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DEVELOPING A MARKET SEGMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR A NEW ONLINE STORE (SHOP X)

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<p>The objective of the thesis was to create a market segmentation framework for a new online retail store inspired by Afrocentric styles. The goal of the framework was to support a strong entry into the competitive fashion industry by identifying optimal target market segments and marketing strategies.</p> <p>This research explored market segmentation and marketing strategies in the theory section, then employed a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a quantitative-dominant survey directed at Afrocentric enthusiasts across diverse age groups. Key segmentation variables, including demographic, geographic, psychographic, and behavioral factors, were identified and utilized to analyze the results. Four distinct market segments were established based on shopping motivation, style preferences, and online behavior: urban male customers, urban female customers, gender-neutral customers, and rural customers.</p> <p>In conclusion, a product, pricing, promotion, and distribution strategy was recommended for Shop X to tailor its product offerings and marketing efforts to align more effectively with the identified segments. The study also emphasized the necessity for a deeper research focus in a broader area and the value of employing diverse methods, including in-person interviews.</p>	
Keywords Market Segmentation, Positioning, Targeting.	

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1 INTRODUCTION

Johnson & Koech (2022, 2) in a study to establish how fashion designers today have managed to bring culture into cloths and created contemporary designs that have brought pride to East African communities, the authors note that recent years have seen Kenyan fashion artists feeling unsupported and lacking enough platforms to showcase their work, even as global demand for East African dresses has grown. To address this, a new venture, referred to in this study as Shop X, will be established. With fifteen years of experience in the fashion industry in Finland and Kenya, and a strong interest in Afrocentric style, this online store aims to introduce a new Afrocentric fashion trend in Finland. The goal is to support East African cultural identity and promote diversity in the Finnish fashion industry.

In 2023, Finland recorded a high of up to 73,236 immigrants, indicating a significant shift in the population's diversity (Official Statistics Finland 2023). The rise in cultural diversity in Finland is expected to create a substantial demand for diversity in fashion trends, including those of Afrocentric taste. This presents an opportunity to introduce and promote Afrocentric-inspired designs. Shop X has a vision to introduce Afrocentric-inspired designs in Finland and Europe.

The main objective of this thesis is to develop a target market segmentation framework for the upcoming Afrocentric fashion venture, Shop X. This Study aims to guide Shop X in entering the Finnish market by addressing the key question: "Who are the target market segments for Shop X?" To achieve this, the research will explore market segmentation processes relevant to the fashion industry,

1. Develop a segmentation framework tailored to Shop X's target audience
2. The Study will identify effective marketing strategies that best engage each segment. By addressing these areas, the research will provide valuable insights to ensure Shop X's successful market entry and long-term sustainability.

Chapter 2 of this study presents the idea of Shop X as a future business endeavor inspired by Afrocentric style. Chapter 3 explores the literature on market segmentation, its benefits, and challenges. Meanwhile, Chapter 4 outlines marketing strategies; Chapter 5 maps the quantitative-dominant mixed-methods survey directed at Afrocentric style enthusiasts. Following this, Chapter 6 analyzes the results, develops a market segmentation framework for Shop X, and suggests marketing strategies. This is succeeded by Chapter 7, which discusses the study. Chapter 7 summarizes the study, and Chapter 8 concludes the research.

2 SHOP X AND AFROCENTRIC STYLE

At this stage, Shop X is just an idea: a future online store specializing in Afrocentric style-inspired clothing, with a strong emphasis on fabrics originating from Eastern Africa. "Afrocentric style" or "Afro-style" is derived from "Afrocentrism," reflecting the store's commitment to using authentic, culturally significant materials. According to Bay (2000), Afrocentrism is an idea that celebrates the African origins, history, and character of Black people. The Afrocentric style reflects Shop X's commitment to using authentic, culturally significant raw materials in the creation of its finished goods.

The primary fabrics Shop X will use include the Kitenge fabric, a bold and colorful fabric often used for traditional and contemporary fashion; the Kanga fabric, a lightweight, patterned fabric with symbolic meanings and cultural expressions; and the Shuka, a durable and vibrant fabric commonly associated with Maasai culture. These fabrics form the foundation of Shop X's designs, conveying the brand's cultural identity, heritage, and product confidence.

According to Johnson & Koech (2022, 2), African clothing is not just about appearance. Every fabric's color, texture, and print symbols have meaning. These fabrics represent a culture's creativity, status, and connection to African roots. Fashion and dressing often play a vital role in preserving culture, and designers should always strive to showcase their work effectively enough to gain global recognition and appreciation for the beauty of East African heritage.

An article by Karim (2023), titled "Discover the Cultural Significance of Kitenge Fabric," states that African textiles, particularly the "kitenge" from East Africa, are now utilized for traditional purposes locally and serve as symbols of African pride while gaining recognition in contemporary fashion. Promoting African culture globally is crucial for preserving and celebrating African heritage and identity.

Johnson & Koech (2022,62,) describe the "Kitenge fabric" as a cotton fabric known for its vibrant colors and intricate patterns, created using a variation of the Indonesian batik technique. The "Kitenge" fabric is a visual representation of African cultural pride and unity. Figure 1 below shows assorted folded kitenge fabrics.



Figure 1. A stall sells a wide range of kitenge in Nairobi, Kenya (Zhu 2019, CC BY-SA-NC)

The "Kanga" Fabric is a rectangular cotton fabric developed by Muslim women along the East African coast in the mid-19th century. The "Kanga" is named after a guinea fowl, "Kanga" in Swahili, as

the fabric's patterns resemble the bird's feathers. The fabric's designs incorporate elements of the Tanzanian landscape, its flora and fauna, and other relevant cultural symbols. Figure 2 below shows the design of "Kanga Fabric." People often confuse the identities of the "Kanga" and "Kitenge," but there is a clear distinction in the fabric's texture and quality; "Kitenge" is thicker and more durable. (Johnson & Koech 2022, 62–64). While it retains the name "Kanga" in Tanzania, it is commonly referred to as "Leso" in Kenya. Besides the "Kangas" vibrant pattern designs, it is also popularly known for its traditional Swahili phrases, often used to express social values and identity (Figure 2). The "Kanga" plays a vital role in life events within the East African community, from wrapping newborns to shrouding the deceased. (Ryan 2016, 2).

Both "Kanga" and "Kitenge" have gained global recognition. In his recent publication, Karim (2023) highlights that designers and fashion enthusiasts worldwide have increasingly incorporated "Kitenge" into modern styles, maintaining its vibrant patterns, versatility, and cultural significance, and transforming the fabric into a global fashion icon. The designer's actions have created a market for it as a popular choice for casual and formal wear.

The "Kanga" fabrics gained international recognition and acclaim through their commemorative designs, including those honoring the former President of the United States, Barack Obama. In 2008, an "Obama Kanga" design was created to celebrate his presidential election (Figure 2). Furthermore, another Obama Kanga was introduced in 2013 to commemorate his visit to Tanzania, further enhancing the fabric's global appeal. (Ryan 2016,2).



Figure 2. "Kanga" with a message, which reads in translation, "Congratulations Barack Obama!" (Haight 2009, CC BY-NC).

The popular "Maasai" dress from the Eastern African Maasai tribe is crafted from "shuka" fabric, a cotton textile distinguished by its bold stripes and checkered patterns. Traditionally, red is the dominant color in Maasai attire. Over time, additional color variations of the "Shuka" fabric have emerged, symbolizing elements deeply connected to nature, the earth, freedom, bravery, and blood; the other colors include blue, representing the sky, heaven, and God, and green, which signifies fertility, the

earth, and prosperity. (Johnson & Koech 2022,62–64). Figure 3 below shows men from the “Maasai” tribe dressed in “Shuka” fabric clothing.



Figure 3. The “Maasai” tribe men wearing “Shuka” fabric (PxHere 2017, CCO)

Shop X's aim is to create its initial designs using the “Kitenge”, “Kanga”, and “Shuka” fabrics, ensuring it remains true to its commitment to the authenticity of African Heritage and cultural identity.

2.1 Why an Online Store?

As digital technology continues to transform businesses, its strategic and practical application holds the potential to achieve remarkable results. When utilized correctly, it enhances processes by enabling efficient data collection and analysis, saving time and money. This has empowered leading companies to establish digital organizations that automate repetitive tasks, boosting efficiency and reducing costs. (Myerson 2020, 212).

According to Kotler, Kartajaya, Huan, and Mussry (2023, 202–203), in 2020, sixty percent of the global population was connected to the Internet, which is projected to increase to ninety percent by 2030. This has driven a rapid evolution of technology, giving rise to social media platforms that facilitate personalized marketing, offer deeper customer insights, and benefit businesses.

By 2030, marketing practices are projected to have transformed to integrate creativity and technology, enhancing daily experiences. Artificial intelligence is also projected to prove essential for customer engagement and brand strategies, making its application indispensable for marketing departments. Therefore, to maintain competitiveness, businesses must be ready to adapt to the evolving market landscape swiftly. (Kotler et al. 2023, 38). Apart from Technology playing a prominent role, the COVID-19 era has significantly altered daily life, especially in shopping behavior, shifting from traditional shopping practices to contactless shopping. Both sellers and buyers adapted to contactless transactions through technology.

Technology enables companies to understand customers across multiple touchpoints and deliver personalized products and services more efficiently. Additionally, online technology has facilitated electronic payment methods, replacing traditional cash transactions. (Kotler et al. 2023,215).

Technology and the internet are essential in making supply chains more reliable and efficient, lowering costs and improving communication. The advent of technology has simplified the management of inventory, purchasing, transportation, order processing, vendor relationships, and customer service. Online systems enable businesses to track inventory, streamline procurement processes, and reduce paperwork. Real-time tracking enhances transportation reliability, while automation speeds up order processing. Companies can better assess vendor performance and improve customer service through real-time updates. These innovations enable supply chains to operate more quickly, efficiently, and respond effectively to market demands. (Myerson 2020, 72-73).

As an online store, Shop X offers more advantages than a traditional shop in today's digital era. Unlike physical stores, Shop X does not require a large workforce or the cost of maintaining physical space, allowing the business to keep operating costs low. The online platform also offers full-time accessibility, ensuring customers always have convenient access. It enables targeted marketing, personalized product recommendations, and efficient inventory management. Additionally, it facilitates a deeper understanding of customer behavior, allowing for quick adaptation to market trends.

