

Gender and socio-economic differences in South African consumers' sentiments toward marketing practices

Thérèse Roux

*Department of Marketing, Supply Chain Management and Sport Management,
Tshwane University of Technology*

Staatsartillerie Rd, Pretoria West, Pretoria, 0183, South Africa

Email: RouxAT@tut.ac.za

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0820-1723>

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ABSTRACT

Studies on modern consumers' sentiments toward marketing in an emerging market context are vital. This paper compares demographic differences in South African consumers' sentiment toward marketing. Data were collected via a survey with 444 diverse consumers residing in the Tshwane metropolitan area. The findings revealed that South African males are significantly less satisfied with marketing communication practices compared to females. Consumers earning lower income were significantly less positive towards marketing in general as well as product quality, price, and selling practices. Afrikaans-speaking consumers' attitudes were less positive towards marketing communication. The finding can guide the marketing industry to advance its image by adjusting its practices and coordinating with the government and other stakeholders to collaborate.

JEL classification: M2; M3; M30, M39, M310

Keywords: consumer attitudes, demographics, marketing practices, consumers' sentiment toward marketing, CSM.

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding consumers' sentiment toward marketing (CSM) is crucial for practitioners as well as for academics. CSM refers to consumers' attitudes to and perceptions of marketing activities (Jain et al., 2021). There is a long tradition in the marketing management literature to equip managers with the tools they need to enable them to calculate and make judgements about their actions (Aaker et al., 2000). As consumer attitudes considerably shape their behavioural responses to marketing activities, knowledge of consumers' attitudes toward marketing should aid in devising effective strategies for companies as well as developing regulations by government agencies to protect consumers' interests. There however remains a lack of appreciation of the marketing and management dynamics in emerging markets and a disregard for intricacies and potential as drivers of learning (Mason et al., 2013; Mason et al., 2017). There is an urgent need for proper comprehension of market practices broadly and perceptions of consumers in emerging

markets to obtain insight into the kind of marketing interventions and actions likely to support the development of markets (Mason et al., 2013; Mason et al., 2017).

In the past two decades, CSM has been examined in developed countries such as the USA (Gaski & Etzel, 2005; Webster, 2011), Germany (Burns et al., 2015), New Zealand (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Lawson, 2012), and Portugal (Fernandes & Pimenta, 2013), as well as developing countries such as China (Chan et al., 2004), Turkey (Peterson & Ekici, 2007), India (Jain & Goel, 2011; Jain et al., 2021; Kanta et al., 2013) and Bangladesh (Ferdous & Towfique, 2008). The studies conducted in countries with different levels of economic development and marketing sophistication reported noticeably different levels of CSM and contradictory findings regarding the influence of consumers' demographics on their perceptions of marketing practices. Contemporary studies examining CSM are conspicuously lacking in the South African context. An extensive electronic search delivered only three studies (Boshoff & Du Plessis, 1992; Boshoff & Du Plessis, 1995; Boshoff & Eeden, 2001). These studies might offer a historical perspective, but were conducted more than two decades ago and excluded African respondents. To fill the identified gaps, the current paper compares and contrasts demographic differences in South African consumers' sentiment toward marketing. With multiple official languages, South Africans represent a diversity of consumers ideal to examine the impacts of demographics. Identifying the perspectives of consumers from different gender, income, education, and language groups will help the marketing industry to advance its image by adjusting its practices in terms of product quality, price, promotion, and retailing efforts to meet expectations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Consumer sentiment toward marketing in emerging markets

CSM relates to consumers' attitudes toward the four elements of the marketing mix (i.e., Product, Price, Promotion, and Place), postulated by McCarthy (1960). These 4Ps as activities performed by marketers can be re-conceptualised for emerging markets. For this purpose, Abendroth and Pels (2017) developed a useful market resource gaps framework with four specific outcomes valued by customers when fulfilled, increasing the likelihood of marketplace success. These include: i) acceptability of the product, which entails delivering on the customers' needs or exceeding expectations of functional dimensions (e.g. features, quality, and reliability) and emotive emotional dimensions (e.g. brand image, style, social and hedonic significance); ii) affordability, which relates to pricing that involves not only the monetary ability to pay (e.g. income, financing) but also the psychological inclination of customers to pay (e.g. perceived value, fairness); iii) accessibility delivered via place/retail activities, which relates to acquiring and using products by customers' focusing on availability (e.g. supply) and convenience (e.g. time and effort to acquire and use); iv) awareness, as obtained via promotion/marketing communication tools, which refers not only to brand awareness but also to product knowledge (e.g. understanding of relevance and value).

