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**Consumers' expectations of furniture
labels during their pre-purchase
information search: toward label
development**

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ABSTRACT

Labels serve as a source of external information during the consumer decision-making process, and frequently contribute to consumers' prior knowledge of different products as well as their search activities prior to purchase of furniture. Labelling of a wide range of products, such as food and clothing has been investigated with regard to the effectiveness of the label, to convey information and draw consumers' attention to the product, and the usage of the labels by consumers. However, no literature suggests the existence of labels with regard to furniture items, or consumers' expectations about furniture labels. It is believed that labels on furniture items could assist consumers during the pre-purchase information search of the decision-making process.

The current study investigated consumers' expectations of furniture labels, during the pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process, in order to propose furniture labels. The objectives of the study were to determine what questions regarding product information consumers frequently ask store assistants prior to furniture purchasing; to determine consumers' expectations regarding furniture labels in terms of the product information on the label, the appearance of the label and the placement of the label on furniture items; and finally to suggest a preliminary furniture label according to consumers' expectations.

A mixed-method research approach was followed, using a two-phase exploratory design. Qualitative findings indicated that consumers enquire about the type of materials used for the manufacturing of furniture items, finishes used on items, quality, guarantees, warranties, design, performance, maintenance, care instructions and colours of items. Similarly, quantitative results showed that the majority of respondents deemed the price, materials used, cleaning instructions, guarantee and warranties important to be displayed on the furniture label. Appearance characteristics were summarised and preliminary furniture labels were suggested accordingly. These labels can be used by product developers, marketers, and the furniture

industry to assist consumers during their pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process.

OPSOMMING

Etikette dien as 'n bron van eksterne inligting en dra dikwels by tot verbruikers se vooraf kennis van verskillende produkte, en hulle soekaktiwiteite voor meubelaankope. Die ettikering van 'n wye verskeidenheid produkte soos voedsel en klere is ondersoek ten opsigte van die effektiwiteit van die etiket, om inligting oor te dra, om verbruikers se aandag na die produk te trek, sowel as verbruikers se gebruik van die etikette. Daar is egter geen literatuur wat die bestaan van meubeletikette, of verbruikers se verwagtinge van meubeletikette voorstel nie. Daar word geglo dat etikette op meubelitems verbruikers kan help tydens die voor-aankope fase van die besluitnemingsproses.

Die huidige studie het verbruikers se verwagtinge van meubeletikette tydens die voor-aankope inligting soeke van die verbruikers-besluitnemingsproses ondersoek, om sodoende meubeletikette voor te stel. Die doelwitte van die studie was om te bepaal watter vrae, rakende produkinligting, verbruikers gereeld aan winkelassistente vra voor meubelaankope; om te bepaal wat verbruikers se verwagtinge van meubeletikette is ten opsigte van die bewoording van produkinligting, die voorkoms van die etiket en die plasing van die etiket op meubelitems; en laastens om 'n meubeletiket voor te stel volgens verbruikers se verwagtinge.

'n Gemengde-metode navorsingsbenadering, deur gebruik te maak van 'n dubbel-fase eksploratiewe ontwerp is gevolg. Kwalitatiewe bevindinge het bevestig dat verbruikers navrae doen oor die tipe materiale gebruik in die vervaardiging van meubels is, afwerkings op die items, kwaliteit, waarborge, voorwaardes vir waarborge, ontwerp, onderhoud, versorgingsinstruksies en kleure van items. Soortgelyk hieraan het kwantitatiewe resultate aangedui dat die meerderheid van respondente dit belangrik ag dat die prys, materiale gebruik, skoonmaakinstruksies, waarborge en voorwaardes vir waarborge op die meubeletiket vertoon moet word. Voorkomseienskappe is ook opgesom en 'n meubeletiket is daarvolgens voorgestel. Hierdie etikette kan deur produkontwikkelaars, bemarkers en die meubelindustrie, gebruik word om

verbruikers in hul voor-aankope inligting soeke van die verbruiker-
besluitnemingsproses by te staan.

KEYWORDS

- Consumer behaviour
- Consumer decision-making process
- Consumers' expectations
- Furniture labels
- Information search

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	i
OPSOMMING	iii
KEY WORDS	v
CHAPTER 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background and motivation	1
1.2 Problem statement.....	5
1.3 Conceptual framework	5
1.4.1 Aim	7
1.4.2 Objectives	7
1.5 Structure of the mini-dissertation	7
1.6 Authors' contributions	8
1.7 References	10
CHAPTER 2: Literature review	14
2.1 Introduction	14
2.2 The South African consumer	14
2.3 The consumer decision-making process.....	15
2.3.1 Problem recognition	17
2.3.2 Information search	17
2.3.2.1 Source and effort during information search.....	18
2.3.2.2 Perceived risk associated with furniture purchasing	19
2.3.2.3 Sources of pre-purchase information	21
2.3.2.4 Missing information	23
2.3.3 Evaluation of alternatives	24
2.3.4 Product choice	27
2.3.5 Post purchase evaluation.....	28
2.4 Labels as an external source of information during consumer decision-making	31
2.4.1 Role of furniture labels in the execution of consumer rights in South Africa	32
2.4.2 Standards regarding labelling in South Africa	34

2.4.3	Missing label information.....	34
2.4.4	Important information on furniture labels.....	35
2.4.5	The appearance of furniture labels.....	38
2.4.6	The placement of furniture labels.....	40
2.5	References.....	41
CHAPTER 3: Methodology		49
3.1	Introduction.....	49
3.2	Research approach.....	49
3.3	Study environment.....	50
3.4	Pilot study	52
3.5	Research phases.....	53
3.5.1	Phase 1: Qualitative data collection	53
3.5.1.1	Sampling technique.....	53
3.5.1.2	Method of data collection	54
3.5.1.3	Data analysis.....	54
3.5.1.4	Ethical considerations	55
3.5.1.5	Trustworthiness	56
3.5.2	Phase 2: Quantitative data collection	57
3.5.2.1	Sampling technique.....	57
3.5.2.2	Method of data collection	60
3.5.2.3	Data analysis.....	61
3.5.2.4	Ethical considerations	62
3.5.2.5	Reliability.....	62
3.5.2.6	Validity.....	63
3.5.3	Phase 3: Quantitative data collection	64
3.5.3.1	Development of a preliminary furniture label.....	64
3.6	References	65
CHAPTER 4: Research Article		70
	Abstract	72
	Key Words.....	72
	Introduction.....	73
	Literature background.....	75
	The South African Consumer.....	75

Labels as source of information during the consumer decision-making process.....	76
Considerations for furniture label design: information on labels.....	76
Considerations for furniture label design: appearance of labels	77
Considerations for furniture label design: placement of labels.....	78
Research method	78
Research strategy.....	78
Study environment.....	79
Study population and sampling.....	79
Pilot study	80
Ethical considerations	80
Data collection	81
Data analysis	82
Trustworthiness, reliability and validity.....	82
Results and discussion.....	84
Consumers' frequently asked questions prior to furniture purchasing (Phase 1)	84
Consumers' expectations regarding furniture labels (Phase 2).....	89
Suggested preliminary furniture label.....	95
Conclusion.....	100
References	102
CHAPTER 5: Concluding discussion	110
5.1 Introduction.....	110
5.2 Conclusion	110
5.3 Practical applications of the research	112
5.3.1 Applications for consumers	112
5.3.2 Applications for product developers and marketers	113
5.3.3 Applications for the furniture industry	113
5.3.4 Applications for future research.....	113
5.4 Limitations and recommendations	114
5.4.1 Scale of the research study.....	114
5.4.2 Time limitations	114
5.4.3 Exploratory nature of current research.....	115

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Table 1.1: Authors' contributions to the study	8
--	---

CHAPTER 2: Literature review

Table 2.1: Upholstery cleaning codes	38
--	----

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Table 3.1: Sample size calculation (at the 5% level) based on a preliminary sample size of 90	58
---	----

CHAPTER 4: Article

Table 1: Summary of participants' opinions regarding the information on furniture labels	87
Table 2: Summary of participants' opinions regarding the appearance of furniture labels	88
Table 3: Summary of participants' opinions regarding the placement and type of labels for furniture	89
Table 4: Respondents' involvement in furniture purchasing: Do they search for information prior to purchasing?	90
Table 5: Percentage of respondents that searched for specific information for prior to furniture purchasing	91
Table 6: Sources of information respondents use prior to furniture purchasing	92
Table 7: Relationship between respondents' search criteria and their expectations towards the information on a general furniture label	92
Table 8: Mean importance of information on different furniture labels to respondents.....	93
Table 9: Effect sizes of the relationship between respondents' expectations of wooden, leather and upholstered furniture labels	94

Table 10: Respondents' expectations of appearance characteristics of furniture labels	95
Table 11: Guidelines regarding the appearance of labels used to propose furniture labels	96

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework – consumers’ expectations of furniture labels during their pre-purchase information search .	6
---	---

CHAPTER 2: Literature review

Figure 2.1: The consumer decision-making process.....	16
Figure 2.2: Alternative evaluation and selection process	24
Figure 2.3: Evaluation of different products prior to purchase.....	26
Figure 2.4: Post-purchase consumer behaviour	28

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Figure 3.1: Exploratory mixed methods procedures followed to determine consumers’ expectations of a furniture label.....	50
Figure 3.2: Research framework: Consumers’ expectations of a furniture label during their pre-purchase information search – toward label development.....	51

CHAPTER 4: Article

Figure 1: Exploratory mixed methods procedures followed to determine consumers’ expectations of a furniture label.....	78
Figure 2: Label for a wooden furniture item from the (a) front and (b) back.....	97
Figure 3: Label for an upholstered furniture item from the (a) front and (b) back.....	98
Figure 4: Label for a leather furniture item from the (a) front and (b) back.....	99

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview schedule: Phase 1	116
Appendix B: Findings: Phase 1 – categories, concepts & quotes.....	119
Appendix C: Consent form: Participants in Phase 1	130
Appendix D: Consent form: Store managers	134
Appendix E: Questionnaire: Phase 2.....	138
Appendix F: Results: Phase 2	145

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and motivation

During the researcher's B. Honours research project, unexpected results were found, leading to the current research. The previous study was based upon consumers' knowledge regarding furniture cleaning product labels and the resulting effect on their furniture purchases. The results showed that consumers preferred labels on the furniture items. Respondents were enthusiastic towards the prospect of furniture labels and suggested the following components to appear on a label for furniture items: materials used; proposed maintenance (cleaning instructions and prevention of damage); caring instructions for different climates; warranty and guarantee. It was also recommended by the researchers that furniture labelling should be investigated further, in order to develop effective and user-friendly care labels for furniture items. Therefore, the current research aims at suggesting furniture labels to assist consumers during the purchasing of furniture.

The furniture purchasing process is infrequent and expensive, urging the consumer to be alert during the process (Ward & Sturrock, 1998:327). The process starts when consumers identify a need for a specific product, such as furniture. After identification of the need, consumers seek information regarding products from different sources to satisfy their needs (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:526). Information regarding products may be sought from both internal and external sources (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:532; Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007:198). Prior knowledge is an internal source of information that takes little effort to access (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:526). An external source of information that consumers use during their pre-purchase information search regarding products, is product labels (Dimara & Skuras, 2005:92; Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007:206; Bleda & Valente, 2009:513), and in the case of the present study, furniture labels.

The purchasing of furniture is perceived by consumers to be a relatively high-risk activity (Ward & Sturrock, 1998:327) as furniture is expensive and there is a high level of uncertainty associated with it (Mitchell, 1992:27). The level of perceived risk may be reduced by providing the consumer with enough information to make sound decisions (Ward & Sturrock, 1998:331). Product labels may be utilised to inform the consumer regarding the product attributes as well as recommended care instructions in order to maintain the item effectively (Cooklin, 1997:116), which may possibly reduce consumers' perceived risk regarding the purchasing of furniture. Consumers may, therefore, gain peace of mind through thorough knowledge of the product prior to purchase, and knowledge regarding the maintenance of the furniture item.

The utilisation of product labels as a source of information may reduce the effort consumers devote to their search for information, since consumers often spend a considerable amount of time and effort gathering and comparing product attributes from different sources (Ndubisi & Koo, 2005:56). However, the efficiency of product labels as a source of information has been questioned in the context of food (Dimara & Skuras, 2005:92). Grossman *et al.* (2006:791) state that product label information is often outdated, and according to Kivetz and Simonson (2000:427), it is often incomplete. Conversely, Sawalha (2007:1188) found that the majority of consumers who read cleaning product labels indicated that the information was clear and understandable.

However, consumers often face the problem of missing or incomplete information (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:544), also known as information search failure (Mansourian, 2008:28) when searching for product information during the decision-making process. This results in coping strategies implemented by the consumer to compensate for the missing information (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:544; Mansourian, 2008:29; Mansourian *et al.*, 2008:411). Coping strategies involve certain actions to rectify the failed search, or to complete the search (Mansourian, 2008:29). These strategies may involve a delay in decision-making, ignorance of missing information, adaptation of the

decision strategy (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:544) and finally inference of missing information (Graeff & Olson, 1994:201). Hence, complete and fully informative furniture labels may prevent consumers from turning to coping strategies by providing all the information consumers need prior to furniture purchase.

Furniture labels may also assist the consumer during the evaluation of alternatives during the consumer decision-making process, similar to the manner in which food labels assist consumers during decision-making (Dimara & Skuras, 2005:92). Consumers evaluate different alternatives by measuring each alternative against specific evaluation criteria (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:572). The criteria consist of product attributes that each consumer perceives as important (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:537). According to Dimara and Skuras (2005:92), food product labels convey attribute information to consumers. Furniture labels, in accordance with food labels, may provide the consumer with all the attribute information he or she needs in order to make an informed choice. Furthermore, labels may be standardised so that all labels provide information regarding the same attributes, which may simplify the evaluation of alternatives for consumers (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000:427). Similarly, furniture labels may be standardised for the same reason.

After different alternatives have been evaluated, a final decision is made, followed by usage and the post-purchase evaluation (Blackwell *et al.*, 2001:80) of the product. Schiffman and Kanuk (2010:547) state that consumers use their expectations of a product to evaluate its performance. Ofir and Simonson (2007:164) add that consumers' expectations with regard to specific products, determine their consumption experience, satisfaction and loyalty. The consumer develops either positive or negative feelings toward the product and its performance (Arnould *et al.*, 2004:755-768; Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:638-660; Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:272-297; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:547). Positive feelings usually result in consumer satisfaction, whereas negative feelings result in consumer dissatisfaction (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:648).

In order to improve consumers' satisfaction, it is necessary to meet or exceed their expectations (Myers, 1991:42). Labels on furniture may provide consumers with the precise product information regarding the furniture item to create a realistic expectation of the item's performance, because product labels may contain information regarding the item's guarantee and warranty (Ampuero & Vila, 2006:103). Furthermore, furniture labels may contain instructions for proper care and maintenance of the furniture item, which if followed, may prevent deterioration of the item, which may lead to greater satisfaction, as in the case of appliances and food products (Westbrook, 1984:313). It is, however, also important to acknowledge consumers' expectations toward furniture labels. For that reason, research should be done to determine what consumers expect from furniture labels.

Literature on research regarding product labels of a wide range of consumer commodities, such as food (Moussa & Touzani, 2008:526), clothing (Goswami, 2008:442), textiles, as well as information regarding eco-labelling of products such as raw wood (Ireland, 2007:202) and raw wool (Hustvedt *et al.*, 2008:434) has been documented. Literature also suggests the appearance, in terms of colours (Funk & Ndubisi, 2006:41; Crozier, 1999:10; Gorn *et al.*, 1997:1395-1396) and images used (Underwood *et al.*, 2001:421; Wells *et al.*, 2007:684), as well as placement (Bettman *et al.*, 1986:18) of product labels in general. However, no literature could be located by the researcher to suggest the existence of labels specific for furniture items, or guidelines for the design thereof.

There is thus a paramount lack of literature discussing consumers' expectations toward furniture labels. Furthermore, while non-scientific evidence exists that mention the demand for labels on furniture (Cabinet maker, 2000:4); there is inadequate scientific literature on this topic. Therefore, it becomes clear that further research is needed in the mentioned area. Such research will be of value to both the furniture industry as well as the consumer.

1.2 Problem statement

Labelling of a wide range of products, such as food and clothing has been investigated with regard to the effectiveness of the label, the comprehensiveness of the information on the labels and the usage of the labels by consumers. However, no literature suggests the existence of labelling with regard to furniture items, or consumers' expectations toward furniture labels. It is believed that labels on furniture items could assist consumers during the decision-making process' pre-purchase information search. Other benefits to consumers include increased knowledge regarding the maintenance of furniture items, and greater post-purchase satisfaction levels as a result of extended lifetime of furniture items. Labels on furniture items may also be advantageous for the furniture industry, product developers and marketers, by satisfying consumers' needs, and ultimately increasing sales. Thus, the development of labels for furniture items is a promising research area, which holds advantages for various industries as well as for consumers.

1.3 Conceptual framework

A number of concepts concerning the consumer decision-making process, the role of product labels within this process as well as information regarding labels are indicated in the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) and will be discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2). It is important to acknowledge that not all consumers are the same and the South African consumer was, therefore, considered as an entity. However, all consumers, when faced with a decision of any nature, are inclined to use the consumer decision-making process which consists of five phases namely, problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, product choice and post-purchase evaluation (Solomon, 2011:332)

There are various aspects that assist consumers during the decision-making process, including for example their prior knowledge and external sources. Product labels serve as a source of external information that consumers may

use during the information search phase of the decision-making process (Dimara & Skuras, 2005:92; Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:206; Bleda & Valente, 2009:513). Labels on furniture items may thus assist consumers during their information search as well as contribute to greater post-purchase satisfaction with the purchased items. It is thus important to determine what consumers' expectations regarding the words, colours and pictures as well as the placement of furniture labels are, in order to suggest a furniture label for future use. The role of furniture labels in the execution of consumer rights, standards for furniture labels and the role of missing information on labels are also discussed.

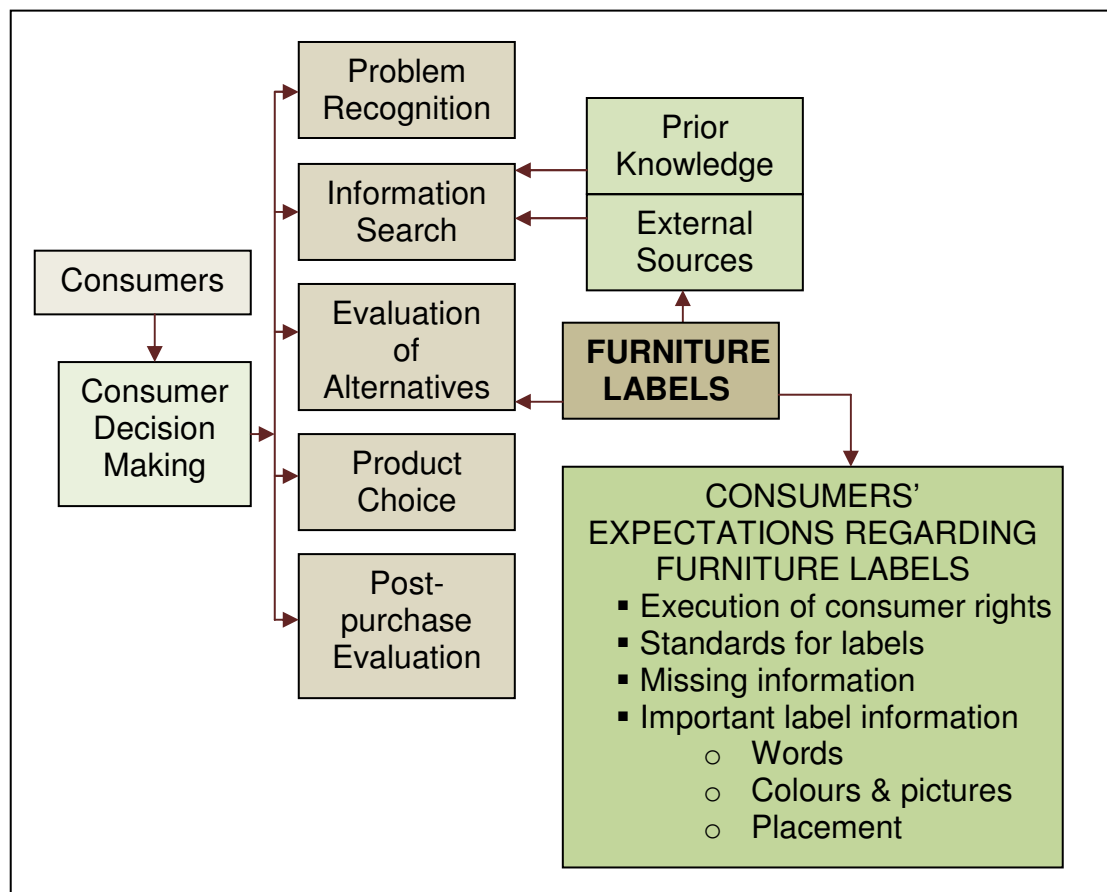


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework – Consumers' expectations of furniture labels during their pre-purchase information search.