Moreover, according to Agyapong (2017), in a recent study titled "Exploring the Influential Factors of Online Purchase Intention in Finland," Online shopping in Finland is driven by convenience, variety, and competitive pricing, with younger consumers leading the trend. While Finnish shoppers are open to new products, they tend to have more brand confidence in established stores. Trust issues persist as a significant barrier to online shopping. Still, despite this, the e-commerce industry continues to grow, influenced by consumers who recognize the convenience and accessibility that e-commerce provides.

2.2 Existing Afrocentric Online Stores

One of the existing Afro-centric online stores is Esengo, known for blending Nordic design with vibrant African prints. The brand aims to introduce bold patterns and colors to the Finnish fashion scene, with products crafted in collaboration with artisans in Ghana and local sewists in Finland and Sweden (Esengo n.d.).

Kip Fashion is also recognized as an online platform offering wholesalers and retailers custom-made African fashion and accessories. The brand has recently organized fashion shows in Nordic and the U.S.A., promoting a modern and Afro-centric mix of styles as the designs fuse traditional African artistry with contemporary aesthetics. Kip Fashion offers affordable, high-quality, and distinctive fashion pieces, and has been recognized not just as a business entity, but also as a community that celebrates African artistry and culture. (Kip Fashion n.d.).

River & Mara is an online store that represents the African heritage identity through its clothing. According to the online store, African fashion is regarded as a lifestyle, with handcrafted designs created to tell local stories. The brand believes in making each piece stand out through its uniqueness, utilizing high-quality African fabrics and storytelling. (River & Mara n.d.). The main similarity between the shops is that they all base their products on African-inspired heritage and distribute them globally via online stores, business models that provide a visual business idea for the upcoming shop X.

3 MARKET SEGMENTATION

According to McDonald & Wilson (2011,9), businesses must realize that markets are not homogeneous but exhibit diversity in customers' wants, preferences, and buying behaviors. Market segmentation, a fundamental concept in successful marketing, divides customers into distinct groups, also known as segments, based on similar characteristics. This, in turn, enables businesses to address the unique needs of each segment, making it easier to develop targeted marketing strategies and ensure customer satisfaction, ultimately helping companies thrive. Once segments are identified, brands can cater to each group directly, making it much easier to allocate resources efficiently, refine product offerings, and create messages that resonate with the targeted segments, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all strategy. Online businesses have also found it vital because segmentation enables firms to analyze customer behavior, predict preferences, and tailor marketing efforts accordingly.

It is essential to recognize that a fundamental challenge for businesses is delivering the right value proposition profitably without a thorough understanding of customer wants and needs, primarily because these needs differ across segments. Some customers may prioritize affordability in the fashion industry, while others may focus on brand prestige. (McDonald & Dunbar 2012, 10).

3.1 Types of Market Segmentation

According to Leisch, Dolnicar & Grün (2018, 39), segmentation variables typically focus on a single consumer characteristic. Variables commonly used to segment markets include demographics, geographics, behavioral, and psychographics. Figure 4 below illustrates the key variables of significance for consumer markets.

Segmentation Variable	Examples
Geographic	Nations, regions, states, counties, cities, neighborhoods, population density (urban, suburban, rural), climate
Demographic	Age, life-cycle stage, gender, income, occupation, education, religion, ethnicity, generation
Psychographic	Social class, lifestyle, personality
Behavioral	Occasions, benefits, user status, usage rate, loyalty status

Figure 4. Main Segmentation Variables in Consumer Markets (Kotler & Armstrong 2013,215)

3.1.1 Geographic Segmentation

Geographic segmentation is the oldest and most widely used technique for classifying customers by geographic areas, which can include broad segments like countries and regions, as well as detailed classifications such as cities, neighborhoods, or climate zones (Leisch et al. 2018, 42).

According to McDonald & Dunbar (2012, 206), geographic characteristics such as postcode or zip code, metropolitan area, rural area, city, town, village, county, state, region, continent, population

density, and even climate contribute to geographic segmentation. The authors also note that these segmentation characteristics enable businesses to understand how location may impact consumer behavior and preferences.

Zip codes usually enable businesses to target customers based on regions. In contrast, metropolitan and rural areas reveal the lifestyle and purchasing preferences of the inhabitants, allowing for the possibility of meeting customers' demands. Highly populated urban areas, such as city centers and towns, demand convenience goods and services, making e-commerce and digital marketing more prevalent for businesses and customers than in rural regions. Climate also significantly impacts purchasing behavior; for example, in tropical regions, customers focus on buying lightweight clothing, unlike in colder areas, where they opt for warmer, heavier garments. Well-integrated geographical data can facilitate more effective promotion and distribution strategies. (McDonald & Dunbar 2012,206).

According to Leisch et al. (2018, 42), the main advantage of geographic segmentations is that they are easily identified and can be placed almost automatically. This ease makes it simpler to target communication messages relevant to the segment target. However, people in a particular region do not necessarily share similar purchasing habits, tastes, or preferences.

3.1.2 Demographic Segmentation

Demographic segmentation categorizes customers into distinct segments based on various factors, including age, gender, family size, family life cycle, income level, occupation, educational background, religion, ethnicity, household composition, social class, and preferences for leisure activities or hobbies. Demographic characteristics are crucial in market segmentation, enabling businesses to identify and target specific consumer groups based on measurable factors. Age segmentation varies depending on the market, as different age groups have distinct needs, preferences, and purchasing behaviors. Gender also influences consumption patterns, with companies often tailoring their products and messaging to appeal to male, female, or non-binary consumers. Income level and occupation significantly influence purchasing power, affecting product affordability, brand preferences, and social status, whether one is interested in luxury or essential goods. The family life cycle is another crucial factor as individuals progress through stages such as being single, newly married, or raising children, each with unique spending habits and priorities. (Kotler, Armstrong & Opresnik 2021, 206-207).

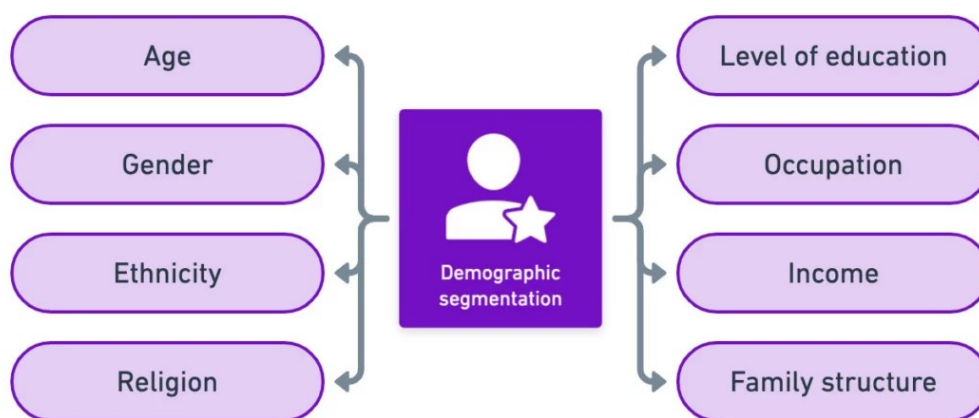


Figure 5. Demographic Segmentation Defined With 5 Examples (Yieldify 2020)

Demographic variables have an advantage over other segmentation variables because they are easy to measure. Factors such as age, gender, income, and education are readily available through surveys, census data, and market research, making them cost-effective and widely applicable. (Kotler et al. 2021 206-207)

Demographic data helps businesses identify the "who" within each segment; essentially, it outlines the characteristics of the people who comprise different groups. By understanding factors such as age, gender, income level, family life cycle, occupation, and other demographic characteristics, businesses can construct a clearer picture of their target audience.

3.1.3 Psychographic Segmentation

Psychographic segmentation categorizes individuals based on psychological criteria, such as beliefs, interests, preferences, aspirations, or the benefits sought during purchasing (Leisch et al. 2018 44; Kotler et al. 2021,207).

According to McDonald & Dunbar (2012, 207-209), Psychographic characteristics play a crucial role in market segmentation by providing insights into consumer behavior, preferences, and decision-making processes. Personality traits like compulsive, extroverted, or adventurous can influence how individuals interact with a new online company.

Identifying internal factors that drive customer behavior linked to specific segments and psychographics not only helps attract the attention of target groups but also provides insights on how to isolate and engage these segments (McDonald & Dunbar 2012,14).

The primary advantage of the psychographic approach lies in its ability to represent the psychological factors underlying variations in consumer behavior accurately. This method offers a deeper understanding of the reasons behind consumer choices, enabling businesses to develop more targeted and effective marketing strategies. On the downside, it heavily depends on the reliability and validity of empirical measures that assess psychographic dimensions. Furthermore, psychographic criteria are inherently more complex than geographic factors, making it difficult to identify characteristics that offer meaningful insights into the psychographic realm. (Leisch et al. 2018,44).

3.1.4 Behavioral Segmentation

An alternative segmentation method involves looking for similar behaviors or reported actions. Various behaviors can be analyzed, such as how often purchases occur, the amount spent each time, or over several buying instances, along with information-seeking behavior (Leisch et al. 2018,44).

According to Kotler et al. (2021,208), behavioral segmentation is considered the most effective starting point for market segmentation and can be subcategorized into benefit segmentation, occasion segmentation, loyalty status, and user status as key variables that define consumer behavior and purchasing patterns.

Benefit segmentation classifies customers based on the specific advantages they seek. Some prioritize affordability, seeking budget-friendly options and discounts. Others value convenience, preferring quick delivery and seamless transactions over price. Meanwhile, some emphasize premium quality, choosing luxury products, while others seek variety and trendiness, searching for the latest styles. Occasion segmentation groups the market based on when consumers purchase or use a product. This strategy helps businesses increase sales by aligning marketing efforts with specific times, seasons, or events. For example, companies may promote certain products more heavily during peak demand periods, such as winter clothing in the cold season. Businesses can optimize their marketing strategies to maximize engagement and revenue by understanding when customers are most likely to purchase. Behavior segmentation can be based on user status, categorizing consumers as non-users, ex-users, potential users, first-time users, and regular users. This approach enables businesses to tailor their marketing strategies to specific target groups. Non-users may need awareness campaigns, while potential users require incentives. First-time users benefit from onboarding, and regular users respond well to loyalty programs. Companies can re-engage former users by addressing the reasons they left. Understanding user status enables brands to develop targeted strategies that effectively attract, convert, and retain customers. Loyalty status segmentation categorizes consumers based on their brand commitment, ranging from fully loyal to frequently switching. Highly loyal customers are valuable advocates, promoting their brand through word-of-mouth and social media. Evaluating less loyal consumers enables businesses to pinpoint competitive risks and refine their engagement strategies. Understanding loyalty patterns enables brands to strengthen customer relationships and refine marketing efforts. (Kotler et al.2021, 209).

