Township consumer perceptions of advertised retail brands in Tshwane: South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Black urban areas consumers in the period before independence were communities that were generally regarded as being lower in income. Since democracy however in 1994, these communities have seen a steady rise in income, which has heightened attention to the development of retail outlets which in the past was very limited (Ligthelm, 2008: 37; Tustin & Strydom, 2006: 48-49). With new developments within the black urban areas, consumers are becoming more exposed to branded merchandise and the advertising thereof, therefore new perceptions as to such merchandise will have been formed. Therefore the aim of this study is to explore the perceptions that black urban area consumers have with regards to retail brands and the advertising thereof. In order to satisfy research objectives, the study took the form of a self-administered location based survey, which was distributed to the residents of Attridgeville, Mamelodi and Shoshanguve.

Key words: Visual merchandising, apparel stores, colour schemes, space utilization, retail outlay

The worldwide economic crises over the last few years has forced many companies to be more focussed on their target market as well as to spend money in the most effective way in order to generate a satisfactory profit. Another aspect that is vital for companies is to increase the loyalty base amongst all customers and specifically in markets where there is growth – and this requires an understanding of the customer base. By not understanding the needs and wants of the market, or consumer purchasing behaviour, marketers will not be able to establish and promote a relationship with their customers (Knowledge resources, 2010). Therefore it becomes imperative that marketers look at how consumers perceive offerings in order to better understand and cater for their markets.

South Africa is a consuming population of an estimated 50, 59 million individuals (Statssa, 2011:2) of which a large number live within informal settlements/Black urban areas also referred to as townships. These so called townships have an estimated R307-R308 billion in annual consumer spend (Dlamini, 2011; Forsite, 2011). The importance of these communities to marketers lies not only in the fact that they account for a large segment of the consuming population of South Africa, but in the past these communities were only catered for by small informal businesses and were thus limited in choice (Ligthelm, 2008: 37), thereby exposure to branded merchandise was limited to outbound shopping, or brands that spaza shops or informal retailers had to offer. Today however following political change (Mathenjwa, 2007:1) individuals within these areas can be seen to be climbing the corporate ladder. This means that the incomes and expenditure of these communities have increased which in essence means that more of the country's gross domestic income is being located within these areas (Dlamini, 2011; Ligthelm, 2008: 37). With the shift in income and expenditure within these communities townships have thus attracted the attention of retail developers (Ligthelm, 2008: 37) and thus according to Dlamini (2011) many organisations are endeavouring to position their brands in order to cash in on the growth that is occurring within these communities. Even though this growth has taken place there is still a lack of knowledge of the profile and expenditure patterns of these township consumers (McCann World Group, 2008). Hummel (McCann World Group, 2008) states that townships not only present an immense portion of the South African economic and social setting they are the sector within the economy that will play an increasingly important role in the South African markets of tomorrow, therefore by understanding these markets organisations, can open up new and profitable segments which will offer benefits to the broader community and economy. van Eck, Grobler and Herbst (2004: 2), Radebe (2005), Dlamini (2011) and Ismail (BusinessLIVE, 2011) supports Hummel (McCann World Group, 2008) in this statement and further state that very limited knowledge has been gained regarding these consumers and research conducted over the past few years in relation to Black urban areas/ townships of South Africa, has been limited and restricted which in effect means a potentially profitable and lucrative market has been left unattended to.

Therefore the aim of this paper is to explore the perceptions that township consumers have with regards to retail brands and the advertising thereof. The subsequent section shall now delineate the research aim and objectives needing to be satisfied, followed by a literary review of previous research. Thereafter a discussion as to the research methodology employed will follow. The paper will then conclude with the research findings, limitations, recommendations and a conclusion.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions that township consumers have with regards to retail brands and the advertising thereof. Therefore in order to attain the aim of the study, the following research objective was formulated:

- To determine township consumers' perceptions of advertised retail brands in the Tshwane area of South Africa.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of branding and the importance thereof

Branding according to the American Marketing Association (AMA: 2012) is defined as an "...activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large". The concept of branding a product to show ownership of a producer's merchandise goes back many years, but its use and importance within business and the field of marketing is a lot more recent. The use of branding as a marketing tool offers many advantages and is not merely used to indicate quality of products and to identify a manufacturer. It is also used as a strategic tool around which the organisations total marketing campaign is built and a central message is sent to the consumer regarding the product or service offering (Blythe, 2009: 163). Marketers use branding as a major tool to differentiate its offerings from that of competitors, products are very similar in many ways and often the same suppliers or manufacturers are used by competitors and the only differentiating factor is the brand.