1.4.1 Aim

The aim of the study was to determine consumers' expectations of furniture labels during the pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process, in order to suggest furniture labels.

1.4.2 Objectives

Subsequent to the aim of the study, the objectives were:

- Objective 1.1: To explore information gained from experienced furniture store assistants regarding two sub-objectives:
 - Product information consumers frequently ask store assistants for prior to furniture purchasing.
 - Store assistants' opinions regarding important information and appearance characteristics on furniture labels in order to develop a questionnaire regarding consumers' expectations of a furniture label.
- Objective 2: To determine consumers' expectations regarding furniture labels in terms of three sub-objectives:
 - Sub-objective 2.1: The product information on the label.
 - Sub-objective 2.2: The appearance of the label in terms of colours and pictures used.
 - Sub-objective 2.3: The placement of the labels on furniture items.
- Objective 3: To suggest a preliminary furniture label according to consumers' expectations in order to assist consumers during their pre-purchase information search phase of the consumer decision-making process.

1.5 Structure of the mini-dissertation

This mini-dissertation is presented in article format. **Chapter 1** provides an introduction to the study and contains the background and motivation of the study, as well as the conceptual framework, problem statement, aim and objectives. Literature regarding the South African consumer, the consumer decision-making process, and labels as an external source of information

during consumer decision-making is provided in **Chapter 2**. **Chapter 3** provides an in-depth description of the research methodology. The research consisted of three separate phases, each explained and motivated in this chapter in addition to the *Research Method* section in the research article (**Chapter 4**). The article was written and is to be submitted to the *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, and contains an overview as well as the results of the study. The format and references for this article were done in accordance with the journal’s editorial and referencing guidelines. The mini-dissertation is concluded in **Chapter 5** with a summary of the results. The limitations of the study are also discussed and recommendations for future research are made. Each chapter contains a reference list, written according to the Harvard referencing style, as required by the North-West University. For comprehensiveness, additional information, findings and results are attached in **Appendices A-F**.

1.6 Authors’ contributions

The study reported in this mini-dissertation was planned and executed by a team of researchers. The contribution of each researcher is given in the following table:

Table 1.1: Authors’ contribution to the study

Name	Role in the study
A. Labuschagne	Author, responsible for literature research, the gathering and interpretation of data, descriptive analysis and preparation of this mini-dissertation
Ms. S.D. van Zyl Prof. M. van der Merwe Prof. A. Kruger	Study leaders and co-authors, supervising descriptive analysis and interpretation, as well as completion of this mini-dissertation. Also assisted in organising sponsorships and funds to enable the study

The following is a statement from the co-authors confirming their individual role in the study and giving their permission that the article may form part of this mini-dissertation.

I declare that I have approved the article included in this mini-dissertation, that my role in the study, as indicated above, is representative of my actual contribution and that I hereby give my consent that it may be published as part of the Magister in Consumer Sciences' mini-dissertation of Ms. A. Labuschagne.

Adri Labuschagne

Prof. M. van der Merwe

Ms. S.D. van Zyl

Prof. A. Kruger

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Product labels have been researched thoroughly during the past half century, with many studies focusing on the completeness of labels on various products (Kivetz & Simonson 2000:427; Grossman *et al.*, 2006:791). Labels serve as a source of external information and frequently contribute to consumers' prior knowledge of different products as well as their search activities prior to purchase (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000:428). There is, however, no literature specifically regarding the completeness of labels on furniture items, or evidence of the existence of such labels. This chapter consists of relevant literature regarding the South African consumer, the consumer decision-making process and finally labels as a source of external information throughout the consumer's pre-purchase information search of the decision-making process. Although the main focus of the study is on consumers' pre-purchase information search of the decision-making process, all the stages in this process are discussed to ensure a comprehensive explanation of the process.

2.2 The South African consumer

A consumer is the end user of a specific product or service (Wright, 2006:489). According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010:4), consumers display distinct behaviour in their search for, purchasing, use, evaluation and disposing of products and services. Du Plessis (2003:49) adds that not all consumers display identical behaviour as a result of the difference in their situations and backgrounds (Du Plessis, 2003:49). Therefore, the South African consumer could also be considered as an entity, especially within the context of South Africa as an emerging economy.

According to Selvanathan and Selvanathan (2004:2327), South Africa is one of the world's top ten 'big emerging markets'. The term emerging market is

best defined as “a country that has undertaken transition in its political or economic systems and experienced rapid economic development” (Fan, 2008:354). For example, Gothan and Erasmus (2008:640) state that millions of South Africans, who were previously disadvantaged, now have access to commodities and services. However, South African consumers are still faced with many difficulties, including the unbalanced state of the country’s economy (Whitfield, 2008:14).

In a 2008 article Whitfield (2008:14) reported that consumers in South Africa were struggling to cope with the economy’s unbalanced state. There is a rapid growth in consumers’ debt levels, in accordance with the increasing inflation rate (Whitfield, 2008:14) and the majority of consumers’ low income levels (Consumer Goods and Retail Forecast, 2005:324). By implication, consumers have less disposable income to spend on products, ranging from necessities such as food, housing and medical care, to luxuries such as transport, recreation and furniture (Selvanathan & Selvanathan, 2004:2331), to satisfy their needs.

Despite the difficulties consumers in South Africa experience, they still have needs and desires to be satisfied. In order to satisfy their needs, consumers have to acquire certain products and services. The acquisition of these products is preceded by the consumer decision-making process (Arnould *et al.*, 2004:676). Decision-making is an integral part of every consumer’s life, which takes place at different involvement levels (Rousseau, 2003b:109).

2.3 The consumer decision-making process

The consumer decision-making process is a sequence of activities namely, problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, product choice, and outcome (Solomon, 2011:332). There are three levels of involvement in the consumer decision-making process namely nominal, limited and extended decision-making (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:512). Nominal involvement (habitual involvement) is the type of decisions where consumers barely engage in any search activity whatsoever, whereas limited decisions

involve both internal and some degree of external information search (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:512). Furthermore, extended decision-making is more complex, and requires an extensive internal and external information search, the comprehensive evaluation of alternatives as well as a high level of perceived risk (Solomon, 2011:335; Rousseau, 2003b:114). The decision of furniture purchasing is considered as an extended decision (Rousseau, 2003b:114; Ndubisi & Koo, 2005:56).

The consumer decision-making process is depicted in Figure 2.1. The process is the same for all consumer products (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:4), and will be used to explain consumers' decision-making process during furniture purchasing. The current study focuses essentially on the pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process because labels are a source of information during the information search period (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:206). As mentioned previously, the consumer's pre-purchase information search is dependent on the level of involvement of the consumer. Schiffman and Kanuk (2010:533) add that the pre-purchase information search is also influenced by the degree of perceived risk associated with the product purchase.

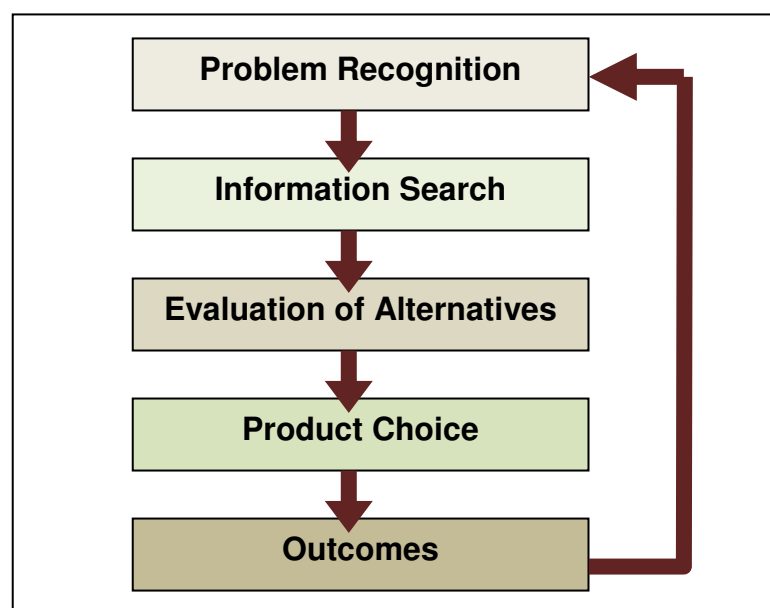


Figure 2.1: The consumer decision-making process (Solomon, 2011:333)

2.3.1 Problem recognition

The first step of the consumer decision-making process is problem recognition. Hoyer and MacInnis (2007:195) describe problem recognition as the difference consumers perceive between their actual and ideal state. The actual state refers to the present situation where the consumer perceives him/herself to be in, whereas the ideal (desired) state refers to the situation the consumer would prefer to be in (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:514). Problem recognition thus occurs when the consumer realises the difference between their actual and ideal state (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007:195) and a need or desire is aroused (Assael, 1987:28).

The perception of the ideal state is created as a result of many different variables (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007:197). The reason could be social status (materialistic desire), goals, and changes in circumstances (becoming a parent, or getting a promotion). Assael (1987:30) adds several internal and external variables that could influence consumers' perception of their desired and actual state. Internal variables include motivations and characteristics, such as demographics, lifestyle and personality, while external variables include culture and marketing stimuli, such as price, product, promotions and stores. According to Hoyer and MacInnis (2007:198), a consumer's actual state may be influenced by physical factors as well, including running out of a product, an unexpected malfunction or the need for an upgrade of a specific product. For example, a need is recognised as soon as a small child gets too big to sleep in his crib, the family needs to acquire a bed for their growing toddler.

2.3.2 Information search

Hawkins *et al.* (2007:516) state that the desire to resolve the recognised problem or to satisfy the need, prompts the consumer into action. This action is usually the second step of the consumer decision-making process, and is known as the information search period. Information search regarding the

problem is a fundamental activity during the decision-making process (McColl-Kennedy & Fetter, 1999:242).

McColl-Kennedy and Fetter (1999:242) found that the search for information consists of two basic search activities: source and effort, which will be explained in 2.3.2.1. Furthermore, the effect of consumers' perceived risk associated with the purchasing of furniture items on their information search (2.3.2.2), the different sources where consumers might search for information during their information search (2.3.2.3) and the effect of missing information on consumers' information search (2.3.2.4) will be discussed further.

2.3.2.1 Source and effort during information search

Source refers to different resources consumers use to search for information (McColl-Kennedy & Fetter, 1999:244), such as internal and external sources (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:532; Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007:198; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:531). Effort simply refers to the effort one expends during the information search activity (McColl-Kennedy & Fetter, 1999:244). According to Ndubisi and Koo (2005:56), consumers spend a considerable amount of time and effort during their information search, gathering information and comparing product attributes.

The extent to which consumers engage in the search activity depends on the level of involvement of the consumer. As previously mentioned, different levels of decision-making rely on different levels of information search, thus source and effort. According to Hawkins *et al.* (2007:512), nominal involvement will demand a limited internal search and almost no effort while limited involvement will demand both internal and limited external search, as well as a fair amount of effort for the evaluation of alternatives. Extended involvement demands extensive internal and external search as well as effort for the broad evaluation of alternatives (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:512). Since furniture purchasing is seen as extended decision-making (Rousseau, 2003b:114; Ndubisi & Koo, 2005:56), it also demands more effort than decisions for other products. Thus, consumers are more involved in the

purchasing of furniture and, therefore, search more extensively for information in both internal and external sources.

2.3.2.2 Perceived risk associated with furniture purchasing

The purchasing of expensive products such as furniture is associated with high risk, and is considered as high involvement decisions (Rousseau, 2003b:114; Ward & Sturrock, 1998:327; Solomon, 2011:335). According to Ndubisi and Koo (2005:56), consumers require more information about furniture products than other shopping products, prior to purchase. The reason for this is that furniture is expensive and the purchase thereof is not frequent (Assael, 2004:43; Elsasser, 2004:17), which could lead to potential financial loss and damage to property (Solomon, 2011:346). Mitchell (1992:27) ascribes the high perception of risk to the high level of uncertainty associated with expensive purchases.

There are different types of perceived risk namely, social, financial, physical, time, performance and psychological risks (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007:62). Social risk implies that other's perceptions regarding the consumer might be affected negatively resulting in harm to one's social standing (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007:62), in other words, an incorrect choice of furniture may result in a lower perceived social standing by other consumers. Financial risk implies that the consumer will not achieve the best monetary gain from the purchase (Solomon, 2011:346), and in the current state of the South African economy, this is probably the prevalent perceived risk associated with furniture purchase by consumers (Whitfield, 2008:16).

The risk that harm could come to the consumer or the product is known as physical risk (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007:62). Physical risk is not an influencing factor during furniture purchase since it is mainly associated with the purchasing of electrical goods, medicine, food and beverages (Solomon, 2011:346); however, there is a risk that the consumers' time may be wasted. Time risk refers to the possibility that time spent on the search for a certain product may be wasted as a result of the performance of the purchased item

being dissatisfying (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010:187). Hoyer and MacInnis (2007:62) separate time risk from performance risk and explain that performance risk is the peril that the product may not be satisfactory.

A poor product choice may also pose a psychological risk for the consumer (Shiffman & Kanuk, 2010:187). According to Solomon (2011:346), consumers who are conscious regarding their status, purchasing expensive and luxury items are prone to perceive purchases as a psychological risk. Psychological risk is the hazard that a disappointing product might influence the consumer's self-perception, peace of mind (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007:62) and ego negatively (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:62). Hawkins *et al.* (2007:550) also include effort cost in the list of possible risks. Effort cost is the risk that the spent effort was futile. Risk reducing strategies could, however, be implemented to assist consumers during the purchasing process.

Literature suggests that peace of mind can be obtained by implementing the following risk reducing strategies: developing purchase goals, describing intended use, describing consumer involvement and prior knowledge (Ward & Sturrock, 1998:331). Assael (1987:170) adds that consumers could reduce risk of dissatisfaction by gathering adequate information regarding the proposed product and by choosing well-known brands. However, Lin (2008:986) found that brand awareness does not necessarily reduce the perceived purchasing risk.

It is, however, important to overcome negative risk perceptions, as they are one of the reasons for delay in the consumer decision-making process (Greenleaf & Lehmann, 1991:475). Other reasons for delaying decision-making are task avoidance, unpleasantness, uncertainty, lack of time, and selecting the most appropriate alternative (Greenleaf & Lehmann, 1991:475). Nevertheless, the purchasing of all products relies on the consumer decision-making process.

2.3.2.3 Sources of pre-purchase information

It is important for consumers, during the consumer decision-making process, to acquire sufficient product information in order to make well informed choices (Bettman *et al.*, 1986:1; Rao & Sieben, 1992:256). As mentioned previously, the consumer searches for information from both internal and external sources. Internal sources refer to the consumer's memory, where past experiences, feelings and a variety of information are stored (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:198; Rousseau, 2003b:118). The consumer's past experiences can also be seen as prior knowledge regarding a specific product or service. An internal search for information, prior to the purchasing of products is considered to require less effort than an external search for information, since consumers need only access their memory (Burke, 1990:252). According to Hoyer and McInnis (2007:199), consumers store four types of product information in their memory namely: brands, attributes, evaluations and experiences. Information regarding a specific product or service (past experiences) is recollected from the memory, and assists the consumer to make an informed decision (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:533).

Consumers with little prior product knowledge often use the price of a product to evaluate its quality, whereas consumers with more prior product knowledge are more quality conscious (Rao & Sieben, 1992:256). According to Johnson and Russo (1984:550), experienced consumers bear knowledge of efficient decision-making procedures. Thus, insufficient prior knowledge of a specific product may lead to a poor decision and uninformed decisions could, therefore, be seen as high risk decisions (decisions that may result in dissatisfaction).

Prior knowledge may effectively reduce consumers' perception of the purchasing risk (Ward & Sturrock, 1998:331). In addition, consumers with higher levels of knowledge can differentiate effortlessly between different product attributes (Sen, 1998:64). Prior knowledge can be obtained in a number of ways, for example radio, television advertising, in-store information, brochures, catalogues, personal experience and recommendations, which is

then stored in the consumer's memory for later utilisation (Rousseau, 2003b:123). Another resource consumers depend on during their pre-purchase information search is external information (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:533).

McColl-Kennedy and Fetter (1999:246) state that consumers search for various sources of external information, such as personal sources and impersonal sources (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:536). Personal sources include *interpersonal search* (friends, neighbours, relatives, co-workers); and *experiential search* (samples, product trials) (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:206). Impersonal sources include *retailer search* (visits or calls to stores, package information, pamphlets); *media search* (advertisements, and other marketer-produced communications); and *independent search* (books, magazines, government pamphlets) (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:206). For example, a consumer searching for information regarding furniture could ask friends, neighbours, relatives or co-workers for information regarding the specific item of furniture. Advertisements or books may also be examined for information. Furniture labels can be classified as an impersonal or retailer source of external information.

The amount of effort consumers spend searching for information depends on various factors. According to Hoyer and McInnis (2007:210), the time consumers spend searching for external information depends on their ability to process the information, the opportunity they have to process the information, and their motivation to process information. The following are determinants of the amount of effort spent on information search: involvement (Solomon *et al.*, 2008:106); perceived risk (Assael, 2004:187); perceived costs and benefits (Assael, 2004:187); consideration set (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:210); relative brand uncertainty (Assael, 2004:188); attitudes toward search; and discrepancy of information (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:210).

Discrepancy of information refers to consumers' tendency to categorise new stimuli into existing categories in their memories. When a suitable category could not be found, the consumer engages in an information search (Hoyer &

McInnis, 2007:211). For example, consumers with little product knowledge regarding leather sofas will search comprehensively for external sources of information on the topic, which increases the amount of effort put into the search activity (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:533).

2.3.2.4 Missing information

Another factor that might increase consumers' search effort and cause an inconvenience is missing information. Missing or incomplete information is a problem often faced by consumers during their information search (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000:427) resulting in consumers not being able to make an informed decision when they do not have all the information they need. This lack of comprehensive information results in coping strategies implemented by consumers to overcome the problem (Burke, 1990:250; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:544). Thus, when faced with incomplete information during a search for information regarding leather sofas, consumers may implement certain coping strategies, to avoid the inconvenience of missing information.

The first coping strategy is to delay decision-making until all the necessary information is obtained (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:544), consequently delaying purchase of sofas until all information regarding the furniture items is obtained. Secondly, consumers might ignore the missing information and base their decision on the available product information (Rao & Sieben, 1992:259). The third and fourth coping strategies involve the altering of the decision strategy used and the inference of missing information (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000:428; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:545). Inference of missing information involves that the consumer fills in information regarding product attributes from their prior knowledge (Graeff & Olson, 1994:201), for example, if information regarding the maintenance of the leather sofas is missing, consumers might fill in information from their prior experiences with other sofas.

To avert the inconvenience of missing information from consumers, and to ultimately simplify their decision-making process and increase their satisfaction levels, it is necessary to provide them with complete product information. One method to ensure complete product information prior to product purchase is through means of comprehensive product labels. The information on product labels is an important contributing factor to consumers' search activities (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000:428) for a wide range of products, including furniture items. Labels on various products aid consumers in their decision-making by providing an informative base (D'Souza *et al.*, 2006:163; Silayoi & Speece, 2004:612). Labels as an external source of information, and their role in the consumer decision-making process will be discussed in 2.4.