CSM studies conducted in countries with different levels of economic development and marketing sophistication have shown that the observed value differs noticeably (Boshoff & Eeden, 2001; Burns et al., 2015; Boshoff & Du Plessis, 1992; Du Plessis & Boshoff, 1995; Chan et al., 2004; Ferdous & Towfique, 2008; Fernandes & Pimenta, 2013; Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Lawson, 2012; Gaski & Etzel, 2005; Jain & Goel, 2011; Jain et al., 2021; Kanta et al., 2013; Peterson & Ekici, 2007; Webster, 2011). CSM can change over time due to i) fluctuating macro-economic conditions (e.g. inflation, exchange rates, economic cycle) generally shaping sentiments towards prices and product quality, ii) infrastructure developments (e.g. introduction of new retail formats or media channels) influencing the perception of retailing or advertising,

and iii) changes to various business practices affecting sentiments toward the marketing mix. It is essential to inspect why CSM varies within different demographic groups of a population, because this may show discontent amongst specific market segments that require attention. Two studies conducted in the 1990s considering the South African context reported that demographic factors had a significant influence on CSM. The 1990 analysis found that older South Africans are more negative toward marketing than the younger generation (Boshoff & Du Plessis, 1992). In the 1994 study, the language of respondents, their marital status, and their level of education had a considerable influence on the marketing index. Afrikaans-speaking consumers were especially discontented as were respondents who were married or in stable personal relationships as opposed to those in other marital status groups (never married). The academically better-qualified respondents who participated in the 1994 study were also more dissatisfied with marketing activities than those who were less qualified (Du Plessis & Boshoff, 1995). A subsequent study conducted in 2011 however found that none of the demographic factors had a significant influence on the four marketing mix elements (Boshoff & Eeden, 2001). This current study, therefore, needs to examine whether demographic factors do have a significant influence or not on the four marketing mix elements in the contemporary market landscape.

2.2. Hypotheses development

2.2.1. Gender differences

Jain and Goel (2011) and Kanta et al. (2013) found neutral rather than positive sentiments toward marketing in India, with no differences between males and females. However, others found that women in India (Jain et al., 2021) and China (Chan et al., 2004) have significantly less favourable sentiments toward marketing compared to males.

Some scholars specifically investigated gender differences in attitudes toward specific marketing elements (i.e. product quality, price, marketing communication, retailing/selling) as examined next. Contradictory findings have been reported regarding males' and females' perceptions of product quality. Kanta et al. (2013) reported no differences between gender groups in India regarding product quality. In turn, others concluded that men are concerned about functional product quality; however, females are sensitive to certain product or service categories (Zhong & Moon, 2020). Women have also been reported to be more concerned about expressive values like aesthetics, symbolic value, and social value (Creusen, 2010; Williams, 2002). This is specifically true for luxury brands in western cultures (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013).

Consumers use prices as signals of quality for certain product categories (e.g. food, wine, high-tech products). Kanta et al. (2013) similarly observed no gender differences when comparing Indian consumers' attitudes toward price. Van Slyke et al. (2002) oppositely found gender differences with women reacting more positively towards special or discounted prices when doing online shopping.

In terms of marketing communication or promotion, there seems to be consensus in the findings that women tend to be more susceptible to and favourable of it, while males are less influenced (Chan et al., 2004; Fam et al., 2019; Henry, 2002; Kwon & Kwon, 2007; Williams, 2002).

As regards attitudes towards retailing via conventional as well as online channels, males' attitudes towards retailing/selling tend to be stronger than those of women (Dittmar et al., 2004; Hasan, 2010; Rodgers & Harris, 2003). The recent systematic review of gender differences and similarities by Kanwal et al. (2021) report that men generally have more favourable attitudes towards retailing, specifically online shopping and e-payments, than women do. This is likely due to males doing less conventional shopping for households and generally having a more satisfying shopping experience with online shopping, which is more practical and convenient for males. Worrying is that online shopping may not be as attractive or appealing to women as it is to men

due to aspects such as privacy concerns negatively affecting their online trust. Female consumers, therefore, tend to rely more on eWOM which significantly affects their trust attitudes towards online retailing.

In light of the above discussion of inconsistent findings, the first research question and related hypothesis to be investigated in this study are:

RQ1. Do women and men differ in their sentiments toward marketing practices?

H1₀: There are no significant differences among different genders regarding their sentiments toward marketing practices.

H1_a: There are significant differences among different genders regarding their sentiments toward marketing practices.

2.2.2. Socio-economic differences

Consumer behaviour and attitudes are moulded by the social class to which consumers belong. Social class is “relatively a permanent and ordered division in a society whose members share similar value, interest, and behaviour” (Prasad, 2022). While socio-economic status is determined by several factors, this study focused especially on levels of income and education as well as home languages.

