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Challenges Facing Apparel Traders in Nairobi, Kenya, and Strategies for Flourishing in a Liberalized Market

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Abstract

The lack of enabling policies that would have ensured fair trade amongst various stakeholders of contrasting interests in Kenya became obvious when market liberalization was introduced in the 1990s. It created increased importation of cheap textiles and apparel products to the detriment of the local industry. Market liberalization became a common phenomena in developing countries in the 1990s, prompting the need for their documented assessment, hence this study. Data were collected from a random sample of 90 apparel traders drawn from three market centers in Nairobi according to the types of apparel they sold

(new imported, second-hand, locally produced, and custom-tailored apparel). Lack of customers and stiff competition were the major challenges facing over 55% of the apparel traders. Most traders provided high quality merchandise as the main strategy to increase purchase of apparel. Chi-square analysis showed that the trader's age, employment position/designation, and source of fabric/clothing were the socioeconomic characteristics that significantly influenced the type of apparel sold. Therefore, the study recommends that other apparel traders adopt these factors, to increase their competitive edge and enhance growth of the local industry.

KEYWORDS: competitiveness, clothing retailer, prosperity, consumption, liberalization

Introduction

To enhance international trade in Kenya, the government undertook market liberalization in 1993 with the hope of increasing efficiency in trade for improved economic growth (Nyang'or 1994: 38). The net effect of this liberalization has been increased importation of both new and second-hand apparel into the Kenyan market, thus diversifying consumer choices. With relatively higher taxes being imposed on locally produced items, imported apparel (whether new or second-hand) has become cheaper leading to their increased purchase as opposed to local apparel (GOK, Central Bureau of Statistics 1995: 143). Other factors such as good workmanship and the garment enhancing the wearer's appearance have also contributed to this trend (Migunde 1993: 39–65).

Despite being the second largest employer in the manufacturing sector after the food industry, Kenya's textile and apparel industry has been faced with problems that have negatively affected its development (Werbeloff 1987: 80–6). These problems include a local market limited by low per capita incomes thus reducing the purchasing power of consumers; shortages of local skilled personnel hence the need for expatriates; inadequate foreign exchange; and increased imported textiles and apparel resulting from market liberalization which are sold at informal open markets to the disadvantage of local traders (Werbeloff 1987: 80–6). Market liberalization redirected consumer clothing choices to imported apparel, a situation that has threatened survival of the local industry.

Although apparel traders range from mass-producing industries to exclusive fashion designers and custom tailors, they must evaluate apparel quality before making decisions on acquiring it (whether by production or purchasing). As noted by Donnel *et al.* (1986: 34), it is the fabric that a consumer sees first, and a closer inspection of a garment

is made only if the fabric is visually appealing. Other factors such as workmanship, care labeling, and price also influence a consumer's decision to purchase (Migunde 1993: 39–65). Research on imported apparel in the area of Kenyan consumer preferences and selection (Migunde 1993: 39–65; Nyang'or 1994: 41) indicated that traders of locally produced apparel are unable to meet consumer needs with respect to quality, thus are often out-competed by traders of imported apparel. However, regardless of the type of apparel being traded, the ability of the trader to influence preferences of a consumer contributes significantly to his or her purchasing decisions (Elung'ata 2003: 4). Therefore, to understand trade within a liberalized market and the ability of a business to flourish within it, this study was guided by the following objectives: (a) to identify the socioeconomic characteristics of selected local apparel traders; (b) to identify the challenges facing these apparel traders as they work within a liberalized market; and (c) to investigate measures being undertaken by local apparel traders to be competitive

Methodology

Study Area and Sampling

This study was carried out 2003 in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya and a major center of various business activities. Nairobi is a central market for a variety of apparel for Kenya's cosmopolitan population. The Nairobi City Council has designated several market centers (a designated area defined by roads or enclosure comprising of up to 100 shops rented/assigned to traders of different merchandise) where different types of apparel traders are found. These markets include the Central Business District and its environs such as City, Jericho, Kenyatta, Uhuru, Burma, Kariobangi South, and Kariokor markets (Figures 1, 2, and 3). Traders of apparel were stratified according to the type of apparel sold: new imported, second-hand, locally produced apparel, and custom tailors.