2.3.3 Evaluation of alternatives

After the information search, the consumer needs to evaluate alternatives in order to make a final decision. The evaluation and selection of alternatives is depicted in Figure 2.2.

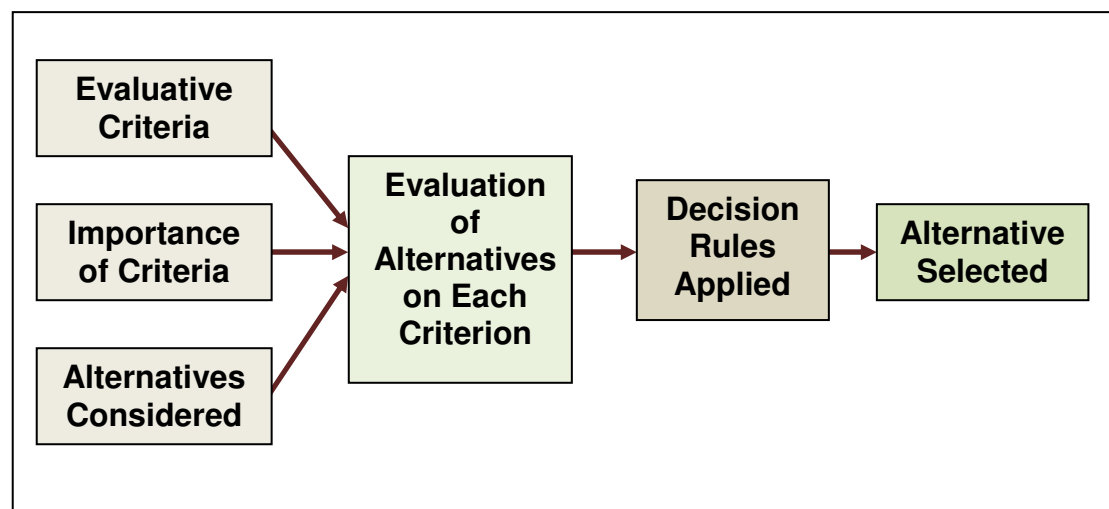


Figure 2.2: Alternative evaluation and selection process (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:566).

According to Hawkins *et al.* (2007:572), consumers often evaluate the potential performance of the intended product or service according to one or

more dimensions. These dimensions are also known as the evaluation criteria for a specific product (Figure 2.2). The criterion is usually expressed in terms of the product attributes which the consumer perceives as important (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:537). The evaluation criteria differ from consumer to consumer, since the criteria include the attributes which are important to each individual consumer (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:573).

General search criteria include price, quality, size, performance, appearance and warranties (Rousseau, 2003b:111; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:537). In addition to general criteria, consumers add product specific criteria during decision-making prior to furniture purchase. Consumers evaluate furniture according to product quality, design and finish (Brinberg *et al.*, 2007:21), as well as the perceived purchasing risk (Ward & Sturrock, 1998:327) and brand familiarity (Tam, 2008:3).

Following the identification of the criteria, the consumer evaluates each alternative according to the selected criteria (Figure 2.2). During the selection of suitable alternatives consumers often differentiate between alternatives that will be considered, that will not be considered, and indifferent products (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:225; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:534). Figure 2.3 depicts the evaluation of different products before purchase. All known products are divided into three groups, namely the evoked set, the inept set and the inert set (Solomon, 2011:347). The evoked set consists of all acceptable products; the inept set consists of all unacceptable products, while the inert set consists of products that are indifferent to the consumer (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:536). Thus, leather sofas from the evoked set will be considered and evaluated for purchase.

Throughout the evaluation of alternatives, the consumer is faced with a number of decisions. Decision rules are applied by consumers in order to facilitate them when making product choices (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:539) (Figure 2.3). According to Hawkins *et al.* (2007:581), there are five decision rules that consumers often use during decision-making, namely: conjunctive, disjunctive, elimination-by-aspects, lexicographic, and compensatory rules.

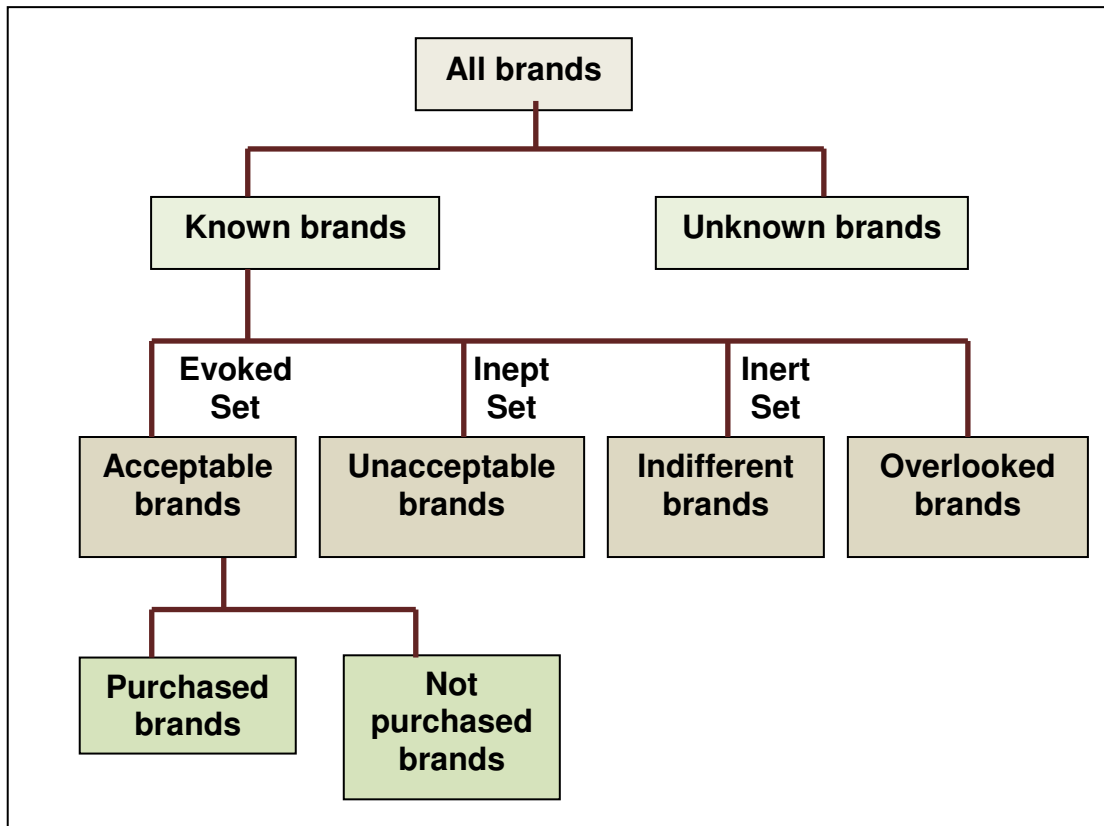


Figure 2.3: Evaluation of different products prior to purchase (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:536).

When using the conjunctive decision rule, consumers establish a minimum acceptable standard for each of the evaluation criteria. If the product does not meet these minimum standards, it is rejected (Solomon, 2011:361). The disjunctive decision rule establishes minimum acceptable performance levels for each important attribute. All products that do not meet the minimum performance level are discarded (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:583). Consumers using the elimination-by-aspects decision rule rank the evaluation criteria in order of importance and establish a cut-off point for each attribute (Solomon, 2011:361). Requirements for the lexicographic decision rule is that consumers rank the criteria in order of importance; the product that performs the best in the most important criteria is considered the best alternative (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:540).

The above mentioned four decision rules are also known as the noncompensatory decision rule (Solomon, 2011:361; Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:586). According to Hoyer and McInnis (2007:226), the

noncompensatory rule, to summarise, implies that the consumer rejects products with negative attributes immediately. For example, Consumers X and Y compile a list of attributes that are compulsory to satisfy their needs regarding a sofa: three seats, soft cushions, and blue colour. If one of the alternatives they consider does not have soft cushions, the sofa will be disregarded even if it is blue and has three seats. Whereas, the compensatory decision rule states that consumers consider both positive and negative attributes of alternative products, and choose the product with the highest score in total (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:226; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:539). The compensatory rule thus allows the consumer to balance negative product attributes out with positive attributes. Thus if the sofa has three seats and soft cushioning, they will consider buying it in black if it is not available in blue.

In order to minimise the need to use decision rules, it is important to provide consumers with all the information they need to make an informed decision. An effective way of converting information to the consumer is by means of product labels. The consumer can thus evaluate alternatives according to set criteria, with all the information needed on the furniture label. After all the alternatives have been evaluated, the consumer needs to make a final decision between the selected alternatives and purchase it (Figure 2.2).

2.3.4 Product choice

There are three types of purchases consumers make: trial purchases, repeat purchases, and long term commitment purchases (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:545). Trial purchases are exploratory, and consumers make this type of purchase to evaluate the product through direct use (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:546), whereas repeat purchases are similar to brand loyalty and occur when consumers purchase the same brand repeatedly (Macdonald & Sharp, 2000:9). It is, however, not possible to make trial purchases, or repeated purchases when purchasing durable goods, such as furniture, because furniture is expensive and not frequently purchased. The purchasing of

furniture (and other durables) is, therefore, a long-term commitment (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:546).

2.3.5 Post purchase evaluation

According to Schiffman and Kanuk (2010:547), consumers tend to evaluate the performance of a purchased product in light of their own expectations of the product. This evaluation may result in a number of actions or feelings, such as, post-purchase dissonance, product use and non-use, disposal, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, regret, confirmation and disconfirmation (Arnould *et al.*, 2004:755-768; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:547). Hawkins *et al.* (2007:638) propose a model of post-purchase consumer behaviour (Figure 2.4).

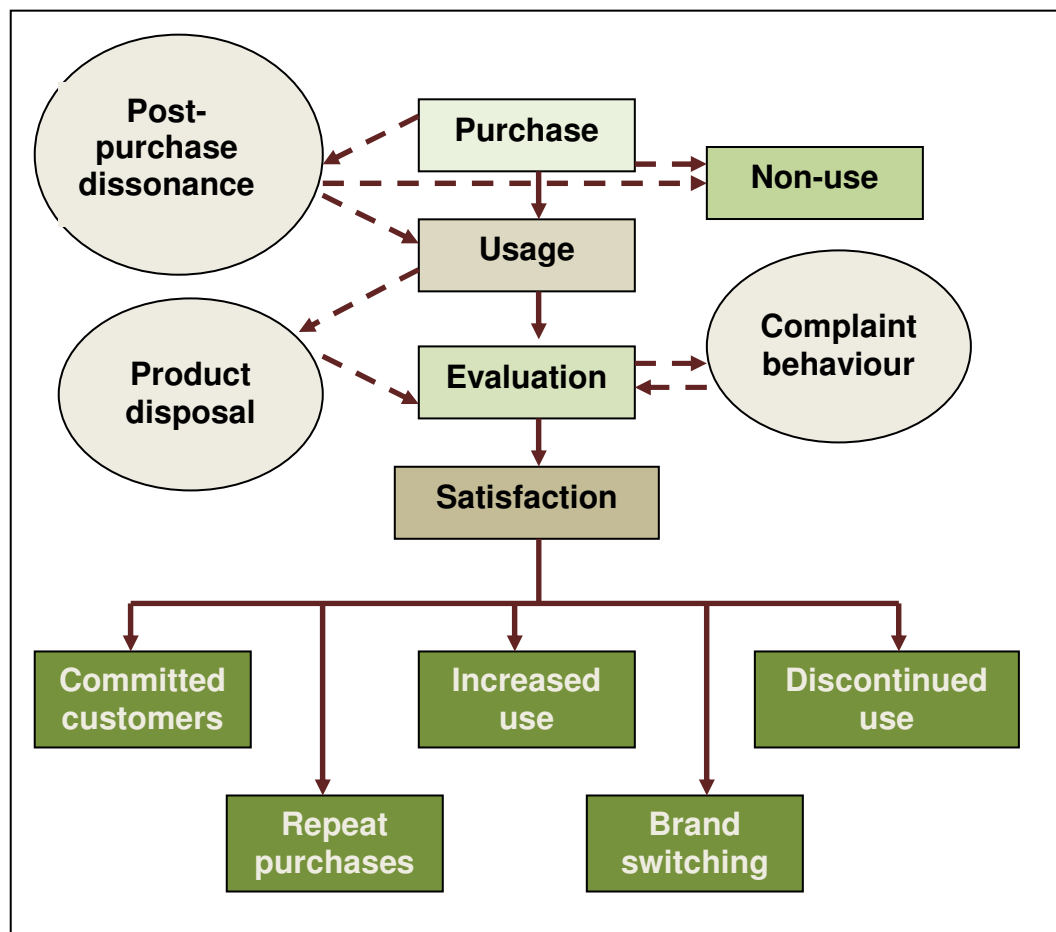


Figure 2.4: Post-purchase consumer behaviour (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:638)

Consumers purchase a product and either feel post-purchase dissonance, or the purchase is followed by non-use (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:638) (Figure 2.4). Post-purchase dissonance often occurs after a difficult or relatively permanent decision has been made (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:638). This phenomenon is characterised by a feeling of doubt or uncertainty by the consumer regarding his or her decision (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:272). Post-purchase dissonance most often occurs when a certain decision is made regarding products that need a high degree of commitment; the decision is important; it is difficult to choose between alternatives and when an individual is prone to high anxiety levels (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:639), for example when purchasing furniture.

It is suggested that consumers reduce dissonance by searching extensively for additional information from experts (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:272), and that consumers can reduce dissonance after purchase by: increasing the desirability of the brand purchased; by decreasing the desirability of the rejected alternatives; by decreasing the importance of the purchase decision and by returning the product before it has been used (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:639). By implication, post-purchase dissonance can be reduced by offering consumers sufficient information on furniture labels to make responsible and well-informed decisions. Furthermore, information on furniture labels may also provide the consumer with peace of mind regarding their purchase, for example guarantees and warranties.

The evaluation of the purchased product follows usage and results in either post-purchase satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Figure 2.4) (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007:648). The expectations consumers have with regard to specific products, determine their consumption experience, satisfaction and loyalty (Ofir & Simonson, 2007:164). According to Arnould *et al.* (2004:755), satisfaction is a consumer's judgement of the level of consumption-related pleasure or fulfilment. It also involves levels of under-fulfilment or over-fulfilment. Satisfaction is thus a positive evaluation and is also associated with feelings of happiness, relief, acceptance, delight and excitement (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:279).

Dissatisfaction is an unpleasant level of fulfilment (Arnould, 2004:757) and is the result of a negative evaluation of a product (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:297). Feelings such as distress, agitation, sadness, outrage and regret are commonly associated with dissatisfaction. The feeling of regret often occurs when the consumer perceives a negative comparison between the attributes or performance of the purchased product, and the un-chosen products (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:272). Therefore, it can be assumed that buyer's remorse causes dissatisfaction.

There are several factors which may influence the level of a consumer's satisfaction with a specific product, among which are time related factors, purchase situation factors and individual difference (Cote *et al.*, 1989:502). Time related factors refer to a change in the consumer's needs from time of purchase to current situation. The consumer's expectations change which lead to a different level of satisfaction (Cote *et al.*, 1989:502). When consumers purchase a specific product, knowing that it is not the best alternative (purchase situation factor), they should be satisfied with the decision (Cote *et al.*, 1989:503). For example, if a consumer purchases a sofa, which he knows is of low quality, he will not expect a sofa of high quality, and he will thus be satisfied with the lower quality sofa. Finally individual differences refer to different motivations for purchase of a specific product for a specific purpose. Hoyer and McInnis (2007:283) add that consumers' feelings, expectations and the product's performance also influence his or her satisfaction with the product. The consumer is satisfied if the product lives up to their expectations of the specific type of product (Cote *et al.*, 1989:503).

Consumers' expectations are a key influencing factor in their satisfaction and satisfaction based on consumers' expectations is known as the disconfirmation paradigm (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:282) or the expectancy-disconfirmation model of satisfaction (Arnould *et al.*, 2004:768). According to Day (1977:149), the disconfirmation paradigm implies that the consumer evaluates to which extent his or her expectations have been met or exceeded by the purchased product's performance. Consumers' expectations are broad and could be divided into three categories: performance expectations;

expectations regarding the total cost of the product; and expectations of the social approval and other benefits (Day, 1977:149). There are many sources of consumer's expectations of certain products, such as past experiences, word-of-mouth communications, promotions, media, product cues, third party information and the consumer's cultural milieu (Arnould *et al.*, 2004:770). Hoyer and McInnis (2007:282) define expectations as consumers' desired outcome, including their pre-consumption beliefs regarding the product's performance and its attributes.

In light of the disconfirmation paradigm, the expectations of consumers might be exceeded, met or disillusioned. Hoyer and McInnis (2007:282) explain that when a product's performance is as good as the consumer expected simple confirmation occurs. When the product's performance exceeds the consumer's expectations, positive disconfirmation occurs (Arnould *et al.*, 2004:769; Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:282). However, negative disconfirmation occurs when the expectations toward the performance or the product are not met (Arnould *et al.*, 2004:769; Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:282). Simple confirmation and positive disconfirmation result in consumer satisfaction, while negative disconfirmation results in consumer dissatisfaction (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:282). Therefore, it is important to know what consumers expect from a certain product, in order to ensure post-purchase satisfaction.

The current study aims to determine what consumers' expectations toward labels on furniture are, in order to develop effective furniture labels. The researcher aspires to propose useful furniture labels, which will assist the consumer to make informed and responsible decisions when considering furniture purchase, as well as contribute to positive post-purchase evaluation of the furniture item.

2.4 Labels as an external source of information during consumer decision-making

According to the South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (SACOD) (2002:645), labels are a source of information, attached to a specific object.

Labels are an important source of external information, used by consumers to make informed decisions, as well as by retailers to communicate to their consumers (Cooklin, 1997:116). Labels can be categorised as a source of information, which can be found when visiting the retailer (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007:206) and are utilised for a number of reasons.

Labels provide consumers with information regarding the product, before they purchase it (D'Souza *et al.*, 2006:163), and assist consumers to distinguish different products from each other (Wright, 1997:418). Furthermore, if label information is complete it may result in less extensive information search for the consumer during the decision-making process (McColl-Kennedy & Fetter, 1999:246). Thus, if products have comprehensive labels, with all the information consumers require to make informed decisions, they would not have to search for more information regarding the product, which decreases the level of effort put into the search process.

The completeness of product labels is compulsory to ensure that consumers make well-informed decisions (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000:441). However, excessive information on product labels may cause a decline in the quality of the consumer's final decision (Johnson & Russo, 1984:550). Silayoi and Speece (2004:612) as well as Sonnenberg and Erasmus (2005:11) add that product information often confuses consumers more than it helps them, which may also lead to irresponsible and uninformed consumer decisions. Therefore, it is important to develop product labels that are clear and understandable, as not to confuse the consumer, and that will help the consumer to make responsible decisions. It is, however, important that the label should comply with certain expectations consumers have regarding product labels.

2.4.1 Role of furniture labels in the execution of consumer rights in South Africa

The concept of consumer rights was first initiated in the United States in 1962, by President, John F. Kennedy (Assael, 1987:644). Initially, only four rights

were legislated: the right to safety, to be informed, to choose and to be heard. The right to a clean environment and the right to be a minority consumer without disadvantage were added later in the United States of America (USA) (Assael, 1987:644).

In South Africa there are eight consumer rights to protect consumers:

- The right to satisfaction of basic needs;
- The right to safety;
- The right to be informed;
- The right to choose;
- The right to be heard;
- The right to redress;
- The right to consumer education; and
- The right to a healthy environment.