By integrating various behavioral variables, marketers gain a detailed perspective of the market and its segments, enabling them to refine their targeting strategies (Kotler et al. 2021, 265).

The primary advantage of behavioral segmentation is its reliance on actual consumer actions rather than self-reported intentions, aligning segmentation with key purchasing factors. However, it may not be suitable for potential customers who have yet to purchase the product (Leisch et al. 2018,44).

3.2 Role of Artificial Intelligence in Market Segmentation

Big Data and Artificial Intelligence (AI) transform marketing by enabling businesses to analyze vast amounts of customer data in real-time. AI-powered tools help marketers gain deeper insights, personalize offers, and enhance customer engagement. With advanced analytics, companies can use AI for faster decision-making, improved customer interactions, and automation through chatbots and virtual assistants. These technologies make marketing more efficient and responsive to consumer needs. (Kotler et al. 2021,45)

It is inevitable to mention Artificial Intelligence, especially in this post-pandemic era, as it significantly influences our day-to-day lives and is highly prominent in the business sector. Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious and vigilant about the potential risks associated with their purchases, particularly those involving physical interactions. Consequently, companies were compelled to revise their conventional market segmentation strategies to account for the new realities of consumer behavior. (Sawang, Lee, Chou, Vighnesh & Chandrashekar, 2023).

According to Haleem, Javaid, Qadri, Singh, & Suman (2022), in their article titled "Artificial Intelligence (AI) Applications for Marketing," AI has made significant inroads into marketing in recent years, helping firms enhance every stage of the consumer experience. AI enables marketers to quickly determine which content to target at customers and which channel to use at any given moment, focusing more on the customer and meeting their needs in real-time, thanks to the data collected and generated by its algorithms.

Algorithms analyze user data, including age, gender, demographics, and interests, to identify the most suitable audience for a specific brand. With the rise of voice search technology, significant changes have been observed in how people search for information online. As a result, marketing language is expected to become more precise due to the additional input provided by these technologies. (Haleem et al. 2022).

3.3 Benefits and Challenges of Market Segmentation

Market segmentation offers valuable benefits. It compels organizations to evaluate their position and strategies, enabling them to identify strengths relative to their competitors and gain a deeper understanding of consumer needs. Organizations can gain insights and develop fresh perspectives by segmenting, leading to effective decision-making and improved outcomes (McDonald & Dunbar 2012, 7).

Shop X is in its early stages and lacks data on consumer needs. However, market segmentation will help identify initial target segments. By focusing on specific groups, Shop X can tailor its approach, prioritize key customer needs, and establish a solid foundation for future growth, despite the lack of consumer data.

Segmentation enables resource allocation to areas with competitive advantages, enabling a company to differentiate itself, establish expertise by offering products or services that better meet customer needs, and focus on a niche for dominance (McDonald & Dunbar 2012, 40).

Marketing defines markets and identifies customer needs within segments, quantifying their significance. Strategies are developed to meet these needs, creating customer value (McDonald & Wilson 2011,2). Segmentation is crucial in marketing management, defined by Kotler et al. (2021,30-31) as selecting target markets and building profitable relationships. Creating segments is essential; merely pursuing many customers does not ensure satisfaction. Marketing management emphasizes demand and customer management.

Market segmentation enables businesses to target their sales efforts specifically to certain consumer groups, rather than attempting to appeal to a broad audience. This strategy enhances efficiency by directing resources to the most promising segments, making marketing more relevant and increasing the likelihood of a higher return on investment. However, smaller businesses face challenges

due to limited financial resources. Market segmentation also fosters teamwork, as it requires input from various departments, breaking down silos and enhancing communication. Collaborative efforts lead to synchronized strategies, which in turn improve overall performance. (Leisch et al. 2018, 8).

A study by Amine & Smith (2009, 93) titled “Challenges to modern consumer segmentation in a changing world” found that traditional market segmentation overlooks consumer migration and changing consumption habits, failing to meet their needs. New strategies, such as customer relationship marketing, value-added marketing, and personalized micro-marketing, highlight consumer uniqueness and offer tailored services. Therefore, transitioning to these methods is recommended to gain a deeper understanding of consumer behaviors.

3.4 Effective Market Segmentation Strategies

Market segmentation involves dividing a significant market into smaller, more manageable groups based on shared characteristics. For it to be effective, specific requirements must be met. First, the segments need to be measurable, meaning the characteristics of each group, such as size, purchasing power, and other relevant factors, can be quantified. Additionally, the segments should be substantial enough to justify targeting with marketing efforts. A segment that's too small may not be profitable or worth pursuing. It is also essential that the segments are accessible, meaning they can be reached through appropriate marketing and distribution channels. The segments must also be differentiable; there should be clear distinctions between them, with unique needs and behaviors that justify separate marketing strategies. Finally, the segments need to be actionable, meaning businesses can develop effective marketing programs or strategies tailored to meet the needs of each group. These requirements ensure market segmentation is effective and practical for creating targeted and profitable marketing strategies. (Kotler et al. 2021 213).

4 MARKETING STRATEGIES

Once a company understands its customers' needs, it must develop the right products to meet those needs. Additionally, a fair price must be set that strikes a balance between affordability for customers and profitability for the business. However, having a great product at the right price is not enough; the product must also be promoted effectively. This includes advertising, social media, personal selling, and special offers to attract and inform customers. Next, one must ensure the products are readily available at the right time and place. This involves distribution channels and customer service, which help build trust and long-term relationships with buyers. A comprehensive marketing plan or strategy must combine all these elements to ensure everything works smoothly. Ultimately, gathering accurate information about customers, competitors, and market trends is crucial. This helps us make more informed decisions and ensures that products meet people's needs. (McDonald, Wilson, & Chaffey 2024,11-12)

A marketing strategy defines how a business promotes its brand, products, and services to customers. The first step is to set clear marketing objectives, identify key targets, and establish a timeline for achieving them. While strategies vary based on business size and goals, the core marketing processes remain broadly consistent. These include identifying business opportunities, developing products and services, attracting and retaining customers, delivering value, and fulfilling business agreements. All steps in the marketing process are interconnected, so if one goes wrong, it can harm the entire business and negatively impact how customers perceive the brand. For a business to succeed, it must effectively handle all these steps. The marketing mix helps by ensuring that all its components are harmonized to achieve the company's goals. (Posner & William 2015,40)

4.1 Marketing Mix Strategies

The marketing mix is a key concept in modern marketing, referring to the combination of strategic tools a company uses to achieve its desired response from the target market. It includes all business actions to engage customers and deliver value, typically through product, price, place, and promotion. These tools are carefully blended to form a comprehensive strategy that addresses customer needs and helps the company meet its objectives. (Kotler et al.2021,71)



Figure 6. The Four Ps of the Marketing Mix (Burton Incorporated and Vibe Education Limited 2012-2023, CC BY-NC)

There is no specific way to use the marketing mix, as each business requires a unique approach. The key is to ensure the product is suitable for the market, competitively priced, readily available in the right locations, and effectively promoted to the target audience. A well-crafted marketing mix aligns with the company's goals and effectively adapts to market changes. (Posner & William 2015, 40-41). Figure 6 above clearly illustrates the four Ps of the marketing mix, showing how they are centered on the target market and intended positioning.

The traditional 4P marketing mix primarily centers on the seller's perspective and the company's internal priorities, often overlooking the evolving needs of buyers. However, the original model has been redefined due to a shift in market dynamics, with customer preferences now emphasizing value and relationships. In the modern era, the 4Ps are now more effectively represented as the 4As, focusing on accessibility, affordability, acceptability, and awareness. This updated approach ensures businesses align their strategies with consumer expectations, fostering stronger connections and delivering better value. (Kotler et al. 2021,73).

Four Ps	Four As
Product	Acceptability
Price	Affordability
Place	Accessibility
Promotion	Awareness

Figure 7. The 4As of the Marketing Mix (Kotler et al. 2021,73)

The 4As of marketing- Acceptability, Affordability, Accessibility, and Awareness- enhance the traditional 4Ps (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) by transitioning the focus from internal company strategies to a customer-centric approach. Acceptability corresponds to Product, highlighting the necessity of fulfilling customer demands through quality, functionality, and emotional resonance. Affordability is linked to Price, ensuring a product's cost aligns with customer expectations and perceived value. Accessibility aligns with Place, prioritizing the availability of products when and where customers require them via effective distribution channels. Finally, Awareness relates to Promotion, ensuring that marketing initiatives effectively convey a product's value and benefits to the intended audience. By merging the 4As with the conventional 4Ps, companies can create a holistic marketing strategy that provides customer value, strengthens relationships, and promotes long-term success in a competitive market.

- Product

As shown in Figure 6 above, the product in the marketing mix includes variety, quality, design, features, brand name, packaging, and services. Different product options are provided to meet customer needs, and quality is ensured to build trust. Design and features are added to enhance usability and appeal. Brand names help create recognition and value. Packaging not only protects the product but also serves as a marketing tool. Additional services, such as warranties, are offered to

enhance customer satisfaction. All these factors are carefully planned to make the product competitive and appealing in the market, thus, the acceptability of the goods by customers, as illustrated in Figure 7 above.

According to Posner & William (2015,42), in fashion, a product is more than just clothing; it encompasses design, style, fit, size, quality, trends, and function. Rather than standalone pieces, apparel is typically part of a well-planned collection that meets customer needs and falls within the proper price range. A good marketing strategy ensures that products offer variety and appeal to the target audience. Every product has attributes and benefits. Core attributes, such as protection and coverage, serve basic needs, while tangible attributes, like fabric and design, provide physical benefits, like a waterproof jacket keeping someone dry. These details are often highlighted in marketing. Beyond function, intangible qualities such as emotions and brand perception play a crucial role in the fashion industry. People do not just buy clothing; they buy into the ideas and feelings that come with it, making fashion a profound personal experience.