A preliminary survey of the above categories indicated that, out of the total population of apparel traders, 40% were designers/custom tailors, 30% were new imported apparel traders, 18% were second-hand apparel traders, and 12% were locally produced apparel traders (Figures 4 and 5). Purposive sampling was then used to select market centers in which there were at least 100 apparel traders as well as those in which at least four categories of apparel traders could be found Nairobi. The market centers that qualified were Jericho and Kenyatta markets, and the Central Business District, from which a sample (15%) was obtained. Simple random sampling was then used to select individual traders of each category at each market center.

Figure 1

A custom tailor working in her stall at a market center. Photograph: Maina Thange.



Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using an interview schedule consisting of both open-ended and closed questions that addressed the various socio-economic factors of the apparel traders and details about the individual businesses and merchandising techniques. To check for bias and flaws, the instruments were pre-tested on twelve respondents, three from each category of apparel traders who qualified to be in the sample but were not included in the final sample. Bias and flaws could have occurred if the research instruments were neither reliable nor valid. Any bias and flaws in the interview schedule and observation checklist were modified for more clarity and accuracy. The variables measured were gender, level of education, occupation including business ownership, geographical location of the business

Figure 2

A shopping alley in a Nairobi City Council market. Photograph: Maina Thange.

**Figure 3**

A local Woolworths franchise operated under the Deacons name. Photograph: Maina Thange.



and the quality of apparel sold. Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Frequencies and percentage tables were used to present the results. Results from the checklist were used to describe sales promotion techniques used in the respondents, elaborate findings from the interviews and explain unexpected phenomena.

Figure 4

A shop in Nairobi's Central Business District selling locally manufactured fabrics and apparel. Photograph: Maina Thange.

**Figure 5**

Blashara Street in Nairobi's city center is where budget-conscious tourists as well as locals go for fabrics and textiles. Photograph: Maina Thange.



Results and Discussion

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Apparel Traders

This study revealed that there were more female apparel traders (57%) than male apparel traders (43%) in Nairobi. The overwhelming majority (89%) of the apparel traders were under the age of 40 years and none were over 55 years old. All traders interviewed had attained some

form of formal education with the majority having attained secondary level (56%). Most of those who only had primary or some secondary level education learnt the trade on the job as apprentices. The usefulness of education was evident in the way traders kept their business records and communicated with customers.

Most apparel traders (65%) owned their businesses while only 35% were employed as assistant managers or attendants. The assistant managers had the sole responsibility of running the businesses while their employers only provided the necessary capital. Most (57%) of the apparel traders had been in the business for less than five years, perhaps because most of them were young people who had just completed high school or college.

Characteristics of the Apparel Businesses

Target Clientele

Target clientele in this study refers to the main customers targeted by the apparel traders. An overwhelming majority of the traders interviewed (89%) had women as their target clientele compared to 39% who targeted men, 30% targeting children, and 12% infants. This they reported was because new designs for women's clothing were being introduced often into the market and women consumers strive to acquire them at the same pace, thus becoming desirable customers. According to most (30%) apparel traders, women were targeted most because they said they always needed clothes, thus the traders were sure their merchandise would be bought. Frisbee (1985: 203) observed that women have more clothes than men and working women have more than those not working. Also, 21% of the traders emphasized the fact that women were always willing buyers of their merchandise because they enjoyed dressing up. It was evident that several of the traders that had women as target clientele also included children and/or infants/babies. Traders who targeted men reported that men were high earners and preferred new items. Some of these traders sold womenwear as well as targeting tourists.