(Rousseau, 2003:454a; Anon, 2008:19)

Labelling could play a key role in the execution of consumer rights. Firstly, as mentioned previously labels serve as a source of information (D'Souza *et al.*, 2006:163), and when complete and comprehensive, they could assist consumers to execute their right to information. According to Rousseau (2003a:455), consumers' right to be informed means that consumers are given the facts they need in order to make informed and responsible decisions. It also implies that consumers are protected against misleading and dishonest advertising and labelling (Anon, 2008:19). Therefore, consumers have a right to complete labels, which provides them with sufficient information to make responsible decisions.

Furthermore, effective labelling may contribute to consumer education (Hoch & Deighton, 1989:2; Rousseau, 2003a:456) by informing the consumer in such a way that the label adds to the consumer's knowledge regarding the product or the proposed maintenance thereof. Additionally, the label may provide information regarding consumers' responsibilities toward exercising their rights, which may also contribute to consumer education (Anon, 2008:19). Consumers' responsibilities include the acquisition of information,

knowledge and skills in order to make responsible decisions (Rousseau, 2003a:457). These decisions are beneficial for both the consumer and society.

2.4.2 Standards regarding labelling in South Africa

The SABS has set standards that must be complied with for consumer goods such as textiles, as well as the labelling found on the packaging of these goods. There are only a few standards for labelling in South Africa (South African National Standards, 2008). Many of these standards are applicable to food items and environmental labels. There is, however, only one standard for labels of other consumer goods such as furniture, namely packaging: *recommendations for addressing consumer needs* – ARP 41:2008 (South African National Standards, 2008:767).

In addition to standards for labels on consumer goods, the SABS also has standards for furniture items *per se*, to which all locally manufactured as well as imported furniture must comply with (Rousseau, 2003a:453). These standards include standards for:

- *Upholstery fabrics* – SANS, 1324:2006;
- *Furniture part one: seating* – SANS 1528-1:2008;
- *Furniture part two: desks, tables and computer stands* – SANS 1528-2:2008;
- *Furniture part six: high chairs for domestic use* – SANS 1528-6:2008;
- *Cleaning of textile upholstered furniture* – SANS 10247:1993 (SANS, 2008:155, 173, 481).

There is, however, no standard for the information that must be present on labels for furniture items and, therefore, consumers' expectations towards furniture labels should be investigated.

2.4.3 Missing label information

It is important that label information should be complete and comprehensive (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000:441). As previously discussed, consumers often

engage in different search behaviour and coping strategies when faced with missing information (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010:544). Hoch and Deighton (1989:9) state that consumers become extra vigilant when information is missing. Consumers faced with this problem turn to surrogates for information such as warranties and reputation. Consequently, the final decision is not entirely based on product attributes, but rather on perceptions regarding the attractiveness of the product package. Furthermore, consumers are often apprehensive of dealers who provide insufficient information (Rao & Sieben, 1992:259) and consumers also perceive products as inferior when all information regarding the product is not disclosed (Meyer, 1981:440).

In order to prevent negative consumer perceptions and coping strategies, as discussed in 2.3.2.4, it is important to provide consumers with all the information needed to make informed and responsible decisions (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000:427). Johnson and Levin (1985:170) suggest that it is difficult for consumers to evaluate alternative products and make decisions when different attribute information from each product is available. Moreover, Graeff and Olsen (1994:204) point out that consumers form inferences whenever product information is missing. There is thus a risk that consumers could make wrong inferences, which may lead to unsatisfying decisions. Therefore, labels for furniture items should also be standardised, which means that all labels should contain the same product information, even if some of the attributes are substandard, and labels should be designed in such a manner that there is no room for inferences.

2.4.4 Important information on furniture labels

Consumers demand accurate, appropriate (D'Souza *et al.*, 2006:163) and informative labels (Dimara & Skuras, 2005:96). However, the effectiveness of labels for products such as food is a controversial issue among researchers (Dimara & Skuras, 2005:92). Some literature states that the information on product labels is often outdated (Grossman *et al.*, 2006:791) and incomplete (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000:427), which can lead to consumers' preference intransitivity. In contrast, Sawalha (2007:1188) points out that consumers who

read labels on cleaning products indicated that the information was clear and understandable. Therefore, a clear understanding of consumers' expectations toward product labels should be obtained in order to develop effective labels for furniture items.

In a recent South African study by Tustin and De Jongh (2008:25), consumers' ethical purchasing behaviour was investigated. The results exemplify seven preferences of consumers toward the information on product labels. Materials used for manufacturing; country of production (with a preference for South African products); environmental friendly packaging; organically produced; and containing recycled materials were some of the participants' preferences. The results also stated that consumers want information regarding ethical business behaviour, ethical products or services, the production process and ethical packaging of the product. Nicholls and Bumgardner (2007:80) agree with Tustin and De Jongh (2008:45) regarding the importance of informing the consumer of the types of materials used during the manufacturing of furniture items. The reason is that consumers' ages and income were proven to be influencing factors during the purchasing of wooden furniture. Older consumers preferred oak to spruce, which was preferred by younger consumers, and that consumers with higher income preferred cherry to oak. Consequently, stating the materials used during manufacturing may assist the consumer to make satisfying purchase decisions.

Consumers also want to know in which country the product originated (Cheng *et al.*, 2007:370). It was established that consumers perceive products from other countries to be more superior in quality than local brands. There is, however, evidence that some consumers are sensitive to imported products and prefer products that are manufactured locally (Supphellen & Grønhaug, 2003:223). Therefore, it is important to state the country of origin on product labels, as suggested by Tustin and De Jongh, 2008:45.

In addition to country of origin, brand names are also important information which should be included on furniture labels. Maqalika-Mokobori (2005:576)

reports that consumers use the brand name on textile labels to identify products and to simplify their decision-making process. According to Tam (2008:8), familiarity with a brand increases consumers' satisfaction with the product. Therefore, it is important to emphasise familiar brand names on labels, or to introduce furniture brands in such a way that consumers feel safe and comfortable with the brand.

An approach to furniture labels that may be used is the basic principle of clothing care labels. Clothing care labels provide the consumer with information and instructions for cleaning and maintenance (Cooklin, 1997:117). The literature states that consumers expect to see the following information on textile labels: country of origin, care instructions, name of the manufacturer as well as the brand name of the product (Maqalika-Mokobori, 2005:64). However, no literature was found by the researcher stating requirements for furniture labels, or even literature suggesting the existence of formal furniture labels. Yet, there is literature on the cleaning and protecting of furniture (Lewin, 1999:51; Kadolph, 2007:426). Similar upholstery cleaning codes to those in the USA (Table 2.1) (Kadolph, 2007:426), may be used to develop potential care labels for furniture items together with the care instructions for wood, upholstery and leather as suggested by Lewin (1999:51; 105; 118). The initiative is to provide consumers with furniture labels in order to assist them with instructions on the most effective way to maintain and clean their furniture items.

By implication, it would be sensible to develop labels with sufficient information regarding materials used for manufacturing of furniture items, such as type of wood, country of production, the presence of recycled products, the production process and care instructions. It is suggested that labels should include practical information to guide and educate the consumer regarding proper care and use of products (Sonnenberg & Erasmus, 2005:18). Labels should also warn consumers about the consequences of improper use and care of products.

Table 2.1: Upholstery cleaning codes (Kadolph, 2007:426)

Symbol	Meaning
W	Use water-based upholstery cleaner only.
S	Use solvent-based upholstery cleaner only.
WS	Can use either water- or solvent-based upholstery cleaner.
X	Do not clean with either water- or solvent-based upholstery cleaner; use vacuuming or light brushing only.

Furthermore, in a study regarding consumers' attitudes toward food labelling, it is stated that labels should be clear and understandable, not misleading, and printed in visible letter sizes to avoid confusion and ignorance (Wright, 1997:425). In a study concerning food allergic consumers' labelling preferences, it was found that consumers preferred lettering to be in contrast to the background in order to make the information on the label clearly visible (Voordouw *et al.*, 2009:97). Regarding the language on the labels, consumers prefer label-information to be given in a language that is not difficult to interpret, but rather understandable and clear (Wright, 1997:424; Voordouw *et al.*, 2009:97). Labels often cause confusion among consumers, resulting in ignorance (Wright, 1997:420). Therefore, information on furniture labels should be clear and presented in an understandable language, as to avoid confusion among consumers.

2.4.5 The appearance of furniture labels

There are many visual aspects regarding product labels in general. In addition to the information on the product label, the appearance of the label is also a factor which should be considered when attempting to design effective labels (Bettman *et al.*, 1986:2). The most frequent visual aspect of packaging and thus labelling is colour, given that it is the first stimulus consumers register during the assessment of products (Ambrose & Harris, 2003:166). According to Funk and Ndubisi (2006:41), colour can stimulate consumers' interest in certain products and may result in increased purchasing of the specific item. Colour also influences the readability of the label, for example dark letters printed on a dark background cause difficulty with the interpretation of fonts on food labels (Voordouw *et al.*, 2009:97).

Consumers associate different colours with different product categories and situations (Grossman & Wisenblit, 1999:82) and colours are also associated with events and feelings (Ambrose & Harris, 2003:166-167). Therefore, it is important to select colours for furniture labels with care and consideration in order to prevent possible negative or unsuited associations which may lead to the rejection of the product by the consumer.

Different colours have different effects on consumers' emotions and energy levels. The use of various hues, values, and chroma has different effects on consumers' excitement or relaxation levels (Gorn *et al.*, 1997:1395). Crozier (1999:7) explains that hue is the actual colour, for example blue, red or orange, value refers to the brightness of the colour, and chroma is the purity of the colour. Product labels containing red and other pure, high chroma colours result in higher excitement levels in consumers, whereas labels containing blue and bright, high value colours result in higher levels of relaxation in consumers (Gorn *et al.*, 1997:1395-1396). Consequently the effect of different colours as well as brightness and purity of colours should also be carefully examined when selecting colour schemes for product labels. Literature states that the majority of consumers selected blue as their favourite colour, followed by green and red (Crozier, 1999:10). This could be used as a basic guideline for colours that could potentially be used for furniture labels.

Another visual aspect that should be considered for furniture label design is imagery. The use of images or pictures on product labels is generally considered as advantageous. Images serve as a source of instant communication, and may convey an idea, instructions, information or even feelings to the consumer (Ambrose & Harris, 2003:127). However, it is suggested that symbols should be selected carefully since they might confuse consumers (Voordouw *et al.*, 2009:97). Pictures on labels increase consumers' attention to specific products, which means that the product receives more exposure to consumers (Underwood *et al.*, 2001:421). Wells *et al.* (2007:684) confirm that pictures on product labels are beneficial, because

73% of consumers rely on product labels and packaging to make their final purchasing decision. Therefore, imagery should be considered when designing and proposing a label for furniture items.

2.4.6 The placement of furniture labels

In a study regarding consumers' perceptions of textile labels, it was found that consumers preferred labels to be visible and that the positioning thereof should be consistent (Maqalika-Mokobori, 2005:108). Labels differ between products and could be positioned differently on products. In-store information displays may be used, as well as package inserts or attached labels in order to communicate information regarding cleaning agents to consumers (Bettman *et al.*, 1986:18). These types of labels may also be used for furniture labelling. In the past, in-store displays were mainly used for promotional purposes (Hu & Jasper, 2006:42) as an effective communication medium to consumers. In-store information displays will be effective to communicate product attributes to consumers, but care and maintenance instructions will not be communicated effectively since care and maintenance instructions must be available at time of use (Bettman *et al.*, 1986:18).

Package inserts and attached labels are another type of information that consumers may use in order to obtain information regarding product attributes as well as usage and care instructions. Package inserts are inserted into the original protective packaging of furniture items. The information is printed on a separate leaflet and inserted into the packaging of the product. Although this type of label conveys more complete information regarding the product it may become lost (Bettman *et al.*, 1986:18), hence leaving the consumer without any informative source at time of use. In contrast attached labels provide information to the consumer at time of purchase (pre-purchase information search), and at time of use (Bettman *et al.*, 1986:21). Another advantage is that attached labels are always on hand when needed and do not get lost. It is thus expected that attached labels will be better suited for furniture items.

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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.4 Introduction

In order to achieve the objectives of the current study, a mixed-method research approach was followed, consisting of two phases of data collection and a third phase in which a furniture label was proposed. In order to ensure that the reader has a clear understanding of the methodology, as well as the reasons why the specific approach was chosen, this chapter regarding the research methodology was included in addition to the shortened version included in the research article (Chapter 4).

3.2 Research approach

A mixed-method research approach was followed, consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods can generate convergent and complimentary results (Flick *et al.*, 2005:174), as well as assist the researchers to acknowledge all aspects of the research topic and expand and enrich their understanding of the research topic (Bloor *et al.*, 2001:13; De Vos, 2005a:361; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:7).

A two-phase exploratory design by means of an instrument development model, as suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:75), was used during the research (Figure 3.1). A qualitative research approach was used initially in phase one, in order to obtain participants' insights into the initiative of furniture labels, as well as to determine variables for the development of a measuring instrument for the second, quantitative phase of the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:77). A quantitative research approach followed in order to obtain more detailed data regarding the information that consumers need on furniture labels. The results of the quantitative research phase were used to propose trial furniture labels in phase three. Different research methods were thus used sequentially (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007:85)

during this investigation in order to oversee all aspects of consumers' expectations of furniture labels. Figure 3.2 gives an overview of the research framework for this study.

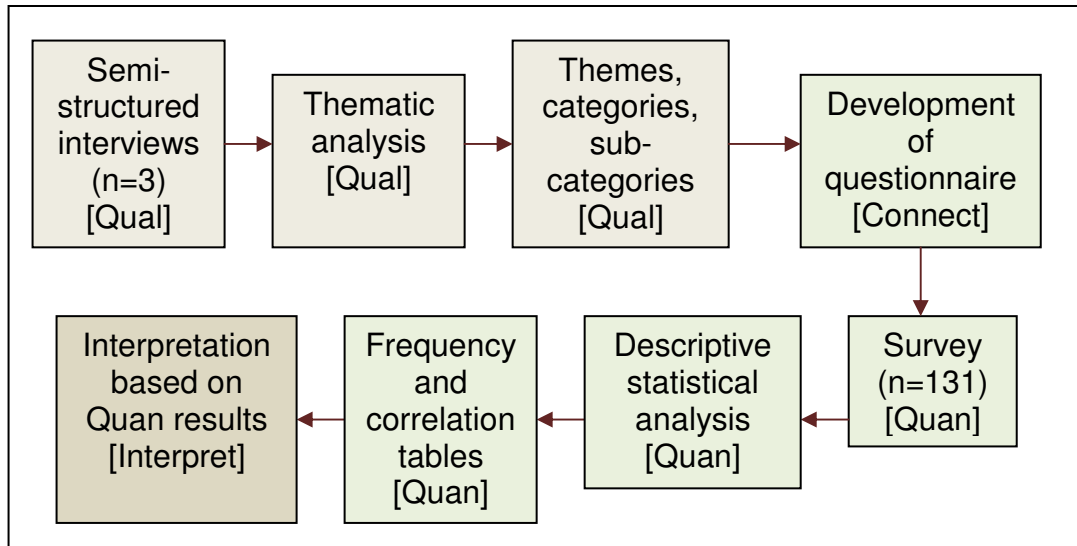


Figure 3.1: Exploratory mixed methods procedures followed to determine consumers' expectations of a furniture label (Adapted from Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:76; Ivankova *et al.*, 2007:272).

3.3 Study environment

Data collection during all phases of the research took place in selected furniture retail stores in Gauteng, South Africa. The study environment was diversified, in order for data collection to take place in the same retail stores (thus, the same environment) in three different business centres, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Centurion. The reason for selecting these three business centres was that they are located in the largest cities in the Gauteng Province. The furniture retail store selected for the study was Wetherlys, because it is a well-established furniture retail store, specialising in exclusive imported and locally manufactured furniture, with warehouses and smaller stores countrywide (Wetherlys, 2009). According to Kolbe (2002:2), the majority of Wetherlys stores are located in Gauteng and Wetherlys also has the largest number of sales per square metre (Kolbe, 2002:5) in comparison to other furniture retail stores in South Africa. Previous studies showed that

consumers are not necessarily bound to stores in their immediate areas (Goldman, 1978:17; Williams & Hubbard, 2001:248). It could, therefore, be concluded that a moderately representative sample could be drawn from stores that are centrally located and well known. For this reason the following stores were used: Wetherlys: Johannesburg, corner of Malibongwe Drive and River Road, Randburg; Wetherlys: Pretoria, corner of Simon Vermooten and Pretoria Road, Silverton; Wetherlys: Centurion, shop no. 10, Eco Décor Centre, Highveld.

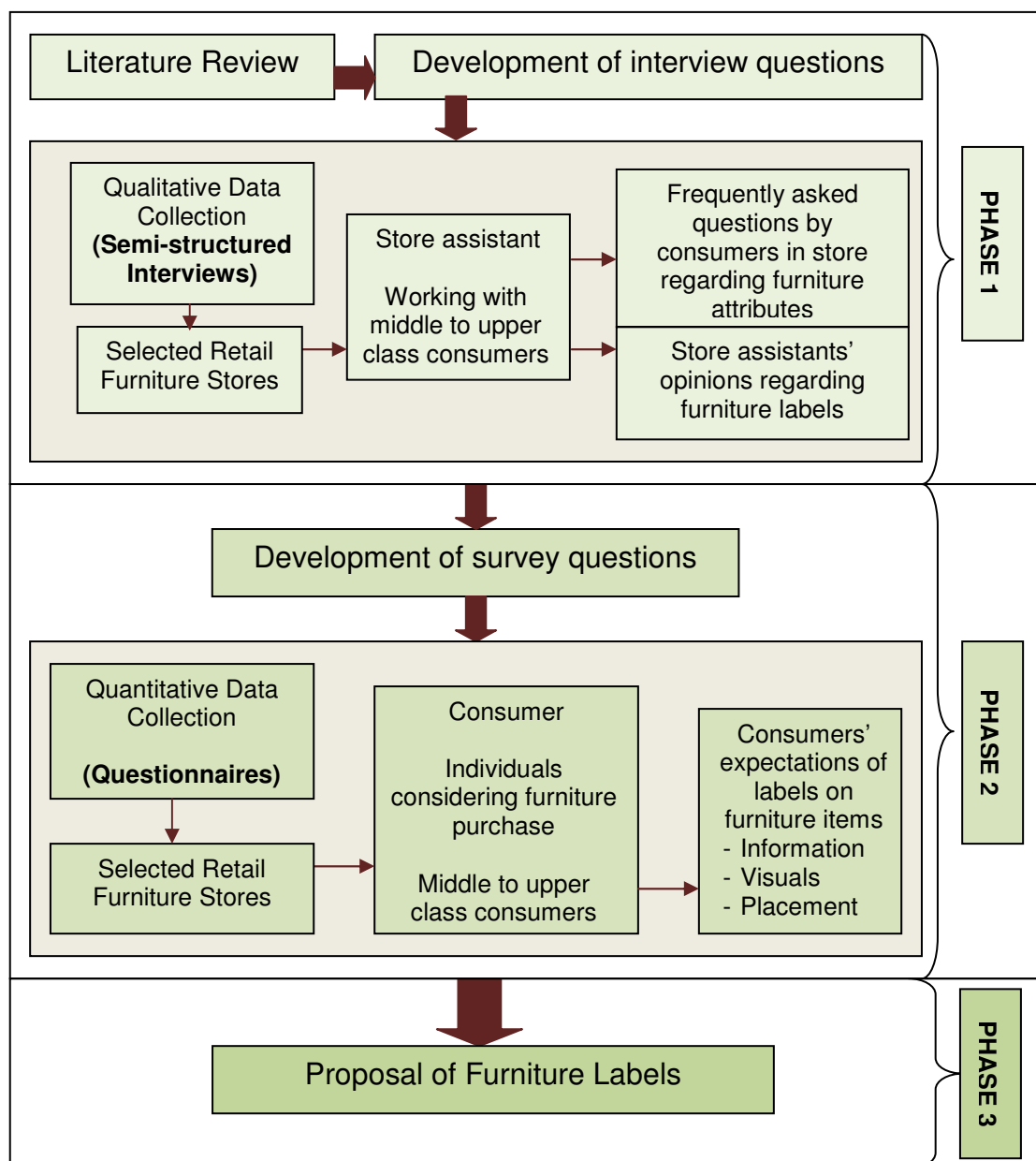


Figure 3.2: Research framework: Consumers' expectations of a furniture label during their pre-purchase information search – toward label development.