- Pricing

Figure 6 illustrates Various factors, including base cost, discounts, and payment options, that determine the price of a product. Adjustments are made to align with customer expectations and market trends. Discounts are offered to attract buyers, while flexible payment options are provided to ease purchasing. A well-structured pricing strategy is implemented to maintain profitability and competitiveness. Figure 7 also illustrates the Graduation of Price to affordability, which is more tailored to every unique customer.

Price includes manufacturing costs, wholesale and retail prices, discounts, margins, and profits. It can be viewed from two perspectives: the cost perspective, which focuses on production or purchase costs, and the selling price perspective, which considers what customers are willing to pay based on affordability and perceived value. Understanding customer perceptions and competitor pricing is essential, as research helps track changes in these areas. A balanced pricing strategy is needed for individual items and the overall product mix. A pricing structure that ranges from the lowest-cost items to the most expensive must be established when developing a pricing strategy. This structure should include products at multiple price points to cater to different customer segments. Specifically, it should offer items at introductory, medium, and high price points. By doing so, businesses can effectively address a broad range of customer needs and preferences, ensuring that pricing options align with the diverse market segments they aim to target. Price points must be carefully set; however, the desired profit margins may not always be met. Nevertheless, price adjustments can help achieve a workable margin overall. (Posner & William 2015,46).

According to Hollensen (2019,512), Pricing is often underrated, even though it is the only element in the marketing mix that directly generates revenue. The other elements, product, place, and promotion, mainly incur costs such as marketing strategy and advertising expenses.

- Place

According to Figures 7 and 8, to ensure accessibility and convenience, the distribution of products is carefully planned through strategic channels and locations. Inventory management, transportation,

and logistics are structured to deliver products efficiently, allowing customers to receive them at the right time and place.

In the context of fashion marketing, place refers to ensuring that the right product reaches the right location at the right time and in the correct quantity. It involves logistics, including transportation, storage, and distribution of merchandise. The process, known as the 'route to market,' encompasses various distribution and sales channels. These include direct routes, such as online shopping and phone orders, service-oriented channels like retail stores, catalogs that may transition to online platforms, and public events like fashion shows. (Posner & William 2015, 48-49).

- Promotion

The promotion section in Figure 6 discusses how customers communicate with and are encouraged to engage with a brand. Key elements are highlighted, including advertising, personal selling, sales promotions, public relations, and digital marketing strategies. Target customers and intended positioning are recognized as the core focus; concerning the 4 As, promotion is perceived by customers as Awareness, as illustrated in Figure 7.

In fashion marketing, promotion refers to the process of communicating with customers using various tools to market and promote a company and its products. A promotional mix is employed to achieve a company's promotional goals. In the fashion industry, standard promotional methods include advertisements in renowned fashion magazines and catwalk shows that attract the public, gain media attention, and secure celebrity endorsements. Additionally, the rise of digital and social media has created new and innovative ways to effectively promote fashion brands. (Posner & William 2015, 49).

4.2 Targeting

Chapter 3 examines segmentation as the first step in target identification, breaking a large market into smaller groups based on shared characteristics. These include demographics such as age, gender, income, education, and occupation, which help identify groups with similar needs and purchasing power. Geographics refers to customers' locations—country, region, or city—which is vital for location-dependent products or services. Psychographics explores lifestyles, interests, values, and attitudes, offering insights into purchasing motivations. Behavioral segmentation analyzes customer actions, including purchase frequency, brand loyalty, and usage patterns. Understanding these elements enables businesses to identify distinct market segments and tailor their offerings and marketing strategies to meet the unique needs and preferences of each group. (Kotler et al. 2021, 211-212).

Once the market is segmented, the next step is to target and decide which group or groups to focus on. Not all segments are equally attractive, so evaluating each based on several key factors is crucial. First, assess the size of the segment and whether it is large enough to be profitable. Then, consider the segment's growth potential and whether it has room to expand or provide long-term opportunities. Accessibility is also crucial in determining how to effectively reach segments through marketing efforts, including distribution channels and communication strategies. Lastly, it is essential to analyze the segment's competitiveness, including the number of other companies already targeting this group and the level of competition within it. Evaluating these factors helps ensure that target

segments are viable and align with the company's resources and objectives. (Kotler et.al. 2021, 213-214).

During the targeting stage, market segments are identified using segmentation data, enabling businesses to pinpoint specific consumer groups that can be reached with tailored marketing approaches. Companies employ various targeting strategies, including undifferentiated, differentiated, concentrated, and micromarketing, to direct their efforts toward the most promising segments of the market. These strategies help businesses meet the diverse needs of their customers. Analyzing consumer behavior plays a crucial role in understanding decision-making processes and facilitating the development of personalized marketing messages, product offerings, and pricing strategies. This strategic approach ensures alignment between marketing efforts and the target audience, ultimately enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction. (Tiwari & Tiwari 2024, 67).

4.3 Positioning

Positioning focuses on how the target audience perceives the brand. It is about creating a unique identity in the market that sets the product apart from competitors and ensures customers associate it with specific benefits or qualities that fulfill their needs. Effective positioning involves highlighting the product's unique features, including design, functionality, or quality. It also employs effective pricing strategies to reflect value while remaining competitive. Additionally, positioning is reinforced through advertising, branding, and customer experiences, all of which help communicate the product's unique value and solidify its position in the minds of consumers. The goal is to ensure that when the target audience thinks of the product, they think of a solution that best meets their needs. (Kotler et al.2021,221).

The brand must be positioned to appeal directly to the target audience. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, positioning is based on perception and refers to how consumers perceive a brand. This position also depends on how the brand or product is viewed in relation to other brands in the same sector. To position itself effectively, a strategy must be developed that considers the positioning of competitors and the brand's desired perception. A positioning map illustrates a brand's desired position and compares it with its competitors. The positioning process involves several key steps. First, the market in which the brand or product will compete must be defined. Next, a decision must be made regarding where the brand will be positioned within that market. It is then necessary to determine whether to compete directly with a competitor or to differentiate by offering something unique. Understanding how consumers currently perceive the brand's position is crucial to the process. Ultimately, based on these insights, the company must determine whether repositioning is necessary to better align with its desired market position. Repositioning is shifting a brand's position in consumers' minds to achieve this alignment. Once a clear position is established, it must be communicated to consumers through all aspects of the brand, including image, products, packaging, promotion, and online presence. Consistency across these elements is crucial. Positioning and repositioning are costly, so a brand's position should remain stable to ensure clear differentiation from competitors. (Posner & William 2015,55-57).

4.4 Distribution channels

Distribution channels, also known as marketing channels, are structured systems that facilitate the movement of goods and services to end-users. They are essential for connecting producers with

consumers. These channels include intermediaries such as wholesalers, retailers, and agents who bridge the gap between manufacturers and customers. The involvement of these intermediaries is crucial for ensuring the availability, accessibility, and efficient delivery of products on the market. Through these organized networks, the distribution process is effectively enabled and maintained. (Dhotre 2009,4, 4)

Role of Distribution Channels

Distribution channels efficiently move goods and services from producers to consumers, sometimes bringing together buyers, sellers, and even middlemen. In the distribution process, promotional information about products is provided to customers. Prices and delivery terms are negotiated on behalf of producers, and ownership of goods is transferred. Inventory is kept to reduce risks and costs for producers. Financial backing is frequently given through advance payments or stockholding. Pre-sale and post-sale services, such as support and complaints management, are available when direct customer contact is not feasible. Customers receive updates on new features, pricing changes, and product launches. Arrangements for transportation and warehousing are made, and market feedback is collected to guide future business decisions. (Dhotre 2009, 4–5).

Levels of Distribution Channels

Distribution channels can be categorized into several levels. The zero-level or direct channel bypasses intermediaries, enabling products to be sold directly from manufacturers to consumers. This method is often used for perishable goods, luxury items, or products from financially stable companies sold through exclusive outlets or online platforms. Typically, small producers catering to local markets utilize this strategy. Examples include brand selling through websites, factory outlets, or direct services such as freelancing. The one-level channel involves a single intermediary between the manufacturer and consumer, such as a retailer, dealer, or franchisee. This setup enhances market reach and provides some control over distribution, a common approach in sectors such as electronics, automobiles, and luxury brands. A two-level channel includes two intermediaries, usually wholesalers and retailers. This model is prevalent for fast-moving consumer goods, groceries, and household items. It enables manufacturers to effectively access a larger market, especially when distributing substantial quantities of products. Lastly, the three-level channel introduces an additional intermediary between the wholesaler and retailer, typically an agent. This approach is typical in complex or international markets that demand extensive coverage. While it enhances market access, it also leads to higher distribution costs and less control over product and brand representation for the producer. (Kotler et al. 2019,634-635).

Multichannel marketing

Multichannel marketing involves engaging with customers through multiple channels, including both direct and indirect communication methods. These channels include websites, physical stores, direct mail, emails, and other communication methods. Businesses typically utilize a combination of these methods to allow customers to select their preferred channels, thereby enhancing the customer experience and increasing the likelihood of purchases. This approach enables businesses to expand their reach by connecting with a broader audience, thereby making marketing campaigns more effective. (Kotler et al. 2019,628, 628).

Factors Influencing the choice of a distribution channel

Several factors influence the selection of distribution channels. The type of product, whether perishable or durable, dictates the need for direct or indirect channels. The target market and its purchasing habits are also significant. Additionally, considerations regarding middlemen, including their costs, availability, and legal limitations, are crucial in this selection process. Moreover, a company's resources, distribution policy, and organizational framework also significantly impact decision-making. Market aspects must also be considered, including the size, frequency of customer orders, and the distribution channels of competitors. (Dhotre 2009,8).

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, primarily quantitative. Quantitative methods involve analyzing numerical data to test hypotheses, performing statistical analysis, and drawing general conclusions from the findings. In contrast, qualitative methods focus on non-numerical data, such as experiences and meanings, to explore phenomena in depth within specific contexts. (Hammond & Wellington 2021, 127-128).

Primary research refers to data obtained through first-hand investigation. New data is collected to answer a specific question using interviews or observation. Secondary research involves information gathered from reports and surveys compiled by others. The existing data is collated and analyzed to explore the question at hand. (Posner & Wiliam 2017,76).

For this study, primary data were collected by distributing a structured questionnaire via email using Google Forms. A survey is a research method in which participants answer questions through a questionnaire or an interview (Kawamura 2020,62).