Consumers who identify with the brand as marketed by the organisation will support such a brand if it meets his or her needs and ideals and the consumer will most likely repurchase the product and would probably recommend it to others- in essence advocating its ideals (Blythe, 2009: 163). van Eck, Grobler and Herbst (2004: 2) state that brands create a form of trust between the organisation and the consumer, it takes away uncertainty or risk that a customer could feel is associated with the item and is more of a psychological promise than a palpable item. van Eck *et al.* (2004: 4) further go on to say that it is due to the psychological nature of purchasing a consumer goes through that producers of products need to become more aware of and should focus on the perceptions and attitudes held by consumers.

Township consumers of Tshwane, retail development and branding

Tustin and Strydom (2006: 48) and Ligthelm (2008: 37), state that black urban area consumers in South Africa in the past were mostly catered for by small informal businesses which provided these lower income consumers with basic necessities, however limiting purchase choice amongst inhabitants. Following political change within South Africa, township areas have emerged as a new market for national retailers (Ligthelm, 2008:42) as the inhabitants have seen a steady increase in household income and expenditure. This emerging black middle-class is noticeable in the LSM profile of the nation, which can be seen to be indicative that there is a higher demand and need for retail development within previously underdeveloped areas (SA property review, 2010: 29). This increased demand has subsequently attracted the attention of retail developers to expand into these areas and thus the infiltration of brands to cash in on the lucrative township markets, which can be seen to mark the last of the large retail development frontiers in South Africa (Dlamini, 2011; Ligthelm, 2004: 37).

The developments within townships according to Tustin and Strydom (2006: 49) are a reflection of retailers wanting to create growth opportunities and build a sustainable competitive advantage However one of the challenges that retail developers are facing in entering these markets is that they need to find a compromise between local or regional traders and national brands or traders (SA property review, 2010: 29). According to van Loggerenberg and Herbst (2010: 13) companies are not yet exploiting the potential of different communities in South African with their brands and this is evident from the fact that their products and marketing efforts are not appealing to the township consumers tastes (Durham, 2011). van Loggerenberg and Herbst (2010:13) state that marketers of organisations are failing to make use of creative marketing activities that would take advantage of the different psychographic profiles of township communities which could assist organisations in forming bonds or relationships with the particular targeted community.

A research study conducted by the McCann World Group SA entitled “Township stories” revealed that a large portion of South African companies have very limited interactions with township areas, thus their knowledge of these consumers is merely guesswork, and it is this guesswork that creates misunderstandings or misinterpretations as to the inhabitants and the market structure that resides within these areas (Marsland, 2007). Without an understanding as to this market and their needs or at least an investigation into the habits of these consumers, marketers will not be able to cater for these consumers. Foshizi (2012) indicated that township consumers tend to prefer to buy branded products when it comes to winter clothing as they are of the opinion that this clothing must last longer and they are prepared to pay more in such cases.

According to the McCann Worldgroup SA study (2008) and Kunene (Dlamini, 2011), one of the biggest problems organisations have when entering township areas is that these consumers are often seen as one homogenous group instead of a group that comprises of individuals that differ in terms of lifestyles perspectives, areas and mind sets. Kunene (Dlamini, 2011) further highlights that problems companies are experiencing in infiltrating these communities is that brand managers assume that residents within these areas are usually poor and thereby provide residents with smaller, and cheaper products. This is an immense misconception as these areas have many different types of individuals with different means and needs that need to be spoken to differently. Kunene (Dlamini, 2011) lastly stipulates that township consumers do not mind paying the additional rand for a branded product; they just need to understand as to why they should buy a certain brand.
Through the identification of all the challenges brand managers face, it becomes apparent that there is a mismatch between the township consumer, the organisation and their brands (Dlamini, 2011). This is a serious problem and due to this lack of knowledge and understanding of the township consumer it points to a need for this type of information (van Loggerenberg & Herbst, 2010: 13).

