

THE CLOSER I GET TO YOU, THE LESS I FEAR

The change in the South African economic landscape and the current economic conditions has led to the South African consumer tightening their belts. This has led consumers to be cautious with their spending and becoming risk averse when purchasing branded clothing, despite the consumer's need to uniquely express themselves through the branded clothing.

A research study was conducted by Batandwa Simelane, a [Master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#), to investigate the role of risk aversion on a consumer's involvement and decision-making process when purchasing branded clothing. The study used the Social Exchange Theory as a foundation for the conceptual framework. The study was specifically investigating the role of a consumer's fears and related risks on; their loyalty to a brand, their perception or awareness of the brand and their cognitive and affective involvement in the decision-making process when they are purchasing branded clothing. The study seeks to fill a literature gap to understand the role of an individual's culture on their purchase behaviour and it also seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of how risk impacts the consumer's engagement with a brand.

The study used panel data collected using a convenience sampling online, resulting in a total of 814 valid responses.

The findings of the study found that risk aversion influences a consumer's brand loyalty when they are purchasing branded clothing. This means that consumers want to build a long-term relationship with a brand, this will allow them to reduce their costs related risks and maximise the reward that they are looking for, which is to fully express themselves through the branded clothing. This has an implication in the way in which brands engage with consumers. Brands need to offer consumers functional and emotional experiences that resonate with them, to build brand loyalty. Therefore, it is recommended that brands offer functional experiences by telling their consumers what the expected outcome will be when buying the product.

The emotional experience can be achieved by encouraging the consumer to engage with the brand through the brand's various online communities (portals) such as Instagram. The online communities will enable the consumer to visually engage with the brand as it will be in display and in use by a person they can relate to. This will then enable the consumer to anticipate how they might feel after they purchase or consume the product. This will also reduce their risk because they would have seen the product on someone else they resonate with or relate to and thus assisting them in the purchasing process.

This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [Master's degree](#) in [Marketing Management](#) in 2018 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by [Juanita Loots](#) under the supervision of [Prof M Wiese](#).