Developing a socioecological model for tweens' consumption of branded apparel

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ABSTRACT

Much of the research into children and their consumer behaviour has been predicated on theories of cognitive development. Developmental approaches have been criticised for focusing primarily on cognitive development and neglecting other factors that may significantly influence a child's consumption behaviour. This study proposes Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework for Human Development (1979) as an alternative method for understanding the environmental factors that influence tweens' consumer behaviour. Ecological models emphasize the social context of behaviour and seek to discover and understand the process and conditions that ultimately shape human behaviour. Theories of consumer culture and the sociology of consumption are largely silent when it comes to African children. The purpose of this study was to develop a socioecological model to understand tweens' consumer behaviour in the apparel industry. This was achieved by way of a convergent parallel mixed-method study which included 192 respondents and 60 focus group participants. The findings suggest that there are a myriad of environmental factors that influence branded apparel consumption in tweens. The results may assist marketers and practitioners alike to understand the South African tween consumer.

Keywords: ecological models, tweens, environmental factors, consumer culture, materialism, brands, apparel

Research on children and their consumer power has shown that these young consumers have more financial clout as their discretionary income and power to influence their parent's purchases have increased (Charry & Demoulin, 2014; Lopez & Rodriguez, 2018; Ellis & Maikoo, 2018). In South Africa, this spending power and influence was estimated at R112 billion per annum by the year 2016 (Duffett, 2016, cited in, Ellis & Maikoo, 2018:434). Consequently, for marketers, the child market is one that is so lucrative it cannot be ignored. Over the last three decades, the study of consumption and consumer culture has experienced significant growth and sustained interest (Burns & Fawcett, 2012; Gbadamosi, 2015). At the same time, academic interest into children as "social actors" has grown significantly due to the growth of the child consumer market (Cook, 2004; Morrow, 2011). However, despite this, theories of consumer culture and the sociology of consumption are largely silent when it comes to children, particularly in the African context.

If children are now active participants in contemporary consumer culture, then it is imperative to understand their consumption practices to situate them in theories of consumer culture. Children need to be made part of the epistemology of consumption by acknowledging them as socio-economic actors and significant objects for consumption (Cook, 2008:222). They must be brought into the theories of consumption not by merely appending them into existing

conceptions and theoretical ideologies but by recognising them as an important, independent consumer market. Children must be viewed as active constructors of their individual and social identities (Nain et al., 2008; Nain & Spotswood, 2015; Mingazova, 2018). As the interest in children and young consumers grows, there is concurrently a need to understand the contextual influences on the consumption practices of children. Additionally, there is a need to consider marketing's role in conjunction with other social and cultural influences in shaping the child consumer and how these influences contribute to how children understand and construct associated brand meanings (Watkins et al. 2016; Watkins et al. 2017; Mingazova, 2018).

Much of the research into children and their consumption behaviour has been predicated on child development theories. Based on Piaget's (1960) theory of cognitive development and in marketing expanded on by Belk et al. (1984) and Roedder-John (1999), these approaches have been criticised for focusing primarily on cognitive development and neglecting other factors that may significantly influence a child's consumption behaviour (Nairn et al. 2008; Vaisto, 2009; Nairn & Spotswood, 2015; Mingazova, 2018). Nairn et al. (2008) provide three motivations for research that broadens Piaget's framework. Firstly, Piaget's model focuses on chronological age while other pertinent influences such as socioeconomic class, gender, race and ethnicity, which may have significant influences, are forgotten. Secondly, since the approach is developmental, it takes on a primarily cognitive perspective and essentially ignores the "social dynamics of interpretation, emotion and peer group influence" (Nairn et al. 2008:629). Lastly, they argue that this approach sees child consumers as "frozen in time" and isolated from other influences of society and culture. For these reasons, the current study proposes the socioecological model as an alternative theory for understanding child consumers in South Africa.

Ecological models emphasise the social context of consumption and seek to discover and understand the process and conditions that ultimately shape human behaviour (Kilanowski 2017:295). Social context includes all aspects of the position that is occupied by a person in society including the specific levels of human interaction such as family, peers and the local community (Donald et al. 2014:2). Socio-ecological theories are predicated on the reality that the lives of children are influenced by wider legislation, theoretical and scholarly approaches, government policy and the people they interact with (Taylor et al. 2013:3). Attempting to understand the development of tween consumers from a socio-ecological standpoint means that issues within the home, family, community and the wider society must be taken into consideration.

The purpose of this study was to develop a socioecological model to understand tween consumer behaviour in the apparel industry. This paper responds to calls for more research perspectives in the African context with regards to marketing to children. The vast amount of literature on the consumption habits and patterns of children focuses primarily on American and European children with very little attention being placed on the African child (Delport, 2015; Ellis & Maikoo, 2018). The paper provides an overview of the socioecological model in light of child consumers. This is followed by a presentation of the research methodology, results and findings. Lastly, the paper offers a discussion of the implication of the research in light of the research objectives.
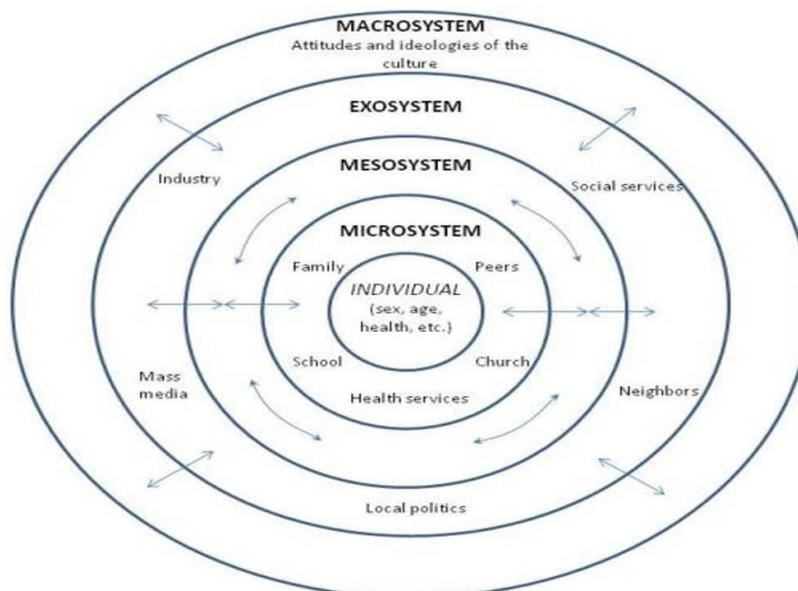
THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Socioecological models