Past results regarding the impact of socio-economic differences on product quality perceptions are incongruous. Some showed that higher-income consumers attach more importance to product quality since they have the luxury to afford these and be less concerned about being able to pay for them (Creusen, 2010). For high-income or high-social-class consumers, functional features like product quality are less important, while expressive orientation is more significant (Henry, 2002). Kanta et al. (2013) however found no differences when comparing income groups’ attitudes toward product quality in an Indian context.

Price is guided by the utility theory postulating that consumers will compare search costs (e.g. time and energy) with monetary savings when making decisions regarding marketing offerings price. High-income consumers, with high discretionary income, seem to be less concerned about discounted prices and promotions while low-income ones are more likely to seek discounts and promotions (Lee et al., 2012).

Marketing communication has been proven to be significantly affected by consumers’ level of income (e.g. Creusen, 2010; Fam et al., 2019; Kwon & Kwon, 2007; Lee et al., 2012). Lee et al. (2012) found that high-discretionary-income earners are less influenced by discount promotions, while other lower-income groups are inclined to respond comparably to discounts. This relative negative position of high-income consumers towards marketing communication has been empirically confirmed. Fam et al. (2019) examining the differences in response to marketing communication techniques in eight culturally dissimilar environments across the globe found that discounts are the most preferred technique by consumers from all income levels. Lower-income groups are negative towards advertisements, while the high-income group is negative towards promotion offered at the point of purchase. Remarkably and contradictorily, Kwon and Kwon (2007) found that high-income earners are more likely to take advantage of sales promotion. There thus seem to be somewhat contradictory findings regarding whether high- or low-income consumers are more positively inclined towards marketing communication initiatives.

Surprisingly, links between income levels and consumer perceptions regarding retailing or selling conditions are weak (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Lawson, 2012). This is likely due to consumers shopping at different types of retail points meeting their specific shopping values. Seo and Lee (2008) concluded that consumers’ social class does moderate their perception regarding where they buy products. High-end income consumers tend therefore to be more positive toward department stores and online shopping and shopping malls, while lower-income earning groups are more positive towards discount stores (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Lawson, 2012). Kanta et

al. (2013) conversely noticed no significant differences between income groups for their study in India.

Differences in attitudes toward all four marketing dimensions among consumers from different socio-economic positions (e.g. income, education, employment levels and types) in society have been found in some studies (Jain & Goel, 2011). Other studies conducted in emerging countries reported no differences among consumers from different socio-economic groups (e.g. Boshoff & Du Plessis, 1992; Du Plessis & Boshoff, 1995; Boshoff & Eeden, 2001; Kanta et al., 2013).

It can be challenging to develop marketing offerings suitable for targeting cultural, language, or ethnic-sensitive consumer groups, and even more so in a multi-linguistic country (Fam et al., 2019; Licsandru & Cui, 2019; Pires & Stanton, 2000). When segmenting multi-linguistic countries, the use of appropriate persuasive marketing language is crucial for effective marketing communication. Since language is a form of social interaction, the language used influences consumers' ability to find meaning in terms of text and context (Fam et al., 2019). The study of Aaker et al. (2000) guided by the distinctiveness theory suggests that customised marketing offerings and culturally congruent cues with messages in home languages are preferred when targeting and satisfying the needs of different ethnic or language groups. Similar advice was given in the study by Gadzekpo et al. (2020) examining consumers' attitudes towards language used in campaigns in Ghana, where they condemn global approaches with westernised content delivery. They call for more accommodation of the aspects of culture in media and marketing. On the other hand, Licsandru and Cui (2019) oppose customisation and ethnic targeting marketing aimed at global millennial consumers, suggesting that multi-ethnic embedded marketing communications will lead to more positive feelings.

The results regarding ethnic and language group differences in marketing practice are inconsistent. Meyers and Morgan (2013) argue that African Americans are different in their ethnic advertising reception than other population groups. Webster (1991) found significant attitudinal differences regarding marketing practices (product quality, pricing, promotion, and retailing) among Hispanic subpopulations speaking different home languages in the USA. Another study conducted in South Africa in the 1990s found that the language of respondents has a significant influence on their perceptions of marketing practices, with Afrikaans-speaking consumers being less satisfied than other groups (Du Plessis & Boshoff, 1995). Subsequent studies however found no differences between languages (Boshoff & Eeden, 2001; Lawson et al., 2001). This current study, therefore, needs to examine whether demographic factors do have a significant influence or not on the four marketing mix elements in the contemporary market landscape.

Considering the findings above, the second research question and related hypotheses to be investigated in this study are:

RQ2. Do consumers from different socio-economic groups differ in their sentiments toward marketing practices?

