

Catwalk to Consumer: Critical Communication Considerations for Fashion Designers to Achieve Omnichannel Success in South Africa and Germany

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Abstract

In the evolving retail landscape, fashion designers must strategically navigate omnichannel platforms to meet diverse consumer expectations. This paper addresses the limited understanding of how consumers in South Africa and Germany prioritise omnichannel success factors, which affects fashion designers' ability to implement communication strategies that drive engagement and sustained patronage. The empirical research conducted aims to identify the preferences that influence consumers' omnichannel loyalty across online and offline environments. The key research questions are (1) What are the critical omnichannel factors fashion designers should prioritise for effective communication with consumers? and (2) How do these factors differ between South Africa and Germany? Implementing a quantitative approach, the study utilised quota sampling of 1,043 consumers, 511 in South Africa and 532 in Germany segmented by regional demographics and socio-economic measures. Constructs were operationalised through a structured 7-point Likert-like scale instrument and analysed using exploratory factor analysis and regression modelling. The findings revealed that information searching options, the availability of online shopping alternatives, and the general intention to patronise multiple channels during a single shopping trip were the most influential variables shaping omnichannel preferences. South African consumers showed stronger advocacy and emotional engagement, favouring experiential communication and community-based loyalty. German consumers valued functional efficiency and in-store mobile integration, preferring streamlined digital interaction. This paper offers insights for fashion designers seeking to optimise consumer communication across channels, and provides recommendations for policymakers aiming to support omnichannel retail through targeted infrastructure and capacity-building programmes.

Keywords: fashion-designers, omnichannel-retailing, consumers, technology, South Africa, Germany

1. Introduction

Fashion communication-related studies are essential, particularly in this period of uncertainty among fashion leaders and "relatively muted consumer confidence", which has resulted in minimal growth predictions for 2025 (Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2024). Moreover, the shift in retail dynamics, prompted by the digital revolution, presents both challenges and opportunities for fashion designers. The growth of e-commerce, the pivotal role of social media in marketing strategies, and the increasing consumer emphasis on sustainability and ethical production, have all contributed to reshaping the operational environment for fashion designers (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes, & Ghezzi, 2017).

The research problem lies in the limited understanding of how consumers consider and prioritise omnichannel success factors for fashion design entrepreneurs in the contrasting contexts of South Africa and Germany. This gap hinders the development of effective, consumer-centred communication strategies by fashion designers and other stakeholders. The selection of South Africa and Germany reflects two distinct retail and cultural environments: one characterised by rapid digital expansion and entrepreneurial adaptation, and the other by established infrastructure and stable consumer

expectations. These contrasting contexts provide insight into omnichannel communication across diverse ecosystems.

This paper aims to critically examine the evolving dynamics of the retail environment by exploring omnichannel communication strategies that influence consumer purchasing decisions. The goal is to uncover critical success factors and consumer communication needs relevant to fashion design entrepreneurs in Germany and South Africa. The findings may empower fashion designers to navigate market complexities, enhance competitive advantage, and foster sustainable business growth through omnichannel retailing. Based on this, the key research questions guiding this paper are:

1. *What are the key omnichannel communication success factors that fashion designers should prioritise to effectively engage with consumers?*
2. *How does the consumer communication needs from fashion designers differ between Germany and South Africa in an omnichannel context?*

2. Literature Review

With the existing fast-changing and diverse environment, it is argued that it is essential to review the discourse of innovation and successful retail formats outside the context of deliberate over-formalised design but, rather through opportunistic and incremental processes that create winning formats (Reynolds, Howard, Cuthbertson, & Hristov, 2007). In recent times, the concept of omnichannel retailing has been established as a format with the potential to drive consumer patronage in the fashion industry (Cattapan & Pongsakornrunsilp, 2022). By definition, omnichannel is “the set of activities involved in selling merchandise or services through more than one channel or all widespread channels, whereby the customer can trigger full channel interaction and/or the retailer controls full channel integration” (Beck & Rygl, 2015). Simply defined, omnichannel retailing provides consumers with the ability to shop at any time and any place (Kopot & Cude, 2021). Therefore, omnichannel retailing emphasises the need for integrated retail channels to provide a seamless customer [communication] experience across various channels (Rusanen, 2019). Omnichannel retailing is generally regarded as useful, as it enhances customer satisfaction by allowing consumers to interact with the brand in ways that suit their preferences and lifestyles (Verhoef, Kannan, & Inman, 2015). For fashion designers, useful omnichannel communication strategies can increase reach and facilitate greater customer engagement by integrating touchpoints, leading to higher conversion rates and sales (Cao & Li, 2015).

The concept of consumers actively using various communication channels, such as media, to satisfy specific psychological and social needs is well established. The Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a communication framework that explains how individuals engage with information, entertainment, personal identity, and social integration to fulfil these needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Earlier research demonstrated that informational and social gratifications play a significant role in motivating consumers to adopt mobile shopping platforms and engage across multiple touchpoints (Lim & Ting, 2012). More recently, the framework has been extended to omnichannel retail, showing that smartphone dependency can alleviate shopping anxiety and enhance consumer experience by fulfilling emotional and informational needs (Lyu, Krasnikolakis, & Chen, 2023). For fashion designers, this study supports the view that effective omnichannel communication strategies can expand reach and enhance customer engagement by integrating touchpoints, ultimately leading to higher conversion rates and sales (Cao & Li, 2015). When aligned with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, omnichannel retailing responds directly to consumers’ desire for informational access, social connection, and experiential fulfilment, all of which drive active engagement across multiple retail channels. Omnichannel retailing thus emerges as a transformative strategy that integrates digital and physical channels to improve the overall consumer experience.

2.1 Technological Implications in Omnichannel Retailing

The role of retail formats, retail place and retail design is transformed by the evolving role of the physical store as a place of transaction, and as a place where different channels of retailers communicate, joined together by technology (Alexander & Cano, 2019). Building on this technological transformation, fashion designers have been observed to continuously leverage innovations such as augmented reality (AR), customer relationship management (CRM) systems and data analytics via social media to improve and streamline personalised retail offerings.