Survey research involves collecting data from a group of people. It generally focuses on quantitative data, such as the frequency of an event or the level of agreement with specific statements; however, some surveys also include open-ended questions. The primary purpose of a survey is to understand how people feel, think, or behave in particular ways. Surveys provide a quick and straightforward means to gain a general overview, but they can also be used to explore ideas and test hypotheses. (Hammond & Wellington 2021 170-171).

The survey used in this Study consists primarily of closed-end multiple-choice and checklist-format- ted questions, allowing for statistical analysis of trends and patterns. Additionally, one open-ended question was used to capture qualitative insights, providing a deeper understanding of respondents' perspectives. The questions explored in the questionnaire aimed to gain an in-depth knowledge of customer buying behavior and motivations, shopping and style preferences, customer expectations and unmet needs, and the amount customers are willing to spend on Afrocentric-style clothing.

The quantitative component of this research enables the identification of measurable patterns, while the qualitative aspect helps contextualize these findings by incorporating direct participant feedback. By integrating both methods, this Study ensures a more comprehensive analysis of a market seg- mentation framework for Shop X.

Secondary data can be utilized in three ways: for reference, such as general statistics; as bench- marks for comparison, for instance, local findings versus national averages; or as the primary source for research projects, for example, market behavior. If available, secondary data are a valuable re- source for research (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 87). The secondary data in this study fo- cused on market segmentation, marketing mix strategies, research processes, and Afrocentric fash- ion sources. The relevant sources included journals, articles, and eBooks by various authors.

In the initial stage of this study, sources were used to understand Market segmentation, Marketing, and research methodology. The survey questions are derived from concepts and literature on mar- ket segmentation processes. Finally, the literature is utilized to appropriately analyze Shop X's seg- mentation and provide suitable distribution channel recommendations. Since this study employed a quantitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Primary data was collected through Google Forms, which automatically generated summary statistics and visual representations, making it relatively easy to interpret.

5.1 Research Design

The survey consists of questions covering various aspects of the respondents' demographics and fashion preferences. The key areas of inquiry include demographic information such as age, gender, and other relevant background details; fashion preferences, mainly focused on preferred styles with a particular emphasis on Afro-style clothing; and shopping habits, mostly exploring shopping frequency, including online shopping behavior and purchasing patterns. Questions focused on style availability and pain points, investigating whether respondents find clothing that aligns with their preferences and identifying challenges they face in the market. Spending behavior, assessing the amount respondents are willing to spend on Afro-style fashion. Questions were asked to gauge respondents' familiarity with and enthusiasm for Afro-style clothing, and suggestions were gathered on how to enhance the online shopping experience for Afro-style fashion.

5.2 Research Implementation

According to Twenge (2023,2), in a book titled "Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents and What They Mean for America's Future", the author categorizes the six age groups into Generation Z, Millennials, Boomers, and Silents, he is quick to mention that the categories are not just an American phenomena but also other countries do relate to generations even though there might be slight cultural differences in them. The author also explains that age-based categories are relatively new; years ago, the term "generation" was understood in terms of family relationships, but now it is understood as a group of people who grow up around the same time and share similar experiences. He supports the idea that age categorization is a more reliable way to understand people of similar age who have been shaped by similar experiences, rather than grouping them based on family backgrounds.

In his article titled "Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins," Dimock (2019) explains that there is no formula for defining generations; their span categorizes them. This explains why different authors share minor generational differences in age group categories. According to Dimock, Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996, Generation Z between 1997 and 2012, and Generation X between 1965 and 1980.

These age groups were relevant to this study because they targeted millennials, Generation Z, and Generation X. The survey questionnaire was distributed to participants of various age groups interested in Afrocentric styles. This study values the inclusiveness of diverse generations and all genders to ensure a range of perspectives and a comprehensive market analysis.

The selected groups included Millennials Born between 1981 and 1996 known to be representing the prominent working group; their responses provide valuable insights into purchasing power and shopping habits; moreover, according to Agyapong(2017,27) in a recent study titled "Exploring the Influential Factors of Online Purchase Intention in Finland" younger adults, mainly those aged 20-25, are more inclined towards online shopping which this Study is particularly interested.

Generation X, born between 1965 and 1980, is known for its extensive shopping experience. Generation X's input helps us understand purchasing behavior from a seasoned consumer perspective.

According to Agyapong (2017, 27), the Study also revealed that young adults in Finland are more engaged in fashion purchases, but shopping declines after college as responsibilities increase. By their 30s, consumers tend to focus more on their family needs. However, between the ages of 36 and 40, increased income from career advancements leads to a resurgence in shopping activity.

Generation Z, between 1997 and 2012, is considered the younger generation of consumers in this study. Their trends, preferences, and input are essential in shaping a modern and youthful collection for Shop X. Their involvement aligns with the entrepreneur's vision of incorporating a fresh and contemporary touch into the brand's offerings. Naturally, Generation Z could be Children of some Millennials or Generation X, who will mostly be shopping for them; Shop X must be inclusive of their views for this future store's Study and as the near future millennials, including them in the focus group ensures that shop x will be updated in the oncoming trends that will interest them.

5.3 Findings And Analysis

We emailed randomly chosen participants from our target demographic, who showed an interest in Afrocentric style and were assumed to belong to the age groups of Millennials, Generation X, and Generation Z. Collecting and organizing the responses was straightforward using Google Forms. Out of thirty participants, twenty responded, offering valuable insights into the study. The results were analyzed and visualized in the pie charts and bar charts below.

What is your age group?

20 responses

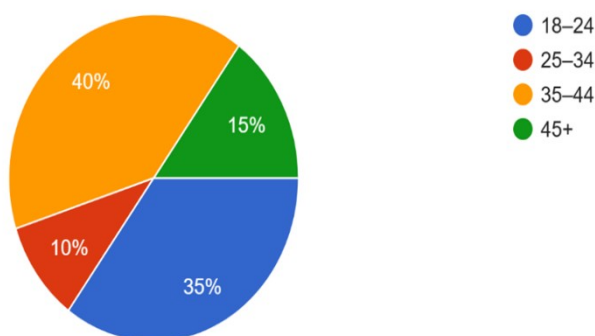


Figure 8. Age group analysis pie chart

Figure 8 indicates that the largest group of respondents is made up of individuals aged 35–44 (40%), which includes late Millennials and early Generation X, reflecting a strong presence of middle-aged users. Generation Z (ages 18–24) is close behind at 35%, highlighting substantial engagement among younger adults. In contrast, Millennials aged 25–34 represent only 10% of the respondents, indicating a lower participation rate from this age group compared to others. Meanwhile, older generations (ages 45 and above) account for 15%, indicating some engagement from Generation X. This distribution suggests that the main audience is primarily composed of middle-aged and younger individuals, while Millennials form a relatively small portion.

What price range do you consider reasonable for Afro-inspired clothing

20 responses

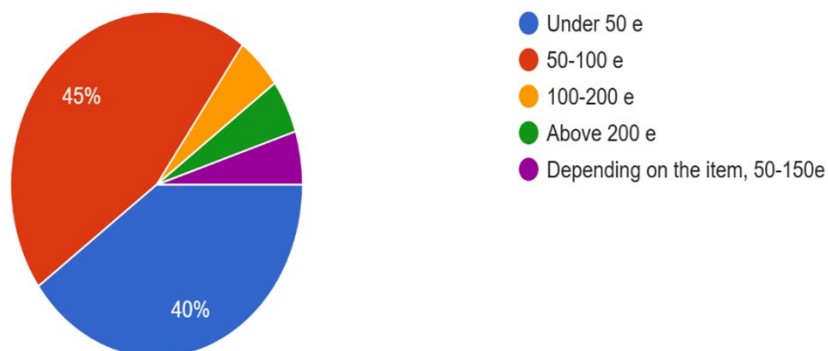


Figure 9. Price range analysis pie chart

Figure 9 illustrates that survey results indicate a significant preference for affordable Afro-inspired clothing. Of the 20 participants, 40% believe that a price below €50 is reasonable, while 45% prefer the €50-100 range, making it the top choice. The results show that a substantial majority (85%) expect Afro-inspired clothing to be priced below €100. Only a few respondents find the price ranges of €100- €200 or above €200 acceptable, reflecting limited interest in higher-priced items. Additionally, some participants expressed that pricing should vary based on the item, ideally between €50 and €150. These findings suggest that businesses targeting this market should prioritize competitive pricing in the €50-100 range, while allowing for some flexibility in pricing premium items.

What is your gender?

20 responses

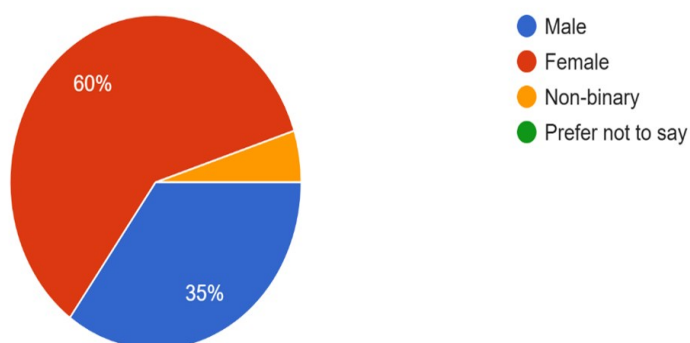


Figure 10. Gender analysis pie chart.

The pie chart above, labeled Figure 10, shows the gender distribution of survey respondents. Approximately 60% of the participants are female. Male respondents account for 35%, while 5% iden-

tify as non-binary. Notably, no participants opted to withhold their gender information. This distribution highlights a greater engagement from female participants, which may impact the overall preferences and trends noted in the study, particularly in fashion choices and shopping behaviors.

Where are you located?

20 responses

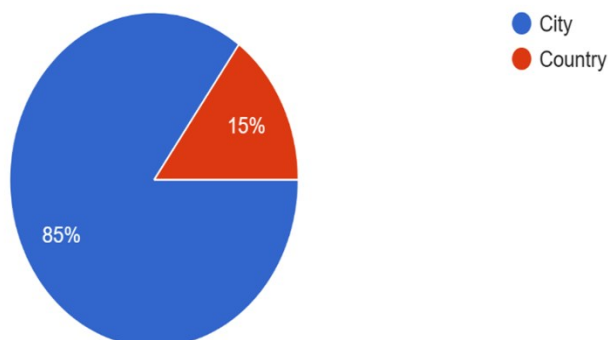


Figure 11. Demographics- Location analysis pie chart.