The narrow scope of developmental psychology theories with regards to human development gave rise to the advancement of socio-ecological theories that sought to bridge a gap between behavioural theories that analyse small settings and anthropological theories that focus on larger settings (Piscopo, 2004; Donald et al. 2014). Socioecological theories posit that there are multiple levels of influence in human behaviour and, as a result, that behaviour both shapes and is shaped by the social environment (Kilanowsky, 2017; Caperon et al. 2019). Social context includes all aspects of the position that is occupied by a person in society including the specific levels of human interaction such as family, peers and the local community (Donald et al. 2014:2). Ecological theories are based on "the principle

of interdependence between a person and their physical environment" (Eloff & Swart, 2018:273). The fundamental assumption of ecological models is that all things in nature, and by extension, human interaction, are related to one another in a complex but systemic way.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework for Human Development

FIGURE 1
BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s as a conceptual model for understanding human behaviour, the socio-ecological model (SEM) was formalised as a theory in the 1980s (Kilanowski 2017:295). Bronfenbrenner argued that child development is embedded with multiple overarching systems which influence the child and are in turn influenced by the child (Woolfolk, 2007:73). According to this model, to gain an understanding of human development, the whole system in which the individual child grows must be considered. This holistic approach emphasizes the interconnectedness of all elements of human development (Donald et al. 2014:40). The model is concerned with how the individual interacts with the different elements of the environment in which he or she exists. The environment is any event or condition that exists outside of the person and either influences or is influenced by that person. Interaction, on the other hand, refers to the exchanges that are reciprocal in nature which take place between the person or persons and the objects and symbols present in their immediate environment. This model recognises the synergistic way in which the individual is the sum of all the parts of their environment (Eloff & Swart, 2018:273). As illustrated in figure 1, the basic premise of the model is that at the centre of the system is the individual who is then surrounded by various other systems.

Individual

At the core of this ecological model is the individual. This level includes all the interpersonal characteristics that may potentially influence consumer behaviour. At this level lies the personal factors that can influence a child's life (Donald et al. 2014:45). These factors include age, gender, personality traits, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, skills, cognitive development, resilience and any other factors that may influence their lives (Robinson 2008; Donald et al. 2014; Elderberry, 2016). At the individual level "social behaviour is explained in terms of internal dispositions, or processes, which include personality traits, emotions and cognitive mechanisms" (Swartz et al. 2008:305). With regards to relationships with brands at the individual level, previous studies have shown how chronological age affects brand meaning (Arnas et al. 2016), how gender influences materialistic values (Tifferet and Hersteinand,

2012), and how race and culture affect the development of consumer culture (Brusdal & Frones, 2014) which may, in turn, lead to the development of consumerist attitudes, such a deep desire for branded possessions.

Microsystems

The microsystem, otherwise known as the interpersonal level, includes all systems with which the child has close proximal interactions and contain the roles, relationships and activity patterns that essentially "shape many aspects of cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual development" (Donald et al. 2014:45). In this situational level, behaviour is a result of the interaction with other individuals or particular situational contexts (Swartz et al. 2008:305). This layer of the system is the closest to the child and represents the structures to which the child has the most direct contact such as family, friends, classmates, teachers and peers which provide support, social identity and role definition (Robinson, 2008:398). The microsystem is the core environment in which the child initially learns about life and learns how to live (Donald et al. 2014; Eloff & Swart, 2018). Research has shown that relationships at this level have the greatest influence on consumer behaviour of tweens (Kerrane et al. 2012; Hemar-Nicolas, 2015). For instance, the opinion of peers has been shown to have a marked influence on the desire of tweens to possess branded apparel. This is because peer pressure often fosters materialistic attitudes in children and leads to them wanting more and end up being discontent (Lenka & Vandana, 2015:870). The current study sought to understand which structures in the microsystem influence tween consumers.

Mesosystem

This system connects the various systems in which the child, parent and family live. It represents the connections and processes that exist between the two or more settings in which the developing child lives (Piscpo, 2004:44). It is a set of microsystems that are in continuous interaction with one another; therefore, mesosystems provide connections between the different structures of the child's microsystem (Donald et al., 2014:46). For example, the connections that exist between the child's parents and his teachers, the connections between the child's neighbourhood and the church are all parts of the mesosystem. Therefore, what happens at home and in the peer group may influence how the child reacts and responds at school, and vice versa. For example, in a study on the impact of consumer environments on the consumption patterns of children with regards to brands, Page and Ridgeway (2001) found that 'neighbourhood of origin' played a role in the consumer behaviour of adolescents, particularly with children from disparate socioeconomic backgrounds.

Exosystems

This system represents the environment or the greater social system where the child may not necessarily be a direct participant or does not directly function. Although the child may not be directly involved in this system, the exosystem may influence people who have proximal relationships with him or her in the mesosystem (Donald et al. 2014:46). This level contains "all the linkages and processes between two or more settings, one of which does not contain the child but in which events that occur in that environment will indirectly influence or impact the immediate settings in which the child lives" (Piscopo, 2004:44). The child may not be directly involved in this system but will feel the positive or negative forces that may result as an interaction with their own system. The main exosystems that influence the child include parent's workplace, social networks of the family, neighbourhood, local politics, mass media and industry (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986). For the current study, the exosystem of interest is the mass media. Previous studies with children have shown the influence of the media on brand knowledge (Dotson & Hyatt, 2000); brand consciousness (Nelson & McLeod, 2005) and brand consumption (Lenka & Vandana, 2015).