Technology is undoubtedly at the forefront of omnichannel retailing, as mobile and digital technologies and their applications are developed to offer consumers the option to shop offline/physical stores, online/websites or through mobile applications channels, simultaneously or spontaneously, during one shopping trip (Ryu, 2019). Confirming these sentiments, Business of Fashion and McKinsey (2022), in their “The State of Fashion Technology Report”, emphasised that fashion brands needed to leverage technologies to amplify the omnichannel customer experience in order to bridge the gap between online and offline channels. The term “phygital” has been established to combine the physical and digital elements of luxury omnichannel retailing to create unique shopping experiences and consumer patronage (Banik, 2021). For instance, consumer-facing technologies could provide an integrated experience for fashion designers through digital technologies, online retailing and brick-and-mortar

channels at the same time (Perry, Kent, & Bonetti, 2019), such as a customer ordering something online, trying it on using AR and then going to a brick-and-mortar store for final fittings and payment. Conversely, a customer might visit a brick-and-mortar store, find a design they like, check online for a variation of the design or colour from the same brand, order the item online, and then finalise the payments either in-store or online, all in one visit. As a result, through omnichannel retailing, consumers are able to use mobile applications without delay or travelling to other locations when the desired colour or size is not available at the store initially visited (Ryu, 2019). Despite the technological advancements and benefits, it is important to consider that significant disparities may exist for fashion designers, particularly in navigating some technological barriers caused by regional infrastructures, resource constraints, affordability and consumer adaptation to technology.

2.2 Communication in Omnichannel Retailing

Considering consumers' adaptation to technology, fashion designers should concentrate on leveraging the vast communication capabilities of "phygital" retailing for exceptional consumer experience (Pangarkar, Arora, & Shukla, 2022), which could potentially increase consumers' patronage intention, usage, patronage and engagement. At the core, the use of omnichannel communication encourages retailers to cease operating in silos and instead implement communication and sales strategies that are coherent and integrated across online and offline channels (Ozuem & Patten, 2021). This means that the difference between multichannel approaches and omnichannel strategies lies in the integration process between channels, where omnichannel retailing allows consumers to seamlessly transition between retail formats such as e-commerce sites, mobile apps, and brick-and-mortar stores.

Ozuem and Patten (2021) study shows that it is important for German fashion retailers to develop coherent and integrated sales and communication strategies across channels, while ensuring in-store sales teams are well trained to meet the needs of informed omnichannel customers with distinct characteristics that need to be understood to tailor effective communication strategies. In summary, omnichannel strategies require seamless communication that ensures uninterrupted transitions across channels; personalisation, by tailoring recommendations and messaging for consumers; integration that guarantees consistency, unified systems for inventory, customer data, and marketing; and the agility to adapt to regional needs and consumer segments.

2.3 Segmentation for Omnichannel Retailing

For consumer segmentation in omnichannel retailing, numerous variables need to guide communication strategies. These include consumer perceptions of personalisation, trends, purchase intention and, fashion innovation (Serrano-Malebrán & Arenas-Gaitán, 2021). On the one hand, fashion involvement, innovativeness, self-expression through clothing and, buying impulsiveness are also a criteria used to identify fashion consumers (Szczepaniak, 2015). Mosquera, Juaneda Ayensa, Pascual, and Murillo (2019), in addition, apply psychographic variables such as perceived usefulness, shopping enjoyment and social influence to determine fashion consumer segments based on omnichannel retail formats. Subsequently, the study from Mosquera et al. (2019) summarised the consumer segments as; reluctant omnishoppers, who do not appreciate the integration of channels; omnichannel enthusiasts, who enjoy the benefits of omnichannel shopping; and indifferent omnishoppers. Evidently, segmentation plays a pivotal role in shaping omnichannel success by accounting for consumer expectations and behaviours, which this study suggests may be influenced by regional factors.

Figure 1 outlines the conceptual framework of this paper, which initially considers fashion design entrepreneurs using omnichannel retailing through technology to communicate with the different consumers in South Africa and Germany, with the aim of identifying the critical communication strategies for the different regions.

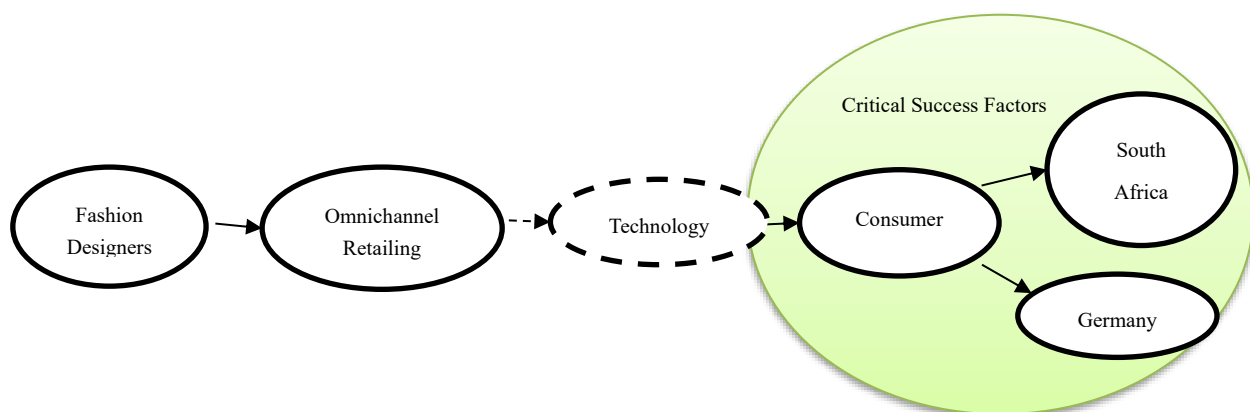


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research methodology. It focused on consumers based in Germany and South Africa, over the age of 18 years, who met a specific quota outlined in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

3.1 Respondents

Bearing in mind the specific target population, this paper ensured that different subgroups from Germany and South Africa were represented in the sampling method, with their respective population ratios; this sampling method is called quota sampling (Muijs, 2011).