To address this question, the following hypotheses will be tested.

H₂₀: There are no significant differences between consumers with lower and higher incomes regarding their sentiments toward marketing practices.

H_{2a}: There are significant differences between consumers with lower and higher incomes regarding their sentiments toward marketing practices.

H₃₀: There are no significant differences among consumers with different levels of education regarding CSM.

H_{3a}: There are significant differences among consumers with different levels of education regarding CSM.

H₄₀: There are no significant differences amongst language groups regarding CSM.

H_{4a}: There are significant differences amongst language groups regarding CSM.

3. THE RESEARCH METHOD AND ANALYSIS

The target population for this study was South African consumers residing in the Tshwane metropolitan area. Tshwane is one of the largest metros in South Africa measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the third largest in terms of land mass in the world (Stats SA., 2023). Non-probability quota sampling that involves selecting participants based on predetermined characteristics to ensure representation (Pallant, 2020) was applied to collect data from consumers intercepted at large retail and transport facilities and screened to meet the quota requirements reflecting the diversity of South African citizens. Intercepting the respondents at these locations allowed for quick data collection and a targeted sample based on demographics.

The first section of the questionnaire measured demographical characteristics (gender, income, employment, education, and language). The second part determined Consumers' Sentiments toward Marketing (CSM) based on the scale developed by Gaski and Etzel (1986) and validated in studies concerning developed (Chan et al., 2004; Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Lawson, 2012; Gaski & Etzel, 2005; Webster, 2011) and developing markets (Du Plessis & Boshoff, 1995; Boshoff & Eeden, 2001; Ferdous & Towfique, 2008; Fernandes & Pimenta, 2013; Lawson et al., 2001; Peterson & Ekici, 2007).

The CSM scale applied for this study consisted of 25 items with a five-point Likert scale measuring attitudes towards marketing practices (i.e. product quality, price, marketing communication, retailing/selling, and marketing overall). For the purpose of this study, only the attitudes towards marketing practices were measured and not the expectations. All the items in the questionnaire thus did not have the same scoring direction just like the original instrument by Gaski and Etzel (1986). A pre-test was carried out with 10 subjects not included in the sample that was used to establish the level of reliability.

The data collection commenced across the city of Tshwane's metropolitan municipal area after pre-testing of the questionnaire. Of the 25 items, almost half of 12 items (i.e. 3 items in product quality, 3 items in price, 3 items in marketing communication, 3 items in retailing/selling) were reverse scored before conducting statistical analysis and hypothesis testing. Reverse scoring is a way to counteract response bias by introducing questions that are phrased in the opposite direction to other questions in the survey (Pallant, 2020). Reverse scoring is effective because it forces participants to pay closer attention to the questions being asked, and reduces the likelihood that they will simply respond in a socially desirable or acquiescent way.

Cronbach's alphas of the scales used to measure CSM as seen in Table 1 are all acceptable since they exceeded the 0.7 minimum suggested by Nunnally (1978).

Table 1

Reliability scores or measurement indices

| | α | Number of items |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------------|
| Product Quality | 0.87 | 5 |
| Price | 0.87 | 5 |
| Marketing communication | 0.85 | 5 |
| Retailing/selling | 0.87 | 5 |

Statistical data analysis was performed using the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28 software. Independent sample tests were applied for hypotheses 1 to 3 to determine differences in gender, income, and education groups. One-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) with post-hoc Tukey HSD test or Welch's t-tests when the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated was conducted for hypothesis 4 to explore the impact of language groups on CSM, as measured by the four marketing dimensions and overall assessment.

4. THE RESULTS

4.1. Sample profile and descriptive statistics

The sample consisted of 444 South African consumers surveyed (see Table 2). With regard to the demographic characteristics, gender is relatively equally represented with 47.1% of males and 53% of females. Younger consumers aged 19–30 years (57%) represented the largest part of the sample. However, older consumers who are 31–40 years old (22.1%) and older than 40 were also included in the survey (21.2%). With regard to income, a relatively equal sample was surveyed with 51.1% of those earning up to USD 1000 and 48.9% of those having more than USD 1000 per month. The sample comprised the main cultural groups in Tshwane, namely Afrikaans (24.1%), English (12.45), and five African groups (63.5%). Most of the consumers surveyed are employed (59.7%), followed by full-time students (33.8%) and a relatively small portion of those currently unemployed (6.5%).