Most traders, however, sought more than one type of clientele in order to exploit multiple categories of customers more easily and efficiently. Only a few traders chose only one target clientele, mainly because they specialized in specific categories of clothing. The apparel traders stocked merchandise that would meet the needs of their target clientele (i.e. men's wear, women's wear, infants' wear). Apparently when traders attracted other clientele in addition to their targeted clientele, some realized increased sales. This was considered a boost to the business. Clearly, a greater knowledge of their customers enabled the respondents to meet their clients' clothing needs.

Number of Employees and Duration of the Business

With regard to the number of employees in the various business establishments, most apparel traders (71%) had fewer than five employees

or none (20%); only 8% had 6–15 employees. Such apparel businesses were small enough that the owner or assistant manager could effectively attend to their clients. Only when the designers/custom tailors had several orders did they hire part-time tailors. These small businesses show themselves to be powerful instruments of generating job opportunities; since through contracting, they can perform small projects anytime that might be too costly for large firms thereby working at competitive prices (Mvubu and Thwala 2008: 1).

Type of Clothing Sold

The study revealed that 37% of the respondents sold custom-tailored/designer apparel that they made themselves and 32% of the traders sold new imported apparel. These proportions could indicate that consumers considered both new imported and custom-tailored clothing as high quality. Only 17% sold second-hand apparel and 14% sold locally produced apparel, mostly uniforms for schools or work.

Most traders preferred fabric/clothing from foreign sources (76%) rather than local (Kenyan) sources (24%). The preferred reasons for foreign fabric/clothing related to customers' preference for imported apparel. They saw imported apparel as high quality, representing current styles with a large variety to choose from, cheap, and easily available. Other reasons given by traders for preferring foreign apparel included the fact that local sources had been depleted, forcing traders to look for alternative sources of merchandise and the merchandise sold quickly. Of those that preferred Kenyan sources for their fabric/clothing, 56% of them said it was because these items were cheaper than foreign ones. Kenyan fabric/clothing were easily available for 24% of the respondents. Of the respondents, 8% said Kenyan items were unique and another 8% said tourists preferred these. Most traders obtained the merchandise they sold by themselves (52%) while others (48%) got their merchandise through a second party (employer, agent/supplier). In some cases, customers would bring their own fabric to the custom-tailors to be made into garments. Regardless of whether the merchandise was obtained from local or foreign sources, the items brought profits to the traders. Since profit is the ultimate goal of business, no profit will lead to discontinuation of fashion lines (Dickerson and Jarnow 1997: 8). Though traders would not sell merchandise that did not realize any profits, these findings indicate that local fabric and apparel manufacturing firms must review their products so as to compete with imported merchandise.

Apparel Traders' Level of Awareness

Apparel Traders' Level of Awareness of Consumer Preferences

This study also tried to determine the traders' awareness of the factors customers considered when selecting specific apparel to buy. Most of the sampled apparel traders in Nairobi (77%) agreed that majority of customers looked for good stitching/workmanship in garments because

these garments were durable. Other major factors that influenced customer selection included right size (57%), right style (57%), and right color (50%). Interestingly only 43% and 29% said that customers were concerned with a suitable price and fabric, respectively. Only a mere 8% cared whether the clothing was a new arrival, mainly in keeping with the current clothing trends. Thus, knowing consumer clothing preferences assisted the trader in providing the right merchandise. Also, by pointing out these aspects to customers, traders were able to sell their merchandise.

Traders' Level of Awareness of Specifications Asked by Customers

In terms of what customers often asked for, 43% of the respondents agreed that customers often asked for specific items, probably because most customers had already decided on the type of garment to buy before visiting the shop. Most customers asked for either a specific type of clothing (e.g. shirt, blouse, skirt or trousers (84%), specific fabric like cotton or polyester (60%), or specific color (57%) or size (21%). The low number of customers asking for specific size could be that once they had found a garment they liked, they would simply try on various sizes until they got the one that fitted best.

