relates to retailers’ customer service, product quality, and the ease of returning items. This factor also had a high level of internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ). QS had the highest mean ( $M = 3.96$ ) of all the factors, indicating female respondents’ agreement with the importance of good customer relations and service, high-quality products, and hassle-free returns when engaging with clothing retailers. In the original scale development study (Öberseder *et al.* 2014), this domain emerged as the most prominent factor in shaping consumers’ perceptions of companies’ CSR initiatives. The importance assigned to this factor might extend beyond a retailer’s CSR initiatives to consumers’ overall views of a business. In the context of this study, it clearly emphasises the importance clothing retailers should assign to their service and product offering, in valuing their female customer base.

Only two items ( $r^2 = 0.26$ ) loaded under the factor labelled “Local Sourcing” (LS). The low  $r^2$  value with a minimum of two items assigned to this factor highlights the need for further scale development in future studies. Still, the factor was retained as it contributed 2.98% to the variance explained. The mean ( $M = 3.15$ ) indicates female respondents’ slight agreement with clothing retailers’ sourcing strategies that endeavour to localise their product assortments. Research in the US reveals changing consumer attitudes, with an increased demand for locally produced items (Lillywhite *et al.* 2009). However, in South Africa, challenges are encountered based on the lack of supply chain management and lack of local manufacturing to facilitate local production (Pooe & Mugobo 2020), leading to large amounts of international imports (Morris

& Einhorn 2008, Wood & Bischoff 2019). Therefore, consumers should be sensitised about where materials are sourced from and by whom they are manufactured (Pinar 2017).

The fifth factor, labelled “Pricing Policies” (PP), also had a minimum of two items ( $r^2 = 0.25$ ), but similar to LS, this factor also contributed substantially to the total variance explained (2.85%). The items included in this factor focused on retailers’ pricing strategies. The mean value of 3.56 suggests that female respondents were inclined to agree on the importance of retailers’ pricing policies and the necessity of setting fair prices. With the second highest overall mean, this factor reveals the importance of pricing policies in shaping female respondents’ perceptions of clothing retailers’ CSR initiatives. It aligns with previous research identifying pricing as a significant consumer decision-making factor (Eisenhauer & Principe 2009).

Unlike the five-factor female dataset, an EFA of the male dataset revealed a six-factor solution, as shown in Table 2. However, similar to the female dataset, the EFA of the male dataset cumulatively explained 43% of the total variance.

In the male dataset, 14 items loaded onto the factor labelled “Ethical Stakeholders” (ES), which mostly aligns with the ES factor identified in the female dataset and prior empirical evidence (Öberseder *et al.* 2014). Reliability analysis revealed that this factor had excellent internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ). The factor’s mean ( $M = 3.35$ ) indicates male respondents’ slight agreement to statements surrounding clothing retailers’ ethical and responsible relations with their suppliers, employees and shareholders. Ethical and socially responsible practices can contribute to a more sustainable and ethical business landscape. Therefore, retailers should prioritise such practices in their stakeholder relationships to improve their reputation and