Macrosystems

The macrosystem includes dominant social and economic structures that consist of the cultural values, norms, beliefs, practices customs and laws of the society that influence all other social systems (Donald et al. 2014:46). It refers to the patterns of ideology and organisation of a society or social group and can be regarded as the "societal blueprint" for a given society. Macrosystems also include the cultural or social contexts of different social groups such as social class, ethnic grouping and religious affiliations (Robinson, 2008; Townsend & Foster, 2011). This is the outermost layer in the child's environment, which helps to hold together the various threads of the child's life. This system includes the belief systems, customs, material resources, bodies of knowledge, lifestyles, opportunity

structures and hazards that are embedded in the broader system (Piscopo, 2004:44). Essentially, this is the system that governs the what, how, where and when of human interactions. The current study sought to understand the influence of South African belief systems, customs and lifestyles on the consumption behaviour of tween consumers.

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

An analysis of the extant literature on tween consumers resulted in the development of two main objectives. The primary objective of the study was to develop a socioecological model for tweens consumption of branded apparel. This was motivated by an identified gap in literature whereby there are no models of this nature. This model is intended to contribute to the understanding of the tween consumer from an African perspective. The secondary objective was to profile the South African tween consumer based on consumer behaviour with regards to branded apparel. While there exists a vast amount of literature describing and defining tweens, much of it is based on western tweens, neglecting South African tweens. In addition, while the use of ecological models to understand human behaviour has been widely used in the health sciences, no studies were found by the author applying this model to consumer behaviour in the apparel industry with specific regard to child consumers, more especially in the African context. The scope of the study was limited to apparel consumption, particularly branded apparel as this was identified in the pilot study as the area in which pre-teens are most interested. The scope was also limited to tween consumers, aged 10-14 years. The two research question of the study were: 'what environmental factors influence South African tween consumer behaviour' and 'what is the impact of socio-cultural factors and socialisation agents on brand-related behaviours of South African tweens'.

The research focused on tweens for two reasons. Firstly, since the emergence of the "tween girl" and the related "feminine commercial persona", there has been a sharp focus on this potentially lucrative space between childhood and teenagehood (Cody, 2012:288). Tweens are targeted by marketers more than any other group because they have been said to have more purchasing power than other children of their age in any generation (Chan et al. 2011:67). However, in South Africa, this is still an under-researched group hence a need for empirical studies. Secondly, tweens are very appealing to marketers not only for their personal consumption but for the influence that they exert on their parents (Chan et al. 2011; Kerrane et al. 2012; Ellis & Maikoo, 2018). Given their level of influence, marketers and practitioners alike have a vested interest in understanding this cohort hence research in this regard is immensely valuable.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Given the scope and research objectives, the study employed a convergent parallel mixed-method research approach to allow for triangulation of the research data. In this type of design, when attempting to address the research questions, the researcher collects quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously to develop a complete understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Maree, 2016:318). The selection of this approach was motivated by a lack of empirical research and theoretical frameworks regarding tweens consumers and their engagements in consumer culture. Additionally, this approach was selected because it advocates for the collection of diverse but complementary data on the same phenomenon (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017:181).

Sampling and Data Collection

The target population for the study was primary school children aged between 10 and 14. These belong to the "tween" segment. This is an age-defined cohort whose concept is based on the idea that these children are "in be-tween childhood and adolescence (Chan et al. 2011:67). While the epistemology of the term indicates that it is short for the word 'tweenager', the age range itself has varied from 8 – 14 years [Lindstrom, 2004] to a limited 11 – 12 years [Dibley & Baker, 2001] (Lloyd-Parkes & Doherty, 2012:1). While the tween cohort has largely been defined to include both preteens and early teens, there have been ideological differences between scholars and authors concerning the age range. The respondents included tweens from the 4 main population groups in South Africa, namely Black,

White, Coloured and Indian. The respondents were sampled from primary schools in Gauteng using a non-probability convenience sampling approach. This sampling method was employed given that to access school children, at least 3 levels of gatekeeper consent needed to be acquired hence it was deemed most expedient. The research objectives and the shortcomings of this method were considered with respect to bias and generalisability (Hedt & Pagano, 2011; Leedy & Omrod, 2014).

The quantitative data were collected using self-completion questionnaires while the qualitative data were collected using focus groups. A total of 221 questionnaires were administered and 214 completed questionnaires were returned. Of these, 192 were included in the final analysis as some had to be discarded due to failure of the tweens to fill in the questionnaire appropriately. To determine the number and composition of focus groups that were necessary to yield meaningful results, Guest et al. (2017:18) determined that 80% of all themes were discoverable within two to three focus groups while 90% of all themes were discoverable within three to six. In light of this information, 6 focus groups were deemed to be sufficient to gather the insights needed to address the research questions. Each of the 6 focus groups was comprised of 10 respondents. With the exception of focus group 6, the focus groups were comprised of an equal number of boys and girls.

The measurement instrument consisted of four sections. Section A of the survey instrument (questionnaire) was designed to generate four (4) classes of demographic data, namely: age, gender, grade and race. An additional demographic variable, 'socioeconomic background' was included in the data set during the analysis. The researcher used the location of the school to determine the socio-economic level of each of the respondents.