Figure 11 illustrates that most survey participants (85%) reside in urban areas, while 15% live in rural locations. The prevalence of urban responses indicates that the preferences and insights collected reflect the views of city inhabitants. Recognizing this is crucial for market segmentation, as urban consumers often exhibit distinct fashion influences, purchasing behaviors, and access to Afro-inspired clothing compared to those in rural areas.

How often do you shop for clothing online?

20 responses

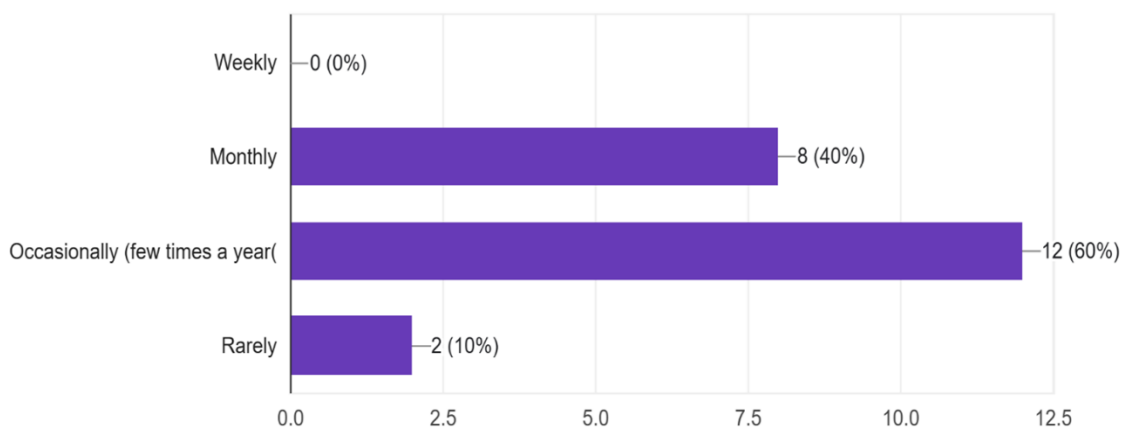


Figure 12. Shopping frequency analysis chart.

The survey results presented in Figure 12 indicate that most respondents, comprising 60% (12 out of 20), engage in online shopping only occasionally, specifically a few times each year. Conversely,

40% (8 respondents) reported making online clothing purchases monthly; no participants indicated engaging in weekly shopping, highlighting the rarity of frequent online shopping within this demographic. Furthermore, 10% (2 respondents) stated they seldom shop for clothing online. These findings imply that while online shopping is relatively common, it also signifies that most consumers participate infrequently, with only a smaller segment engaging in more regular online purchases.

How do you discover new clothing brands?

20 responses

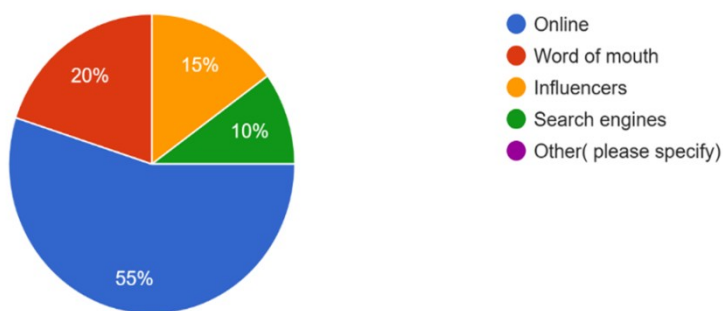


Figure 13. Shopping Behavior Pie-Chart analysis

Figure 13 illustrates that 55% of participants discover new clothing brands through online platforms, highlighting the significant dependence on digital channels for brand discovery. Following this, word of mouth emerges as the second most prevalent method, accounting for 20% of answers and underscoring the enduring influence of personal recommendations. Influencers, or brand ambassadors, affect 15% of respondents, indicating that social media personalities and content creators have a slight impact on consumer decisions. Additionally, 10% of participants use search engines to find new brands, indicating a smaller yet notable group that engages in targeted searches rather than relying on passive discovery.

What's the most important feature when shopping for clothing online

20 responses



Figure 14. Online shopping behaviors and preferences analysis.

The survey results in Figure 14 also indicate that easy website navigation and customer reviews are the most essential features when shopping for clothing online, each selected by 65% of respondents. This highlights the value consumers place in a seamless browsing experience and the influence of peer feedback in shaping purchasing decisions. Additionally, 50% of respondents emphasized the importance of detailed product descriptions, multiple payment options, and fast shipping, highlighting that clear product information, flexible payment methods, and quick delivery are also key factors influencing online shopping behavior.

What attracts you to Afro-inspired clothing?

20 responses

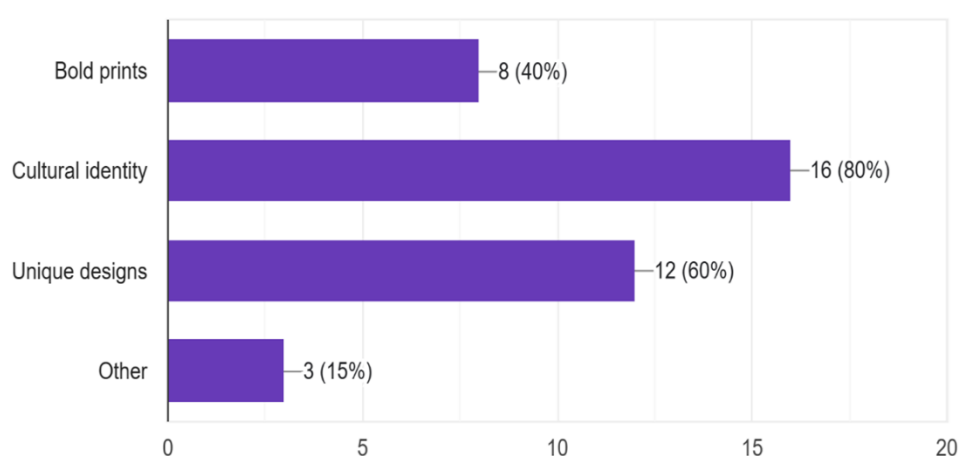


Figure 15. Style detail preference analysis.

The survey results presented in Figure 15 indicate that cultural identity constitutes the most significant factor enticing respondents toward Afro-inspired clothing, with 80% (16 out of 20) identifying it as their primary attraction. This underscores consumers' strong emotional and cultural connection to fashion, highlighting their heritage. Moreover, unique designs contribute to this inclination, appealing to 60% of respondents, which suggests an appreciation for distinct and creative styles. Simultaneously, bold prints attract 40% of participants, demonstrating an interest in vibrant, eye-catching patterns typically associated with Afro-inspired fashion. Furthermore, 15% of respondents selected "Other," indicating that additional factors influence their preferences beyond the options provided.

When do you usually wear Afro-inspired fashion?

20 responses

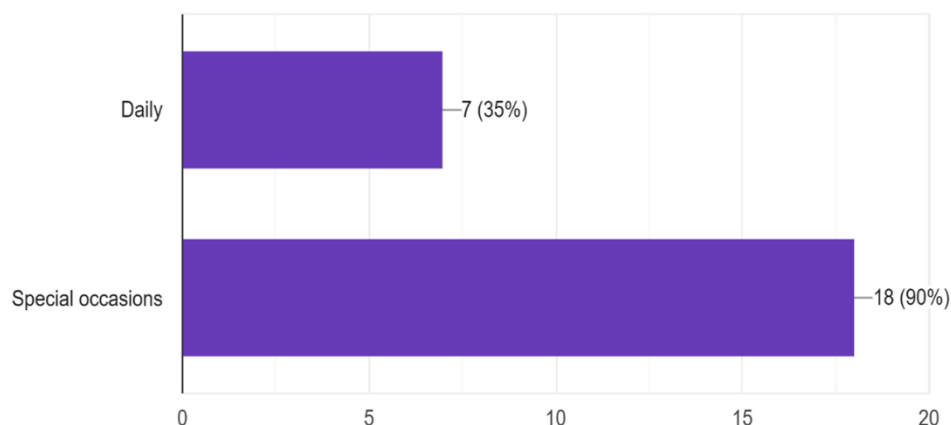


Figure 16. Afro Style Frequency Analysis

Figure 16 illustrates that Afro-inspired fashion is predominantly worn during special occasions, rather than as part of daily attire. Among the 20 respondents surveyed, 90% indicated they wear Afro-inspired styled clothing for special events, while only 35% integrated it into their everyday wardrobe. This implies that Afro-inspired fashion is primarily suited for cultural celebrations, formal gatherings, or specific social occasions, rather than casual wear. The findings highlight the significance of cultural identity and tradition in fashion choices, underscoring that Afro-inspired styles are often reserved for special occasions rather than everyday use.

Responses to the open-ended question highlight several key factors that would make an Afro-inspired online store stand out. One of the most frequently mentioned aspects is uniqueness and identity, with respondents emphasizing the importance of a “very unique identity and style” and “unique outfits” that reflect Afrocentric culture. Additionally, the quality of the fabric and designs plays a crucial role; as one respondent noted, “the quality of fabric and designs,” while another described the style as “the best.”

Many respondents underscored the significance of vibrant colors and bold patterns as defining characteristics that enhance overall appeal. Moreover, exceptional customer service and favorable reviews substantially contribute to a brand's reputation, as one individual aptly articulated, “Unique designs and great customer service!” A respondent expressed the demand for Afrocentric streetwear and casual fashion, showing interest in items such as “hoodies with an Afrocentric twist” and suggesting that an Afro-inspired online store would distinguish itself by featuring streetwear with an African influence.

Lastly, a strong cultural connection remains a significant factor, with one response highlighting the importance of “personality and individuality that communicates passion for the culture.” These findings suggest that an Afro-inspired online store can differentiate itself by focusing on originality, high-quality products, bold aesthetics, excellent customer service, and a mix of traditional and modern styles.

6 MARKET SEGMENTATION FOR SHOP X

Segmentation for Shop X is based on the various segmentation processes discussed in Chapter 3 and their application to Shop X. We explored how businesses categorize their customers to determine the best ways to target the market and meet customer needs. The segmentation process will also help Shop X recommend marketing strategies that effectively enhance customer satisfaction.