**TABLE 2: EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS OF THE MALE DATASET (N=459)**

Clothing retailers' CSR:	Factors					
	1 ES	2 SC	3 EC	4 QS	5 PP	6 EP
buys from suppliers that implement fair working conditions	<b>0,63</b>	0,09	0,21	0,12	0,05	0,13
buys from suppliers that pay decent living wages	<b>0,62</b>	0,14	0,25	0,02	0,08	0,18
communicates honestly with their suppliers	<b>0,61</b>	0,22	0,09	0,16	0,10	0,05
buys from suppliers that protects the rights of their workers	<b>0,59</b>	0,26	0,20	0,16	0,04	0,12
negotiates fairly with their suppliers	<b>0,56</b>	0,15	0,20	0,14	0,23	0,09
treats employees equally	<b>0,56</b>	0,20	0,06	0,31	0,05	0,00
communicates honestly with employees	<b>0,55</b>	0,25	0,05	0,22	0,17	0,07
invests capital of shareholders responsibly	<b>0,50</b>	0,18	0,15	0,10	-0,02	0,16
develops employees to further their careers	<b>0,50</b>	0,33	0,15	0,22	0,07	0,08
communicates honestly with shareholders	<b>0,48</b>	0,17	0,15	0,11	0,13	0,17
buys from suppliers that do not use child labour	<b>0,45</b>	0,03	0,18	0,12	-0,01	0,08
buys from local clothing suppliers	<b>0,43</b>	0,28	0,14	0,01	0,12	0,01
provides decent working conditions for employees	<b>0,42</b>	0,09	0,07	0,32	0,11	0,02
provides sustainable growth and long-term success	<b>0,37</b>	0,21	0,20	0,18	0,11	0,26
sponsors cultural programmes in the local community	0,23	<b>0,67</b>	0,28	0,14	0,02	0,07
sponsors sport development programmes	0,19	<b>0,59</b>	0,06	0,07	0,19	-0,01
contributes to solving problems in society	0,26	<b>0,54</b>	0,27	0,15	0,04	0,18
improves quality of life in the local community	0,28	<b>0,53</b>	0,28	0,17	0,21	0,09
sponsors art and cultural programmes	0,21	<b>0,52</b>	0,31	0,11	-0,01	0,01
invests in the education of young people	0,18	<b>0,47</b>	0,33	0,09	0,13	0,12
contributes to the economic development of the local community	0,31	<b>0,43</b>	0,28	0,11	0,13	0,20
promotes recycling	0,17	0,15	<b>0,66</b>	0,06	0,09	0,07
sells products made from recycled materials	0,12	0,17	<b>0,65</b>	0,10	0,02	0,08
invests in research regarding the environment	0,31	0,27	<b>0,57</b>	0,05	0,14	0,10
tries to protect the environment	0,22	0,26	<b>0,53</b>	0,26	-0,04	0,07
sponsors pro-environmental causes	0,25	0,26	<b>0,53</b>	0,21	-0,02	-0,05
reduces energy consumption	0,30	0,23	<b>0,39</b>	0,13	0,12	0,15
meets clothing quality standards	0,14	0,03	0,18	<b>0,55</b>	-0,03	0,21
labels clothing in an understandable way	0,09	0,07	0,10	<b>0,53</b>	0,10	0,08
offers quality service	0,15	0,13	0,26	<b>0,49</b>	0,23	0,13
implements fair return policies	0,19	0,09	0,00	<b>0,45</b>	0,08	0,04
offers the possibility to file complaints	0,19	0,20	0,08	<b>0,42</b>	0,15	0,09
sets fair clothing prices	0,15	0,17	0,03	0,17	<b>0,70</b>	0,10
has a competitive pricing policy	0,15	0,11	0,08	0,18	<b>0,63</b>	0,10
always tries to improve its financial performance	0,21	0,14	0,09	0,22	0,10	<b>0,63</b>
ensures the economic success of the company	0,25	0,05	0,11	0,26	0,16	<b>0,55</b>
Mean	3,35	3,16	3,21	3,92	3,64	3,71
Standard deviation	0,43	0,58	0,59	0,51	0,78	0,59
Cumulative % variance explained	13,6	22,1	30,1	35,9	39,7	42,82
Cronbach $\alpha$	0,89	0,84	0,82	0,69	-	-
r <sup>2</sup>	-	-	-	-	0,28	0,23

Factor loadings  $\geq 0.35$  in bold  
 ES = Ethical Stakeholders, SC = Social Causes, EC = Environmental Causes, QS = Quality Services, PP = Pricing Policies, EP = Economic Performance.

customer loyalty.

A total of seven items loaded under the factor labelled "Social Causes" (SC) in the male

dataset. These items solely focused on the retailer's contribution to societal causes. The responses for this factor showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ). The mean (M = 3.16)

suggests that male respondents agreed slightly about retailers' contribution to societal causes, which may indicate some uncertainty among male respondents about the specific social causes that the retailers are contributing to and/ or the actual impact of retailers' contributions to such social causes.

A further six items loaded under the factor labelled "Environmental Causes" (EC), which relates to the retailer's support of environmental causes. Reliability analysis revealed a high level of internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ). The mean ( $M = 3.21$ ) suggests that while there might be slight agreement among the male respondents about retailers' contribution to environmental causes, there is scope for further improving perceptions surrounding EC. Retailers who want to enhance their reputation and customer loyalty may need to increase their efforts in demonstrating their commitment to environmental causes through visible and transparent initiatives such as reducing their carbon footprint, using environmentally friendly packaging, or implementing sustainable supply chain practices. It is interesting to note that the social and environmental domains merged in the female dataset, while these domains remained separate in the male dataset. This finding may suggest that females view social and environmental causes as interconnected, while males view them as separate matters.

Like the female dataset, the male dataset also revealed the "Quality Services" (QS) factor, with five items relating to the quality of retailers' services, products and returns policies. The internal consistency of responses for this factor was lower than that of the other factors ( $\alpha = 0.69$ ), barely missing the 0.7 threshold for good acceptability. This factor had the highest mean ( $M = 3.92$ ) of all the factors. A comparison between the male and female QS factors shows that both genders perceive quality service as a priority

when engaging with retailers. However, in the male dataset, the factor had fewer items with slightly lower internal consistency in responses. Despite this, the high mean in the male dataset suggests that quality service is still highly valued by male respondents.

Similar to the PP factor identified in the female dataset, two items ( $r^2 = 0.28$ ) loaded onto the factor labelled "Pricing Policies" (PP) in the male dataset. The mean ( $M = 3.64$ ) suggests that male respondents mostly agreed on the importance of retailers' efforts toward establishing fair and competitive pricing policies. South African retailers have experienced substantial price increases to cope with economic instability and rising inflation rates in recent years. Therefore, competitive pricing policies may have gained importance in attracting and retaining both male and female customers in the clothing sector.