Section B was concerned with the consumption symbolism that is engaged by the tweens. The research used the concept of cool vs uncool to determine how tweens use brands as consumption symbols. These questions required the tweens to describe their interactions with brands as well as those of their peers or people in their racial and social classes. The first 15 questions were measured on a Likert scale labelled from No, Not at all to Yes, Very much. Likert scale questions capture the intensity of the respondents' feelings on a statement based on the extent to which they agree or disagree (Burns et al. 2017:209). The rest of the questions included dichotomous, matching and multiple-choice questions.

Section C in the questionnaire focused on the consumer socialisation of the tweens. The main aim of this section was to identify the socialisation agents responsible for the development of tweens as consumers. The study also intended to understand if the tweens recognise the main influencers of their consumption patterns and behaviours. This section consisted of 9 open-ended questions and included four YES/NO dichotomous scale questions.

Section D enquired of the tweens concerning their usage of technology in relation to consumer behaviour, particularly with regard to social media. This was supplemented by the focus group questions that addressed the influence of celebrities and celeb culture. There were 7 questions relating to media usage. The first two were multiple-choice questions concerning the various media tools that the tweens use. The third question asked the tweens to name social media platforms that they used which not mentioned in the previous questions. The last four questions were YES/NO dichotomous questions regarding the use of social media and tweens' desire for possessions as seen on television or the internet.

The last section of the questionnaire included questions on materialism and material culture. The review of literature on the sociology of consumption in relation to consumer culture found that materialism is one of the key variables to be understood with regards to children as consumers, given that the tweens of the 21st century are growing up in the most consumption-centric generation of all time. The study sought to understand children's engagements with material culture and how this contributes to their social development as consumers. Some of the questions in this section were adapted from the materialism scale proposed by Richins & Dawson (1992). This section consisted of 8 Likert scale questions arranged from no, not at all to yes, very much and 15 YES/NO dichotomous questions.

The measurement instrument was pre-tested in a pilot study that included 20 respondents. The reliability for each of the sub-dimensions was calculated using Cronbach's coefficient alpha. The results ranged from 0.732 to 0.815, which were within the acceptable limits. A value above 0.8 is deemed good; a value between 0.6 and 0.8 is deemed acceptable, while a value below 0.6 is deemed unacceptable (Widd & Diggines, 2015:249). Data were analysed

using SPSS Statistics for both descriptive narration and inferential analysis.

The qualitative data were collected in the form of focus group discussions, which were recorded with an audio recorder. The purpose of the qualitative data was to gather insights that may have been missed in the quantitative data collection phase. The average duration of each focus groups was between 15 to 20 minutes. This is because children have limited attentional abilities (Issanchou, 2015:53). The moderator' guide with the focus group questions was comprised of 18 questions. The questions in the interview guide were framed to elicit responses from the tweens concerning their perceptions of (1) cool/uncool among their peers, (2) the biggest influences on their consumer behaviour (3) brand differences by race, gender and class (4) influence of celebrities on consumption behaviour and (5) the relationships that tweens have with brands. These discussions were later transcribed and Nvivo 12 Pro software was used in the coding and analysis of the data

RESULTS AND FINDINGS
Sample Profile

TABLE 1
PEARSON CHI-SQUARE TESTS

Questions	Age	Grade	Gender	Race	Class
"I prefer to wear the same brand of clothes as my friends."	-	-	-	-	0.030
"What my friends think about my clothes is important."	-	0.027	0.024	-	-
I buy the same type of sneakers/takkies as my classmates	-	-	-	-	0.019
I buy the same types of sneakers/takkies as people of my race	-	-	0.035	0.05	-
The type of clothes you wear show whether your family is rich or poor	-	0.033	-	-	-
Some brands make you look cooler than others	0.044	-	-	-	-
You can tell the kind of friends a person has by the kind of clothes they wear	-	-	-	0.001	-
I feel pressure from my friends to buy certain products	-	-	-	0.002	-
I enjoy the attention I get from my friends for having cool things	0.001	0.001	-	-	-
Do you ask for something that you see on tv?	0.048	-	-	-	-
Do you ask for things that you see on the internet	-	0.021	-	-	-
"Do you think it's important to own expensive clothes?"	-	0.035	0.002	-	-
"Does having a lot of money make you happy?"	-	-	0.005	-	-
"Do you feel unhappy if you don't get the things you really want to have?"	-	-	0.014	-	-
"Do you think other children like you more if you have many expensive things?"	-	-	0.011	-	-

The first demographic variable to be analysed was age. Age was a significant variable in this investigation because the study intended to focus on the tween cohort, not just children in general. The highest number of respondents (26%) came from both the 10 and 11-year-old age groups while the least (8%) was the 14-year-old group. 17% of the tweens were aged 12 while 23% were aged 13. The mean (M=2.602) indicated that the average age for the respondents was 12, which is acceptable for a study on the tween cohort. Grade was also used as a criterion to select age-appropriate respondents, with participants ranging from grades 4 to 8. The mean (M=2.98) and the mode (m=3) suggested that that the average grade was grade 6. A strong correlation between age and grade (p=0.000, r=0.839) indicated that by and large, children of the same age were primarily in the same grade; therefore, the use of the grade variable was appropriate.

Table 1 indicates the results of the Pearson Chi-Square Test for Significance. The results reveal a p-value of less than 0.05 for 7 of the 15 questions on the age or grade variable. This means that these demographic factors played a significant role in the manner that the tweens answered those specific questions. For instance, for the question "I enjoy the attention I get from my friends for having cool things" both age and grade played a significant role in the way the question was answered, with the younger tweens from the lowest grades most likely to answer in the affirmative than older tweens. This set of results, therefore, indicates that age played a role in the manner that the tweens responded to some of the questions.