This study applies primary market segmentation variables, including demographics, geography, behavior, and psychographics, to segment its market. It hopes to answer the main research question, “How to develop a Market segmentation framework for the new online store?”

6.1 Demographic Segmentation

As discussed in Chapter 3, Demographic segmentation categorizes customers into distinct segments based on various factors, such as age and gender. The survey had questions related to age and demographics. The respondents indicated whether they live in an urban or rural area and their corresponding age group.

Figure 11 illustrates the Age Segmentation results, highlighting that the 35 to 44 age group (40%) includes Late Millennials and early Generation X members. This group typically demonstrates financial stability and is intensely interested in cultural heritage and modern fashion trends. The 18 to 24 age segment (35%) represents Generation Z, known for their high engagement levels and preference for bold, Afro-inspired fashion as a form of self-expression. Individuals aged 45 and older (15%) mainly consist of older Generation X individuals, who value cultural connections, though their buying behaviors can vary. Finally, millennials aged 25 to 34 form a smaller segment (10%), indicating lower engagement in this market; nevertheless, they present a potential interest group for Shop X to explore further to enhance engagement strategies.

Fig. 13 depicts gender segmentation. Females constitute 60% of the demographic, indicating that marketing strategies should prioritize designs and fashions tailored for women. Males, accounting for 35%, represent a smaller yet noteworthy segment; therefore, there should be a concentrated effort to promote Afro-inspired fashion for men. Non-binary individuals, who comprise 5% of the population, represent a minority in numerical terms. Still, they are a significant demographic to engage with for inclusivity, thereby ensuring that the brand offers gender-neutral options.

6.2 Geographic Segmentation

Geographic segmentation categorizes consumers based on their geographic location, as detailed in Chapter 3. The survey question yielded results contingent upon whether the participants resided in rural or urban regions. According to Demographics, the location analysis pie chart (Figure 14) illustrates that 85% of the population inhabits urban areas. Urban residents constitute the largest segment and should be the primary target for marketing initiatives. Inhabitants of densely populated urban locales are more inclined to participate in online activities, with urban, fast-paced, high-fashion trends being more relevant than a convenient style tailored to the rural population's target market. Approximately 15% of the respondents reside in rural areas. Although this segment is smaller, marketing strategies should consider the unique needs of rural consumers, who may experience limited access to Afrocentric-inspired fashion, primarily due to their focus on convenience in attire rather than style.

6.3 Behavioral Segmentation

According to the information presented in Chapter 3, behavioral segmentation encompasses a diverse array of potential consumer behaviors and purchasing patterns, including occasion segmentation, loyalty status, and user status. Figure 15 illustrates a Shopping Frequency Analysis chart. A significant portion of the respondents indicate that their purchase frequency reveals a tendency to shop online occasionally, with 60 % of respondents purchasing a few times per year. Furthermore, the Afrocentric Style Frequency Analysis depicted in Figure 19 shows that most respondents tend to wear Afrocentric styles occasionally rather than frequently, indicating a clear trend for Shop X products. Regarding occasion segmentation, this finding suggests that Shop X should focus on seasonal promotions and create opportunities for customers to make more frequent purchases.

The price range pie chart analysis indicates that most respondents (85%) favor clothing priced below €100, while a segment is prepared to spend between €50 and €150. This insight suggests that Shop X could successfully offer competitively priced products while appealing to customers willing to invest in premium items.

Figures 16 and 17 present the survey results, emphasizing consumer shopping behaviors. Most respondents preferred online shopping; the results further indicate that user-friendly website navigation and customer reviews constitute the most critical features when purchasing clothing online. Shop X has established a significant advantage in its distribution strategy. It is recommended that the company prioritize these factors: rather than relying on conventional methods, implementing an intuitive online store incorporating a dependable feedback system is of the utmost relevance.

6.4 Psychographic Segmentation

Psychographic segmentation is based on psychological criteria, such as beliefs, interests, and preferences, to categorize buyers, as discussed in Chapter 3. Results from the Style preference analysis generated from this study reveal that most respondents are motivated by the cultural connection to the Afrocentric style, unique designs, and bold patterns. This indicates that Shop X's designs should feature vibrant, eye-catching patterns that reflect African heritage. Additionally, Shop X can focus on stocking authentic fabrics from various East African cultures, such as those mentioned in Chapter 2.

Segments for Shop X

The segmentation criteria, including demographics, geographics, behavioral, and psychographics, were used to create Shop X's target segments, which identify target market segments one, two, three, and four.

- Segment 1: Urban women (aged 18–44):

According to the survey results from the Shop X study, urban women aged 18 to 44 represent the largest and most engaged group of females. They may include university students, younger and older professionals, and even entrepreneurs with moderate to high incomes, enabling them to focus on fashion, dressing, and style. While mostly financially stable, they also bear significant financial responsibilities. This group predominantly resides in urban areas, such as Kuopio City, where most research participants are based.

The urban women's segment emphasizes self-expression, empowerment, and authenticity, and their options reflect their values and beliefs. They often appear motivated to seek brands that align with their personalities, lifestyles, and identities; they are highly fashion-conscious and culturally aware.

Often, when foreigners leave their home countries, they appreciate their culture more and strive to reconnect with their heritage as a means of establishing a sense of identity. Shop X should focus on creating culturally resonant, trendy, and affordable Afro-inspired clothing lines that target young adults and middle-aged women, who are likely to resonate with the brand's values. This segment is also expected to be highly active on digital platforms, with online shopping being particularly prevalent, as it aligns with existing social media trends.

- Segment 2: Urban Men (aged 18–44)

While smaller than the female segment, men aged 18 to 44 can tap into Afro-inspired fashion. This segment comprises young to middle-aged men based in urban areas, like segment 1. The individuals may include students, entrepreneurs, creatives, and professionals, representing a financially stable group ready to spend on clothing.

Segment 2 is also open to expressive fashion trends and authenticity while maintaining cultural pride in style. It values stylish yet functional clothing that communicates cultural heritage while remaining modern and bold. Shop X should reflect cultural identity and creativity, appealing to fashion-conscious young adults, as well as male and mature customers.

- Segment 3: Non-Binary and Gender-Neutral Consumers

While underrepresented, this segment should be targeted through inclusive fashion options that emphasize personal style and cultural heritage. Among the survey respondents, those identifying as gender-neutral represented the smallest percentage compared to other genders. Incorporating gender-neutral clothing allows Shop X to demonstrate its commitment to inclusivity. Non-binary consumers tend to be younger, often from urban demographics, seeking styles that affirm their self-expression and identity beyond conventional brand norms. This segment aligns with brands prioritizing authenticity, inclusivity, and cultural significance. Shop X could offer affordable, Afrocentric pieces that are accessible to everyone, regardless of gender bias in clothing.

- Segment 4: Rural areas segment (Aged 45+)

While they make up a small portion, the rural demographic promotes inclusivity. This group includes individuals over 45 who reside in rural areas and value fashion that honors heritage and community identity. Generally, they favor modest, practical clothing that is closely tied to their cultural identity. These garments are often worn in the rural areas at community events, ceremonies, and religious gatherings. Quality and affordability are key factors when focusing on the rural segment.

6.5 Positioning

Effectively positioning the brand will be crucial in distinguishing it from competitors and appealing to its target markets. According to this study, potential competitors include existing Afrocentric online stores, such as those mentioned in Chapter 2, including Esengo, Kip Fashion, and River & Mara. However, given that the market for this exotic style is growing rapidly today,

Shop X will position itself by highlighting cultural and personal identity, emphasizing authenticity through three East African fabrics: "Kitenge," "Kanga," and "Shuka," as detailed in Chapter 2. The future brand will offer a sense of pride and individuality by positioning Shop X as a brand that celebrates African culture through fashion, emphasizing bold prints and unique designs that resonate with cultural identity and offering a gender-neutral style.

Affordability is also a Highlight in positioning Shop X. Affordable pricing, especially within the 50-100€ range, makes Afrocentric-inspired clothing accessible without compromising style and cultural significance. This should be communicated clearly in all marketing efforts.

The brand's trendiness and inclusivity should also be emphasized. Shop X should offer trendy, modern, Afrocentric-inspired clothing that appeals to urban youth and middle-aged customers. The positioning should also reflect inclusivity for gender identities, with gender-neutral options available.

Unique Selling Proposition: "Shop X should offer affordable, bold, and culturally resonant Afro-inspired fashion that connects heritage with unique designs that individuals can relate to. An example would be," From the heart of Africa to the trendy, culture speaks".

6.6 Recommendations for Shop X

- Product Strategy

As discussed in Chapter 4, product strategy generally emphasizes variety, quality, design, features, brand name, packaging, and services. In fashion, a product is more than just clothing; it provides design, style, size, quality, trends, and function.

This study suggests that Shop X should offer collections featuring genuine East African fabrics such as "kanga," "Kitenge," and "Shuka," which showcase a variety of Afro-inspired designs appealing to both traditional and modern preferences. The selection of a brand name and slogan is crucial to fostering a connection to Afrocentrism and cultural heritage, as many respondents from the survey expressed a desire for this relationship, emphasizing that brand names significantly contribute to recognition and value. A strong suggestion for a brand name is "**Maridadi**," a Swahili word meaning beautiful, which has East African origins.

Packaging serves as a marketing tool, not just a form of protection, so Shop X should boldly convey the brand's originality and authenticity. The originality of the East African fabrics is crucial for this study's segments because they all seemed to lean towards Afrocentrism.

The product line should feature bold prints, vibrant colors, and distinctive patterns that celebrate African heritage, while offering versatility to suit a range of style preferences. Urban consumers tend to prefer more trendy pieces, while rural markets often opt for more traditional and functional items, prioritizing convenience and practicality. Shop X should offer gender-neutral options for the smaller but valuable non-binary segment.

- Pricing Strategy

According to Chapter 4, pricing is often underrated even though it is the actual revenue generator, while promotion, place, and product are basically just supporting elements. This study does not in-

tend to underrate pricing for this reason. Price is determined mainly by manufacturing costs, wholesale and retail prices, discounts, margins, and profits and depends on whether it is viewed from a cost or selling price perspective.