Random selection is regarded as a significant element when conducting survey research, because it safeguards the generalisation of the findings (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Accordingly, a random sample formula was applied to generate a sample size, resulting in a total sample size of 550 participants for each country. Equation (1) explains how the targeted sample was initially established.

$$n = \frac{\sigma^2 \cdot z^2}{E^2} \quad (1)$$

- $\sigma = 1$; $z = 1,96$ (because $\alpha = 0,05$, $1 - \alpha = 0.9545$); $E = 0.1 \rightarrow n = 384.16$ (rounded up to 400)
- Failure rate consideration: $n \cdot 0.375 = 150 \rightarrow n + 150 = 550$

3.2 Quota Sample Germany

The sampling approach for Germany was based on the population's income, gender and age. This decision was made, because this is how the demographics in Germany were categorised, thus making the initial population data easily accessible and dependable (Dobbelstein & Lochner, 2023).

3.3 Quota Sampling South Africa

In South Africa, the approach was different, as the segmentation approach was initially through living standard measures (LSM), a socioeconomic segmentation system commonly used for market research to analyse demographics by dividing them into groups of 10, classifying households and individuals into different categories or segments based on a combination of factors such as income, education, housing, and ownership of assets (Ntloedibe & Ngqinani, 2020).

On the one hand, some researchers argue LSM is outdated and researchers should move towards more current segmentation methods in South Africa, such as Socioeconomic Measures (SEM) (Langschmidt, 2017). On the other hand, other researchers state that alternative segmentation measures beyond LSM and SEM should be considered, as SEM appears to be the continuation of LSM (Muller, 2017). After carefully considering the two segmentation options in South Africa, it was important for the researchers to obtain a specific database of respondents (to meet the quota), which was only commercially available for LSM and not for SEM. Nonetheless, the researcher decided to transfer the theoretical data (percentages) available for SEM to LSM quotas. In other words, the data were collected from commercially available LSM demographics but were based on the SEM quota (BRCSA, 2018).

In South Africa, the lower LSM (1-4) have been considered as segment groups representing consumers in rural areas with lower incomes and relying on basic commodities for survival, while the higher LSM (5-10) are regarded as urbanised and more financially stable consumers (Mason, Corbishley, & Dobbelstein, 2022). However, the researcher decided to work with LSM 7-10 (SEM 7-10), which represents households from the upper-middle class categorised by levels of affluence, access to technology, a range of consumer goods, services, a high level of education, and who live in metropolitan, suburban or urban areas, with comfortable lifestyles (BRCSA, 2018). This paper, therefore, deems the urbanised population (LSM/SEM 7-10) in South Africa to be individuals who would possibly consider purchasing clothing from fashion designers through omnichannel retailing.

4. Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was initially proofread and piloted with the assistance of marketing research students with over 350 respondents to ensure completeness, clarity of structure, and appropriateness of the research questions. It was then translated into German and cross-checked by a German researcher/copywriter to ensure translation accuracy for the final data collection. Once the survey proved understandable and acceptable, it was distributed with the assistance of a commercial research company, providing online access panels. The entire questionnaire was distributed online in July 2023.

4.1 Actual Sample Size

All responses and subsequent data analysis were checked through SPSS version 29. Ultimately, a total sample size of

1.129 respondents was reached, with $n = 573$ in Germany and $n = 556$ in South Africa. A systematic data cleaning process was conducted to ensure data quality by identifying inconsistencies, straight-lining responses, and filtering out improbable response times based on the median survey completion time. This resulted in the exclusion of 41 responses in Germany and 45 in South Africa.

Following these quality checks, the final sample sizes were $n = 532$ for Germany and $n = 511$ for South Africa. In South Africa, LSM 7 was overrepresented by +9.9% points, while LSM 10 was underrepresented by -8.7% points; however, LSM 8 and 9 closely matched the targeted distribution. In Germany, the 25–34 age group was overrepresented by +13.1% points, while the 65+ age group and 50–64 age group were underrepresented by -17.2% points and -8.3% points, respectively. Minor variations were also noted in gender representation and household income distribution.

A comparison of mean values indicated that these discrepancies had minimal impact on the study's overall findings. Therefore, despite these differences, the final sample was deemed representative of the target populations in both countries, ensuring reliable insights into consumer patronage for fashion design entrepreneurs. The final quota profile and sample distributions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Targeted and Achieved Quotas

South Africa (n=511)				
Criteria	Target (%)	Achieved (%)	Frequency (n)	Difference (% points)
LSM 7	31.0	40.9	209	9.9
LSM 8	24.0	23.9	122	-0.1
LSM 9	21.0	20.0	102	-1
LSM 10	24.0	15.3	78	-8.7
Germany (n=532)				
Male	49.0	46.1	245	-2.9
Female	51.0	53.8	286	2.8
Diverse / not specified	0	0.2	1	0.2
18 – 24	11.4	18.0	96	6.6
25 – 34	14.3	27.4	146	13.1
35 – 49	21.7	27.4	146	5.7
50 – 64	26.2	17.9	95	-8.3
65+	26.4	9.2	49	-17.2
Less than € 1,250	15.4	16.2	86	0.8
€ 1,250 to 2,000	19.7	19.2	102	-0.5
€ 2,001 to 3,000	23.6	24.4	130	0.8
€ 3,001 to 5,000	26.7	28.4	151	1.7
€ 5,001 and more	14.6	11.8	63	-2.8

4.2 Operationalisation of Constructs and Hypothesis

The questions and corresponding constructs in the operational construct were both derived from the literature discussed under section 4.2.1, with the questions slightly adapted for the purposes of this study. The questions were treated as independent variables, while the constructs served as dependent variables, and were formatted using 7-point Likert-like scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

4.2.1 Dependent Variables

It is important to understand that the types of consumers more inclined to omnichannel formats, have been shown to have a high level of fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership (Cho & Workman, 2011; Ryu, 2019). Thus, for fashion design entrepreneurs to meet industry and consumer communication expectations effectively, it is crucial for them to understand the technical requirements of consumers, based on perceived usefulness of omnichannel retailing, the intention to use multiple channels, and the level of patronage towards omnichannel retailing (Banik, 2021; Mosquera et al., 2019; Ryu, 2019), which were evaluated as dependent variables, while the factors (questions) informing each dependent variable were evaluated as independent variables.

