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## **The Effect of Buyer's Remorse on Consumer's Repeat-Purchase Intention: Experiences of Generation Y Apparel Student Consumers within the Vaal Triangle**

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### **Abstract**

Repeat purchasing is critical as well as imperative for the survival and success of any retail outlet. This study complements the growing body of literature by having a critical analysis of buyer's remorse and its effect on the consumer's repeat-purchase intention of Generation Y apparel student consumers within the Vaal Triangle. In order to solicit information from participants an exploratory qualitative approach was adopted using semi-structured personal interviews and focus groups. The results reviewed that when Generation Y student consumers experience remorse after buying apparel products, they will no longer have the intention to buy the products again. Recommendations were made for fashion retailers, sales persons and marketers on how to mitigate buyer's remorse in order to retain Generation Y student consumers. Lastly future research directions were clearly enunciated.

**Keywords:** Buyer's remorse, repeat purchase intention, Generation Y, Apparel

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In today's customer-oriented era, the retail sector is tremendously becoming competitive as time passes, with consumers frequently changing their preferences and tastes. According to Musasa (2014) customers have now become more sophisticated, their demands and expectations are increasing as well. Retailers should aim at providing top class customer service to gain competitive advantage and retain customers (Levy & Weitz, 2012). However, it is imperative for retailers as well as marketers to comprehensive study the repeat purchase intention of consumers in order to segment and retain customers. Loyal customers are valuable to a business (Ciciretti, Hasan & Zazzara, 2009; Bhatti, Skinkle & Spalding, 2001). Therefore, from the authors' elucidations it can be noted that maintaining loyalty should be the main objective for businesses and apparel retail outlets can meritoriously rise profits and reduce costs as long as they can successfully keep customers and induce their repeat-purchase intentions. Despite this, buyer's remorse is a factor that has an effect on consumer's repeat-purchase intention. Huff (2008) explains that, in order to bypass remorse, a consumer does a lot of research before entering the market for bargains and if buyer's remorse is present, then the value of the bargain drops dramatically and in some cases may not even be a bargain anymore. Nevertheless, because of little research that has been conducted to understand the concept of buyer's remorse from a consumer perspective, the purpose of the present study is aimed at comprehensively understanding the experiences Generation Y student consumers with regards to buyer's remorse. Moreover, this study will add a new dimension and a significant contribution to the limited body of available literature on the concept of buyer's remorse as experienced by Generation Y apparel student consumers within the Vaal Triangle of South Africa.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

North, Devos and Kotze (2003) points out that fashion consumers are continuously involved in the

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buying process of fashion apparel and retailers as well as marketers are constantly facing challenges to determine and fulfill the needs of consumers and to find methods to meet these needs as competently as possible. Buyer’s remorse can be a factor that can confront retail businesses from successfully maintaining their market share. Everyone experiences buyer’s remorse, to some degree, with every single purchase and buyer’s remorse often results in returns or cancellation of purchases (Friedman, 2012). Therefore, it is critical for organizations to have a deep understanding of buyer’s remorse as it has effect on consumer repurchase behaviour. Customer repeat-purchase intention is critical to store profitability and customer retention (Kuo, Hu & Yang, 2013; Oliver, Rust & Varki, 1997). For instance, Reichheld and Sasser (1990) pointed out that a 5 percent improvement in customer retention can increase profits by 25-85 percent, and the cost of attracting a new customer is about five times that of retaining an old one.

Such an investigation is important and is likely to contribute significantly to both the academic field and to marketers. Hence, this study could offer managers with the essential data on where their marketing focus should be and what is imperative for each segment of consumers.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this study is to achieve the following:

- To document experiences of Generation Y apparel student consumers in Vaal triangle so that appropriate action may be taken by retailers to ameliorate Buyer’s remorse
- To make recommendations to fashion retailers, sales persons and marketers.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to present a well-rounded picture in relation with the title of the study, this study is going to review literature on buyer’s remorse, re-purchase intention and generation Y consumers.