Techniques Apparel Traders Used to Convince Reluctant Clientele

In order to convince reluctant customers to buy items, the majority of the traders tried to explain the positive aspects of the garment, such as durability and ease of care (71%) and its suitability for enhancing their appearance (52%). Additionally, a good number of the traders (41%) lowered the prices to convince reluctant customers to buy, while 37% suggested alternative colors. Other techniques included pointing out alternative styles (33%) to convince them to buy, especially when business was quiet.

Less than 10% of the respondents used the following methods to convince customers to buy: introduced the products available, asked the customer the reason for buying an item, or explained the item's value for money. Generally, 64% of traders were sometimes successful in convincing reluctant customers to buy, while 36% were always successful. Survey findings on national micro and small enterprises by GOK, Central Bureau of Statistics, International Center for Economic Growth and K-Rep Holdings Ltd (1999: 26); identified lack of knowledge of what consumers want as a major problem for traders. However, findings of this and other studies (Holleesen and Jenster 2000: 451–9) clearly suggested that most of the apparel traders were well aware of customers' apparel needs.

Challenges Faced by Apparel Traders

The responses revealed that 89% of the apparel traders in Nairobi said the government did not support their businesses in any way. This could

be attributed to the fact that a number of government-supported textile and apparel firms (Rivatex, Kisumu Cotton Mills) had closed down (Nyang'or 1994: 39). Also, with employees in these industries being retrenched (GOK, Central Bureau of Statistics, International Center for Economic Growth and K-Rep Holdings Ltd 1999: 28) apparel traders became wary of government support to their businesses. Interestingly, 41% of the traders did not need government support, as they felt better off being responsible for their own businesses, while 15% thought the government could not do anything anyway. The other 59% of the respondents, however, thought they needed some kind of government support to succeed. This could be attributed to the fact that most traders lacked knowledge about other institutions that could provide financial and/or technical support to them.

Other challenges faced by the majority (91%) of the apparel traders were those associated with too few customers, especially during low season (62%), and too many competitors selling the same items in the same place (60%), thus reducing the number of clients one trader could receive (Table 1). Additionally, harassment by the Nairobi City Council officials was cited as a major challenge facing about 24% of the traders. They also encountered con men who gave fake currency notes, thieves and shoplifters, stubborn customers, delayed payments by credit customers, and delayed agent deliveries. Irregular electricity and water supply, lack of money, and high rent for their premises negatively affected apparel businesses.

Suggested Solutions to Challenges Experienced

Of the traders who wanted government support, 28% needed loans. The need for government support could be attributed to the fact that many traders may have lacked collateral required for credit, thus needing alternative loans that could be acquired without collateral. The traders may also have lacked information on the availability and source

Table 1

Respondents' Challenges (multiple responses were allowed).

Problems	Frequency	%
Lack of customers	56	62.2
Too many competitors of same items	54	60.0
Harassment from tax/license officers	22	24.4
Stubborn customers	3	3.3
High rent	6	6.7
Credit customers delay to pay	2	2.2
Lack of money to run business	7	7.8
Electricity, water rationing	11	12.2
Con-men, shoplifters, thieves	4	4.4
Delay in delivery by agent	1	1.1

of loans from commercial institutions. The traders also suggested that overheads be made affordable by reducing license fees, taxes, and customs charges (28%). That would enable them to meet their operating costs and at the same time reap profits by having more capital. Other suggestions included government support in making apparel from the Export Processing Zones (EPZ) and Manufacturing under Bond (MUB) available locally instead of local traders having to import them at higher costs. Clearly, the apparel traders needed education on the role of EPZs and MUBs, which are companies that have set up production facilities in Kenya to make products (clothing, canned food, etc.) for export only. The government of Kenya in Sessional Paper No. 2 of 1992 on Small Scale and Jua Kali Enterprises (SSJKE) had reiterated their support of small businesses through developing them, creating easy access to credit and harmonizing licensing procedures. However, the findings of this study indicated that these proposals have not been fully realized, thus apparel traders need to look for other sources of funding if their businesses are to prosper.