4.2.2 Independent Variables

Overall, Mosquera et al. (2019) operationalised perceived usefulness by assessing omnichannel time efficiency, access opportunity, and ease of shopping as independent variables. These variables were defined by Mosquera et al. as “the degree to which consumers perceive the use of different channels and/or technologies during the customer journey as rewarding them when they are buying clothes by streamlining the shopping process.” In other words, perceived usefulness, in this case, evaluated whether omnichannel retailing was expected to be efficient by consumers (Kopot & Cude, 2021). This indicated that perceived usefulness arises from instrumental beliefs or object-based beliefs (instead of behavioural

beliefs), which in turn, drives intention (Juaneda-Ayensa, Mosquera, & Sierra Murillo, 2016; Kopot & Cude, 2021). Accordingly, the following hypotheses was proposed:

H1a: Time efficiency significantly influences consumers' perceived usefulness of omnichannel retailing for fashion designers.

H1b: Access opportunity significantly influences consumers' perceived usefulness of omnichannel retailing for fashion designers.

H1c: Ease of shopping significantly influences consumers' perceived usefulness of omnichannel retailing for fashion designers.

Naturally, omnichannel shopping intention became the second dependent variable, which considered the future plans of consumers to shop from retailing fashion design entrepreneurs using multi-channels simultaneously, by evaluating the following independent variables; omnichannel usage intention, the offer of online shopping alternatives, and information searching options (Ryu, 2019). The motivating factors such as technological innovativeness, fashion purchase involvement and innovativeness, applied by Ryu (2019) in the same study, were not considered for this paper, which concentrated more on whether omnichannel retailing impacted consumers' patronage towards retailing fashion design entrepreneurs, instead of the reasons behind using omnichannel retailing. The following hypotheses were then formulated:

H2a: The intention to use omnichannel retailing strongly influences consumers' overall omnichannel shopping intention.

H2b: The availability of online shopping alternatives significantly influences consumers' omnichannel shopping intention.

H2c: Information searching options significantly influence consumers' omnichannel shopping intention.

Omnichannel patronage intention then developed into the third dependent variable, which measured the intended level of consumer involvement in engaging with multi-channel or "phygital" shopping options by operationalising omnichannel patronage intentions, intention to recommend omnichannel, and future omnichannel preferences (Banik, 2021). Therefore, with all the variables applied, the indicators were specifically modified to measure communication and reflect the omnichannel shopping environment for fashion designers. Taking this into account, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H3a: Omnichannel patronage intention significantly influences consumers' continued engagement with fashion designers using omnichannel formats.

H3b: Intention to recommend omnichannel retailing indicates consumers' overall patronage intention.

H3c: Future omnichannel preference significantly predicts consumers' long-term patronage of fashion designers using omnichannel.

Ultimately, an omnichannel fashion retailing environment, has been shown to have the potential to reduce perceived risk for consumers, act as a strong shopping motivator, increase consumer satisfaction, and increase sales (Cattapan and Pongsakornrungrungsilp 2022: 15), through effective communication.

4.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (Reliability and Validity)

The definitions of the independent variables were refined based on the mean values of variables measuring closely related items according to the EFA results. As a result, all variables for this paper, namely omnichannel usefulness, omnichannel intention, and omnichannel patronage, had a high loading on the same factor and were ultimately grouped into one dependent variable termed omnichannel preferences. Accordingly, the research model was adjusted to demonstrate one dependent variable as illustrated in Figure 2.