Table 2
Demographic profile of the sample (n = 444)

| | | Frequency | Per cent |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Gender | Male | 209 | 47.1 |
| | Female | 235 | 52.9 |
| | Other | 0 | 0 |
| Age | 19–30 | 252 | 56.8 |
| | 31–40 | 98 | 22.1 |
| | 41–50 | 59 | 13.3 |
| | 51 and older | 35 | 7.9 |
| Average income | Up to USD 1000 per month | 227 | 51.1 |
| | More than USD 1000 per month | 217 | 48.9 |
| Occupation status | Employed | 265 | 59.7 |
| | Full-time | 166 | 37.4 |
| | Part-time | 47 | 10.6 |
| | Self | 52 | 11.7 |
| | Students | 150 | 33.8 |
| | Unemployed | 29 | 6.5 |
| Language groups | Afrikaans | 107 | 24.1 |
| | English | 55 | 12.4 |
| | Total African | 282 | 63.5 |
| | Sepedi | 67 | 15.1 |
| | Sesotho | 50 | 11.3 |
| | Setswana | 54 | 12.2 |
| | Zulu | 57 | 12.8 |
| Tsonga | 54 | 12.2 | |

The descriptive statistics (see Table 3) showed that the South Africans surveyed were neutral rather than positive towards marketing overall as well as three of the marketing practices (Product: $M = 3.44$, $SD = 0.67$; Promotion: $M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.81$; Retailing/selling: $M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.71$). They were less satisfied with pricing practices ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.75$).

Table 3

CSM descriptive statistics (n = 444)

| CSM | M | SD |
|-------------------|------|------|
| Overall marketing | 3.22 | 0.53 |
| Product | 3.44 | 0.67 |
| Price | 2.87 | 0.75 |
| Promotion | 3.38 | 0.81 |
| Retailing | 3.18 | 0.71 |

4.2. Gender differences

The results of hypothesis 1 testing (see Table 4) showed no significant differences between males and females for the overall CSM and three of the specific marketing elements (i.e. product, price, retailing/selling). A significant difference in sentiment towards marketing communication was however observed, with males rating it lower ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.82$) than females ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.80$; $t(437) = -2.702$, $p < 0.05$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.21 , 95% CI: -0.36 to -0.06) was medium (eta squared = -0.26).

There is thus partial support for H1a with significant differences among different genders regarding their sentiments toward marketing practices.

Table 4

T-tests for CSM by gender groups (n = 444)

| Consumers' attitudes toward marketing overall and marketing mix elements | | Gender groups | n | M | SD | | p | |
|--|--------|---------------|-----|------|------|-------|---|-------|
| Overall marketing | Male | | 209 | 3.20 | 0.55 | -0.82 | | 0.08 |
| | Female | | 235 | 3.24 | 0.50 | | | |
| Product | Male | | 209 | 3.46 | 0.71 | 0.63 | | 0.06 |
| | Female | | 235 | 3.42 | 0.64 | | | |
| Price | Male | | 209 | 2.86 | 0.75 | -0.42 | | -0.04 |
| | Female | | 235 | 2.89 | 0.76 | | | |
| Promotion | Male | | 209 | 3.27 | 0.82 | -2.70 | * | -0.26 |
| | Female | | 235 | 3.48 | 0.80 | | | |
| Retailing | Male | | 209 | 3.21 | 0.74 | 0.47 | | -0.05 |
| | Female | | 235 | 3.17 | 0.70 | | | |

4.3. Socio-economic differences

4.3.1. Income

Consumers from the lower income group ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 0.53$) were significantly less satisfied with marketing overall than higher-income consumers ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 0.52$; $t(442) = -3.13$, $p < 0.05$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.16 , 95% CI: -0.25 to -0.58) was medium (Cohen's $d = -0.30$).

The lower income group ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.66$) rated product quality significantly lower than the higher income group ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.67$; $t(442) = -2.54$, $p < 0.05$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.16 , 95% CI: -0.29 to -0.04) was medium (Cohen's $d = -0.24$).

The same applied to sentiments towards price for the lower income group ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.77$), rating significantly lower than in the higher income group ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.73$; $t(442) = -2.45$, $p < 0.05$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -1.7 , 95% CI: -0.31 to -0.03) was medium (Cohen's $d = -0.23$).

The lower income group ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.84$), rated marketing communication/promotion significantly lower than consumers earning more ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.78$; $t(442) = -1.70$, $p > 0.05$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.13 , 95% CI: -0.28 to -0.02) was very small (Cohen's $d = -0.16$).

In term of retail practices, those earning lower incomes ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.71$) were also significantly less satisfied than those earning more ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.71$; $t(442) = -2.30$, $p < 0.05$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.16 , 95% CI: -0.29 to -0.02) was medium (Cohen's $d = -0.22$).

The results of hypothesis 2 testing thus showed significant differences between income groups for the overall CSM and three of the specific marketing elements (i.e. product, price, retailing/selling) (see Table 5). There is thus partial support for H2a concerning significant differences between consumers with lower and higher incomes regarding their sentiments toward marketing practices.