#### **Buyer’s Remorse**

The notion of regret is expressed in customers by what marketers call buyer’s remorse. According to Hoff (2008) if consumer satisfaction is not met then the consumer has buyer’s remorse. A remorse is a feeling we have that we have done something wrong (Berger, 2005). Irfan (2014) is of the view that regret is also known as “buyer remorse” in the literature and can be defined as a comparison to “what might have been right”. Friedman (2012) explains that buyer’s remorse is the bitter regret or guilt over a purchase. Buyer’s remorse can also manifest itself in consumers when they make a decision and then regret making that decision after the fact (Kros & Brown, 2012). Jayagopal (2007) asserts that buyer’s remorse is the extreme feeling of paranoia, guilt or uncertainty that occurs after you have bought something rather impulsively. Actually, people often feel buyer’s remorse even when they have done a fair amount of research and the purchase is a planned event (Jayagopal, 2007).

From the author’s elucidations on the concept of buyer’s remorse it that be seen that buyer’s remorse is the sense of regret after having made a purchase, for example a Generation Y student consumer can purchase an apparel product and later on he or she may feel unsatisfied about the purchase or may begin to wonder whether he or she would have waited to get a better price, purchased something else, or gathered more information first.

#### **Repeat-Purchase Intention**

Lin and Liang (2011) define repeat-purchase intention as “the degree to which customers are willing to purchase the same product or service and it is a simple, objective, and observable predictor of future buying behavior”. Consumer repeat-purchase intention is important to company’s profitability (Jones and Sasser, 1995). Repeat customers are the core source of profit for any business in the world (Gupta & Kim, 2007). For that reason, strategies to attract consumer’s repeat purchase has become an imperative concern for any organization (Qureshi, Fang, Ramsey, McCole, Ibbotson & Compeau, 2009). According to Lien *et al.* (2011) behaviour intentions have an indicative value. They assist management of organizations to know whether their customers intend to switch to competitors or not. Lam, Shanker, Erramilli and Murthy (2004) points out that repeat-purchase intention can be regarded as an indicator of loyalty. Likewise, consumers who are happy with the products they bought are

likely to be loyal to that particular product or brand. According to Bansal, Irving & Taylor (2008) consumers intentions to re-purchase a product or brand strictly depends on the evaluation of the of their prior purchase experience. However, when consumers evaluate their prior purchase experiences, they generally consider aspects such as product performance, service quality and price (Olaru, Purchase & Peterson, 2008). After the evaluation of the previous purchase experience, consumers who are satisfied with the previous purchase are likely to return for repeat purchases (Hamadi, 2010).

### **Generation Y**

In marketing terms, the youth market of the twenty-first century is regarded as Generation Y. Markert (2004) identifies the Generation Y market as comprising individuals born between 1986 and 2005. Generation Y can be further divided into three sub-segments, namely: adults of 18 to 27 years old, teenagers of 13 to 17 years old and children of 8 to 12 years old (Martin & Turley, 2004). Some Generation Y individuals are employed, while others are still at school, Further Education and Training (FET) colleges and universities (Martin & Turley, 2004).

Individuals categorised as Generation Y are very active in the marketplace (Noble, Haytko & Phillips, 2009). According to Müller, Bevan-Dye & Viljoen (2014) South African students spend over R39, 5 billion per year, which amounts to about R 3 510 per student per month and generation Y students spend more money than companies realize. These consumers may spend an average of R200 on every shopping trip and influence between R7 billion to R9 billion in families purchasing expenditure per annum, with the wealthiest members between the ages of 19-24 years old (Stephens, Lathrop & Bradish, 2005; Martin & Turley, 2004).

Shim, Serido and Barber (2010) report that marketers are striving to discover ways of appealing to this prominent group in today’s economy. It is clear that Generation Y consumers are significant role-players in the marketplace and that understanding the consumer behaviour of the student portion of this cohort may be especially valuable given their likely future income and social standing (Bevan-Dye, 2013).