3.4 Pilot study

Pilot studies were done prior to phases one and two of the research in order to test the research design and measuring instruments that were used during qualitative and quantitative phases of the research (Strydom, 2005c:206) and to ensure that participants and respondents answer the questions with ease. The pilot studies also ensured that the data are easily administered and analysed (Fink, 1995a:86). According to Strydom and Delpont (2005:331), only a small number of participants are involved in pilot studies for qualitative research. Participants in the pilot study should, however, possess the same characteristics as participants in the main study. Therefore, only one participant, also an experienced store assistant, was recruited for the pilot study of the first phase.

One semi-structured interview was held in order to measure the efficiency of the interviewing schedule (Strydom & Delpont, 2005:332) to reveal the information needed in order to develop questionnaires for the second and third phases of the research. After transcription of the voice recordings, the interviewer found that the interview did not reveal enough information regarding consumers' frequently asked questions prior to furniture purchasing. The interview schedule was modified, and a second pilot study was scheduled in order to test the efficiency of the adapted interview schedule.

A total of 90 respondents was recruited for the pilot study of the second phase of the research in order to test the suitability of the questionnaire (Strydom, 2005c:210) to reveal the information needed. The results from the pilot study were also used to determine the sample size for the main study (3.5.2.1). Furthermore, the pilot studies for the semi-structured interview and survey were held in similar furniture retail stores in order to validate the pilot studies, and to allow the researcher to conduct the pilot studies in exactly the same way in which the main study was to be conducted (Strydom, 2005c:210).

3.5 Research phases

The following section will discuss the different research methodologies for the three phases of the research. Sequential data collection was used and by implication data collection took place in different phases and at different times (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:121). Therefore, each phase in the research will be discussed separately in terms of sampling techniques, methods of data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, trustworthiness (qualitative research), reliability and validity (quantitative research).

3.5.1 Phase 1: Qualitative data collection

The first phase of the research was conducted in order to determine objective one: Information gained from experienced store assistants regarding two sub-objectives, namely, product information consumers frequently ask store assistants for prior to furniture purchasing; and store assistants' opinions regarding important information and appearance characteristics on furniture labels in order to develop a questionnaire regarding consumers' expectations of a furniture label.

3.5.1.1 Sampling technique

For the first phase of the research, individuals were selected by means of non-probability, purposive sampling (Strydom, 2005b:203), because the sample needed to fit into the inclusion criteria, and the researcher needed the insight of participants who have experience (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:112) regarding consumers' frequently asked questions prior to furniture purchasing. Participants were thus recruited on the basis of the researcher's judgement (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:166). The store managers of three different, but similar, furniture stores pointed out the most experienced member of staff, who was then be interviewed.

3.5.1.2 Method of data collection

Semi-structured interviews were held with experienced store assistants in Wetherlys. The motivation behind the selection of semi-structured interviews was to collect data concerning frequently asked questions by consumers regarding furniture items for information collection purposes, prior to furniture purchasing. According to Greeff (2005:296), semi-structured interviews facilitate the researcher to gain insight into the participant's beliefs, perceptions or accounts of a specific topic. This method enabled the researcher to ask the store assistant questions regarding the topic, without being dictated to by a questionnaire, but rather guided by an interview schedule (Greeff, 2005:296).

Open-ended questions were asked in order to obtain the most spontaneous answers from participants (Delpont, 2005:174). Questions were formulated in such a manner that the interviewer could probe more specific answers from the participant if deemed necessary (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:289). Furthermore, questions were developed from existing literature regarding product labels in general as well as literature concerning consumers' evaluation criteria for furniture items. Field notes were taken during the interview, and conversations were audio recorded for data analysis and revision-purposes. Data saturation occurred after two semi-structured interviews. The questions included in the interview schedule are provided in Appendix A.

3.5.1.3 Data analysis

After completion of data collection, the unprocessed data were analysed in order to produce intelligible and interpretable data, which will result in functional themes (Kruger *et al.*, 2005:217). Data analysis was not computerised in this phase of the research, since there were only a small number of semi-structured interviews to be analysed. Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed from audio recordings and

field notes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006:344). The data were analysed by means of thematic analysis (Gomm, 2004:10).

The researcher read through transcripts carefully and noted recurring ideas (Gomm, 2004:10), known as categories. Concepts were developed from repeated occurrence of similar statements. All findings were tabulated (Appendix B) and the concepts were used in the results in order to develop questions for the survey.

3.5.1.4 Ethical considerations

Precautions were taken to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical manner, which did not harm the participants, researchers, or involved companies in any way (Denscombe, 2002:175). In order to protect the interests of participants, the following was done:

- The terms of the participants' involvement in the study as well as the research subject and motivation were carefully explained to all participating individuals (Huysamen, 2001:179).
- It was also explained to participants that involvement in the research study is voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any phase of the process (Huysamen, 2001:179).
- Participants were requested to give informed consent for their involvement in the research study (Strydom, 2005a:58; Piper & Simons, 2005:56; Denscombe, 2002:184) which implied that all the information regarding the research had been given to them. The reason for this is that consumers have the right to confidentiality (Gomm, 2004:305) and informed consent relieves unnecessary tension between the participant and the researcher, aggression toward the researcher, or any insecurities the participant may feel during the research (Strydom, 2005a:58). Individuals participating in the semi-structured interviews were asked to sign a written declaration of consent (Appendix C).
- Permission was asked for the recording of semi-structured interviews.

- Mental stress and physical discomfort on behalf of the participants were avoided by debriefing them regarding the procedures (Denscombe, 2002:179), and ensuring a comfortable environment.
- Confidentiality of data was ensured by reassuring participants that the information collected will not be shared with other participants (Denscombe, 2002:180).
- Participants' anonymity was protected. The individuals' names, participating in the semi-structured interviews were known to the researcher, but were not referred to during the interview schedule or in the research article.
- Managers of selected retail stores were contacted in advance, and permission to conduct the surveys in their stores were requested (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:113) (Appendix D).
- Permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University for conducting the research (Reference code: NWU – 00024 – 09 – S1).
- All the ethical considerations were tested in the pilot studies, to ensure that all ethical aspects of the research had been covered (Piper & Simonson, 2005:59).

3.5.1.5 Trustworthiness

In order for the study to be trustworthy, the following constructs were considered: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (De Vos, 2005b:346). Credibility in the current study was obtained by selecting all participants in the same manner and conducting the semi-structured interviews in similar environments. Audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews were also transcribed as soon as possible after completion of the interviews, to ensure that transcripts were accurate and complete (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277) so that the researcher could easily refer back to the collected data.

Transferability was obtained by selecting participants for the semi-structured interviews that represent a group of people (Denscombe, 2007:299), namely

experienced sales assistants in furniture retail stores. The theoretical background of the study was explained in detail (Denscombe, 2007:300) in order to help the reader understand the research on more than one level and to make the research transferable to other studies. For dependability, the semi-structured interview schedule was tested in a pilot study prior to the main study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006:63) in order to ensure that the interview schedule revealed the correct and sufficient information.

According to Denscombe (2007:300), conformability is also known as objectivity. In order to obtain objectivity during the data collection the researcher's involvement was kept to a minimum, by only using prompts during the semi-structured interviews (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:250) but not leading the participants to answer in a specific way. All findings that did not necessarily fit into the anticipated outcome are also presented in the final findings of the study. The unanticipated findings were investigated further in order to explore whether or not they were significant for the study (Denscombe, 2007:302).

3.5.2 Phase 2: Quantitative data collection

The second phase of the research was conducted in order to determine objective two of this study: Consumers' expectations regarding furniture labels in terms of three sub-objectives, namely, the product information on the label; the appearance of the label in terms of colours and pictures used; and the placement of the labels on furniture items (Figure 3.2).

3.5.2.1 Sampling technique

For the purpose of the second phase of the study consumers in urban areas of Gauteng were targeted as previously mentioned. Consumers shopping in Wetherlys stores in the three selected business centres in Gauteng were recruited as respondents. Individuals were intercepted while shopping for furniture and asked to answer questions in a researcher administered questionnaire regarding consumers' expectations toward the information on,

and the appearance and placement of furniture labels. The sample was thus drawn non-probably and accidentally (Singleton *et al.*, 1988:153). Accidental sampling is also known as convenience sampling (Singh, 2007:107), and is useful in exploratory research (Maree & Pietersen, 2007a:177), although the disadvantage of using accidental or convenience sampling was that it is not representative (Denscombe, 2007:18). However, as the sample had to fit into the inclusion criteria, convenience sampling was used. It is also a quick way to collect data (Maree & Pietersen, 2007a:177), which is advantageous seeing as data collection was sequential and had to be completed in a limited time.

The sample size for the second phase was determined by the Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University, after a pilot study was conducted. The data from the pilot study were used to calculate a sample size that is sufficient to estimate the true underlying multinomial probabilities. The pilot study of 90 participants was used as input data for the sample size calculation. The proposed sample sizes were calculated according to Angers (1984:175), at the 5% level, for each sub-question in the constructs defined by questions 43 to 45. The results for a single question (question 43.5), with the highest proposed sample size are displayed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Sample size calculation (at the 5% level) based on a preliminary sample size of 90

100 x d	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%
Proposed sample size	12 298	1 968	492	219	123

From Table 3.1 it can be concluded that on the 5% level, the estimated multinomial sample probabilities for question 43.5 will not differ by more than 0.05 from the true population probabilities for a sample size of 123. In this study the accuracy of 0.05 at the 5% level was utilised to calculate the sample size required.

Note that at this accuracy level (5%) the calculated sample sizes based on the other questions were all smaller than the sample size of 123 based on

question 43.5. Hence, the largest sample size calculated was 123, and a total sample of 131 was drawn. It is, however, interesting to note that the smallest sample size required at an accuracy level of 5% was 99.

The inclusion criteria for the second phase were: middle to upper income class consumers shopping for furniture with the intention to purchase, 18 years and older, male or female, regardless of race. The reason for the specific inclusion criteria is that as a result of the current economic situation in South Africa, not all consumers are in a financial position to purchase new furniture. It was predicted that furniture purchases will decrease from 2007 until 2010 (Consumer Goods and Retail Forecast, 2005:324). The forecast was validated by Whitfield (2008:14), stating that South African consumers' disposable income lessened in 2008. Therefore, it may be assumed that only consumers with a moderate to high income will purchase furniture under the existing economic pressure.

According to the South African advertising research foundation's living standards measure (LSM), most urban consumers fall between LSM 6 and LSM 10, and have an average monthly income of R5 386 to R25 520 (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2009:53). Moreover, Kolbe (2002:3) reported that the target market of Wetherlys is more affluent and upwardly mobile consumers in South Africa. Consumers shopping at Wetherlys are also disinclined to purchase furniture items on credit (Kolbe, 2002:3) and will, therefore, not be affected by the current economic difficulties in South Africa. Consequently, assuming consumers shopping at Wetherlys fall within LSM 6 to 10, all consumers in-store at the time of the research were regarded as middle to upper class.

Furthermore, consumers of all ages purchase furniture, and according to Nicholls and Bumgardner (2007:82), age has no significant influence on consumers' choice of furniture. Thus, all consumers above the legal age of 18 years were included in the study population. The reason for including both male and female consumers is that consumers of different genders prefer different products (Nicholls & Bumgardner, 2007:80). The literature also

states that furniture purchase is a joint decision between males and females (Shuptrine & Samuelson, 1976:88; Ndubisi & Koo, 2005:53), and not mainly the role of the male or female in a relationship, as in the case of female dominance in cleaning product purchase (Habib *et al.*, 2006:184), and male dominance in automobile purchase (Shuptrine & Samuelson, 1976:88).

3.5.2.2 Method of data collection

After the results from the interviews in phase one had been analysed, survey questions were developed, originating from the findings of the analysis of the interviews (Appendix E). According to Fink (1995a:5), successful surveys consist of specific objectives and straightforward questions. Questionnaires consisted of different types of questions among which there were dichotomous questions (option between two answers) (Fowler, 2002:91) as well as ranking questions (Maree & Pietersen, 2007b:163). The ranking questions were used in order to obtain information regarding the importance of certain aspects of the furniture label for consumers. One open question was also included (Delport, 2005:176) where the respondents could give their opinions regarding the placement of the furniture label on the item. The objectives of the survey in the second phase of the current study were to determine consumers' expectations toward the information on furniture labels as well as the appearance and placement of furniture labels on furniture items.

Closed ended questions were used in order to limit the time respondents had to spend completing the questionnaire, and only one open-ended question was included. The categories and concepts that were derived from thematic analysis of the first phase's data were included as options in multiple choice questions in the questionnaire. For example, for questions regarding respondents' preference toward certain information on furniture labels, concepts from the theme *Information consumers enquire about when purchasing furniture* were used. Thus, the concepts such as *materials used*, *type of product*, *cleaning instructions* and *price* were included in questions as options, from which respondents may choose one or more than one item.

The questionnaire consisted of seven sections, each measuring a different aspect of consumers' expectations of a furniture label. The first section (section A) contained questions regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including age, gender, income and living arrangements. This information was used to determine whether the respondents' matched the inclusion criteria, and to determine the rate of recurrence of each characteristic.

The second section (section B) contained questions regarding respondents' information search behaviour prior to furniture purchasing. Section C consisted of only one question regarding respondents' preference toward information on furniture labels. The physical appearance of the label was investigated in section D, with questions regarding the size, layout, colours, and pictures or images on the label, as well as questions regarding the letter-sizes, lettering styles and graphic form of the information and headings on the labels.

Section E questioned respondents regarding which type of furniture they thought should have a furniture label, while section F investigated respondents' placement preferences of a furniture label. The final section (Section G) investigated respondents' opinions regarding the importance of various attributes on the label of different types of furniture on a 5-point Likert scale (Appendix E).

3.5.2.3 Data analysis

Data analysis of the questionnaires in the second phase of the research was done in conjunction with the Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions were plotted in order to establish which placement and appearance characteristics the largest percentage of consumers expected to see on furniture labels (Field, 2005:8). In addition, the means of consumers' opinions regarding the importance of

information on different types of furniture were calculated, whereafter effect sizes were calculated in order to establish whether there is a significant deviation between consumers' opinion (Field, 2005:32) regarding information that is important for different types of furniture. The information which ranked the highest on the Likert scale, with a mean higher than 3.90, was used on the furniture labels. Although ratings of 4.00 on a Likert scale are usually considered as important, a mean rating of 3.90 is close enough to 4.00 to also be considered important.

3.5.2.4 Ethical considerations

Precautions were taken to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical manner, which did not harm the respondents, researchers, or involved companies in any way (Denscombe, 2002:175). In order to protect the interests of the respondents in the second phase of the research the same ethical considerations were made as in the first phase of the research (3.5.1.4). In addition to the previously mentioned ethical considerations, respondents were requested to give verbal informed consent for their involvement in the research study (Strydom, 2005a:58; Piper & Simons, 2005:56; Denscombe, 2002:184).

3.5.2.5 Reliability

According to Delport (2005:162), the reliability of a measurement procedure is dependent on the stability or consistency of the measure. Subsequently, it is important to implement sound and reliable measurement procedures, in order to obtain valid results. The questionnaire was tested prior to the main study by means of a pilot study which assessed the consistency of the measuring instrument (Denscombe, 2002:101), thus the questionnaire. The above mentioned questionnaire was tested in terms of homogeneity reliability (Fink, 1995a:47).

The homogeneity of the questionnaire was tested by means of Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Fink, 1995a:48), which measures the internal consistency

reliability of the scale items (Malhotra & Birks, 2007:807). By utilising this manner of analysis, it was determined that the questions in the questionnaire were related to each other and to the construct that was tested through the questionnaire. Coefficients vary from 0 to 1, and items with a value higher than 0.7 indicated satisfactory internal consistency (Field, 2009:679).

Data were collected in similar environments (Denscombe, 2002:106) as far as possible. In order to ensure that all the surveys were conducted in the same environment, the same furniture retail stores were used as location, and data collection took place on the same time in each location. The same questionnaires for surveys in each of the three locations were used, administered by the same researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:120). Moreover, only respondents who complied with the inclusion criteria were recruited.

3.5.2.6 Validity

Collected data was validated in order to provide high quality results through which confidence can be established (Denscombe, 2002:100). The validity of data is dependent on the accuracy thereof (Fink, 1995a:41; Frey & Oishi, 1995:25; Denscombe, 2002:100; Babbie, 2005:148). In order to obtain content validity in the current study, the measuring instrument was tested during the pilot study to ensure that it was reliable and that it extracted the correct information.

During the pilot studies, questions were evaluated in terms of appropriate language used (Fink, 1995a:50) and the effectiveness of information extraction. This is known as content validity, and is characterised by the evaluation of measuring instruments in terms of how effective they appear to measure a factor (Litwin, 1995:35; Delport, 2005:161). The questionnaires were evaluated by experts in the field of consumer science and research methodology, to ensure that the measuring instrument provided an adequate or representative sample of all content or elements being measured (Delport, 2005:161). Moreover, the questionnaire was also screened by the Statistical

Services of the North-West University to ensure that all questions were correctly formulated and could be analysed statistically.

In addition to content validity, the measuring instrument was also tested for construct validity. This measure in which the questionnaire successfully measures a theoretical construct was determined (Delpont, 2005:162), by means of exploratory factor analysis. Principle component analysis as extraction method, and varimax with Kaiser Normalisation as rotation method was used to determine an underlying variable, dimensions or factors, which explain the correlations among a set of variables (Field, 2005:619; Malhotra & Birks, 2007:647). Only the final three questions were analysed and four to five factors were isolated in each question (Appendix F). The variables within each factor were related to each other, and factors were labelled accordingly. Data were analysed by the Statistical Services of the North-West University in order to ensure that the analysis was correct and the results were an accurate depiction of what the study revealed (Denscombe, 2007:282).

3.5.3 Phase 3: Quantitative data collection

The third phase of the research was conducted in order to determine objective three: To propose a preliminary furniture label according to consumers' expectations in order to assist consumers during their pre-purchase information search phase of the consumer decision-making process (Figure 3.2).

3.5.3.1 Development of a preliminary furniture label

The quantitative results from phase two were used to propose a preliminary furniture label. Attributes which had the highest frequency were included in the label. This included consumers' expectations of the wording of information on product labels, as well as the appearance, type and placement of the label.

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CHAPTER 4

Research Article

(Manuscript to be submitted for publication in the
International Journal of Consumer Studies)

*Due to a number of words limitation of the journal, not all results (figures and tables) could be included in the article. The data tables for the first, qualitative phase are provided in Appendix B. Additional data as well as the questionnaire used in the second, quantitative phase are provided in Appendices E and F, respectively.

Title: Consumers' expectations of furniture labels during their pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process

Short title: Consumer's expectations of furniture labels

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Abstract

Labels serve as a source of external information during the consumer decision-making process, and frequently contribute to consumers' prior knowledge of different products as well as their search activities prior to the purchase of furniture. This article investigates consumers' expectations of furniture labels during the pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process, in order to propose usable furniture labels. The objectives of the study were to determine what questions regarding product information consumers frequently ask store assistants prior to furniture purchasing; to determine consumers' expectations regarding furniture labels in terms of the product information on the label, the appearance of the label and the placement of the labels on furniture items; and finally to suggest a preliminary furniture label according to consumers' expectations. A mixed-method research approach was followed, using a two-phase exploratory design. Qualitative findings indicated that consumers enquire about the type of materials used for the manufacturing of furniture items, finishes used on items, quality, guarantees, warranties, design, performance, maintenance, care instructions and colours of items. Similarly, quantitative results showed that the majority of respondents deemed the price, materials used, cleaning instructions, guarantee and warranties important to be stated on the furniture label. Appearance characteristics were summarised and preliminary furniture labels were suggested accordingly. These labels can be used by product developers, marketers, and the furniture industry to assist consumers during their pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process.