On the gender demographic, the results revealed that at 64%, females far outnumbered the males (36%) and represented almost two-thirds of the sample. According to the most recent publication of statistics of learner enrolment in South African schools, there are gender disparities in favour of females for public and private schools combined in Gauteng (DoE, 2018:8). Gender was included as a demographic variable in the present study because gender differences in consumption are important in the study of consumer culture (Joy & Li, 2012:152). The Pearson Chi-Square Test for Significance in table 1 indicated that gender played a significant role in the manner that the tweens answered some of the questions, particularly with regards to the questions on materialism. For instance, the question "do you think it's important to own expensive clothes?" revealed a p-value of 0.002, meaning that gender played a significant role in the way the tweens responded to this question. The results revealed that boys were more likely to respond in the affirmative to this question. In a question regarding what is considered cool amongst boys and girls, brands were mentioned 135 times for boys and 82 times for girls while clothing was mentioned 118 times for girls and 53 times for boys. When mentioning what cool boys wear, both genders were more likely to mention a brand, e.g. Nike while for girls, both genders were more likely to mention an item of clothing, e.g. bum shorts and crop tops. These results suggest that there is more brand consciousness among boys than girls.

The 3rd demographic variable considered was race. Racial differences in consumption patterns have always been an important variable in the study of consumer culture (Charles et al. 2009:428). South Africa is characterised by differential access to resources on the basis of race hence this variable is essential in any study. The results indicated that a large majority of the respondents (72%) were Black. This was followed by 12% White, 10% Coloured and 6% Indian. The number of respondents from highest to lowest are consistent with the racial make-up of the South African population. According to the 2011 census, black people make up the majority of South African people at 79.2% followed by white (8.9%), coloured (8%) then Indian (2.5%). The researcher does not discount the fact that the racial make-up of the target population was likely influenced by the fact that the schools which consented to participate in the study were predominantly black.

To determine if the tweens perceived racial differences in consumer behaviour, they were first presented with the question "different races wear different clothes". An overwhelming majority of the respondents (87%) responded in the affirmative. When asked which racial group affords more expensive clothes, 57% of the tweens chose 'white'. To understand perceive differences of race in apparel consumption, the tweens were presented with 4 different sneaker brands and were asked to match the brand with the race that they believed is more likely to wear it. The results revealed that for all of the racial groups, there was one brand which was the most selected. This was particularly true for black (All-Star) and white (sketchers). While it was clear which brand the Black (78%) and White (67%) races wear, there were more similarities for Coloured (44%) and Indian (44%) people. This could be because the children perceive Indians and Coloureds to have similar tastes in clothes.

The last demographic considered was socioeconomic class. According to the Bureau of Market Research (BMR), there are 5 socioeconomic classes in South Africa. Upper middle class and emerging middle had the highest percentage at 23%. These were followed by lower middle class at 20% with lower emerging middle and second-lowest class both having 17%. This variable was included because when studying matters related to sociology and culture, one cannot neglect the relevance of socioeconomic background on issues of consumption. The Pearson Chi-Square test revealed that there were some differences in responses based on socioeconomic class on some of the questions. For instance, the question "I prefer to wear the same brand as my friends" revealed a p-value of 0.030, indicating that there were significant differences in the manner that children of different socioeconomic classes responded to this question.

During the focus group discussions, when asked if there were differences between the rich and the poor in terms of the brands purchased, 61 (95%) of the respondents responded in the affirmative while only 3 said no. The discussions further revealed that the tweens perceived differences in brand consumption between people from the township and people from the suburbs. Some of the tweens believed that people from the township like to show off their brands because "in the township, they like to show off because they want to show people that even if they live in the location but (sic) they are rich". In a study on the impact of the socioeconomic environment in consumption patterns in children, Page & Ridgeway (2001:34) found that a child's environment influences their consumer behaviour and that neighbourhood of origin played a role in the responses given by the study participants.

Factor Analysis for consumption symbolism and materialism

To determine whether the data on consumption symbolism was applicable for factor analysis, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO), Bartlett's test of Sphericity and the total variance explained measures were considered. The results revealed that the KMO indicated a value of 0.739, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (p<0.000) and the total variance explained was 57.46%, suggesting that factor analysis was appropriate. On the material culture items, the KMO indicated a value of 0.783, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant (p<0.000) and the total variance explained was 69.36%. Only those factors with an Eigenvalue of more than 1 were included.

On the consumption symbolism items, the first factor (Image) indicated the highest percentage of variance, accounting for 12.942 of the variance after rotation. It also yielded an initial eigenvalue of 1.941 after rotation. This factor describes how brands can influence the perception of others about you and how tweens sometimes want things just to fit in with others. The second factor (Social Image) had the highest number of correlated variables, whose factor loadings represented 12.753% of the variance. The rotated eigenvalue for this factor was 1.913. This factor
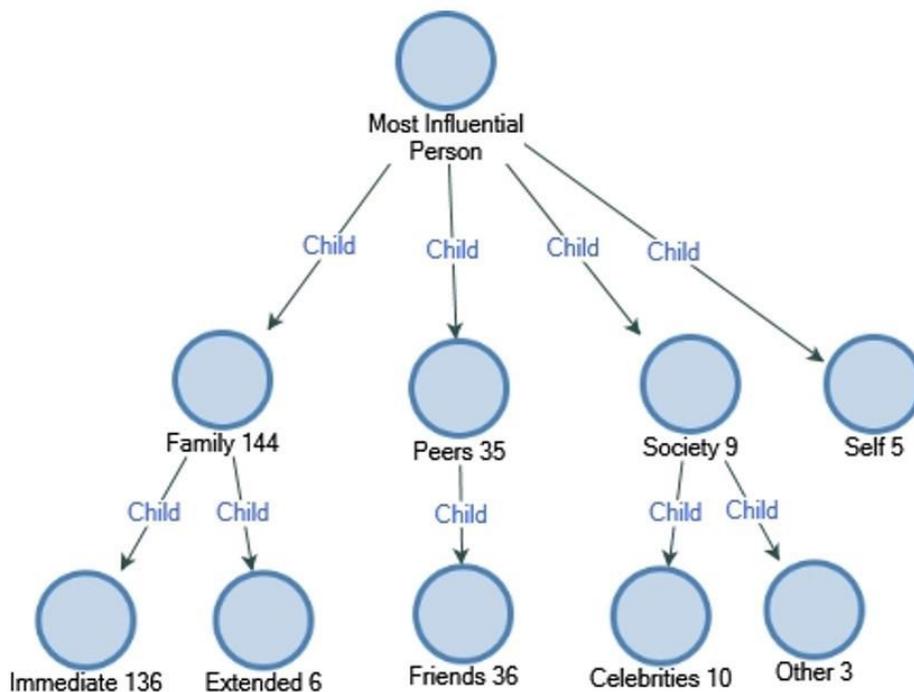
TABLE 2
EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS

	Descriptive Measures		Factor Loadings
	Mean (M)	Std Deviation	Item Loading
CONSUMPTION SYMBOLISM			
Image			
Some brands make you look cooler than others	3.05	.967	0.681
Some brands make you more popular than others	2.82	1.122	0.780
Sometimes you want something just because your friend has it	2.76	1.016	0.578
Social Image			
My clothes show people whether I am cool or not	2.89	1.060	0.656
The type of clothes you wear show whether your family is rich or poor	2.54	1.210	0.733
I prefer to wear the same brand of clothes as my friends	2.51	1.049	0.591
Affiliation			
What my friends think about my clothes is important	2.21	1.112	0.487
My friends help me choose which clothes to buy	2.65	.964	0.370
I buy the same type of sneakers/takkies as my classmates	2.90	1.016	0.688
I buy the same types of sneakers/takkies as people of my race	2.04	1.038	0.674
Identity			
I show people who I am by the kind of clothes I wear	2.33	1.132	0.729
People like to show who they are by the kind of clothes they wear	3.34	.829	0.769
Perception			
I have called someone not cool because of the clothes they wore	1.65	.964	0.515
You can tell the friends a person has by the kind of clothes they wear	3.32	1.012	0.721
What my parents think about my clothes is important	3.37	.917	0.515
MATERIAL CULTURE			
Materialism			
Do think it's important to own expensive things?	2.03	1.092	0.874
Do you think it's important to own expensive clothes?	2.27	1.15	0.867
Do you think it's important to own expensive brands?	2.31	1.076	0.868
Happiness			
Do you think it's really true that money can buy happiness?	2.13	1.191	0.774
Do you believe that people are much happier if they can buy a lot of things?	2.72	1.146	0.773
My friends like me because I have cool clothes.	2.00	1.107	0.511
Envy			
I want to have things that other kids have.	2.15	.987	0.859
I often compare my clothes/things with those of my friends.	2.28	1.104	0.806

describes the way that brands are used to communicate something about someone's status and image. The third factor (Social Affiliation) accounted for 11.989% of the variance. The rotated eigenvalue for this factor was 1.798. This factor describes the influence of reference groups on the types of apparel that the tweens purchase. The fourth factor (Identity) The fourth factor accounted for 10.932% of the variance with the eigenvalue of 1.640 after rotation. This factor describes how clothes and by extension brands, are used to show others who one is and also how others can tell who you are from the clothes that you wear. The fifth factor (Perception) accounted for 8.852% of the variance and had an eigenvalue of 1.328 after rotation. While the previous factor looked at how tweens use their clothes to express something about themselves, this factor looked at the perceptions of tweens on how others use brands to express something about themselves.

On the materialism items, the first factor (Materialism) indicated the highest percentage of variance, accounting for 40.258% of the variance. The eigenvalue was 3.221. This factor describes the importance that the tweens place on the possession of material things. The second factor (Envy) accounted for 16.491% of the total variance, with an eigenvalue of 1.565 after rotation. This factor describes the desire to own the same possessions that other children own and how children can compare their possessions with those of other children. The last factor (Happiness) accounted for 12.614 % of the variance with an eigenvalue of 1.562 after rotation. This factor tested the extent to which the tweens believe that material wealth can lead to happiness.

An open-ended question was presented to the tweens to determine who the most influential person in their consumer behaviour is. Figure 2 below indicates the most frequently mentioned influences. The word "child" in the model below does not constitute any significant information in the data but is an NVivo generated label for sources of data flow. The parent node is the main container of information for topics or themes on a particular question. Coding references are aggregated from the child nodes. Opening the parent node reveals the information directly coded to it and the information coded at the first-level child nodes. Mother was the most mentioned response with 98 (49%), which represents almost half the respondents. The second most mentioned was friends, with 36 (18%) of the tweens stating that their friends have the most influence on the things they buy. Father (13), parents (10), celebrities (10) sister (8) and brothers (6) were the other influencers mentioned by more than 5 respondents. The rest of the other influencers including extended family members like aunt, uncle and cousin; specific celebrities like Chris Brown, Justin Bieber and Nadia Nakai and other influences such as the internet, strangers and God.

FIGURE 2
MOST INFLUENTIAL PERSON

For the quantitative items not included in the factor analysis, most of which included open-ended, dichotomous scale and matching questions as well as the qualitative responses from the focus group interviews, the table below presents a summary of all the influences identified. The qualitative data coded in Nvivo and the quantitative data from SPSS was triangulated and the themes in the table below were identified. The items included questions related to the concepts of cool vs uncool, race, society and media usage.