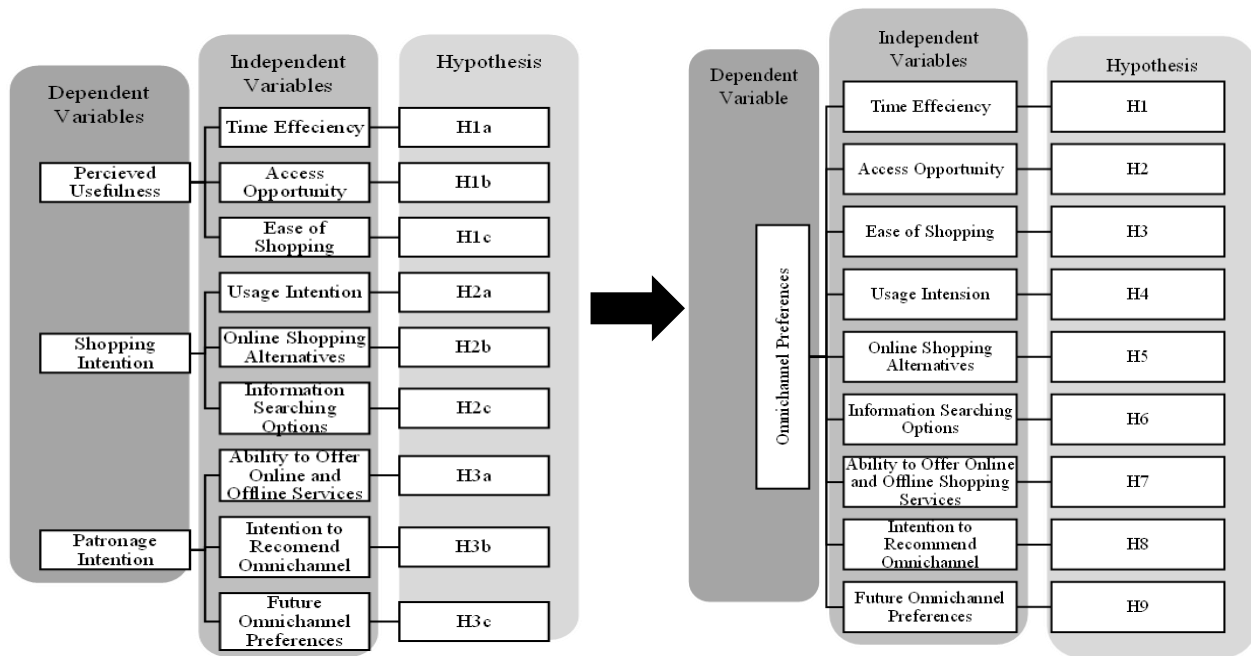


Figure 2. Transition of Research Model (Before and After EFA)

Reliability was assessed by examining the relationship between variances and correlations to ensure attainment of the most desirable reliability coefficient, ranging from 0.6 (considered moderate) to values closer to 1.0, indicating high reliability (Ruel, Wagner, & Gillespie, 2016). This assessment employed the internal consistency reliability strategy, involving the division of a single test into two equivalent or parallel halves, using of Cronbach's Alpha (Suter, 2012).

Validity was established by ensuring the data collection instrument for consumers measured the relevant objectives and addressed the research questions effectively (Watson, 2015). Construct validity was employed, with this study utilising the nomological network, based on measures from previous studies (Maul, 2018). Additionally, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to assist in evaluating the reliability and validity of measurement instruments by analysing the underlying factor structure of the set of observed variables (Watkins, 2018).

Finally a reliability check was conducted to confirm the dataset's consistencies and generalisability by calculating the Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha value (Finch, 2020). The overall Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha for the dataset was highly reliable with a value of 0.929.

Table 2. Exploratory Factor analysis with Varimax Rotated Component Matrix

ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX		
Constr	Item	Components <i>Omnichannel Preference</i> ($\alpha=0.929$)
PI _{ac}	Being able to use multiple channels throughout the customer journey allows me to purchase fashion and clothing faster.	0.772
	The opportunity to use different channels like the internet, shops or shopping apps while searching for and buying fashion and clothing is useful for me.	0.821
	The opportunity to use different channels like the internet, shops or shopping apps while searching for and buying fashion and clothing makes my life easier.	0.796
	In certain situations, I can imagine using different channels like the internet, physical shops or shopping apps that a fashion retailer offers me.	0.774
	I would purchase fashion products from the retailers' website using my mobile phone if I cannot find the correct size or colour at the store.	0.680
	I would search for relevant information using my mobile phone while shopping for fashion at the store.	0.616
	I will continue to patronise retailers which offer both online and in-store services at the same time for fashion and clothing purchases.	0.613
	I will recommend the use of retailers who offer both online and in-store services at the same time to others for fashion and clothing purchases.	0.669
	I would like to use retailers which offer both online and in-store services at the same time in the future to purchase fashion and clothing.	0.711

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

In this section, the mean values and the standard deviation of the constructs refined through EFA and their corresponding items are statistically described, based on the ranked scores where 1 was "strongly disagree" and 7 was "strongly agree".

The values in Table 3 provide an overview of the descriptive statistics for each construct in each country and overall. Variations were observed in the mean scores and standard deviations across countries, indicating differing communication needs for omnichannel success. The greatest difference in mean values was in the intention to recommend omnichannel retailers (Q1r8), with South Africa ($\bar{x} = 6.151$) notably higher than Germany ($\bar{x} = 4.058$), resulting in a mean difference ($d = 2.093$). This suggests stronger consumer advocacy in the South African market, pointing to a favourable communication climate for peer-to-peer influence and recommendation-based growth. The lowest mean score difference was in the use of mobile phones in-store to access information (Q1r6), where Germany ($\bar{x} = 3.897$) scored significantly lower than South Africa ($\bar{x} = 5.681$), with a mean difference of 1.784. This indicates a communication gap in Germany regarding the integration of digital tools within physical retail spaces, signalling the need for clearer in-store communication strategies and mobile integration by fashion designers.

In terms of within-country patterns, South Africa exhibited consistently high mean scores across all variables, with the highest mean observed in Q1r9 ($\bar{x} = 6.219$), reflecting consumers' future intention to use omnichannel services. This points to a forward-looking and digitally receptive consumer base, that is likely to engage continuously if communication efforts are maintained. In contrast, the lowest mean in South Africa was in Q1r7 ($\bar{x} = 5.288$), which measured the intention to continue patronising omnichannel retailers. While still relatively high, this suggests that consistent performance and sustained value are necessary to retain loyalty. In Germany, the highest scoring item was Q1r2 ($\bar{x} = 4.953$), relating to the usefulness of accessing multiple channels, indicating that German consumers recognise the functional value of omnichannel systems, even if overall adoption remains lower. The lowest score in Germany was again in Q1r6 ($\bar{x} = 3.897$), reinforcing the need to strengthen mobile-assisted in-store engagement.