[Number of words: 223]

Key Words

Consumer behaviour; Consumer decision-making process; consumers' expectations; furniture labels; information search

Introduction

Furniture is expensive and the purchase thereof not frequent (Assael, 2004; Elsasser, 2004), which could lead to potential financial loss to consumers (Solomon, 2011) and, therefore, considered high risk purchases (Rousseau, 2003; Ward & Sturrock, 1998; Solomon, 2011). The high perception of risk is ascribed to the high level of uncertainty associated with expensive purchases (Mitchell, 1992). In order for consumers to gain peace of mind, adequate information should be obtained prior to furniture purchasing. The decision-making process for the purchase of furniture is, therefore, extensive (Rousseau, 2003; Ndubisi & Koo, 2005; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010).

Extensive decisions are more complex and require a comprehensive information search, from both internal and external sources (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007). Product labels are a source of external information (Bleda & Valente, 2009), which frequently contribute to consumers' search activities and decision-making prior to purchasing, by providing an informative base of products such as food (Silayoi & Speece, 2004) and clothing (D'Souza *et al.*, 2006). Consumers' level of perceived risk may be reduced by providing the consumer with enough information to make sound decisions (Ward & Sturrock, 1998).

Product labels may be utilised to inform the consumer regarding clothing products' attributes as well as recommended care instructions in order to maintain the item effectively (Cooklin, 1997), which when applied to furniture labels, may possibly reduce consumers' perceived risk prior to the purchasing of furniture. Consumers may, therefore, gain self-assurance through knowledge of the product prior to purchase, and knowledge regarding the maintenance of the furniture item. However, when information is missing or incomplete during the information search stage of the decision-making process, consumers are faced with a problem (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000) also known as information search failure (Mansourian, 2008). In order to avert the inconvenience of missing information from consumers, it is necessary to provide them with complete product information.

Furniture labels may also assist consumers during the second stage of the consumer decision-making process (evaluation of alternatives). Consumers evaluate different alternatives by measuring each alternative against specific evaluation criteria (Hawkins *et al.*, 2007). The criteria consist of product attributes that each consumer perceives as important (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). According to Dimara and Skuras (2005), food product labels convey attribute information to consumers. Furniture labels, as with food labels, may provide consumers with all the attribute information they need in order to make informed choices. Furthermore, labels may be standardised in order for all labels to provide information regarding the same attributes, which may simplify the evaluation of alternatives for consumers (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000). Similarly, furniture labels may be standardised for the same reason.

Product labels in general have been researched thoroughly during the past half century, with many studies focusing on the comprehensiveness of labels on various products (Kivetz & Simonson 2000; Grossman *et al.*, 2006). While non-scientific evidence exists that mention the demand for labels on furniture (Cabinet maker, 2000), there is inadequate scientific literature specifically regarding the comprehensiveness of labels on furniture items, or evidence of the existence of such labels.

Results of a recent study (in the North West Province) indicated a need among South African consumers for labels on furniture items (Heyns *et al.*, unpublished). The aim of the present study was to determine consumers' expectations of furniture labels during the pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process, in order to suggest furniture labels. Consequently, the objectives of the study were to: firstly explore what product information consumers frequently ask store assistants for prior to furniture purchasing and to explore store assistants' opinions regarding important information and appearance characteristics on furniture labels; secondly determine consumers' expectations regarding furniture labels in terms of the product information on the label, the appearance of the label (colours and pictures), and the placement of labels on furniture items; and finally to suggest a preliminary furniture label according to consumers' expectations in order to assist consumers during their pre-purchase information search phase of the consumer decision-making process.

Literature background

The South African Consumer

Consumers display distinct behaviour in their search for, purchasing, use, evaluation and disposing of products and services (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). There are, however, differences in the manner in which consumers behave as a result of the difference in their situations and backgrounds (Du Plessis, 2003). Therefore, the South African consumer should be considered as an entity, which is not completely different from consumers in other countries, but does not share their identical characteristics and behaviour (Du Plessis, 2003).

South Africa is considered one of the world's largest emerging economies (Selvanathan & Selvanathan, 2004), which holds both advantages and disadvantages to consumers. A disadvantage of South Africa as an emerging economy is the relatively low levels of consumer education, resulting in uninformed consumer behaviour. Consumers are also restricted by their relatively low levels of knowledge regarding various products prior to purchasing (Gothan & Erasmus, 2008). Product knowledge is, however, extremely important to help to ensure responsible decision-making and labels on furniture items may increase consumers' product knowledge. One advantage is, however, that an emerging economy could provide better products, services and consumer education (Sonnenberg & Erasmus, 2005:18).

Consumers in South Africa were left with high levels of debt (Whitfield, 2008) along with low income levels, leading to a decrease in the retail market's growth (Consumer Goods and Retail Forecast, 2005), after the financial crisis of 2007/2008 (Calitz, 2009). In the third quarter of 2009, South Africa, however, moved out of the recession (Sapa, 2009). This relieved the financial strain on the country's economy, although it will take some time before small retailers and consumers also have a greater disposable income (Calitz, 2009) for luxuries such as furniture.

Labels as source of information during the consumer decision-making process

Despite the financial difficulties consumers in South Africa experience, their needs and desires have to be satisfied by acquiring certain products and services. The acquisition of these products is preceded by the consumer decision-making process (Arnould *et al.*, 2004). Decision-making is an integral part of every consumer's life, which takes place at different involvement levels (Rousseau, 2003).

The consumer decision-making process is a sequence of activities namely, problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, product choice and outcome (Solomon, 2011; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Product labels assist consumers during the information search and evaluation of alternatives stages of the consumer decision-making process by providing consumers with information regarding the product before purchasing (D'Souza *et al.*, 2006), and helping consumers to distinguish between alternative products (Wright, 1997). Therefore, it is important to offer consumers complete and comprehensive product labels.

Considerations for furniture label design: information on labels

Consumers demand accurate, appropriate (D'Souza *et al.*, 2006) and informative labels (Dimara & Skuras, 2005), preferably in a language which is easily understandable and clear, as in the instance of food labelling (Wright, 1997). The first factor that could be considered during the development of labels is the information occurring on the label, followed by the appearance of the label, and finally the placement of the label. These considerations could be applied to a variety of product labels, including furniture labels.

It is essential that labels are complete, in order to ensure that consumers make well-informed decisions (Kivetz & Simonson, 2000). However, excessive information on product labels, such as food (Silayoi & Speece, 2004), and soft furnishings (Sonnenberg & Erasmus, 2005) may cause confusion, resulting in a decline in the quality of the consumer's final decision (Johnson & Russo, 1984). Therefore, it is

important to develop product labels, that are clear and understandable, as not to confuse the consumer and that will help the consumer to make responsible decisions.

The literature indicates that the following information is compulsory on product labels: materials used for manufacturing of wooden furniture (Nicholls & Bumgardner, 2007); country of production (Cheng *et al.*, 2007; Tustin & De Jongh, 2008) and the production process of various products (Tustin & De Jongh, 2008); brand names on textile products (Maqalika-Mokobori, 2005); and practical information regarding the care of soft furnishings (Sonnenberg & Erasmus, 2005). In addition, it is advised that food labels should be printed in visible letter sizes to avoid confusion and ignorance among consumers (Wright, 1997). Thus, the need for similar information on furniture labels should be investigated, in order to suggest labels for furniture items with compulsory information.

Considerations for furniture label design: appearance of labels

The appearance (visual aspect) of the label is the second factor which should be considered when attempting to design effective labels for food (Dimara & Skuras, 2005) and cleaning products (Bettman *et al.*, 1986) and could be applied to furniture labels. The first and most frequent visual aspect of labels is colour, given that it is the first stimulus consumers register during the assessment of products (Ambrose & Harris, 2003). Colour can stimulate consumers' interest and may result in increased purchasing of a specific item (Funk & Ndubisi, 2006).

Another visual aspect that should be considered for furniture label design is imagery. The use of images or pictures on food labels is generally considered as advantageous (Ambrose & Harris, 2003). Images serve as a source of instant communication and may convey an idea, instructions, information or even feelings to the consumer (Ambrose & Harris, 2003). Moreover, pictures on food labels increase the attention consumers pay to specific products, which means that the product receives more interest from consumers (Underwood *et al.*, 2001). Pictures on food labels are beneficial, because 73% of consumers rely on product labels and packaging to make their final purchasing decision (Wells *et al.*, 2007). Imagery used on food labels

could be applied to furniture labels, although further investigation is needed, as in the present study.

Considerations for furniture label design: placement of labels

The placement of the label is a third important factor to consider when designing furniture labels. There are three different types of labels that could be used on cleaning products, namely in-store information displays, package inserts and attached labels (Bettman *et al.*, 1986). Moreover, in a study regarding consumers' perceptions of textile labels, it was found that consumers preferred labels to be visible and that the positioning thereof should be consistent (Maqalika-Mokobori, 2005). Thus, the type and placement of labels differ between products and consumers' expectations in terms of labels for furniture items should also be investigated.

Research method

Research approach

A mixed-method research approach was followed, using a two-phase exploratory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, Ivankova *et al.*, 2007) (Figure 1). A qualitative research method was used in phase one, in order to determine variables for the development of a measuring instrument for the second, quantitative phase (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), which aimed to gain more detailed data (Creswell, 2009) regarding the information that consumers need on furniture labels. The results of the quantitative research phase were used to suggest furniture labels in phase three.

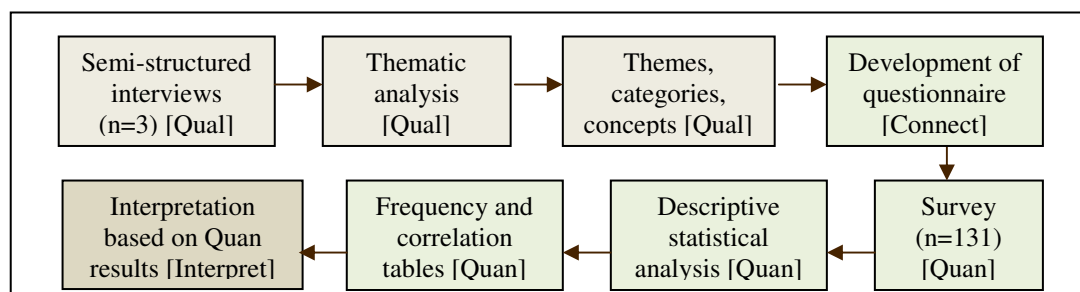


Figure 1 Exploratory mixed methods procedures followed to determine consumers' expectations of a furniture label (Adapted from Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Ivankova *et al.*, 2007).

Study environment

Data collection during all phases took place in selected Wetherlys retail stores in Gauteng, South Africa. This store is a well-established furniture retailer, specialising in exclusive imported and locally manufactured furniture (Wetherlys, 2009). The majority of Wetherlys stores are located in Gauteng and also have the largest number of sales per square metre (Kolbe, 2002) in comparison to other furniture retail stores in South Africa. Previous studies showed that consumers are not necessarily bound to stores in their immediate areas (Goldman, 1978; Williams & Hubbard, 2001). It can, therefore, be concluded that a moderately representative sample could be drawn from stores that are centrally located in Gauteng and well known.

Study population and sampling

As a result of the current economic situation in South Africa, consumers' disposable income lessened in 2008 (Whitfield, 2008) resulting that not all consumers are in a financial position to purchase new furniture. It may thus be assumed that only consumers with a moderate to high income will purchase furniture under the existing economic pressure. Middle to high income consumers in urban areas of Gauteng were, therefore, included in the sample.

Different consumers were recruited for each phase of the research, as suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) for exploratory studies. The sample for the first, qualitative phase consisted of three experienced sales assistants, working in Wetherlys, recruited through non-probability, purposive sampling (Strydom, 2005a). This method was used since the participants had to fit into the inclusion criteria, and the researcher needed the insight of participants who have experience (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) regarding consumers' frequently asked questions prior to furniture purchasing in order to answer the first objective of the study.

For the second, quantitative phase, non-probably, accidental sampling was used (Singleton *et al.*, 1988). Accidental sampling is useful in exploratory research and is a quick way to collect data (Maree & Pietersen, 2007), which was advantageous to the study seeing as data collection was sequential and had to be completed within a

limited time. The disadvantage was, however, that accidental or convenience sampling is not representative (Denscombe, 2007). A sample size of 131 that is sufficient to estimate the true underlying multinomial proportions of the population was calculated (Angers, 1984) from the results of a pilot study, with the assistance of the Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University.

The inclusion criteria for the second phase were middle to upper income class consumers shopping for furniture, above the legal age of 18 years, male or female, regardless of race group. Consumers of all ages purchase furniture, and age has no significant influence on consumers' choice of furniture (Nicholls & Bumgardner, 2007). Both male and female consumers were included since furniture purchase is a joint decision between genders, and not mainly the role of the male or female in a relationship (Ndubisi & Koo, 2005; Shuptrine & Samuelson, 1976). No literature was located that suggests that different races present different furniture purchasing behaviour.

Pilot study

Pilot studies were done prior to phases one and two in order to test the research design, interview schedule, questionnaires that was used during the research (Strydom, 2005b), the ease with which participants and respondents answer the questions, and with which the data were administered and analysed (Fink, 1995). During the pilot study of the first phase, the interview schedule was adapted twice, in order to extract the information needed to develop a measuring instrument for the second phase. Results of the second pilot study were used to determine the effectiveness of the questionnaire and to determine the sample size for the main study. No adaptations were made to the questionnaire.

Ethical considerations

Precautions were taken to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical manner, which did not harm the participants, respondents, researchers, or involved companies in any way (Denscombe, 2002). The terms of involvement in the study as well as the research subject and motivation were carefully explained to all

participating individuals (Huysamen, 2001). Participants and respondents were requested to give informed consent for their involvement in the study (Piper & Simons, 2005; Strydom, 2005a). Permission was asked from participants for the recording of semi-structured interviews, from managers of selected retail stores to conduct the surveys in their stores (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), and from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University for conducting the research (Reference code: NWU – 00024 – 09 – S1).

Data collection

The first phase of data collection determined study objective one: to explore what product information consumers frequently ask store assistants for prior to furniture purchasing and to explore store assistants' opinions regarding important information and appearance characteristics on furniture labels in order to develop a questionnaire regarding consumers' expectations of a furniture label. Data were captured by means of audio recordings and field notes of three semi-structured interviews with experienced store assistants in Wetherlys. Data saturation took place after two semi-structured interviews. This method enabled the researcher to ask the store assistants questions regarding the topic, without being dictated to by a questionnaire, but rather guided by an interview schedule (Greeff, 2005). Open-ended questions were asked in order to obtain the most spontaneous answers from participants (Delpont, 2005).

The second phase of the research was conducted by means of a questionnaire with the intention to obtain data regarding objective two of the study: Consumers' expectations regarding furniture labels in terms of the product information on the label, the appearance of the label (colours and pictures used), and the placement of the labels on furniture items. Individuals were intercepted while shopping for furniture in Wetherlys and filled out a questionnaire. The questionnaires consisted of different types of questions among which dichotomous as well as 5-point Likert scale questions, where one was not important and five was very important were included. In order to determine whether or not consumers expect to see different labels on different types of furniture, the questionnaire contained a number of questions regarding consumers' expectations of wooden, upholstered and leather furniture.

The third phase of the research was conducted in order to propose a preliminary furniture label according to respondents' expectations (objective three). Data obtained through the questionnaire in the second phase of the research were analysed and the results were used as guidelines for a qualified graphic designer to design a preliminary furniture label.

Data analysis

Data from the semi-structured interviews in phase one were transcribed from audio recordings and field notes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Thematic analysis (Gomm, 2004) was used in order to produce intelligible and interpretable data (Kruger *et al.*, 2005). Similar statements from participants were categorised into categories and concepts from repeated occurrence (Strauss, 1987). All findings were tabulated and the concepts were used in the results in order to develop questions for the second phase.

Data analysis of the questionnaire used in the second phase was done in conjunction with the Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University, using The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Inc. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and means were calculated. Thereafter, effect sizes were calculated ($d=0.2$ - small effect; $d=0.5$ - medium effect; $d=0.8$ - large effect) (Ellis & Steyn, 2003) in order to establish whether there was a practically significant deviation between respondents' opinions (Field, 2009) regarding information that is important for different types of furniture. Cross-tabulation was done to determine the degree of association (Kruger *et al.*, 2005:239) between respondents' expectations of a furniture label and the information they search for prior to furniture purchasing ($w=0.5$ - practically significant) (Cohen, 1969:111). For analysis of the data gathered from the Likert scale, ratings with a mean rating higher than 3.90 were regarded as important since the value is closer to 4.00 (important) than 3.00 (indifferent) and was, therefore, used on the furniture labels.

Trustworthiness, reliability and validity

In order to obtain trustworthiness in phase one, the researcher's involvement was kept to a minimum (Babbie & Mouton, 2001), all participants were selected in the same

manner and the group of participants represented (Denscombe, 2007) experienced sales assistants in furniture retail stores. The semi-structured interviews were pilot tested (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) and conducted in similar environments, audio recorded and transcribed as soon as possible after completion of the interviews, to ensure that transcripts were accurate and complete (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Unanticipated findings were also presented in the final findings and were investigated further (Denscombe, 2007) by including them in the questionnaire of the second phase in order to explore whether or not they were significant for the study. The theoretical background of the study was explained in detail in order to make the research understandable on more than one level and to make the research transferable to other studies (Denscombe, 2007).

In phase two of the present study, reliability was obtained by pilot testing the questionnaire prior to the main study to assess the consistency of the measuring instrument (Denscombe, 2002). The questionnaire was tested in terms of homogeneity reliability (Fink, 1995) by means of Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which measures the internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire. It was determined that the questions in the questionnaire were related to each other and to the construct tested, as all items that were tested had values greater than 0.7, which points towards satisfactory internal consistency (Field, 2009).

Content validity as well as construct validity was used in the present study in order to obtain valid results. Content validity was obtained by testing the measuring instrument during the pilot study, to ensure appropriate language was used (Fink, 1995) and that it revealed the correct information. The extent to which the questionnaire successfully measured a theoretical construct was determined (construct validity) (Delport, 2005), using exploratory factor analysis. Principle component analysis as extraction method, and varimax with Kaiser Normalisation as rotation method was used to determine an underlying variable, dimensions or factors, which explain the correlations among a set of variables (Field, 2009; Malhotra & Birks, 2007).

Results and discussion

Consumers' frequently asked questions prior to furniture purchasing and store assistants' opinions regarding furniture labels (Phase 1)

Various themes were derived from the semi-structured interviews, namely: information consumers enquire about when purchasing furniture, essential information on a furniture label, the appearance of furniture labels, the placement of furniture labels, furniture items that consumers ask the most questions about, and sales assistants' reaction towards the idea of a furniture label.

The first category that emerged from the first theme (information consumers enquire about) is the materials used during manufacturing of the furniture item. It is important for consumers to have this information in order to make informed decisions (Nicholls & Bumgardner, 2007). Consumers also evaluate furniture items in terms of characteristics, such as the finish and design of the furniture item (Brinberg *et al.*, 2007). Findings from the semi-structured interviews confirmed that consumers sometimes ask what finishes (category 2) are used, but do not often ask questions about the design (category 5) of furniture items. Yet, consumers who did enquire about the design of an item only enquired about the style of the specific furniture item (*"Yes, I mean you get your contemporary or your classical styles... so they also ask that"*).

Quality of the furniture item was the third category that surfaced during the semi-structured interviews as one of the most prominent aspects consumers enquire about when purchasing furniture (*"Quality... and colour. That's about the two biggest things they want to know"*). A reason for this could be that consumers use quality as part of their general search criteria when evaluating alternative products prior to purchase (Rousseau, 2003; Brinberg *et al.*, 2007; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Participants indicated two basic enquiries regarding the quality of furniture items, namely the quality of the item itself and the quality of the materials used for manufacturing of the item. The participants also emphasised the importance of

information regarding the different materials used to manufacture items, in order to assist consumers to make a judgement regarding the quality of furniture items (“...*good quality material*”).