Township consumer perceptions of branded products

Consumers that inhibit township areas within South Africa according to Knowledge resources (2010) do not necessarily have the biggest share of income distribution per household in the country but in totality have a large share of purchasing power and brand loyalty, thereby making township communities an important sector within the economy and for marketers to consider. But it is the consumers' perception towards a brand and its advertising that will ultimately determine its success and loyalty to which a consumer will ascribe to it.

Perception is an internal or individual factor that can influence consumer's decisions to purchase organisational brands and can be defined as the process by which consumers will select, organise and interpret information that is presented to them within the market environment (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004: 158). Consumer's perception can also be described to be the way in which an individual views the world around them (Blythe, 2008: 91), and according to Majumdar (2010:57) the view that consumers have of the world around them is the result of two inputs: physical stimuli and a series of past experiences.

The process of consumer perception according to Cant *et al.* (2010:108) can be broken up into four elements viz; exposure, attention, interpretation and memory or recall. The ultimate goal for the marketer is to ensure that their products are remembered by the consumer and in so doing keep on purchasing the product and ultimately to ensure future profits over the long term. However in order for consumers to recall the brand consumers need to be exposed to the organisations products (Noel, 2009: 93).

Consumers in the township areas according to van Eck *et al.* (2004:5) have a greater degree of education than their predecessors and are being exposed to new media to a greater extent due to technological advances and this is making this market more attractive to retailers. At the same time it also allows consumers to form perceptions as to merchandise on offer. Social media has played a major role in this increased exposure to organisational products by this segment. Township consumers according to Foshizi (2012) are becoming highly adept and active in the use of social media, as they can access almost anything from their devices from any location. This increases the potential exposure to products and brands of organisations. Social media has changed the way in which marketers can be seen to operate in the market, yet it is still an underutilised medium within townships which needs to be evaluated (Foshizi, 2012). It is becoming more apparent that a brands success is really about how consumers perceive it to be (Lorette, 2011: 201), which is in essence related to the exposure a consumer has with a product, and a marketers promotional efforts.

Previous studies have been conducted in relation to adolescents' perceptions of branding in the clothing industry, whereby results indicated that general perceptions regarding branded clothing were positive, unbranded clothing was less positive and perceptual differences between genders did not present a significant difference (van Eck *et al.*, 2004: 11). The study highlighted the fact that not much has been written or researched on township consumers and branded products. Therefore this study aims to bring more light to the topic under investigation.

METHODOLOGY

In order to establish the perceptions that township consumers of Tshwane, South Africa hold in relation to advertised retail brands and branding, the study utilised secondary and primary sources of data in order to conduct a quantitative analysis. Tustin, Ligthelm, Martins and van Wyk (2005: 120) state that secondary data or otherwise known as "desk research" is defined as information that already exists in the market place, in other words data that can be reused by other researchers in solving new research problems. Sources of secondary data that were utilised were past research studies, journal articles, the internet as well as academic books. However, in order to adequately satisfy the research objective primary data needed to be collected directly from township consumers by means of a survey which took the form of a self-administered location-based questionnaire.

The questionnaire that was utilised in the research contained three questions, of which all were structured close-ended questions. The question that was posed to measured consumers' perceptions was that of a seven item likert-type scale, ranging from *"strongly disagree"* to *"strongly agree"*. The main function of posing a likert-type scaled question was so that the researcher could establish the intensity of the respondent's feelings with regards to the particular statement being made (McDaniel & Gates, 2010: 297-299). The question posed five statements to respondents. The questionnaire was distributed to small business owners that reside in the township areas of Tshwane, South Africa whereby data was collected between the 25th April – 10th May 2012 by means of a non-probability convenience sample; this sampling method was deemed most appropriate as it allowed the researcher to collect data quickly and easily (Anderson, Sweeney & Williams, 2011: 318), whereby 40 comprehensive responses were received.

Once the data had been collected it was then cleaned, quantified and analysed by means of frequency occurrence with the assistance of the software programme, SPSS. Frequency occurrence or distribution analysis according to Gravetter and Wallinau (2009: 37) is when collected data is organised and tabulated to represent the number of respondents whose scores are the same and places them from highest to lowest. From the analysis of frequency counts, variables where tabulated to form an overall perception consumers of townships of Tshwane, South Africa hold in relation to advertised retail branded products.