Across the total sample, the highest overall mean value was also found in Q1r2 ($\bar{x} = 5.533$), showing that consumers across both countries perceive omnichannel systems as useful, making it a critical communication consideration. This suggests that communication efforts by fashion designers should start by reinforcing the tangible, everyday value of omnichannel integration, as it forms the strongest common ground across both markets.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

Independent Variables	Overall (<i>n</i> =1043)		South Africa (<i>n</i> =511)		Germany (<i>n</i> =532)	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev
Q1r1: Being able to use multiple channels (like the internet, shops or shopping apps) throughout the customer journey allows me to purchase fashion and clothing faster	5.197	1.807	5.920	1.470	4.613	1.808
Q1r2: The opportunity to use different channels like the internet, shops or shopping apps while searching for and buying fashion and clothing is useful for me.	5.533	1.676	6.137	1.330	4.953	1.768
Q1r3: The opportunity to use different channels like the internet, shops or shopping apps while searching for and buying fashion and clothing makes my life easier.	5.460	1.704	6.068	1.382	4.876	1.779
Q1r4: In certain situations, I can imagine using different channels like the internet, physical shops or shopping apps that a fashion retailer offers me	5.342	1.649	5.933	1.370	4.774	1.695
Q1r5: I would purchase fashion products from the retailers' website using my mobile phone if I cannot find the correct size or colour at the store	5.181	1.936	5.742	1.713	4.643	1.987
Q1r6: I would search for the relevant information using my mobile phone while shopping for fashion at the store	4.771	2.022	5.681	1.661	3.897	1.951
Q1r7: I will continue to patronise retailers which offer both online and in-store services at the same time for fashion and clothing purchases	4.635	1.981	5.288	1.919	4.008	1.833
Q1r8: I will recommend the use of retailers which offer both online and in-store services at the same time to others for fashion and clothing purchases	5.083	1.885	6.151	1.292	4.058	1.795
Q1r9: I would like to use retailers which offer both online and in-store services at the same time in the future to purchase fashion and clothing	5.395	1.645	6.219	1.184	4.603	1.637

5.2 Inferential Statistics

For the omnichannel factor, separate regression analyses for South Africa and Germany were conducted, and then an overall regression analysis for both countries was completed. The adjusted R-squared was additionally calculated with each regression analysis, to determine whether each independent variable could explain the dependent variable as a percentage (Lewis-Beck & Lewis-Beck, 2016). In each case, the adjusted R-squared value was 1 000 (100 percent fit), with the values calculated as the mean of the specific independent variables allocated to the particular dependent factor.

Moreover, it is important to note that the regression analysis was not intended to capture patterns but to evaluate which independent variable influenced the dependent variable (questions within the measuring instrument) the most. Additionally, the perfect R-squared further proved the reliability of the measuring instrument, suggesting, the model perfectly predicted the dependent variable (questions within the measuring instrument), based on the independent variables (omnichannel preference).

Additionally, tolerance and variance inflation factors (VIFs) were obtained through the collinearity diagnostics, while the Durbin-Watson values were processed to determine whether the independent variables would produce valid regression analyses and results with the dependent variables. In the Durbin-Watson test, the independence of the observations was confirmed as all the values tested were 1.401 (omnichannel preference), which met the requirements for the values not strongly diverging from 2.0 (Osborne, 2017), as shown in Table 4. Following this, the tolerance values were determined with its inverse, the VIFs, with the tolerance values ensuring the proportion of variance in independent variables was not explained by other independent variables, represented by values ranging from zero to one, with small values of 0.1 or less indicating high multicollinearity, while the VIFs measured the relationship between the independent variable, with VIFs greater than 10 being problematic, indicating multicollinearity (Parke, 2013).

Overall, all tolerance values and VIFs were acceptable, based on the field, nature of the data, and analysis goals. The highest VIF was 4.867, corresponding to omnichannel access opportunity (Q1r2), and the lowest tolerance value was 1.934 for omnichannel ability to offer online and offline shopping services (Q1r7). Furthermore, the probability tests of values (p-values) were calculated to test the significance of the observed results, with the focus on the two-sided p-values, which compared two groups (such as South Africa and Germany) and evaluated whether there was a significant difference between the groups when $p < 0.000$ (Ludbrook, 2013). In this study, all variables were found to be highly significant ($p < 0.000$), with less than one percent error.

Overall, information searching options ($\beta = 0.155$) had the strongest influence on consumers' preference for omnichannel retailing, confirming the importance of clear communication across channels. Fashion designers can support this behaviour through effective in-store information systems, such as Wi-Fi or devices that allow consumers to access product information while shopping. The second and third most impactful variables influencing consumers' communication preference for omnichannel retailing were, on the one hand, omnichannel patronage intention ($\beta = 0.152$) and the offer of online shopping alternatives ($\beta = 0.149$), as consumers found it appealing to patronise retailers offering online and in-store services (rather than using those retailers once-off). These findings suggest that consumers are not merely passive recipients of marketing communication but strategically evaluate the functional value of omnichannel retail. The appeal of patronising fashion designers offering both online and in-store services reflects a desire for continuity, convenience, and control for long-term brand engagement rather than one-off transactions, indicating that fashion designers need to consistently create this convenience. On the other hand, future preference ($\beta = 0.126$) had the least influence on consideration for omnichannel shopping, as the variable that measured the future use instead of the current communication preference for omnichannel retailing. This could indicate that consumers are more confident with current omnichannel options than future prospects, meaning consumers' present communication preferences are grounded in tangible, immediate benefits.

In South Africa and Germany, the offer of online shopping alternatives (SA: $\beta = 0.175$; Germany: $\beta = 0.157$) had the strongest influence on omnichannel preference, highlighting consumers' prioritisation of channel flexibility and convenience. This suggests that the ability to access products online when unavailable in-store is not merely a functional benefit but a core expectation in both markets. It reflects a shift from single-channel loyalty to adaptive engagement, where consumers value retailers accommodating their situational needs and shopping contingencies. Therefore, fashion designers should focus on promoting their various online shopping alternatives to consumers. Once again, future omnichannel preference ($\beta = 0.129$ in both countries) did not influence the preference for omnichannel shopping to the same extent as the other variables, which may reflect consumer fatigue with speculative retail promises. Thus, instead of merely expressing future omnichannel innovations, fashion designers need to create consumer engagements through activations, making the future tangible.