Table 5

T-tests for CSM by income levels ($n = 444$)

| | Consumers' attitudes toward marketing overall and marketing mix elements | Income levels | n | M | SD | | p | |
|--------|--|------------------------|-----|------|------|-------|----|-------|
| Income | Overall marketing | Low ($\leq \$1000$) | 227 | 3.14 | 0.53 | -3.13 | ** | -0.30 |
| | | High ($\geq \$1000$) | 217 | 3.30 | 0.52 | | | |
| | Product | Low ($\leq \$1000$) | 227 | 3.36 | 0.66 | -2.54 | * | -0.24 |
| | | High ($\geq \$1000$) | 217 | 3.52 | 0.67 | | | |
| | Price | Low ($\leq \$1000$) | 227 | 2.79 | 0.77 | -2.45 | * | -0.23 |
| | | High ($\geq \$1000$) | 217 | 2.96 | 0.73 | | | |
| | Promotion | Low ($\leq \$1000$) | 227 | 3.32 | 0.84 | -1.70 | * | -0.16 |
| | | High ($\geq \$1000$) | 217 | 3.45 | 0.78 | | | |
| | Retailing | Low ($\leq \$1000$) | 227 | 3.11 | 0.71 | -2.30 | * | -0.22 |
| | | High ($\geq \$1000$) | 217 | 3.26 | 0.71 | | | |

4.3.2. Education

Consumers who completed a high school ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.48$) had significantly lower levels of attitudes towards marketing overall than consumers with post-school qualifications ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 0.54$; $t(442) = -4.24$, $p < 0.05$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.22 , 95% CI: -0.35 to -0.12) was medium (Cohen's $d = -0.42$).

Those who completed a high school ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.63$) rated product quality significantly lower than those higher qualified ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.68$; $t(442) = -4.07$, $p < 0.05$). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.27 , 95% CI: -0.40 to -0.14) was medium (Cohen's $d = -0.40$).

Higher qualified consumers ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 0.77$) also rated price practices significantly better than those lower qualified ($M = 2.72$; $SD = 0.70$; $t(442) = -3.29$, $p < 0.05$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.24 , 95% CI: -0.39 to -0.10) was medium (Cohen's $d = -0.33$).

Marketing communication/promotion was rated better by higher qualified consumers ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.83$) than those lower qualified ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.76$; $t(442) = -2.52$, $p < 0.05$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.20 , 95% CI: -0.36 to -0.45) was medium (Cohen's $d = -0.25$).

Retailing/selling practices were rated significantly better by higher qualified consumers ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.69$) than those lower qualified ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.76$; $t(442) = -2.26$, $p < 0.05$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -0.16 , 95% CI: -0.30 to -0.02) was medium (Cohen's $d = -0.23$).

The results of hypothesis 3 testing (see Table 6) showed significant differences between consumers with different levels of education for the overall CSM and all four of the specific marketing elements (i.e. product, price, marketing communication/promotion, retailing/selling). There is thus support for H3a stating there are significant differences among consumers with different levels of education regarding CSM.

Table 6

T-tests for CSM by education groups ($n = 444$)

| Consumers' attitudes toward marketing overall and marketing mix elements | | Education groups | n | M | SD | | p | |
|--|--------------|------------------|-----|------|------|-------|---|-------|
| Overall marketing | Grade 12 | | 161 | 3.08 | 0.48 | -4.24 | * | 0.42 |
| | Further Qual | | 283 | 3.30 | 0.54 | | * | |
| Product | Grade 12 | | 161 | 3.27 | 0.63 | -4.07 | * | 0.40 |
| | Further Qual | | 283 | 3.53 | 0.68 | | | |
| Price | Grade 12 | | 161 | 2.72 | 0.70 | -3.29 | * | 0.33 |
| | Further Qual | | 283 | 2.96 | 0.77 | | | |
| Promotion | Grade 12 | | 161 | 3.25 | 0.76 | -2.52 | * | -0.25 |
| | Further Qual | | 283 | 3.46 | 0.83 | | | |
| Retailing | Grade 12 | | 161 | 3.08 | 0.76 | -2.26 | * | -0.23 |
| | Further Qual | | 283 | 3.24 | 0.69 | | | |

4.3.3. Language

An ANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of language on sentiment toward marketing. The consumers were divided into three groups according to their home language: Afrikaans (Group 1), English (Group 2), African languages (Group 6). The results revealed no significant differences between language groups regarding the overall CSM and three of the specific marketing elements (i.e. product, price, retailing/selling) (see Table 6). There however was a significant difference in their sentiment towards marketing communication $F(2, 441) = 20.5, p < 0.05$. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was small (0.09). Post-hoc comparisons indicated that Afrikaans-speaking consumers' attitudes were less positive towards marketing communication (Group 1) ($M = 2.98, SD = 0.85$) than those speaking English (Group 1) ($M = 3.31, SD = 0.70$) or African languages (Group 3) ($M = 3.55, SD = 0.77$). Those speaking English at home (Group 1) ($M = 3.31, SD = 0.70$) did however not differ significantly from those speaking an African language at home (Group 3) ($M = 3.55, SD = 0.77$).