According to the price range analysis in Figure 12, many respondents are willing to pay between 50 and 100 euros for the pieces from shop X. Shop X should focus on affordable pricing (50-100€) for most items. Because some respondents are willing to pay over one hundred euros, it is necessary to introduce premium collections with flexible pricing for exclusive high-end items. This means that the Shop will focus on production and logistics prices within the range that the customers are willing to pay. This dual approach allows Shop X to cater to budget-conscious shoppers and those seeking luxury, maximizing market reach and profitability. Developing strategies for discounts or limited time offers to increase engagement and loyalty, especially for occasional online shoppers, is also a good addition. Running a webstore will ensure an efficient, easy-to-use variety of payment options for the diversity of potential customers.

- Promotion Strategy

According to Chapter 4, promotion entails communicating with customers via advertising, personal selling, sales promotions, digital strategies, public relations, and more. In fashion, the promotional mix includes fashion shows to promote the brand and seasonal styles, magazines like the famous Vogue magazine, digital marketing, and more.

For Shop X, multi-channel marketing is essential, which involves interacting with customers through various alternatives by employing both direct and indirect communication channels as discussed in Chapter 4. According to the shopping Behavior Pie Chart analysis, on Figure 13, respondents' shopping habits are online, word of mouth and have a keen interest on influencers and promotions. As a new venture, entering the market requires that Shop X carefully create outstanding content for social media platforms. Initial brand promotion and collaborations with influencers to showcase the clothing line are critical in generating interest, particularly among Generation Z and Millennials.

Emphasis should be placed on crafting content highlighting each design's cultural significance and narrative through partnerships with bloggers, YouTubers, TikTokers, and influencers, fostering a deeper emotional connection with the targeted demographics. Collaborations with influencers will not only enhance the visibility of Shop X but will also allow these partners to earn commissions. Moreover, implementing a loyalty program is advisable to promote referrals, repeat purchases, and increased social media engagement. Prioritizing interactions on social media is essential by initiating user-generated content campaigns that encourage customers to share their images and stories using branded hashtags. Interactive campaigns, such as challenges, should be developed, and content marketing through a blog or video series should highlight the cultural stories behind the designs. Advertising on social media should also be used to drive brand awareness and spark conversions.

It is imperative to incorporate offline channels to cultivate direct customer engagement, particularly targeting potential Generation X customers and the rural segment. Organizing pop-up shops in both urban and rural settings, as well as participating in African cultural festivals, fashion events such as fashion shows, and community gatherings, is recommended. These mixed promotion ideas will enhance brand connection with customers.

- Distribution Strategy

Chapter 4 of this study explained that in the fashion industry, place refers to ensuring the product reaches the customer at the right place and at the desired time, basically including the logistics of the products. This study also explained that Distribution channels are structured systems that facilitate the movement of goods and services to customers.

Shop X should prioritize online distribution channels for several reasons. As discussed in Chapter 2, numerous technological advancements have been made, as well as the Internet's efficiency; for this reason, Shop X was envisioned as an online store. Additionally, according to Figure 16, respondents from the survey conducted by this study indicated that most are already using online options to purchase clothing. Payments can be easily processed over the Internet, and promotions can be effectively managed online, as discussed in the promotion strategy.

Developing a webstore and optimizing its navigation for Shop X will facilitate usability by providing extensive product descriptions accompanied by high-quality images and guaranteeing expedited shipping alongside diverse payment options to accommodate a varied customer demographic. This strategy will enhance customer satisfaction and streamline the purchasing process. Building a strong feedback system and sharing reviews is strongly advisable, as respondents from the survey suggested. Engaging with customers through authentic storytelling via the webstore strengthens emotional connections, enhances brand loyalty, and creates a sense of belonging for the audience.

7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The rise in the immigrant population indicates a growing demand for Afrocentric fashion in Finland. At the same time, the increasing dissatisfaction among Afrocentric fashion entrepreneurs has prompted the need for Shop X and this study. This research explores market segmentation and promotional strategies for the newly established fashion venture, Shop X. Envisioned as a future Afrocentric online clothing store, Shop X aims to cater to a niche audience. After exploring the visual Afro-centric inspirations for Shop X, this research thoroughly examines existing literature on market segmentation and marketing strategies to develop the ideal market segments for Shop X, based on demographic, psychographic, geographic, and behavioral factors. This study highlights the importance of assessing the role of artificial intelligence in market segmentation processes, as it is impossible to overlook its significant impact in today's rapidly evolving international landscape.

After conducting a quantitative-dominant mixed-methods study using Google Forms to explore customer behavior, style preferences, expectations, and willingness to spend on Afrocentric fashion, this research analyzed trends and tested hypotheses, with the qualitative component providing more profound insights. The use of Google Forms was quite efficient and time-saving, as the results are automatically generated in the form of pie charts and tables, making it easier to present them via narrative analysis. The study successfully gathered twenty out of thirty responses, which was sufficient, though more responses would have been even more ideal. Secondary data from journals, articles, and e-books on market segmentation, marketing strategies, Afrocentric fashion, and the impact of technology on businesses today were gathered and utilized to analyze the survey data.

The research has identified four primary demographic segments: urban women aged 18 to 44, men aged 18 to 44, non-binary and gender-neutral consumers, and individuals aged 45 and older residing in rural areas. This study concludes that Shop X should prioritize trendy Afrocentric fashion, functional design, affordability tailored to each segment, high quality, inclusive branding, and, critically, styles that emphasize distinct cultural expression and identity. This finding addresses the initial research question regarding the development of a segmentation framework tailored to Shop X's target audience.

The study also recommended marketing strategies that emphasize the importance of targeting, positioning, and distribution methods specifically tailored to the identified segments. The analysis focuses on segmentation variables to create recommendations for Shop X's strategic potential. A product, price, promotion, and distribution strategy were developed, establishing a solid foundation for the new venture to enhance its market understanding. This study concludes that promotional initiatives should be undertaken to introduce the brand to the market, specifically targeting each segment to improve brand visibility in both urban and rural areas, as well as on online platforms. Marketing strategies involving social media influencers, seasonal promotions, and loyalty programs aim to strengthen customer relationships and drive brand engagement across all segments. The rapidly evolving digital shopping landscape fulfills the initial aspiration to establish a future webstore, as research respondents prefer online stores to traditional physical locations. The study successfully addressed the second research question by identifying the most effective recommendations to engage each target segment group. The findings of this research are expected to provide valuable insights that will aid in the strategic entry and long-term sustainability of Shop X in a market characterized by diversity.

8 DISCUSSION

Throughout this study, the key objectives were successfully achieved. The methodologies employed proved effective in addressing the research questions. This study used a mixed-methods research approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, and utilized both primary and secondary data sources to gain a deeper understanding of various target segments and how to create them. In Chapter 6, Target markets were identified and analyzed based on multiple factors, including urban women, urban men, non-binary or gender-neutral customers, and rural customers aged 45 and above. Positioning was emphasized, with the thesis arguing that a strong cultural identity and authenticity should be at the core of Shop X's brand positioning strategy, standing out from possible competition. The successful engagement of survey participants during data collection also contributed to the positive outcomes, which were crucial in drawing meaningful conclusions. This achievement highlights the importance of careful planning and execution in research design. Furthermore, recommendations were provided for developing a diverse product line that caters to both traditional and modern tastes. It was concluded that by focusing on affordability, trendiness, and inclusiveness, Shop X could establish a unique market presence in the fashion industry. Overall, the thesis presented a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing consumer engagement with Afrocentric fashion, offering strategic insights to enhance brand positioning and appeal.

While the study achieved its primary goals, some aspects could benefit from refinement in future research. The qualitative component of this study yielded some unclear answers, particularly in the open-ended question, indicating a need for more rigorous pilot testing of the survey instruments before their widespread distribution. In the future, different survey methods could be explored to enhance understanding of each query the study investigates. Techniques such as in-person interviews are effective, as they allow the interviewer to seek additional clarification from the interviewee regarding the questions asked.

Another area identified for potential improvement is the study's time management. Several phases experienced delays, which impacted on the overall timeline. This delay challenge was primarily encountered while awaiting respondent feedback; surveys require a well-planned feedback period, as everyone naturally works within certain timelines. Establishing more specific deadlines may help address this issue in the future. Setting a survey reminder system and allowing respondents additional time could enhance the reliability of the results and provide a more comprehensive view of the research question while conducting a questionnaire survey.

Finally, engaging experts from the existing fashion industry, for example, through interviews with similar Afrocentric stores mentioned in Chapter 2, may foster diverse perspectives and innovative approaches, ultimately leading to a more comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

This research has also raised new areas that require further investigation. As noted earlier, this study examined responses from 20 participants primarily located in the urban area of Kuopio, which may have biased the results obtained. Since Shop X plans to operate as an online store, broadening the research to encompass various regions rather than focusing solely on one city would provide invaluable insights into the business's future. The survey can also be extended to a larger area beyond Finland to help grow the business in the years to come.

To ensure the reliability of this thesis, credible data sources were utilized and properly cited using Harvard referencing to promote transparency before drawing any conclusions. The data collection methods and analyses were clearly outlined, and the results were presented clearly and concisely. Limitations and potential biases acknowledged. Additionally, the work underwent a quality assurance review process.

Overall, this study establishes a strong foundation for Shop X's launch, and any further research will only enhance both the foundation and the longevity of the start-up's Afrocentric online store.

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographics Related Questions

1. What is your age group?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45+

2. what your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-Binary/Other (Please specify).

3. Where are you located?

- City
- Country
- Shopping Habits

4 How often do you go online shopping?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Occasionally (Few times a year)
- Rarely

Shopping behaviour-related questions

5. How do you discover new clothing brands?

- Social media ads
- Word of mouth
- Influencers
- Search engines
- Other (Please Specify)

Afro-inspired clothing preferences/Style questions.

6. What attracts you to Afro-inspired clothing?

- Bold prints
- Cultural connection
- Unique designs
- Sustainability
- Other (Please Specify)

7. Which type of Afro-inspired clothing do you prefer?

- Dresses
- Tops
- Skirts/Pants
- Accessories

8. When do you usually wear afro-inspired clothing?

- Daily wear
- Special occasions
- Other (Please Specify).

Pricing, Shopping Experience, and Suggestions.

9. What price range do you consider reasonable for Afro-inspired clothing?

- Under 50 e
- 50-100e
- 100-200 e
- Above 200 e

10. What's the most important feature when shopping for clothing online?

- Easy website Navigation
- Detailed product descriptions
- Multiple payment options
- Fast Shipping
- Customer Reviews

11. What would make an Afro-inspired online store stand out to you? (Open-ended question)