Interestingly, only 2% of the respondents said the government should tax “mitumba” (second-hand clothes) importers, discourage import of substandard goods and illegal goods, and that the Nairobi City Council should stop harassing (making impromptu arrests or closing shops yet the apparel traders have no knowledge of newly created business regulations) them as ways of supporting their businesses. This clearly indicates that governments should issue appropriate import regulations on second-hand clothing. However, this could also indicate that apparel traders recognize the second-hand clothes market as a formidable competitor that they have to exist alongside.

Strategies to Solve the Challenges Apparel Traders Experienced in Their Businesses

Different apparel traders had started self-initiatives to solve some of the problems facing them. Of the respondents, 59% improved the quality of garments they provide to their new and old clients. Some traders introduced unique items, different from those of their competitors, since customers often looked for new and different clothing (Table 2). Other traders went to offices or contacted friends to look for customers to promote their goods. They used kerosene lamps and charcoal irons because of the irregular electricity supply. Paying licenses and other taxes in time, or negotiating for rescheduling of deadlines with tax officers, and simply avoiding the Nairobi City Council officers when they came to their shops helped avoid their harassment. Lowering profits so as to make the prices of their merchandise affordable to several customers and keeping contact with their old customers assisted some traders.

When the shop was full of customers traders sought assistance from their fellow traders to avoid being conned or stolen from. If no assistance were available then the trader would serve one customer as the

Table 2

Frequencies Showing the Strategies Used by Apparel Traders to Solve Problems Facing Their Businesses (multiple responses were allowed).

Strategies	Frequency	%
Negotiating with City Council	6	6.7
Maintain own clients	21	23.3
Look for customers	7	7.8
Promoting own items	7	7.8
Providing high quality items	32	35.6
Extensive marketing	1	1.1
Keep contact with old clients	4	4.5
Just waiting	4	4.5
Agree with colleagues on selling prices	1	1.1
Selecting unique items	11	12.4
Pay City Council on time	6	6.7
Work hard	9	10.0
Lower profit	6	6.7
Use lamps, charcoal irons	9	10.0
Avoid tax officers	5	5.6
Seek assistance from colleagues	4	4.4
Make orders on time	1	4.0

others waited. Agreeing on prices of similar items among fellow traders and ordering merchandise on time were also tactics employed by the traders.

Measures Taken by Apparel Traders to Become Competitive

Overall, 69% of the apparel traders practiced timely budgeting, usually 1–6 weeks ahead of time (88% of those who budgeted), so as to maintain the required stock to meet customers' demands and be able to face unforeseen eventualities that could affect their businesses.

For the 31% of the total respondents who never budgeted at all, the main reason was that they preferred to buy items when demanded by the customers instead of tying down money in stock that did not clear quickly (62%). Notably, not budgeting ahead is inconsistent with normal business practice; therefore, in the event of any crisis (theft, lack of capital) the business could close. These traders clearly lacked proper training. This could also indicate that the traders may have experienced difficulties in getting loans, due to bad proof of collateral.

Respondents' Awareness of Factors Necessary for an Apparel Trader to Prosper

Most apparel traders (66%) considered a good business location important. Other important factors included relevant education (58%), work experience (53%), pleasant personality (52%), readiness to take the challenge (33%), and available capital (22%). Few traders considered

that having clientele that buy ones merchandise (7%), being a good salesperson (6%) or not starting a business now because of the poor performance of Kenya's economy were important factors for an apparel trader to prosper.