The previous section within the research paper dealt with the key concepts of the study and provided insight as to what has been investigated within the field of township consumers' perceptions towards advertised retail branded merchandise. The preceding section then discussed the research methodology to be employed. This section shall now present and discuss the results that were obtained through the distribution of the questionnaire to respondents (n= 40).

Data on how consumers perceive advertised retail brands

This section included five statements that would measure consumer perception towards that of advertised retail branded products by means of a 7-item Likert scale. Table 1 below depicts mean scores, standard error of mean and standard deviations of the way individuals perceive advertised retail branded products:

From table 1 above it can be observed that the highest degree of agreement was for statement 2, "Brands that are regularly advertised are better" (4.625) followed by statements 5 "Brands that are advertised are greater value for money" (4.6) statement 3 "Brands that are advertised are of higher quality" (4.5) and statement 4 "Brands that are advertised are more reputable brands". The lowest degree of agreement was found to have come from statement 1 (3.750) "I only buy branded products".

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Table 1: Consumer perception towards advertised retail branded products*

Statement	I only buy branded products	Brands that are regularly advertised are better	Brands that are advertised are of higher quality	Brands that are advertised are more reputable brands	Brands that are advertised are greater value for money.	Total
Mean	3.750	4.625	4.500	4.425	4.600	**4.380**
Std. Error of Mean	0.312	0.250	0.258	0.306	0.277	**0.280**
Std. Deviation	1.971	1.580	1.633	1.933	1.751	**1.774**

** Table 1 measurement was done on a 7-item Likert scale, whereby 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree.*

Table 2: Consumer perception towards advertised retail branded products*

Statement	Mean	% of agreement	% of disagreement	% of neither agreement or disagreement
1.1. I only buy branded products	3.75	40.00	52.50	7.50
1.2. Brands that are regularly advertised are better	4.63	56.80	27.90	15.30
1.3. Brands that are advertised are of higher quality.	4.50	56.10	25.60	18.30
1.4. Brands that are advertised are more reputable brands.	4.43	57.50	32.50	10.00
1.5. Brands that are advertised are greater value for money	4.60	48.60	23.10	28.30

** Table 2 measurement was done on a 7-item Likert scale, whereby 1 = Strongly disagree and 7 = Strongly agree.*

Table 2 above illustrates the percentage of agreement, disagreement and neither agreement nor disagreement respondents felt towards each statement that was posed:

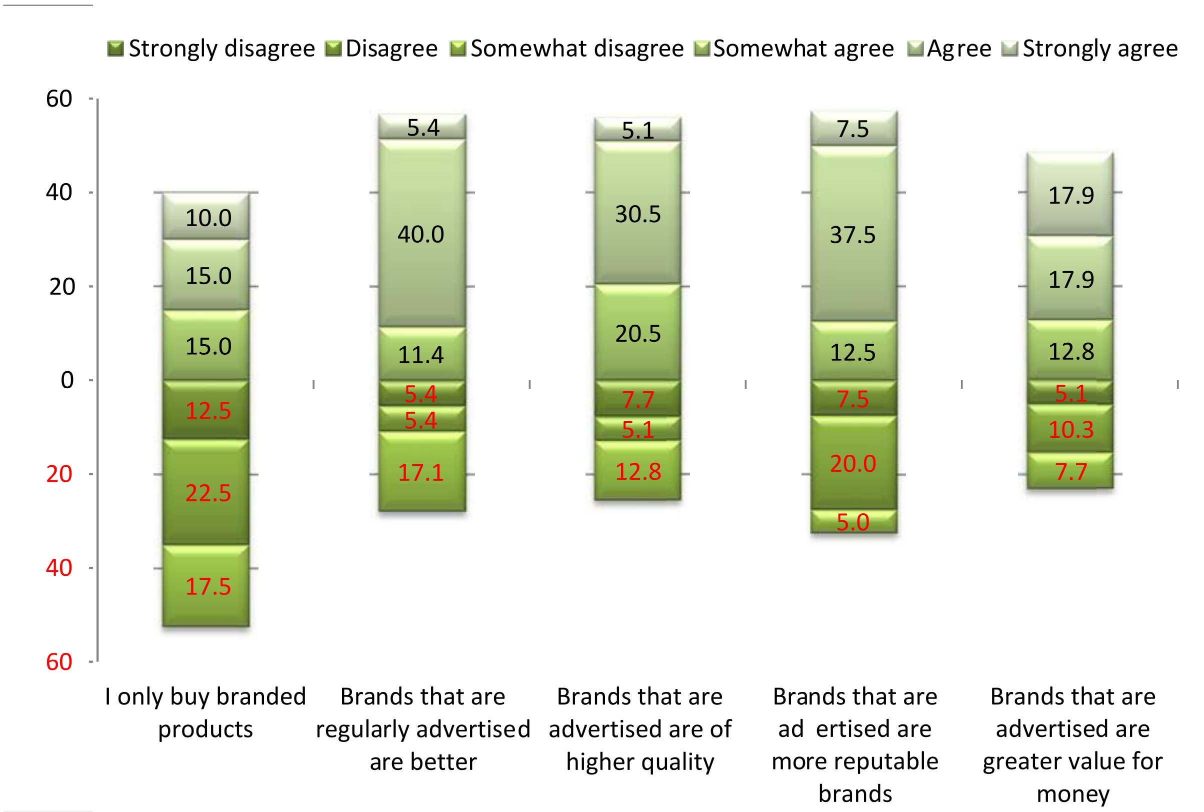
From table 2 it is clear that respondents leaned either positively or negatively in terms of agreement towards the statements that were posed, however it can be observed from the results presented that even though respondents indicated for statement 1.5 that the majority agreed to the statement “Brands that are advertised are greater value for money” many indicated that they were impartial to the statement being made (28.30%). In light of this result, future research could probe as to why many individuals are impartial as to whether or not advertised brands are greater in value or not. For the purpose of the study however, the degree of agreement and disagreement was key to the fulfilment of the research objective. Figure 1 below is a graphic representation as to the various percentages of agreement and disagreement respondents felt towards each statement that had been posed:

From figure 1 it can be seen that 52.5% of respondents disagreed with statement 1: “I only buy branded products”. This could be either due to the fact that consumers within township areas are still purchasing the majority of merchandise from spaza shops where products can sometimes be bought per item, for instance an apple, whereby apples in most retail outlets in malls are packaged and branded collectively. Another reason for this result could be that respondents do not associate no-name branded products or even store branded products as branded products, thereby misinterpreting the question. To alleviate such a misunderstanding a future researcher may perhaps provide a screening question to respondents to ascertain whether or not consumers understand the concept of a branded product or alternatively, provide consumers with a list of product categories whereby they could indicate which categories they purchase branded products in.

Statement 2 “Brands that are regularly advertised are better” showed high agreement from respondents (56.80%). This result could be due to the fact that through frequent and favourable advertisements, consumers gain more exposure to the brand and therefore consumers perceive the product to be better than products that are not advertised. Statement 3 yielded a relatively strong agreement to the statement that was posed “Brands that are advertised are of higher quality” with an agreement percentage of 56.10%. The result could be seen to confirm respondent’s agreeability to statement 2 “Brands that are regularly advertised are better”. With statement 4 “Brands that are advertised are more reputable brands” respondents showed the highest degree of agreeability in terms of percentile (57.50%), thereby once again confirmation as to statement 2 and 3 collectively.

Statement 5 “Brands that are advertised are greater value for money” proved to have the second lowest degree of agreement with 48.60% agreeing to the made statement. What is observable though is that 23.10% of respondents disagreed with this statement and 28.30% were impartial, which implies 51.40% of respondents showed no sign of agreeability. This could be due to the brand equity that

Figure 1: Consumer perception towards advertised retail branded products



branded products have attached to them - the more well known the brand the higher the brand equity, and therefore in many instances the branded product will be priced above that of a regular product which conducts the same function.

From the statements that were asked and the overall analysis thereof, it can be seen that the general perception consumers of Black urban areas hold towards that of advertised retail brands is positive in nature, thereby indicative that advertising plays an incredibly important role in the formation of consumers' perception towards branded products being offered on the market. This may suggest that in order for marketers to succeed in having consumers view their brand in a positive light, advertising of the brand to the target market should be matched to the environment they are positioning the brand to cater for. The following section addresses the demographic make-up of the respondents.