In terms of significant difference in mean values, the greatest difference was observed in the intention to recommend omnichannel retailing ($d = 2.092$), with t -value = 21.531, $p < 0.001$ and a 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.902 to 2.283. The smallest significant difference among the listed items was found in the offer of online shopping alternatives

($d = 1.099$), with a t -value = 9.550, $p < 0.001$ and a 95% confidence interval lower bound of 0.873 and upper bound of 1.325. These findings suggest customers were satisfied with their omnichannel experiences (overall mean value = 5.197), which could drive organic growth through word-of-mouth and recommendations more in South Africa ($\bar{x} = 6.151$) than in Germany ($\bar{x} = 4.058$), as shown in Table 4. Conversely, consumers in Germany were more inclined to switch between shopping channels to find what they needed, indicating a more functionally driven approach to omnichannel engagement. Consequently, if South African fashion designers effectively meet consumers' omnichannel expectations, they are likely to foster strong brand advocacy, while in Germany, designers should prioritise functional reliability and product accessibility to retain and satisfy efficiency-oriented shoppers.

Table 4. Regression Analyses for Omnichannel Preference

Items: Independent Variables	Overall			South Africa			Germany			SA – Ger Diff. in Std. Coeff. beta
	Std. Coeff. beta	Tolerance	VIF	Std. Coeff. beta	Tolerance	VIF	Std. Coeff. beta	Tolerance	VIF	
Q1r1_ Omnichannel Time Efficiency	0.135	0.268	3.735	0.141	0.353	2.833	0.144	0.285	3.513	-0.004
Q1r2_ Omnichannel Access Opportunity	0.129	0.205	4.867	0.136	0.246	4.059	0.140	0.223	4.491	-0.004
Q1r3_ Ease of Shopping via Omnichannel	0.131	0.262	3.823	0.141	0.306	3.263	0.140	0.280	3.569	0.000
Q1r4_ Omnichannel Usage Intention	0.127	0.349	2.867	0.140	0.491	2.038	0.134	0.336	2.974	0.006
Q1r5_ Offer of Online Shopping Alternatives	0.149	0.515	1.943	0.175	0.541	1.848	0.157	0.562	1.779	0.018
Q1r6_ Information Searching Options	0.155	0.457	2.186	0.169	0.500	1.999	0.154	0.558	1.793	0.015
Q1r7_ Omnichannel Ability to Offer Online and Offline Shopping Services	0.152	0.517	1.934	0.196	0.859	1.165	0.145	0.193	5.174	0.051
Q1r8_ Intention to Recommend Omnichannel	0.145	0.275	3.632	0.132	0.336	2.980	0.142	0.187	5.356	-0.010
Q1r9_ Future Omnichannel Preference	0.126	0.337	2.964	0.121	0.333	3.006	0.129	0.470	2.126	-0.009

Table 5. Significance of Mean Values, Omnichannel Preferences

Items: Independent Variables	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence	
			One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper
Q1r1_ Omnichannel Time Efficiency	13.392	1041	0.000	0.000	1.348	0.101	1.151	1.546
Q1r2_ Omnichannel Access Opportunity	12.184	1041	0.000	0.000	1.184	0.097	0.993	1.375
Q1r3_ Ease of Shopping via Omnichannel	12.057	1041	0.000	0.000	1.193	0.099	0.998	1.387
Q1r4_ Omnichannel Usage Intention	12.117	1041	0.000	0.000	1.159	0.096	0.971	1.347
Q1r5_ Offer of Online Shopping Alternatives	9.550	1041	0.000	0.000	1.099	0.115	0.873	1.325
Q1r6_ Information Searching Options	15.875	1041	0.000	0.000	1.784	0.112	1.564	2.005
Q1r7_ Omnichannel Ability to Offer Online and Offline Shopping Services	11.018	1041	0.000	0.000	1.280	0.116	1.052	1.508
Q1r8_ Intention to Recommend Omnichannel	21.531	1041	0.000	0.000	2.092	0.097	1.902	2.283
Q1r9_ Future Omnichannel Preference	18.199	1041	0.000	0.000	1.616	0.089	1.442	1.790

6. Discussion

6.1 What Are the Omnichannel Critical Factors Fashion Designers Need to Focus on to Successfully Communicate with Consumers?

With omnichannel preferences, consumers in South Africa and Germany can be segmented as omnichannel enthusiasts, as they generally appreciate the benefits of omnichannel shopping (Mosquera et al., 2019). While omnichannel enthusiasts generally enjoy shopping, they also value the opinions of others such as, family and friends, which suggests that ensuring good communication with current customers could result in a chain effect of communication and brand advocacy as opinions spread.

In both countries, information searching options emerged as a significant factor influencing consumers' preferences for omnichannel retailing. This finding aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which positions information as central to consumer engagement (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Furthermore, informational and social gratifications have been shown to play a key role in motivating consumers to adopt mobile shopping platforms and engage across multiple touchpoints, indicating that technological dependency can alleviate shopping anxiety and enhance the consumer experience by fulfilling both emotional and informational needs (Lim & Ting, 2012; Lyu, Krasnikolakis, & Chen, 2023). As information searching options are generally supported by technology, this consumers' preference underscores the importance of digital platforms in providing comprehensive and accessible product information across channels (Ryu, 2019).

Moreover, this paper identified omnichannel patronage intention and the offer of online shopping alternatives as key drivers of consumers' preferences for omnichannel retailing. This finding aligns with the literature's emphasis on the concept of "phygital" retailing, which integrates physical and digital elements, or online and offline channels, to create unique shopping experiences (Banik, 2021). In other words, there is a growing expectation for fashion designers to provide multiple, yet consistent brand messages across all omnichannel touchpoints. This includes focusing on online shopping alternatives and offering incentives that motivate customer loyalty, particularly in both South African and German markets.