All respondents recognized the importance of using visual merchandising techniques. Interior displays, which included hanging clothes on the walls, were the most used form of visual merchandising techniques according to 90% of the respondents (Table 3). Some displayed merchandise on a counter/table positioned close or next to the shop's entrance (53.3%), while some (38.9%) had shelves/rails in the shops for displaying their merchandise (Table 3). Only 10% of the respondents displayed items along the aisle, while 6% had items displayed in the center (island) of the shop. Four percent chose a showcase display for their most stunning merchandise and 4% used the ceiling. Door displays were used by 82.2% as a form of visual merchandising and 61% hung clothes on the door. On the other hand, 38.9% announced their business with a premise sign on, above, or close to the doorway.

Window displays were also commonly used by 30% of the respondents. However, 14.4% of the respondents used mannequins. Also window sign painting was done (8.9%), especially during Easter and Christmas. This research established that visual merchandising techniques were vital in turning a customer's browsing into a purchase.

When asked about future plans 48% said they wanted to expand. Some employees wanted to open their own businesses (22%). Some (8%) of current traders planned to increase their existing stock while another 8% wished to "take it easy" and wait for better times. Four

Table 3

Respondents' Use of Visual Merchandising Techniques in Their Businesses (multiple responses were allowed).

Merchandising Techniques	Frequency	%
Window displays	27	30.0
- Hanging clothes	27	30.0
- Using mannequins	13	14.4
- Window painting	8	8.9
Interior displays	81	90.0
- Counter/table	48	53.3
- Wall	81	90.0
- Shelves/rail	35	38.9
- Aisle	9	10.0
- Island (center)	5	5.6
- Showcase	4	4.4
- Ceiling	4	4.4
Door display	74	82.2
- Premise sign	35	38.9
- Hanging clothes	35	38.9

percent planned to diversify. Still others wanted to work harder to reap more benefits. These results indicated the apparel traders were optimistic and hopeful, suggesting that Kenya's apparel industry has a bright future.

Apparently, most apparel traders (94%) enjoyed their present occupation and 32% found pleasure in seeing a customer satisfied after purchasing an item, while 23% said their occupation was a source of income. Clearly, apparel traders recognized important factors necessary for business prosperity.

Factors Influencing the Types of Apparel Sold by Traders

The research objective sought to establish whether social and economic characteristics influenced the type of apparel sold by traders, and was achieved using Chi-square to test the null hypotheses that the types of apparel sold are independent of the trader's number of employees, age, sex, level of education, employment position/designation, experience, length of service, source of fabric/clothing, and challenges faced. For the purpose of Chi-square, various categories (age, number of employees, level of education, experience, length of service, types of apparel sold) were collapsed to provide meaningful results.

Apparently, location, duration of business, number of employees, sex, level of education of the traders, length of service and experience in selling apparel did not influence ($p > 0.05$) the type of apparel sold (Table 4). The key factors that influenced the type of apparel sold ($p < 0.05$) included the age of the trader, employment position/designation, and source of fabric/clothing. These factors are discussed in the following subsections.

Table 4

Chi-square Analysis Showing Relationship of Various Factors on the Type of Apparel Sold by Traders.

Factors Influencing Types of Apparel Sold by Traders	Df	X ²	p-value
Location of business	6	11.2	0.082
Duration of business	3	0.8	0.854
Number of employees per business	1	0.5	0.500
Sex	3	7.1	0.069
Age	3	8.6	0.036
Level of education	3	0.1	0.989
Position/designation of apparel trader	1	17.0	0.000
Length of service of the apparel trader in present business	3	6.4	0.093
Experience in selling apparel	3	5.5	0.140
Source of fabric/clothing	1	22.9	0.000
Lack of customers	3	4.3	0.234
Too many competitors selling similar items	3	3.8	0.287
Harassment from license/tax officers	3	1.9	0.610

Influence of Age of the Traders

According to Solomon (1989: 35), fashion is strongly influenced by three factors; social norms, individual expressions, and technology. Thus, an individual's age would determine the extent to which the aforementioned factors would influence their choice of apparel. It was therefore necessary to establish whether age influenced the types of apparel sold. The Chi-square results in Table 4 indicated that age of the apparel traders influenced the type of apparel chosen for sale ($X^2 = 8.6$, $p < 0.05$). These results demonstrate that a higher percentage of younger apparel traders (20–30 years) sold new imported apparel (69.0%), custom-tailored/designer apparel (15.5%), and second-hand apparel (80.0%). Other age brackets showed most traders sold custom-tailored/designer apparel, possibly what they and their customers could identify with, in this case foreign items as represented by the new imported and second-hand categories.