Although there is a limited amount of literature that states the importance of guarantees and warranties for consumers during the decision-making process (Rousseau, 2003; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010), participants stated that consumers do enquire about guarantees and warranties on furniture items prior to furniture purchasing (“*They usually ask what the guarantee is...*”). Warranties and guarantees thus emerged as the fourth category. Participants also indicated that consumers based their choice of store on the guarantees and warranties offered by the store (“*People come to Wetherlys because of our warranties and our guarantees*”).

Performance is an aspect that consumers often include in their general search criteria for furniture items (Rousseau, 2003). This might be because consumers’ satisfaction with a product is dependent on the performance thereof (Hoyer & McInnis, 2007) and they also perceive the performance of a purchased product as a risk, as it might not be satisfactory (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007). Contrary to this, participants stated that only a few if any consumers enquired about the performance, which formed the sixth category of furniture items (“*Very few people actually come in looking for specific rub counts and stuff*”).

The seventh category that surfaced was the maintenance of the item. Participants stated that they get “*occasional*” or “*odd*” enquiries about cleaning instructions, but consumers do not frequently ask about cleaning instructions for furniture items (“*Occasionally they come in and ask for cleaning instructions. Not always, but occasionally they do*”). Information regarding the maintenance of a product is generally included in labels for clothing and textile products (Cooklin, 1997; Maqalika-Mokobori, 2005), although no literature was found regarding the inclusion of maintenance-related information on furniture labels. There were also occasional consumer enquiries regarding the care instructions for hard furnishings in humid climates (category 8), but none regarding fabrics and the majority of consumers did not enquire about maintenance in different climates.

Participants' (store assistants) opinions regarding the information that is important to be on furniture labels are summarised in Table 1. Findings show that respondents stated that there should not be too much information on furniture labels, as not to confuse consumers. Other categories that emerged were general information on all furniture items; information on wooden, upholstered, leather and plastic furniture items, respectively. Table 2 summarises participants' opinions regarding the appearance of a furniture label. Categories that emerged include the general appearance of furniture labels, colours, images and lettering sizes used on labels, the layout of labels as well as the placement of the labels. Participants noted that the label should be clearly visible, in either neutral or corporate colours, but not red. In terms of the lettering on the label, participants stated that a plain font in a readable size should be used. There were, however, differing opinions regarding the size of the label as well as the layout of the label (Table 2). Table 3 summarises participants' opinions regarding the type and placement of furniture labels. Four categories emerged namely, the general placement of furniture labels, not permanent labels, fixed labels and hang tags. Participants stated that labels should be placed where consumers could clearly see them, unless the label is fixed (permanent) in which case it should be out of sight (Table 3).

Table 1 Summary of participants' opinions regarding the information on furniture labels

Category	Concept	Quote
1. The amount of information on the label.	Not too much information, only the compulsory.	"Because I think you can overkill a label too. If you put too much information on the label in confuses people too."
2. General information on all furniture items.	Type of furniture.	"What the product is, you know, whether that be a dining room table or a couch or whatever it may be."
	Style of the item.	"...the type of style."
	Dimensions of the furniture item.	"Its (dimensions) something that is actually very important to a lot of our customers, to whether it's gonna fit in their houses."
	Guarantees on the item.	"Any guarantees that are applicable to the item."
	Price of the furniture item.	"And then obviously the price."
	Care instructions for the item.	"And then also the care instructions. I mean, they do it with clothing items. They've got a small label that states the washing instructions, so I think it would be cool if it's on a furniture piece as well."
3. Information on labels for wooden furniture.	Type of wood.	"A lot of people also ask about the type of wood..."
	Type of stain.	"...what stains are used..."
	Price of the item.	"...and all the other things like price."
	Dimensions of the item.	"Also the dimensions, a lot of people ask for the dimensions of a furniture item."
	Maintenance of the item.	"...how to maintain it in order to ensure a long lifetime of the item...and then also how to clean it so that you don't have to oil it everyday or week."
4. Information on labels for upholstered furniture.	Price of the item.	"...and what the price is."
	Dimensions/size of the item.	"...what size it is..."
	What type of item it is.	"...what type of couch it is..."
	Rub count of the materials.	"Let's use an example, like couches, rub count of the material..."
	Style of the item.	"...the type of style."
	Fabric used.	"...the fabric, if it's an upholstered couch."
5. Information on labels for leather furniture items.	Care instructions/maintenance of the leather item.	"Definitely how to maintain your leather so that it looks good everyday."
	Products to care for leather items.	"And then also something like that leather care cases State that you can use it to maintain your leather, so that it guarantees the life of the leather item."
	Type of leather.	"What type of leather it is... if it's genuine leather."
	Guarantees and warranties on the leather item.	"...what its guarantee and warranty is because it is leather."

Table 2 Summary of participants' opinions regarding the appearance of a furniture label

Category	Concept	Quote
1. General appearance of the label.	Visible/ bright enough.	"So you want something that is bright enough to be seen, but not over the top... But it has to be visible."
2. Colours used on the label.	Plain/neutral colours.	"I think a plain colour such as beige or white that is striking, so that people can see that there's a label with information."
	Corporate colours.	"You see, ours is in corporate colours, and it's probably a suitable one..."
	Not red.	"...because if you make something red, people think its on sale, that's just a South African thing."
3. Letter-sizes and font used on the label.	Plain font.	"...and plain. Because I feel that plain draws the attention more than curls and twists and so on."
	Large enough to read with ease.	"You know, not everybody has good eyes... But it's something that needs to be big enough that people don't struggle to read."
4. The actual size of the furniture label.	Visible.	"The font must be printed and visible."
	Small.	"Small, and not too overwhelming."
	Not too big.	"If the label's too big, people don't read it, that's a fact."
	6cm ² - 7cm ² .	"About 60mm by 60mm. Maybe a bit bigger, but about 60 or 70 would be the best."
	About 10cm ² .	"I think that our label is about the right size (about 10cm x 10cm) for small furnishings."
5. The layout of the furniture label.	Size of label dependent on size of item.	"...for smalls obviously we'd go for a smaller label but all your big ticket items are literally the bigger ticket items."
	Plain.	"Plain and simple."
	Logo of company should be on top.	"...the logo at the top is actually in a good position."
	Name of company should be on top.	"The name must be at the top."
	Name of company should be on the side.	"...or (the company's name) maybe on the side of the label."
6. Pictures and images	Information should be printed next to name of the company.	"...with the information next to it (the company's name)."
	Price clearly visible.	"The price should be prominent as well."
	Only company's logo/name.	"I would maybe just put the company's logo on, that's very important."
	No picture or image.	"...not a picture or so."
	Only a picture of the product if the furniture item is on promotion.	"You know if it's a promotional item I believe there should be a picture of the product on it. So that people know, and can identify with it straightaway."

Table 3 Summary of participants’ opinions regarding the placement and type of labels for furniture

Category	Concept	Quote
1. General placement of furniture labels.	Where consumers can see it.	“It should be literally next to it or underneath it so that it’s there, and the person can see it.”
	Close to the item.	“I would still place it as close to the item as possible. Because obviously that’s where the customers are attracted to it.”
2. Not permanent labels (Temporary labels).	Label could be placed at the bottom of a couch.	“On a couch, for instance, I would place it at the foot on the left.”
	Label could be placed on the armrest of a couch.	“...or on the armrest, but also something that they can remove.”
	Label could be attached to the price tag.	“...with the price tag. So that they see it together with the price. If they see the price they can also see how to clean it.”
3. Price tags.	Visible and clear.	“But if it’s a price label, it must be visible and clear.”
4. Fixed labels.	Fixed.	“Probably a sewn on label.”
	Underneath the item.	“...although if you want a permanent label, perhaps under the couch next to the foot.”
	Under the seating cushion of a couch.	“If it’s an upholstered couch you can place it under the seating cushion. There’s usually space there.”

Consumers’ expectations regarding furniture labels (Phase 2)

Exploratory factor analysis was done in order to identify the attributes consumers regard as compulsory on a furniture label. Principle component analysis was used to extract five factors for wooden furniture and four similar factors for upholstered and leather furniture, which explained 71.47%, 65.85% and 68.52% variations respectively. The criteria to extract the number of factors were based on eigenvalues larger than one (Field, 2009). Factor loadings larger than 0.4 were used to extract the attributes for each factor, and all the communalities as well as Cronbach’s alpha values were mostly above 0.7 for all factor analyses (data not shown), indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The factor analysis thus contributed to the reliability and validity of the current research. The factors were related to the literature, and consequently labelled in accordance with the literature regarding consumers’ search criteria and expectations of a furniture label.

The factors and items in each factor for all furniture types were value for money (price, guarantee and warranties), appearance (design, finish and type of item), maintenance (cleaning instructions, products to clean item with, care instructions for different climates and warnings) and production (country of origin and the name of

the manufacturer). Wooden furniture, however, included a fifth factor namely construction, which included materials used for production of the item and the performance of the item. These two items, however, loaded as maintenance for upholstered furniture, and appearance for leather furniture.

Demographic results showed that the majority of respondents were female (n=89, 69%) and between the ages of 25 and 30 years (n=20, 16.8%). Possible reasons for this could be that the female role in decision-making has significantly increased since the feminist movement started in the 1960's (Strong *et al.*, 2005). Female consumers often adopt the role of 'suggester' when purchasing furniture (Ward & Sturrock, 1998), leading to a greater female presence during the early stages of the furniture decision-making process. For similar reasons, results also indicate that female respondents were (n=68, 51%) more inclined to a pre-purchase information search than males (n=27, 20%) (Table 4). Older consumers are less mobile than younger consumers and, therefore, they do not visit retailers as often (Cummins & Macintyre, 1999). It is also possible that older respondents had already furnished their homes, as compared to younger respondents still furnishing their homes.

Table 4 Respondents' involvement with furniture purchasing: Do they search for information prior to furniture purchasing?

	Respondents that search for information		Respondents that do not search for information	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Male	27	20.0	13	32.0
Female	68	51.0	21	23.6
Total	97	74.0	34	26.0

Results regarding the income of respondents in the current study coincided with Kolbe (2002) stating that the target market of Wetherlys is more affluent and upwardly mobile consumers. The majority of respondents (n=125, 93.8%) had an average household income of more than R5 386/month, which falls between LSM 6 and LSM 10 (higher income groups) (South African Advertising Research Foundation, 2009). More than half of the respondents (n=68, 51.0%) had an income higher than R26 001/month. Thus, the target population of middle to higher income consumers was sufficiently represented in the study.

In order to determine whether respondents might use furniture labels during their information search prior to furniture purchasing, respondents' involvement with furniture purchasing was determined. Seventy four percent (n=97) of respondents stated that they search for information prior to furniture purchasing (Table 4). This result is consistent with the literature stating that consumers search for information extensively prior to furniture purchasing (Rousseau, 2003, Solomon, 2011).

Information regarding respondents' involvement with furniture purchasing also enabled the researcher to determine what information respondents searched for prior to furniture purchasing (Table 5) and the sources of information they used prior to furniture purchasing (Table 6). Results also showed that respondents searched for information regarding the quality, design, finishes and materials used for the furniture items (Table 5) as supported by the literature (Rousseau, 2003; Brinberg *et al.*, 2007; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). It can, therefore, be concluded that respondents expect to see this information on furniture labels in order to assist them during their pre-purchase information search.

Table 5 Percentage of respondents that searched for specific information prior to furniture purchasing

Information	Males n=42		Females n=89		Total respondents n=131	
	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Quality	24	60.0	65	73.0	91	69.5
Design	16	40.0	48	53.9	64	48.9
Finish	15	37.5	46	51.7	61	46.6
Materials used	16	40.0	44	49.4	61	46.6
Guarantee	12	30.0	44	49.4	57	43.5
Warrantees	6	15.0	26	29.2	33	25.2
Performance	5	12.5	25	28.1	30	22.9
Cleaning instructions	4	10.0	23	25.8	27	20.6
Brand name	6	15.0	16	18.0	24	18.3
Name of manufacturer	4	10.0	9	10.1	15	11.5
Country of origin	3	7.5	11	12.4	14	10.7
Production process	3	7.5	6	6.7	9	6.9
Dimensions	1	2.5	1	1.1	2	1.5
Price	1	2.5	0	0	1	0.8

As expected, respondents did not depend heavily on product labels when purchasing furniture due to the absence of labels on these items (17.6%, n=23) (Table 6), although the researcher believes that the use of furniture labels would increase once they are available. The reason for this expected increase is that cross-tabulation showed that there is a medium to practical significant relationship between respondents' search criteria for furniture items and their expectations of furniture labels (Table 7). The literature also confirms that consumers use the labels of other products during decision-making (Silayoi & Speece, 2004; D'Souza *et al.*, 2006).

Table 6 Sources of information that respondents use prior to furniture purchasing

Source	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Books, magazines	67	51.1
Visits or calls to retailer, pamphlets	63	48.1
Advertisements	49	37.4
Prior knowledge	41	31.3
Friends, neighbours, relatives, co-workers	35	26.7
Product labels	23	17.6
Internet	14	10.7

Table 7 Relationship between respondents' search criteria and expectations towards the information on a general furniture label

Attribute	Phi	Effect*
Country of origin	0.38	Medium effect
Manufacturer	0.50	Practical significant
Performance	0.51	Practical significant
Guarantee & Warrantees	0.25	Medium effect
Design	0.38	Medium effect
Finish	0.31	Medium effect
Materials used	0.21	Medium effect

* Small effect: w=0.1; Medium effect: w=0.3; Large effect: w=0.5 (Cohen, 1969:111)

Respondents had to distinguish between information that they deemed important to be on the label of different types of furniture (data not shown). For general furniture labels, the majority of respondents stated that the price (n=97, 74%), materials used (n=84, 64.9%), cleaning instructions (n=84, 64.1%), as well as guarantee and warrantees (n=83, 63.4%) were important. Table 8 summarises the information respondents expect to see on different furniture labels, as rated according to importance on a 5-point Likert scale expressed as the mean values. The researcher

deemed attributes with a mean higher than 3.9 as important and was, therefore, recommended to be included in the suggested furniture labels.

Table 8 Mean importance of information on different furniture labels to respondents (5-point Likert scale^{**})

Attributes*	Types of furniture			Mean
	Wood	Upholstery	Leather	
Care instructions for different climates	4.10	4.12	4.17	4.44*
Cleaning instructions	4.20	4.52	4.51	4.41*
Price	4.37	4.38	4.38	4.39*
Guarantee	4.24	4.29	4.40	4.31*
Warrantees	4.17	4.26	4.34	4.25*
Materials used	4.03	4.36	4.31	4.22*
Products to clean with	3.95	4.35	4.24	4.18*
Warnings	3.88	4.02	4.09	4.00*
Finish	4.02	3.89	4.06	3.99*
Performance	3.59	3.68	3.64	3.63
Type of product	3.38	3.78	3.66	3.60
Design	3.44	3.46	3.54	3.48
Manufacturer	2.97	3.17	3.42	3.20
Country of origin	3.08	3.09	3.17	3.12

* Attributes recommended to be included in suggested furniture labels.

** 1 = unimportant; 2 = slightly important; 3 = undecided; 4 = important; 5 = very important

The results of respondents' expectations of wooden, upholstered and leather furniture labels were compared and effect sizes were determined in order to establish whether there was a practically significant relationship (large effect size) between their expectations of different types of labels. The results showed only small to medium effect sizes ($d=0.00$ to $d=0.42$), therefore, there was no practical significant relationship between respondents' expectations of the labels of different types of furniture (Table 6). Consequently, the same information and visual/appearance characteristics (Table 7) could be used for all types of furniture labels.

Table 9 Effect sizes of the relationship between respondents' expectations of wooden, leather and upholstered furniture labels

Label	Question	Standard Deviation	Effect Size (d*)	Significance
Materials used	Wood - Upholstered	1.212	0.26	Medium
	Wood - Leather	1.143	0.24	Medium
	Upholstered - Leather	1.129	0.01	Small
Type of product	Wood - Upholstered	3.855	0.11	Small
	Wood - Leather	1.347	0.23	Medium
	Upholstered - Leather	4.003	0.03	Small
Manufacturer	Wood - Upholstered	1.163	0.20	Small
	Wood - Leather	1.255	0.32	Medium
Country of origin	Upholstered - Leather	1.127	0.20	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	1.104	0.01	Small
Cleaning instructions	Wood - Leather	1.124	0.07	Small
	Upholstered - Leather	0.928	0.10	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	0.803	0.42	Medium
Warrantees	Wood - Leather	1.083	0.28	Medium
	Upholstered - Leather	0.766	0.00	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	0.728	0.11	Small
Guarantee	Wood - Leather	0.840	0.20	Small
	Upholstered - Leather	0.653	0.16	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	0.800	0.05	Small
Design	Wood - Leather	0.710	0.22	Medium
	Upholstered - Leather	0.745	0.15	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	1.004	0.00	Small
Finish	Wood - Leather	0.849	0.11	Small
	Upholstered - Leather	0.752	0.12	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	0.931	0.13	Small
Care instructions for different climates	Wood - Leather	0.920	0.08	Small
	Upholstered - Leather	0.909	0.21	Medium
	Wood - Upholstered	1.057	0.00	Small
Warnings	Wood - Leather	0.930	0.05	Small
	Upholstered - Leather	0.767	0.09	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	0.836	0.17	Small
Price	Wood - Leather	0.941	0.22	Medium
	Upholstered - Leather	0.857	0.08	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	0.681	0.02	Small
Performance	Wood - Leather	0.488	0.00	Small
	Upholstered - Leather	0.427	0.02	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	0.843	0.15	Small
Products to clean item with	Wood - Leather	0.913	0.07	Small
	Upholstered - Leather	0.765	0.05	Small
	Wood - Upholstered	0.925	0.43	Medium
	Wood - Leather	1.016	0.29	Medium
	Upholstered - Leather	0.887	0.13	Small

* d = 0.2 – small effect; d = 0.5 – medium effect; d = 0.8 – large effect

Table 10 Respondents' expectations of appearance characteristics of furniture labels

Appearance characteristic	Characteristic deemed most important by respondents	Frequency (n)	Mean percentage (%)
Size of the label	Dependent on size of item	61	46.3
Type of label	Hang tag	76	58.0
Layout of the label	The name and logo of the company should be printed at the top of the label with the information underneath.	72	54.8
Colours on the label	Neutral colours	63	48.3
Pictures/images on label	Symbols for care instructions	71	54.5
Lettering – information	Style: Arial, bold, lower case	59	44.8
	Size: Medium – 16pt	79	60.4
	Graphic form: straight line	119	90.8
Lettering – headings	Style: Arial, bold, uppercase	70	53.4
	Size: Medium – 16pt	63	48.1
	Graphic form: straight line	119	90.6

The majority (n=76, 58%) of respondents selected a hang tag for all types of furniture, which is a small removable tag attached to the furniture item (data not shown). Similar to labels that are attached to an item, hang tags provide information regarding the product at the time of purchase, but not necessarily at the time of usage as is the case with fixed labels. In terms of the appearance of furniture labels, respondents preferred neutral colours (n=63, 48.3%) for the label, with the name and logo of the company to be printed at the top of the label with the information underneath (n=72, 54.8%). The majority of respondents' selected a medium sized Arial font for the headings as well as for the information (Table 10). Results also showed that 41% (n=54) of the respondents stated that they expected the label to be visibly placed on the furniture item, as confirmed by Maqalika-Mokobori (2005) for textile labels.

Suggested preliminary furniture label (Phase 3)

As reported previously, there was no practical significant difference in respondents' expectations of different types of furniture labels and, therefore, a single set of guidelines was used for all types of furniture. Because the product specific information, such as cleaning instructions differed between different types of furniture, three different labels were designed, for wooden, upholstered and leather furniture. All the labels, however, have similar colours, layout and basic information.

Table 11 summarises the general guidelines in terms of the appearance of the label, as derived from respondents' expectations (Table 10).