The empirical findings generally supported the concepts discussed in the literature review, emphasising the significance of information, technology, seamless integration across channels, and regional variations in shaping consumers' preferences for omnichannel retailing. Nonetheless, some gaps were identified between the literature and the findings. While the literature discussed the importance of omnichannel strategies in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Verhoef et al., 2015), the empirical findings provided insights into specific factors influencing consumers' communication preferences for omnichannel retailing, such as information searching options and omnichannel patronage intention. Another gap was the limited discussion in the literature regarding the differential impact of various omnichannel factors across geographical regions. The empirical findings highlight differences in the influence of the offer of online shopping alternatives between South Africa and Germany, indicating the importance of considering regional communication variations in omnichannel preferences.

Additionally, while the literature acknowledged the significance of omnichannel convenience and usefulness (Verhoef et al., 2015), the empirical findings suggested that factors such as information searching options, may strongly influence consumers' preferences for omnichannel retailing. This indicates a need to further explore the relative importance of different omnichannel communication factors in driving consumer behaviour. Ultimately, the empirical findings contribute valuable insights into the drivers of omnichannel preferences, offering a more detailed understanding than what is often discussed in the literature.

6.2 What Type of Omnichannel Communication Is Required for Fashion Designers in Germany Compared to South Africa?

Furthermore, this paper highlighted the influence of regional differences on omnichannel preferences. While both South African and German consumers prioritised the offer of online shopping alternatives, South African consumers demonstrated a higher intention to patronise fashion designers offering both online and in-store services. This regional variation underscores the importance of tailoring omnichannel strategies to specific market contexts (Business of Fashion & McKinsey, 2022; Ryu, 2019).

Specifically for South Africa, fashion designers should leverage physical retail spaces to offer curated engagements, such as technological advancements that facilitate and educate consumers on innovative online and in-store interactions, exclusive product launches that provide a full omnichannel experience, and conceptual online or offline consultations that reflect local style narratives. This approach not only complements digital channels but also reinforces a sense of offline community for consumers, aligning with the notion that consumer-facing technologies are crucial in providing an integrated experience for fashion designers through digital technologies, online retailing, and brick-and-mortar channels simultaneously (Perry et al., 2019).

In contrast, German consumers demonstrated a more pragmatic engagement with omnichannel retailing, placing greater emphasis on information searching options within their shopping journey. This regional variation reinforces that mobile-assisted in-store engagement is closely tied to consumers' demand for real-time information and digital support tools, which are critical for shaping service quality perceptions (Ozuem & Patten, 2021). Specifically for Germany, omnichannel strategies should focus on enhancing in-store digital infrastructure, such as mobile-accessible product information, guided navigation through apps, and interactive displays that support informed decision-making. Such communication efforts not only align with German consumers' preference for functional efficiency but also enable fashion designers to build trust and improve channel synergy. Rather than emphasising emotional engagement, the German market demands clarity, accessibility, and frictionless transitions between online and offline touchpoints to foster sustained patronage and brand credibility. Overall, as Pangarkar et al. (2022) suggest, fashion designers should consider consumers' adaptation to

technology, focusing on leveraging the vast communication capabilities of “phygital” retailing to deliver exceptional experience.

7. Conclusion

This paper provides critical insights for fashion designers seeking to optimise consumer communication across channels, and offers recommendations for policy makers aiming to support omnichannel retail through targeted infrastructure and capacity-building programs. Consumers in both South Africa and Germany clearly prefer omnichannel retailing, particularly when digital and physical platforms are seamlessly integrated to support convenience, real-time information access, and personalised experiences. All tested hypotheses were shown to significantly influence consumer communication preferences toward patronising fashion designers who utilise omnichannel strategies.

For South African fashion designers, the findings highlight the importance of experience-rich in-store activations, mobile-enabled outreach, and community-driven engagements that reflect local narratives and foster emotional loyalty. Communication strategies that effectively bridge offline warmth with online functionality could amplify consumer patronage and peer-driven advocacy in the diverse African market. Policy makers are encouraged to focus on capacity-building programmes for fashion design entrepreneurs, emphasising digital enhancements, infrastructure investment, and creative technology adoption of creative technologies. Supportive policies that strengthen mobile and experiential/conceptual engagement could further democratise access and foster sustainable growth.

In Germany, consumer engagement with omnichannel retailing is more pragmatic, prioritising functional efficiency and real-time information. Fashion designers should focus on clarity, precision, and frictionless transitions across channels, embedding mobile-accessible product information, guided navigation through apps, and interactive displays to support informed decision-making. Policy frameworks in Germany should encourage strategic information flow throughout the value chain, leveraging technological tools, in-store infrastructure, and digital platforms to meet high consumer expectations.

While this paper offers valuable insights into omnichannel communication strategies for fashion designers, it is important to acknowledge a limitation related to the use of quota sampling. Although effective in ensuring demographic representation, the results revealed minor deviations from the targeted distributions. Firstly, in South Africa, LSM 7 was overrepresented, while LSM 10 was underrepresented. Secondly, in Germany, younger age groups were overrepresented, with older cohorts underrepresented. Lastly, the focus on urbanised and affluent segments (LSM/SEM 7–10) in South Africa and middle-to-upper income groups in Germany limits the generalisability of the findings to broader populations, while the exclusive reliance on online data collection introduces potential self-selection bias. As a result, respondents with greater digital literacy and access may be more inclined to participate, potentially skewing results toward more technologically receptive consumers. Future studies should consider expanding the sample to include rural and lower-income consumers to better assess the inclusivity and reach of omnichannel strategies. Overall, this paper contributes to the discourse on omnichannel retail by providing evidenced based insights into consumer communication preferences in South Africa and Germany. It offers culturally sensitive strategies for fashion designers and policy makers, emphasising the critical role of integrated digital and physical platforms to enhance consumer engagement and foster sustainable innovation within the fashion sector.

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Authors contributions

Dr. Boitumelo Poee and Prof. Veena P. Rawjee were responsible for study design and revising. Prof. Dr. Thomas Dobbstein was responsible for ensuring an accurate data collection and interpretation. Dr. Boitumelo Poee drafted the manuscript and Dr. Karen M. Corbishley revised and edited it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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