### **FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE**

Based on the literature review it can be noted that buyer's remorse is a feeling of regret and concern after a customer has made a purchase. Individuals who experienced buyer’s remorse after purchasing a particular brand are less likely to purchase it again. However, the literature also shows that consumer repeat-purchase intention is important to company’s profitability. Repeat purchase intention is an indicator whether the customers intend to switch to competitors or not. Literature review also revealed that generation Y consumers are very active in the marketplace and it is imperative for retailers and marketers to find ways to appeal to this important segment in today’s economy.

### **TARGET POPULATION**

Target population is defined as the aggregate of all the elements that share some common set of characteristics that comprise the universe for the purpose of the marketing research problem (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). According to Malhotra (2005) a target population as a collection of homogeneous elements or objects that possess the information sought by the researcher and about which inferences are to be made. This study drew a sample of undergraduate generation Y student consumers between the ages of 18-24 years. For the purpose of this study two Higher Education Institutions located in the Vaal Triangle namely Vaal University of Technology (VUT) a University of Technology and the Sedibeng College which is a college for Further Education and Training (FET).

### **METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative methodology was utilized to conduct this study. Qualitative research is a paradigm that seeks to discover the meanings that participants attach to their behaviour, how they interpret, and what their perspectives are on particular issues (Woods 2006). The chosen method was considered the best because it offers researchers with the opportunity to ask more questions when necessary, thereby enabling them to gather a detailed and quality data. This is true, because the method enabled the researchers to ask the participants more questions when they needed more information from them.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups are the research instruments that were used to conduct this study.

### **Semi Structured Personal Interviews**

In this study, primary data was collected by employing the semi-structured interview method. The researchers had (conducted preliminary studies) by searching through literature to become more knowledgeable in the concept of Buyer’s remorse. This phase allowed the researchers the opportunity to compare literature findings with the real-life situation. According to Pathak and Intrata (2012) in a semi-structured interview, the researcher asks a series of open-ended questions, with accompanying queries that probe for more detailed and contextual data. Respondents’ answers provide rich, in-depth information that helps us to understand the unique as well as shared circumstances in which they live, and meanings attributed to their experiences (Pathak & Intrata, 2012). Hove and Anda (2005) indicated that such interviews combine particular questions (to get forth the foreknown information), and open-ended questions (to provoke unanticipated types of information). Furthermore, the semi-structured format also permits and encourages the investigator to interject with added questions as appropriate. In order to increase the reliability of the answers all the interviews were recorded, where possible, on a digital voice recording device, except for 5 respondents who declined to be recorded. However, all the answers given by the interviewees were carefully noted on a hard-copy. The notes proved helpful for the purpose of clarity during the transcription process, also done by the researchers to ensure immersion as well as accuracy of data. Semi -structured interviews of about 10 minutes each were conducted on a one-to-one basis. Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted at the Vaal University of Technology and also thirty semi structured interviews were conducted at the Sedibeng FET College. A total of (60) interviews were conducted and the researchers felt it was enough but needed to further corroborate the findings with the data from focus groups.

### **Focus Groups**

The study conducted 6 focus groups, three at the Vaal University of Technology and the other three at the Sedibeng FET College. Each focus group had 8 Generation Y apparel student consumers. Bryman (2004) and Cooper and Schindler (2011) defined a focus group as an interview conducted by a trained interviewer among a small group of respondents and questions are asked in an interactive group setting where participants are free to give views from any aspect and talk with each other. Focus group allows interviewers to study people in a more natural conversation pattern than typically occurs in a one to one interview (Chinomona, Maziriri & Moloji 2014). Focus groups can be utilized to acquire information concerning to how individuals think and to describe insights of an event, idea or experience (Morgan 1997). This technique was utilized to elicit the experiences of Generation Y student consumers with regards to buyer’s remorse when purchasing apparel products.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results revealed that buyer’s remorse has got effects on the repeat purchase intention of Generation Y apparel student consumers. Most students indicated that when they experience a sense of regret after making a purchase they do not intend to re-purchase the same product again. This is because they will be scared to experience the same feeling again and they do not want to waste their money on a product which will not meet their needs and would make them not to be satisfied. Of the interviewed participants only a limited number of students indicated that they would opt to repurchase the very same product that made them to experience buyer’s remorse. On the other hand, some of the students explained that if their needs are met or exceeded about an apparel product they have purchased they will resist the activities of other retail outlets attempting to attract their patronage. Additionally, they also expressed that when the delivery and experience of the product was great, they are ecstatic with their purchase, they will proactively talk about the experience and influence their peers to purchase the very same product.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is vital for marketers to take into consideration how customers react when they have experienced buyer’s remorse. The existing spate of literature proves beyond reasonable doubt that there is need to instill strategies of how retail managers and marketers can reduce buyer’s remorse. Alleviation