The results of hypothesis 4 testing (see Table 7) showed significant differences when comparing language groups in terms of marketing communication, but not for the overall CSM and other marketing elements (i.e. product, price, promotion, retailing/selling). There is thus partial support for H4a stating that there are significant differences amongst language groups regarding CSM.

Table 7

One-way analysis of variance of CSM by language groups ($n = 444$)

| | Home language | n | M | SD | Source | df | SS | MS | p | Eta-squared |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----|------|------|----------------|-----|--------|-------|---|-------------|
| Overall marketing | Afrikaans | 107 | 3.15 | 0.53 | Between groups | 2 | 1.10 | 0.55 | | .009 |
| | English | 55 | 3.17 | 0.44 | Within groups | 441 | | | | |
| | African languages | 282 | 3.26 | 0.54 | Total | 443 | | | | |
| Product | Afrikaans | 107 | 3.52 | 0.77 | Between groups | 2 | 1.30 | 0.65 | | .006 |
| | English | 55 | 3.33 | 0.71 | Within groups | 441 | 199.72 | 0.45 | | |
| | African languages | 282 | 3.43 | 0.63 | Total | 443 | 201.02 | | | |
| Price | Afrikaans | 107 | 2.96 | 0.74 | Between groups | 2 | 2.06 | 1.03 | | .008 |
| | English | 55 | 2.72 | 0.59 | Within groups | 441 | 248.75 | 0.56 | | |
| | African languages | 282 | 2.87 | 0.78 | Total | 443 | 250.81 | | | |
| Promotion | Afrikaans | 107 | 2.98 | 0.85 | Between groups | 2 | 24.95 | 12.48 | * | .085 |
| | English | 55 | 3.31 | 0.70 | Within groups | 441 | 268.43 | 0.61 | | |
| | African languages | 282 | 3.55 | 0.77 | Total | 443 | 293.38 | | | |
| Retailing | Afrikaans | 107 | 3.13 | 107 | Between groups | 2 | 1.00 | 0.50 | | 0.04 |
| | English | 55 | 3.29 | 55 | Within groups | 441 | 226.21 | 0.51 | | |
| | African languages | 282 | 3.18 | 282 | Total | 443 | 227.21 | | | |

5. DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The South African consumers were rather neutral towards product quality, promotion; retailing/selling, while their attitudes towards pricing practices were more negative.

Sentiment toward pricing activities in South Africa has thus declined and changed over time if compared with the longitudinal analysis results reported by Boshoff and Eeden (2001). This is a reason to be concerned.

No significant differences in the overall CSM and three of the specific marketing elements (i.e. product quality, price, retailing/selling) were found when comparing genders. This is aligned with the study conducted by Boshoff and Eeden (2001) in South Africa revealing no differences between male and female consumers and Indian consumers as reported by Kanta et al. (2013). Gender groups in South Africa thus now have similar rather than different perceptions from two decades ago (Boshoff & Eeden, 2001; Boshoff & Du Plessis, 1992).

An exception was marketing communication being rated significantly lower by males compared to females. Differences in gender groups' responsiveness toward marketing communication were also reported globally (Fam et al., 2019; Harmon & Hill, 2003; Henry, 2002; Kwon & Kwon, 2007; Williams, 2002).

South African consumers in the lower income group were significantly less satisfied with marketing in general as well as with product quality, price, and retailing/selling. Income groups differences were also reported in past international studies for product quality (Creusen, 2010; Henry, 2002), price (Lee et al., 2012), marketing communication (Creusen, 2010; Fam et al., 2019; Kwon & Kwon, 2007; Lee et al., 2012) and retailing (Ganglmair-Wooliscroft & Lawson, 2012; Lee, 2008). Surprisingly, the exception was marketing communication with no significant differences being found between consumers with different incomes.

There were significant differences between consumers with different levels of education, and those with lower levels of education were less positive towards the overall CSM and all four of the specific marketing elements. This contradicts the few past studies conducted in South Africa reporting no differences in terms of socio-economic groups (e.g. Boshoff & Du Plessis, 1992; Du Plessis & Boshoff, 1995; Boshoff & Eeden, 2001). This might be due to the fact that these past studies did not have African consumers' perspectives. The result is however similar to the studies in India reporting that consumers from different socio-economic positions (e.g. income, education, employment levels and types) experience marketing practices differently (Jain & Goel, 2011).