Demographic data of respondents having answered the questionnaire

The demographic data on township consumers' perceptions in the Tshwane area covered gender and age. Gender of respondents is therefore represented in figure 2 below:

Of the township consumers in the Tshwane area having participated in the research on consumer perceptions of advertised retail brands, it can be seen that 52% of respondents were female whereas the remainder 48% of respondents were male; this figure presented a relatively equal response from both genders and is in line with the national average. Once consumer gender had been asked the questionnaire requested to see what age group respondents fell into. Age range is represented in figure 3 below:

Figure 2: Gender distribution of respondents

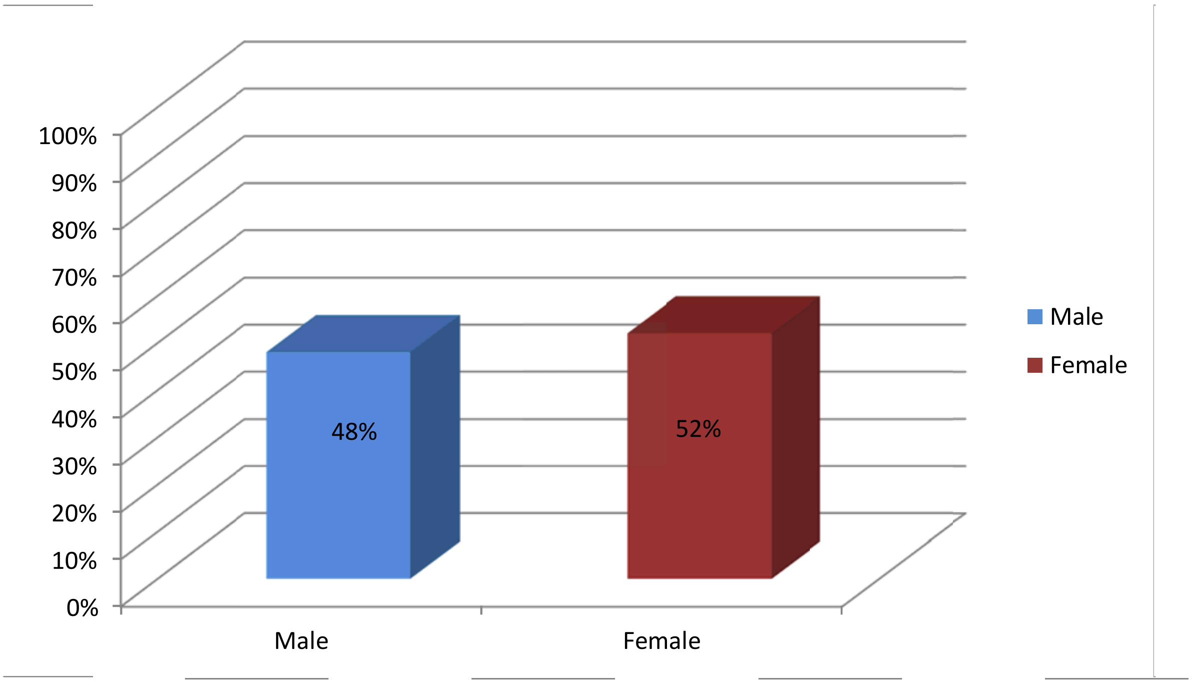
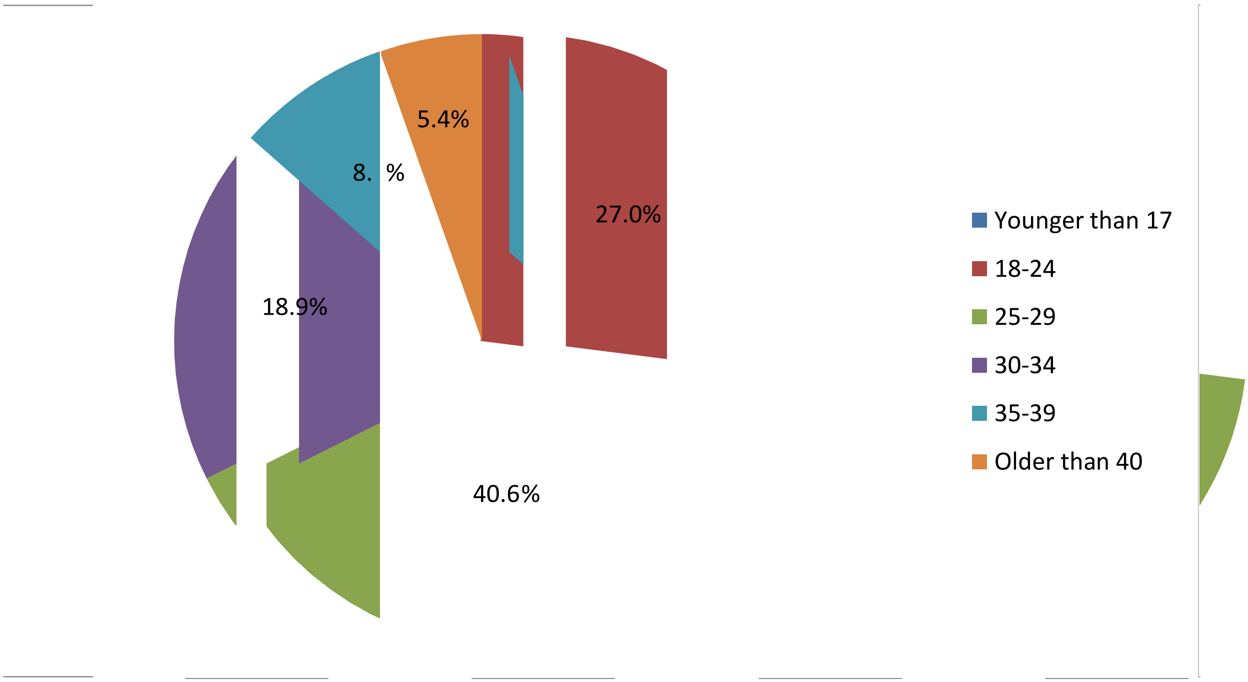