Two items ( $r^2 = 0.23$ ) loaded under the factor labelled "Economic Performance" (EP). This factor is unique to the male dataset and focuses on retailers' efforts toward ensuring the economic success of the company as well as improving financial performance. A relatively high mean ( $M = 3.71$ ) – second only to QS – suggests that male respondents mostly agree that retailers should devote effort toward their economic viability and financial performance. Therefore, retailers may need to communicate their financial performance and stability effectively to build trust and enhance their reputation, especially among male consumers.

In addressing the study's research question i.e. whether male and female consumers differ in their perceptions of clothing retailers' CSR initiatives in the South African emerging market context, the findings suggest that there are subtle differences as the male and female data sets produced slightly different EFA solutions. While both male and female

datasets revealed retailers' commitment to ethical stakeholder relationships, quality services and fair pricing policies as common factors of interest, there were differences in perceptions surrounding the other CSR dimensions. More specifically, the SSEC factor identified in the female dataset split into two distinct factors in the male dataset, namely SC and EC, suggesting that females could have viewed environmental and social causes as a merged issue. In contrast, males viewed retailers' support of social and environmental causes as separate dimensions. These findings correspond with Calabrese *et al.* (2016), which also found that the most significant difference in gender perceptions of CSR relates to the environmental dimension, followed by the economic and social dimensions. This aligns with previous empirical findings suggesting females tend to emphasise the combined impact of social and environmental issues (del Mar Alonso-Almeida, Perramon & Bagur 2015). The findings also align with Fatoki (2016) and Ugwuozor (2020), showing that female respondents demonstrated greater sensitivity to CSR in the stakeholder model as well as gender differences in social responsibility, although the differences were not as statistically significant.

Interestingly, the male dataset presented an economic performance dimension that was not featured in the female dataset. On the other hand, the female dataset included a local sourcing factor that did not manifest in the male dataset. These differences could be attributed to gender socialisation, with males being encouraged to exhibit more instrumental traits (e.g., independence and competitiveness). In contrast, females are encouraged to exhibit more communal traits (e.g., empathy and cooperation) (Eagly & Wood 2013). Moreover, research has shown that males and females tend to differ in their values, with females prioritising interpersonal relationships and social justice, whereas

males tend to place more importance on achievement and material success (Schwartz 2012), which may be particularly relevant given the current economic climate in South Africa.

## **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, the findings of this study have practical implications for clothing retailers operating in emerging markets. The findings suggest that clothing retailers should prioritise their commitment to quality services and competitive pricing policies to improve their reputation and customer loyalty. This might be attributed to the fact that items linked to the quality of retailers' services extend beyond the scope of CSR initiatives to consumers' overall perception of retail offerings. This aligns with industry reports that place high-quality products and services as consumers' top-ranked criteria when deciding to do business with a company (PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC) 2018). Both male and female respondents valued retailers' relations with their stakeholders, highlighting the importance of involving stakeholders in designing and implementing CSR initiatives to ensure their effectiveness and relevance to the local retail sector.

Furthermore, the study's findings indicate that clothing retailers should consider tailoring their support of environmental, social and economic CSR dimensions to appeal to the concerns and values of different gender segments. Female respondents seem to value retailers' local sourcing strategies. Overall, existing literature suggests that females may have greater expectations for companies' CSR initiatives based on the social and environmental dimensions (del Mar Alonso-Almeida 2013), while males seem to take a particular interest in economic performance, as exemplified in the findings of this research.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the current literature on CSR and the TBL framework by applying it to the clothing retail industry in the emerging market context of South Africa. The study also contributes to the literature on gender differences in consumers' perceptions of CSR. CSR in emerging markets like South Africa often needs to be more localized, reflecting the unique challenges and values of those regions rather than simply adopting Western CSR practices. This emphasises the importance of utilising the study's findings to streamline and refine local CSR initiatives in the clothing retail sector.

While the demographic profile of the sub-sample may limit generalisability, the findings of this study still offer preliminary insights into the subtle differentiation between male and female consumers' perceptions of clothing retailers' CSR initiatives in an emerging market context such as South Africa. Future research may want to include more representative samples or use statistical methods such as survey data weighting to adjust for demographic imbalances, explore the relationship between CSR initiatives and purchase intentions or actual purchasing behaviour, and apply further advanced statistical analysis such as confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling to the data. Response bias remains a concern in studies related to environmental and social causes, and therefore, innovative data collection techniques such as conjoint analysis (Sonnenberg, Erasmus & Schreuder 2014) or projective techniques (Donoghue 2000) can be used to gather consumers' true viewpoints on such topics, in a structured indirect manner to combat potential response bias. While the overarching economic, environmental and social dimensions of the TBL framework remain relevant, these can be refined to reflect the various sub-dimensions as identified through the EFA of the gender-specific sub-samples. In addition, gender theories such as the social identity theory and

the gender schema theory, may offer further interpretative value for understanding the interplay between gender, consumption patterns and consumers' CSR perceptions.

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