There were significant differences when comparing language groups in terms of marketing communication, but not for the overall CSM and other marketing elements (i.e. product, price, promotion, retailing/selling). This is contradictory to the past studies reporting ethnic and language group differences (Meyers & Morgan, 2013; Webster, 1991). Less positive attitudes of Afrikaans-speaking consumers towards marketing communication compared to those speaking English are similar to the earlier study by Du Plessis and Boshoff, (1995), but not other subsequent studies with no differences between language groups (Boshoff & Eeden, 2001; Lawson et al., 2001).

Since it is widely accepted that attitudes influence consumers' behaviour towards marketing activities, marketers need to be cognisant of changes in CSM and be pre-emptive to ensure that sentiment is positive rather than neutral or negative amidst fluctuations in the external environment. The declining attitudes towards pricing practices may, in part, be attributed to South Africa's sluggish economic recovery after COVID-19, but this concern justifies future attention.

Dissatisfaction with the price among consumers in a social class with limited resources does not mean that lowering prices or providing financing is the only viable solution. The needs of this price-sensitive and resource-constrained mass market segment require profoundly unique and disruptive strategies while maintaining profitability. This is for sure demanding but has been proven to be possible by global manufacturers developing basic, low-cost products (e.g. India's Mahindra and Mahindra tractors and Ranbaxy generic pharmaceuticals, and Egypt's Orascom telecom) that satisfy the needs of the mass market segment without damaging the image in developed countries,

As an alternative, marketers can revise payment periods or credit terms, and increase perceived value through both product and promotion actions to advance psychological affordability. Altering place is another viable alternative, as lessening acquisition time and effort can free up employable time and increase income. With the various potential solutions, a challenge for marketers becomes

determining which activity not only provides the greatest potential value to consumers but also provides positive financial value to the firm.

Lower sentiment toward marketing communication among men compared to women, lower socio-economic classes, and Afrikaans-speaking consumers present a challenge to marketers attempting to reach these specific groups such as in South Africa. Their lower sentiment toward marketing communication may lead them to be less likely to accept advertising messages. Marketers, therefore, need to determine and use more suitable promotion/marketing communication tools to ensure awareness and use media channels relevant to understandable messages that these groups trust and value.

6. LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary studies on consumer perceptions of marketing practices are limited in emerging economies, even more in the South African context. This study contributed theoretically by examining the gender and socio-economic differences in South African consumers' sentiments toward marketing practice.

As with all other studies, this research has certain limitations. The current study is cross-sectional and was conducted in one large urban metropolitan area within South Africa. There is thus a potential to conduct future longitudinal research and to expand the geographic scope to include consumers from rural communities and other urban areas in South Africa or other countries in order to allow a comparison across time and context. This study investigated the effects of gender and socio-economic factors on South African consumers' sentiment towards the four P's in the marketing mix. Future researchers can widen the focus by including other elements such as people, physical evidence, and process in the service marketing mix. The effects of consumer attitudes toward marketing and marketing practice can also be re-conceptualised for a broader context with a theoretical framework that examines their relationships with other relevant factors such as the effects of consumer scepticism manifested as questioning marketing claims and being wary of advertising messages, co-creation where companies collaborate with customers to create products or services that better meet their needs or engagement which can be fostered through various channels such as social media, events, and customer support.

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ANNEXURE A

Individual question items

The quality of most products I buy today is good enough

I am satisfied with most of the products I buy

The wide variety of competing products makes buying decisions easier for me

The companies that make products I buy don't care enough about how well they perform (-)

Too many of the products I buy are defective in some way

Most products I buy wear out too quickly (-)

In general, I am satisfied with the price I pay

Most prices are fair

Most prices are reasonable considering the high cost of doing business

Most products I buy are overpriced (-)

Businesses could charge lower prices and still be profitable (-)

Companies are unjustified in charging the price they charge (-)

Advertising is a valuable source of information for me

I enjoy most advertisements

I like to look at / listen to advertisements

Advertisements are often irritating (-)

To me, advertising is often misleading (-)

To me, there is too much advertising (-)

Most stores provide adequate service/help

Most of my shopping experiences are pleasant

Most stores provide an adequate selection of goods

I find most people working in actual stores to be rather unhelpful (-)

When I need assistance in an actual store, I'm usually not able to get it (-)

In general, most middle men make excessive profit (-)

Overall, I'm positive towards the marketing offerings I receive

(-) Negative items were reverse scored