Influence of Employment Position Held by Respondent in Business

Trends in the apparel business include a dominance of small producers, product specialization and contracting system (US Office of Education 1973: 20). Thus, there was a need to determine whether the trader's position influenced the types of apparel they sold. The results (Table 4), showed that the managerial position held by the trader in business influenced the types of apparel sold ($X^2 = 17.0$, $p < 0.05$). All traders were managers or assistant managers, allowing them to make crucial business decisions depending on the business performance in terms of customer satisfaction and sales made.

Influence of Sources of Fabric/Clothing

In this study, fabric and clothing from foreign sources were of high quality and most preferred by clientele as compared to Kenyan choices. It was therefore necessary to determine whether the types of apparel sold by traders were influenced by these sources. A Chi-square of 22.9 with $p < 0.05$ indicated that the source of fabric/clothing is associated with the types of apparel sold by traders (Table 4). Most imported and custom-tailored apparel traders (97.7%, 54.3%) preferred foreign sources for their merchandise compared to 45.7% of the locally made apparel traders who preferred Kenyan sources for their fabric/clothing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has demonstrated that the social and economic characteristics of apparel traders significantly influencing the type of apparel sold included age, position, and source of fabric/clothing. Apparel traders already in business or aspiring traders (especially in developing countries experiencing market liberalization) could adopt these factors to increase

their competitive edge. Also local fabric/clothing producers and other related organizations should address the social and economic factors influencing local apparel traders' preference for foreign to local fabric and clothing sources. Attention should be given to the implications of these factors on local fabric/clothing production and marketing if the local industry is to meet consumer needs.

Other conclusions include:

- (i) that although apparel traders faced such challenges as lack of customers and stiff competition, they did not allow these challenges to compromise their business performance. Instead, the traders sought solutions.
- (ii) knowledge of such issues as selecting merchandise that appealed to clientele, being a good salesperson, using eye-catching techniques of visual merchandising to display apparel, planning for the future, and enjoying one's occupation was prevalent. These factors contributed to increased sales hence positive business performance.
- (iii) the apparel traders said they lacked a level trading ground where they could all flourish because they wanted government support by way of providing loans and making prices (license fees, taxes, custom charges) affordable to improve their businesses.
- (iv) With most apparel traders in dire need of extra funds through loans indicates that they lacked expertise on ways of harnessing their earnings to increase profits, even in view of the fact that their earnings were higher than those of general laborers.
- (v) by suggesting that apparel from Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and Manufacturing Under Bonds (MUBs) be made locally available instead of traders having to import them at higher prices, the traders did not appear to understand the role of these industries whose products are solely for export.

Therefore, the study suggests the following recommendations:

- (i) Adoption of suggestions made by the traders on ways of increasing their business viability by relevant government ministries, such as making affordable the prices of license fee, taxes and custom charges, and discouraging importation of substandard and illegal apparel;
- (ii) government ministries and standardization institutions should formulate mechanisms that will enable apparel traders to access information easily on existing regulations and policies to improve the quality of local items and businesses;
- (iii) the role of various sectors in the apparel industry such as the Export Processing Zone, standardization institutions and government ministries should be emphasized in the Fashion Design and Merchandising curriculum at all educational levels.

This will provide learners with adequate knowledge on the functioning of the apparel industry, should they pursue it.

This study provided critical information about market liberalization that dramatically altered existing trends in Kenya's apparel industry as observed in Nairobi. Further research can be carried out in other major towns and rural areas to produce comparative data.

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