Figure 3: Age distribution of respondents



Of the township consumers in the Tshwane area having participated in the research on consumer perceptions of advertised retail brands, as per figure 3 above, the researcher found that 27% were aged between 18-24, 40.6% were aged between 25-29, 18.9% were aged between 20-34, 8.1% were aged between 35-39 and 5.4% were aged 40 years old and older. The distribution of age proved to be favourable to consumers ranging from 25 to 29 years of age, representing 40.6% of the respondent total. Therefore the positive perception that consumers have could thus be because this age group has in particular been more exposed to branded merchandise in their lifetime than say the generations ranging from

30 to 40 years of age. With enhanced usage of media usage and prevalence of brands in townships, consumers in this age group will most likely be more positive towards branded merchandise due to the enhanced exposure. This result might however be varied if age groups are targeted separately, whereby older respondents might perceive branded products in a negative light, due to their past experience or lack thereof. Therefore future research might wish to investigate perceptions held amongst various age groups.

LIMITATIONS

The research undertaken has some limitations that need to be addressed; firstly the sampling frame that was used was very small (n= 40), therefore due to the small sample size, consumer perceptions towards advertised retail branded products cannot be generalised to represent the entire township community of Tshwane, South Africa. Secondly, questionnaire respondents were selected through the use of a convenience sampling method; therefore once again, results received would not be able to be generalizable to the township communities of Tshwane, South Africa. Thirdly, respondents that answered the questionnaires came from three townships of Tshwane (Attridgeville, Mamelodi and Shoshanguve), whereas there are multiple other township area communities within the Tshwane region that were not approached to answer the questionnaire, and therefore perceptions are thus restricted to the three stated areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Apart from the limitations mentioned in the previous section, several opportunities for future research exist. Firstly, due to the immensity and importance of consumption patterns within township areas, future research could expand the study to include all township areas countrywide when deciding to supply surveys to respondents or alternatively covering all Tshwane township areas instead of a select few. Secondly, future research could conduct an analysis between older consumers' perceptions in relation to the younger consumer as well as male and female correlations in relation to brand perceptions.

CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this research was to explore the perceptions that township consumers have with regards to retail brands and the advertising thereof. The investigation into consumers' perceptions of branded merchandise within townships revealed that consumers generally have a positive perception towards advertised retail brands and branding, whereby consumers perceptions are highly influenced by the advertisements that marketers send out.

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