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strategies can be introduced by marketers in order to lessen buyer’s remorse and induce repeat purchasing behaviour which leads to customers being loyal. There are many ways in which sales persons can reduce buyer’s remorse. Hopkins, Zeller and Roberts (2012) explains that by asking the buyers to tell you now if they are a little dubious, you can take the opportunity to resell value and recap the benefits of owning your product. Use this close and you will reduce the number of lost sales caused by buyer’s remorse (Hopkins, Zeller & Roberts 2012). Whatever you do, do not argue about the sale, instead help the buyer to understand that buyer’s remorse is a common malady when purchasing items for the first time and the best method of handling buyer’s remorse is to pleasantly help the buyer review the problem and solution- to summarize the sales call (Ramsey 2009).

Fashion retailers together with marketers can foster greater involvement with apparel products, as the consumers obtains all information regarding apparel products. This, in return reduces buyers’ remorse since the consumer will be perfectly well informed about the product. According to Halepete (2006) In-depth information, as a result of high involvement, functions to reduce risk and uncertainty. Consumers with a high level of apparel involvement are likely to wear innovative and trendy clothing, and are risk takers (Halepete, 2006). Therefore, it can be noted that if Generation Y students are highly involved with various fashion brands they will result to have greater knowledge of fashion brands and their confidence in the selection of apparel products will be increased which leads to less consumers experiencing buyer’s remorse.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Besides providing some fruitful insights, certain limitations need to be considered in this study. First and most significantly, the present research is conducted from them generation Y student consumers in the Vaal Triangle of South Africa. Perhaps if data gathering is extended to take account of other regions and provinces of South Africa, findings might be more insightful. Future studies should therefore consider this recommended research direction because the results of this study were limited as the study was conducted for a specific segment (Generation Y student consumers). There is also the problem of common method bias because qualitative research was purely used in this study. The descriptive nature of qualitative research has a bearing in that the biases, values, and judgment of the researcher become stated explicitly in the research report (Cresswell, 1994). In other words, the researcher explains and interprets the results on the basis of what he or she has observed and uses this information to qualify and elucidate his or her point of view. It was going to be more robust if the study included both qualitative and quantitative methods. All these proposed future opportunities of this study stand to greatly add new data to the existing body of retail and marketing literature.

### **CONCLUSION**

In a nut-shell, this study makes a significant contribution to the retail and marketing literature by systematically exploring the effect of buyer’s remorse in the context of Generation Y student consumers within in the Vaal Triangle of South Africa. In this study the key words has been well introduced, key questions and objectives of the study have been identified, a literature review has been conducted to have an overview or to gain a depth understanding of the concepts like buyer’s remorse, repeat purchase intention and generation Y consumers. A qualitative methodology was utilised with the use of semi structured personal interviews and focus groups. The results revealed that has an effect on the repeat purchase intention of the students within the two selected institutions. Recommendations to marketers and retailers were outlined. Lastly, this paper expands understanding of the consumer buying behavior related to the Vaal Triangle environment which is located within the Gauteng Province of South Africa and highlights the buyer’s remorse factor that highly influence consumer’s repeat purchase intention of apparel products.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The researchers acknowledge all research participants (Vaal University of Technology and Sedibeng FET college generation Y student consumers) for their openness and willingness to share their experiences. Lastly the researcher appreciates the Vaal University of Technology Gold Fields Library for providing state-of-the-art computer facilities with internet access for learning and database research, such as faculty-specific journals and e-books.

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