TABLE 3
SUMMARY OF INFLUENCE FACTORS AT EACH LEVEL

Individual	Microsystem	Mesosystem	Exosystem	Macrosystem
Age	What family thinks	Relationships with	Extended family	Societal attitudes towards
Gender	What friends think	neighbours	Family friends	material possessions
Race	Peer relations	Neighbourhood	Relationships between	Cultural values and beliefs
Access to and use of media	Family structure	religious values	parents and community	Racial attitudes on
platforms	Socioeconomic status	Neighbourhood	Relationships between	materialism
Values and beliefs	Family attitudes on material	socioeconomic conditions	parents and teachers	Technology
Consumer behaviour	wealth	Neighbourhood brand	Mass media	Global brand advertising and
Brand preferences	Family lifestyle Teachers	behaviours	Celebrities	marketing
Perceptions of cool vs uncool	Classmate relations	Neighbourhood material		Country socioeconomic
	School location	values		conditions
	School type	Neighbourhood perceptions		
	Socioeconomic status of	of cool vs uncool		
	school			
	Prevailing attitudes on			
	material wealth			
	Brand related behaviours			
	Perceptions of cool vs uncool			

DISCUSSION

From the empirical study, it was determined that children's consumption choices are affected at all levels of influence. The results revealed that at the individual level, age, race, gender and socioeconomic status were all influential. With regards to age, the results indicated that the older the child, the more likely he or she will desire branded apparel. On the gender demographic, the results revealed that boys are more brand conscious and materialistic than girls. Other researchers have found gender differences in the consumption and perceptions of brands with the nature of brands being seen as deeply gendered. (Chan, 2003; Goldberg et al., 2003; Nain et al. 2008; Handa and Khare, 2013). Racial differences in consumption were evident as 87% of the tweens indicated racial differences in consumer behaviour and when asked, allocated brand preferences on the basis of race. On psychographic and behaviouristic terms, the study revealed that media usage patterns, personal values and beliefs, consumer behaviour brand preferences and personal perceptions of what is cool or not were the most influential.

The next level of influence assessed was the microsystem (intrapersonal level). The study discovered that socialisation agents at this level were the most influential when it comes to tween's consumer behaviour. The results indicated that families and peers were the most influential, with the opinion of immediate family members being most valued. Mother was found to be the most influential figure across all ages. Socialisation theories state that in early childhood, parents are the principal socialisation agents for children (Lawlor & Prothero, 2011; De Witt, 2016). This is because, at this stage, there are more contacts with family members than any other people, and these contacts are closer, warmer and more emotional (De Witt, 2016:32). The socioeconomic status, lifestyle and attitudes towards materialism in the family were factors that were also found to be influential. While peers were the 2nd most cited influencers, when the influence of parents vs peers was compared, 83% of the children said that the opinion of their parents matters while only 39% said the opinion of their friends matters. Classmates, teachers and school

environment were found to play a role in tweens brand preferences. Prevailing attitudes towards brands and the desire to portray a certain image at school were found to be motivators for brand preferences.

In the mesosystem, the neighbourhood in which the tweens resides was found to play the most significant role in their attitudes and behaviours towards brands. Relationships with neighbours, religious values, socioeconomic conditions, brand-related behaviours, material values, and perceptions of cool vs uncool in the neighbourhood influenced tweens brand preferences. For instance, the focus group discussions revealed that children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are most likely to engage in conspicuous consumption. Some of the tweens believed that people from the "township like to show off their brands because they want to show people that even if they live in the location but (sic) they are rich". These results were consistent with Piacentini and Mailer (2004:260) who also found that children from lower economic backgrounds use brands to demonstrate their 'economic competence' and to demonstrate that they are not poor. In addition, they found that children from poor schools were more brand name obsessed while children from private schools expressed distaste for heavily branded clothes.
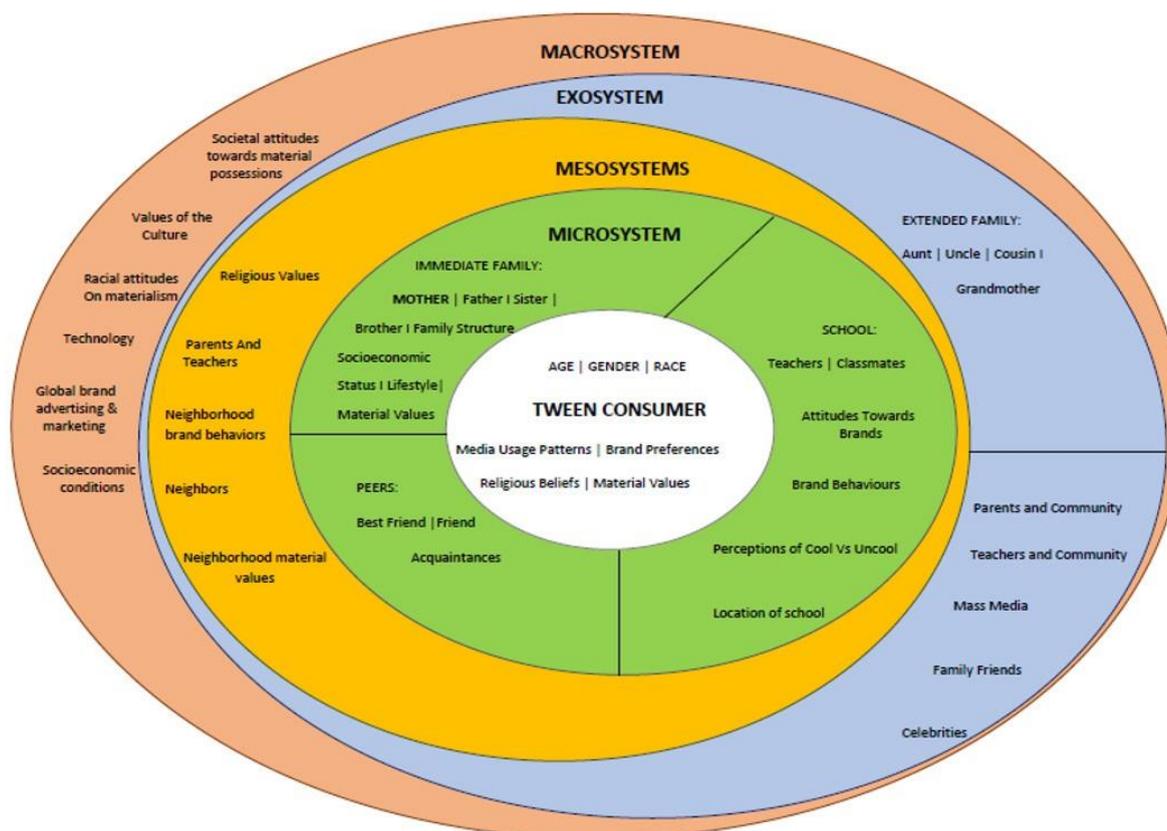
At the fourth level, which is the exosystem, the results revealed that extended family, family friends, relationships between parents and community, relationships between parents and teachers, the mass media and celebrities were the most influential. Of these, the mass media and celebrities were found to play a significant role in the style and apparel choices of the tweens. The findings revealed that 89% of the participants said that celebrities have an influence on their style. In this category, the pattern that emerged was that American celebrities were the most frequently mentioned. Celebrities "represent an idealisation of the life that most people imagine that they would love to live" (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007:321). Goldberg et al. (2003:284) found that tweens are more likely to purchase something once they see someone famous speaking about it on television. Children are therefore heavily exposed to commercials and advertisements which often generate an unreasonable urge to consume (Lenka & Vandana, 2015:870). Closely related to celebrities was the influence of the mass media. Traditional media tools were found to be the most influential, with 68% of the respondents stating that they asked for things that they see on television. With regards to new media tools such as the internet and social media, less than half the respondents stated that they used them to as sources of information for brand-related decisions. These results are contrary to studies that have been carried out in the west that show that the media consumption of tweens is highly mobile (Lehman, 2018; Friedman, 2019; Jones & Glynn, 2019).

In the macrosystem, the factors that were found to likely be influential were societal attitudes towards material possessions, cultural values and beliefs, racial attitudes on materialism, technology, global brand advertising and marketing and the socioeconomic conditions of the country. With regards to materialistic values, when asked if they believed that money buys happiness or if they believed that people with more money are happier, only 39% of the tweens responded in the affirmative. However, other responses concerning brand consumption and material values revealed that they held materialistic values. This indicates that materialism is something that tweens understand is shunned in society, even though they may privately hold materialistic values. With regards to race, the tweens indicated that there were significant differences in consumer behaviour based on race, with black people being cited as being the most brand conscious. Access to and availability (or lack thereof) of technology seemed to influence consumer behaviour. Given that a significant number of the tweens stated that they do not have access to social media, it can be suggested that they do not have access to it as they do not have the technology. Based on the results and discussion above, the study proposes the socioecological model depicted in Figure 3.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends the socioecological model depicted above as a tool practitioners can use to identify the different factors which influence South African tweens consumption of apparel and clothing brands. At the centre of the model is the tween consumer where individual characteristics like race, age and gender, as well as mental and behavioural characteristics or processes that influence consumption of clothing brands and apparel. These

FIGURE 3
A SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL MODEL FOR TWEENS' CONSUMPTION OF APPAREL

behavioural patterns include media usage patterns, brand preferences, religious values and values on materialism. The results of the study indicated that the nature of brand relationships is deeply gendered. Boys reported more brand conscious attitudes, while girls revealed that the aesthetic created by specific clothing is what matters. Apparel marketing communications targeted at boys must focus on highlighting the brand itself while communications targeted at girls must highlight the visual appeal that the apparel will provide.

In the microsystem, which is the intrapersonal level, the findings indicated that immediate family members, particularly mothers are the most influential followed by peers, teachers and classmates. The results indicated that while the interactions within diverse socialisation spheres may be complex and varied, mothers are still the primary socialisation agents for South African tweens. The results showed that they are the most frequently consulted for purchase decisions; they primarily make purchases on behalf of the tweens and are trusted by tweens the most when it comes to style choices. Given that the literature survey revealed that marketing to children is still a contentious issue with marketing theorists and marketing practitioners, marketing communications on brands targeted at tweens can rather be directed at mothers.

In the mesosystem, the factors identified as being relevant were religious values, the interaction between parents and teachers, attitudes and behaviours concerning brands in the neighbourhood and materialistic values in the neighbourhood. The exosystem revealed two major subsystems, the role of extended family members and wider community factors. Wider community factors included the role of the mass media, family friends and celebrities. The role of the mass media and celebrities were the most prevalent here with children stating that they have asked for brands and other possessions that they see on TV and on the internet. The findings reveal that much of the brand interactions the surveyed tweens have come from television. Marketers seeking to capture this target audience should use television as the primary tool for communicating their brand messages to tweens. In the macrosystem, the factors identified as influencing the tweens' brand behaviours included societal attitudes towards material

possessions, values of the culture, racial attitudes on brands and material values, technology, global brand marketing and advertising and the socioeconomic conditions of society. This study argues that the insight of marketers into this segment can be enhanced if marketers can recognise tweens as social actors in their own right within consumer culture while considering the social and cultural contexts in which tweens engage with brands and consumer goods.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study support the arguments put forth by Martens et al. (2004) and Nain et al. (2008) that to understand children's relationships with brands, scholars and researchers must advance from developmental approaches and adopt approaches which conceive children as autonomous beings. The study revealed that there are multiple levels of influence that affect tween consumption of branded apparel. From the results of the empirical investigation and the literature survey, this study proposes a socio-ecological model for tweens' consumption of apparel brands. It is a socio-ecological model because it takes into account the various elements of the environment with which the tween interacts in his or her development as a consumer. The results of this study, therefore, provide useful information to marketers on how to best communicate with tween consumers.

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