Table 11 Guidelines regarding the appearance of labels used to propose furniture labels

	Guidelines
Type and Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hang tag – printed back and front ○ 10cm x 15cm
Layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Front: Business logo printed at the top of the label, with NWU logo next to it. Basic product information should be printed underneath ○ Back: Care instructions
Colours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Brown, beige & white (neutral colours) ○ Background: Beige, white
Lettering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Headings: Straight line, bold, uppercase, 16 font ○ Information: Straight line, bold, 16 font

Results regarding respondents' expectations of the appearance of furniture labels revealed that they preferred furniture labels to be in proportion to the size of the item it is attached to. Furthermore, respondents stated that they preferred the logo of the company to be printed at the top of the label with the information underneath, in a medium font size (Table 11). All information was preferred to be printed in a straight line, bold, and headings should be uppercase. The results showed that respondents preferred the colours used on the labels to be neutral, or the corporate colours of the company.

Only symbols for care of the item, as well as the business logo of the company should be included on the label. In terms of the type of label and the placement thereof, respondents stated the label should be visible. The logos of the retailer, Wetherlys (study location), as well as the logo of the North-West University (where research was conducted), were positioned on the labels (Figures 1 to 3).



Figure 2 Label for wooden furniture items from the (a) front and (b) back.

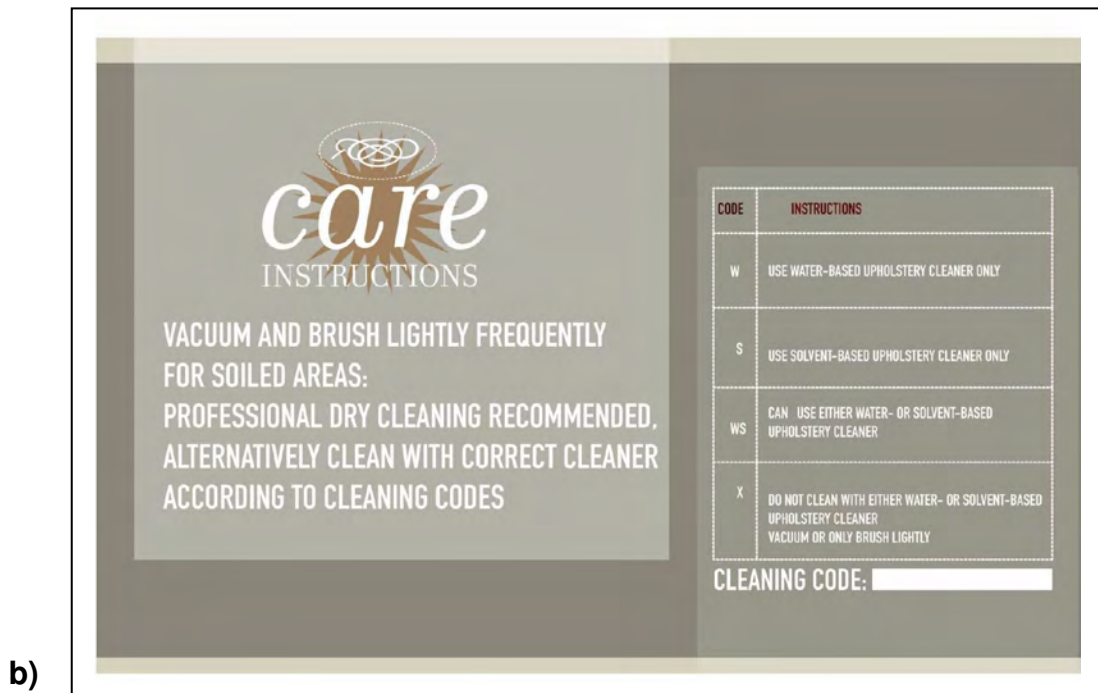


Figure 3 Label for upholstered furniture items from the (a) front and (b) back.

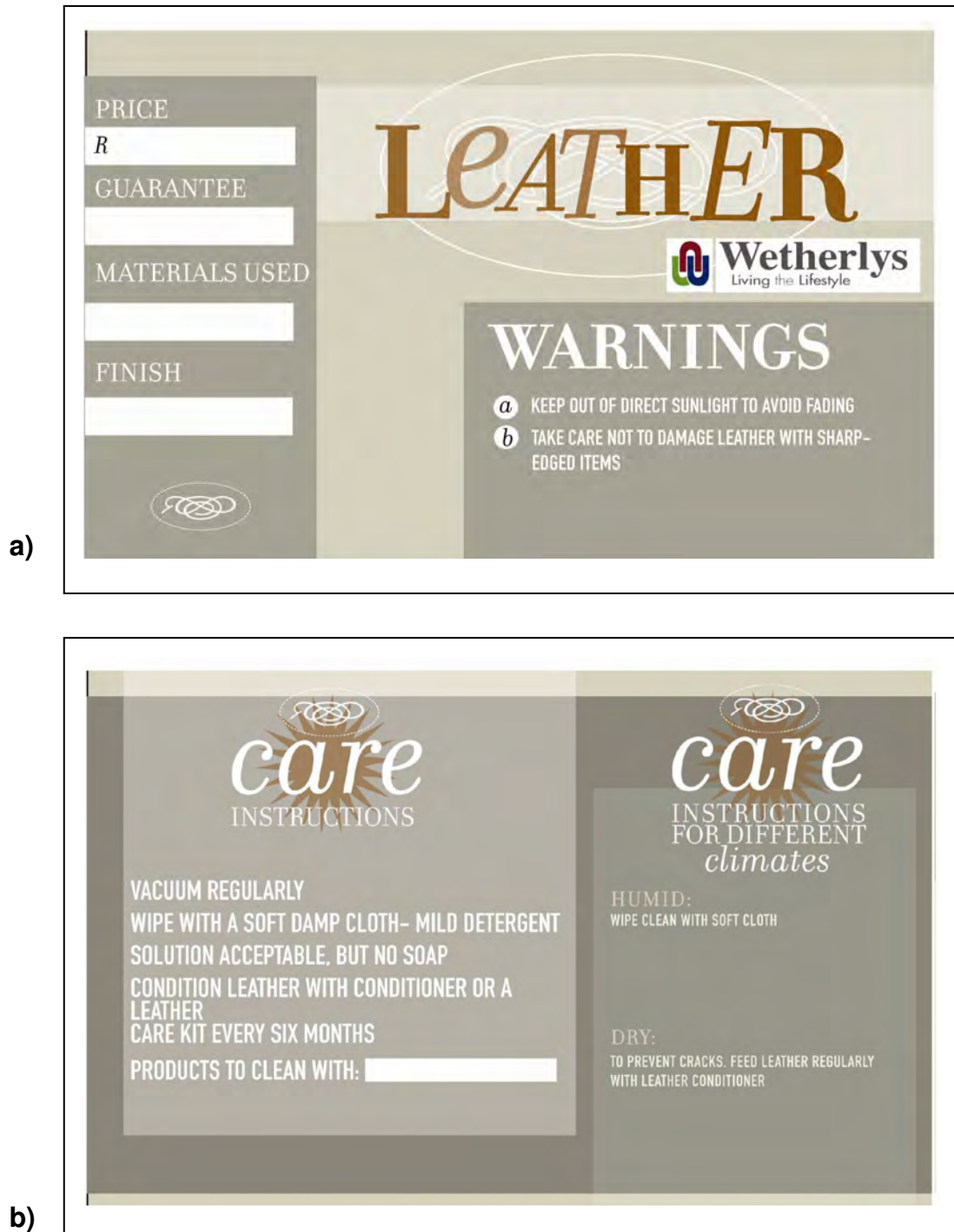


Figure 4 Label for leather furniture items from the (a) front and (b) back.

All furniture labels were designed as hang tags, to draw the attention of consumers when shopping for furniture. These labels could assist consumers during their pre-purchase information search and help them to make informed decisions. All specific information on the labels was based and gained from Wetherlys' general pricing labels and store assistants.

Conclusion

Product labels serve as a source of information which consumers use prior to the purchasing of various consumer goods. However, there has not been any literature discussing labels for furniture items. The aim of the present research was to determine consumers' expectations of furniture labels during their pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process in order to propose a furniture label. The research was conducted in three phases, each addressing a single objective.

By exploring data collected regarding the questions consumers frequently ask prior to furniture purchasing and store assistants' opinions regarding important information and appearance characteristics on furniture labels (Objective 1), a questionnaire was developed for the second stage of the study. Findings showed that consumers enquire about similar information that they include in their search criteria, according to the literature, and that participants' opinions also coincide with the literature regarding information and appearance characteristics of product labels. This information includes materials used during manufacturing of the furniture item, finishes used on the item, the quality, guarantees and warranties of the item as well as the maintenance of the item.

In order to determine what consumers' expectations regarding furniture labels are (objective 2), questionnaires were filled out in furniture retail stores. Similar to the participants in first phase the majority of respondents regarded information that they include in their search criteria as important to be present on furniture labels. There was no practical significant difference between respondents' expectations of the information on, and appearance characteristics of different types of furniture labels. Therefore, it was concluded that the same appearance characteristics could be used on all types of furniture labels, as well as the same attributes of furniture could be listed on all labels, with the exception of product specific information.

The final objective was addressed by utilising the quantitative results in order to propose a furniture label. The same guidelines were used to design labels for wooden,

leather and upholstered furniture items. Three labels were designed, each stating information regarding the specific product to which it will be attached.

The study provided insight into consumers' expectations of furniture labels, as well as possible advantages of furniture labels. In designing labels for various types of furniture items, according to consumers' expectations, it is anticipated that consumers will be more satisfied with furniture items. The proposed furniture labels could assist consumers to make informed decisions when making furniture purchases, thereby reducing their risk perception. Product developers, marketers and the furniture industry could also apply the results of the current study to acknowledge consumers' needs for a complete source of pre-purchase information. Furniture labels could be developed to assist both consumers during their furniture purchasing, as well as establish retailer loyalty which could ultimately increase sales.

Limitations of the study were, however, the relative small scale of the research, limited time, and the exploratory nature of the research. By using a larger sample size, the sample probabilities could be up to 1% accurate to the true population probabilities, instead of the current 5%. In addition, as a result of the exploratory nature and non-probability sampling used in the study, results cannot be generalised to a wider population. Further research could be performed in order to test the labels suggested in the current study. Consumers' intended usage of the labels could be determined, and compared to their actual usage of the furniture labels. It is also recommended that the current study should be replicated in other provinces in South Africa in order to gain information regarding South African consumers' expectations of furniture labels. Because no scientific literature could be located, locally or internationally, regarding furniture labels, the results of the current study could be applied to similar research projects not only in South Africa, but also internationally.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research (5.2) while applications of the research in the furniture industry will also be discussed (5.3), as well as certain limitations of the methods (5.4). Finally, recommendations for future research will be made (5.4).

5.2 Conclusion

Product labels serve as a source of information, which consumers use prior to the purchasing of various consumer goods. There has, however, not been any literature discussing labels for furniture items. The present research aimed to suggest a furniture label according to consumers' expectations, to assist them during their pre-purchase information search of the decision-making process.

The first objective (to explore information gained regarding the questions consumers frequently ask prior to furniture purchasing and store assistants' opinions regarding important information and appearance characteristics on furniture labels in order to develop a questionnaire for the second stage of the study) was addressed using semi-structured interviews with experienced store assistants. Consumers mostly ask store assistants about the materials used for the production of the item, the quality of the item as well as guarantees and warranties on the item, the quality of the item. Few consumers asked regarding the finishes, design, performance and maintenance of furniture items, and all participants indicated that consumers do not ask questions regarding the cleaning instructions for different climates.

Findings regarding participants' opinions about the information on furniture labels showed that labels should be short and clear, and information regarding

the type of furniture, style, dimensions, guarantees, and the price as well as care instructions should be included. According to participants, information regarding similar attributes should be placed on the labels of all types of furniture. In terms of the appearance of a furniture label, participants stated that the label should be clearly visible and easily readable.

In order to determine what consumers' expectations regarding furniture labels are (objective two), questionnaires were distributed in furniture retail stores. The majority of respondents regarded materials used for the production of the item, cleaning instructions, as well as attributes that they also include in their search criteria, such as price and warranties, as important information on furniture labels. There was no significant difference between respondents' expectations of the information on different types of furniture labels and, therefore, it could be concluded that the same attributes of furniture could be listed on the labels of all types of furniture. Similarly, respondents' expectations of the appearance of furniture labels did not vary widely between different types of furniture.

The final objective was addressed by utilising the results of the second phase of data collection in order to propose a furniture label that could assist consumers during their pre-purchase information search phase of the consumer decision-making process. The same guidelines were used to design labels for all types of furniture, thus for wooden, leather and upholstered furniture items. Three similar looking labels were designed, each stating information regarding the specific product it will be attached to. The data collected throughout the study successfully determined consumers' expectations of furniture labels and resulted in the proposal of a furniture label. In conclusion, the study provided insight into consumers' expectations of furniture labels, as well as possible advantages of furniture labels.

5.3 Practical applications of the research

5.3.1 Applications for consumers

During the consumer decision-making process, consumers identify a need, search for information regarding the product that could satisfy the need, evaluate different alternatives, choose the most suitable alternative and finally evaluate the chosen product after purchasing. For high risk purchases, such as the purchase of furniture, product labels could assist consumers during the decision-making process. Using furniture labels as a source of information could reduce the amount of effort consumers devote to information search, reduce their perceived risk associated with the purchasing of expensive furniture and prevent consumers from resorting to coping strategies as a result of missing or incomplete information.

Furniture labels could also assist consumers during the evaluation of alternatives, by providing them with information regarding the same attributes of different types of furniture in order to provide comparable information sources. Because consumers' expectations influence their satisfaction with a product, it is possible to increase their satisfaction by creating a realistic expectation. Therefore, furniture labels could provide consumers with the precise product information to create a realistic expectation of the products' performance during the post-purchase evaluation phase of the consumer decision-making process to result in higher satisfaction levels among consumers.

Consumers' expectations of furniture labels were determined in the current study in order to suggest furniture labels that would satisfy their needs. It is anticipated that the information on the labels could add to consumers' product knowledge. By increasing consumers' knowledge regarding the product as well as its maintenance, furniture items could have an extended lifetime, which would in turn contribute to the consumer's post-purchase satisfaction.

5.3.2 Applications for product developers and marketers

Although the research was conducted from a consumer point of view, the results are also applicable and advantageous for product developers and marketers. It is the intention of product developers to produce products according to, and to satisfy consumers' needs. The current study aimed to determine consumers' expectations of furniture labels. The results of the study were used to suggest clear, understandable and complete furniture labels, for consumers to use. Product developers and marketers could use the proposed labels, and information to develop furniture labels that would be available for consumers to use in furniture retail outlets during the consumer decision-making process.

5.3.3 Applications for the furniture industry

The research does not only have applications for product developers, marketers and consumers, but also for the furniture industry. Retailers could acknowledge consumers' expectations of furniture labels, which were previously unknown, by using the results of the current study in order to provide customers with the information they need prior to furniture purchasing. The utilisation of this information, thus sufficient and efficient information regarding the products sold in-store, could also have a positive effect on the retailer's sales. If retailers provide all the necessary product information, consumers might not feel that the retailer is withholding information, which establishes retailer loyalty and trust between the consumer and the retailer. The provision of complete and trustworthy information regarding the products sold in-store could also contribute to the quality of the retailer's service.

5.3.4 Applications for future research

Various research projects could be planned in order to test the results of the current study. The effectiveness of the furniture labels proposed in the study could be explored. In addition, consumers' intended usage as well as their actual usage of furniture labels could be determined and compared. The

results of the current study could also be used to develop furniture labels for various furniture retail stores. Because no scientific literature could be located, locally or internationally, regarding furniture labels, the results of the current study could be applied to research projects not only in South Africa, but also internationally.

5.4 Limitations and recommendations

5.4.1 Size of the study

The total study sample of the research project was only 134 individuals, recruited by means of non-probability sampling from Gauteng. The sample size was determined at an accuracy level of 5% thus, the sample probabilities will not differ by more than 0.05 from the true population probabilities. However, by using a larger sample size, the sample probabilities would not differ by more than 0.01 from the true population probabilities (at an accuracy level of 1%). In addition, non-probability sampling is not representative of the true population.

It is recommended that more individuals should be recruited from Gauteng, in order to increase the accuracy level of the study to maintain a 1% accuracy of the results. Future research that is not restricted by time could use random sampling, in more than three locations, instead of non-probability sampling. Moreover, individuals were only recruited from a single province in South Africa. It could thus also be recommended that a replication study should be conducted in the other eight provinces in South Africa in order to upgrade the project from a provincial study to a national study.

5.4.2 Time limitations

Apart from the small scale of the research project, time was another limitation that restricted the researcher. Because of time limitations, the efficiency of the developed furniture labels could not be tested (5.3.4). By testing the effectiveness of the labels, shortcomings and further limitations could be

identified. It could also contribute to the credibility of the study, since the results of the current study would be proved. It is thus recommended that the information on, appearance and placement of furniture labels, suggested in the third phase of the current research study, should be tested.

5.4.3 Exploratory nature of current research

As a result of the exploratory nature of the study and the sampling method, the results cannot be generalised. This poses a problem for researchers, product developers and marketers, since the results might not be applicable to their specific situation. However, the results of the current study could be helpful as basis for further research regarding consumers' needs and expectations of furniture labels. The results could also be utilised for the development of furniture labels in other companies.

Appendix A

Interview schedule - Phase 1



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

Furniture labels: consumers' expectations and the resulting usage during their pre- purchase information search

Stage 1: Interview Schedule

How long have you been working as a sales assistant in Wetherlys?
What information do consumers most frequently ask for when purchasing furniture items? What advice do consumers ask for regarding furniture items, prior to purchase?
Probe: What is your <u>opinion regarding the statement</u> : <i>Literature states that consumers look for the following information prior to purchasing furniture:</i> Quality; Performance; Warranties; Guarantee; Design; Finish; Materials used; Maintenance (cleaning instructions and prevention of damage); and Care instructions for different climates.
If you were in the position to design a label for furniture items, what information would you regard as compulsory to be on the label?

Probe:

What information would you put on a label for a furniture item made of:

Wood;

Upholstered material; and

Leather.

How would the label look?

Probe:

How would the label look in terms of:

Colour;

Lettering (size, style etc.);

Pictures/images;

Layout; and

Size.

Where would you place the label on the furniture item?

What is the reason for the specific placement?

Do you have anything to add? Any comments or remarks?

Appendix B

Findings - Phase 1: Categories, concepts and quotes

Table 1: Theme 1 – Information consumers inquire about when purchasing furniture

Category	Concept	Quotes
Materials used for manufacturing of the furniture item.	Wood.	<p>“They always ask what type of wood it is.”</p> <p>“If it’s furniture for example what the woods are...”</p> <p>“Usually they ask what type of wood the item is made of.”</p> <p>“... and what type of wood.”</p>
	Leather.	<p>“Because we don’t use any split hides or anything, it’s very simple to explain to the customer that it is genuine full hide leather.”</p>
	Fabric.	<p>“Fabric, uhm, they can pick and choose exactly what they want...”</p> <p>“I mean specifically soft furnishings, you know, any of our couches we can have made up with any fabric that the customer wants.”</p> <p>“You would get the odd client who inquires about the material used as inners for couches, with what material it is covered and if it’s a slip cover, what material is underneath.”</p>
	Consumers do not ask questions about materials used.	<p>“...we don’t get a lot of questions about it. Everything is laid out in store.”</p>
Finishes used on the furniture item.	What finishes are used.	<p>“If its furniture for example...what the finishes are...”</p> <p>“Not really as much, but sometimes you would get a client that asks about it (finishes), but not often.”</p>
	The availability of different finishes.	<p>“...what finishes are available.”</p>
	Consumers ask about the colour of	<p>“It’s only just the colours...so it’s just the colour.”</p>

Table 1: Theme 1 – Information consumers inquire about when purchasing furniture

Category	Concept	Quotes
	the item.	
Quality of the furniture.	Quality of the furniture item.	<p>“Quality, obviously they want to know.”</p> <p>“Quality...and colour. That’s about the two biggest things they want to know.”</p> <p>“...clients seek information regarding the quality of the item.”</p>
	Quality of the materials used.	<p>“People want to know that what they’re getting is genuine good quality leather.”</p> <p>“...good quality material.”</p>
Guarantees and warranties of items.		<p>“People come to <i>Wetherlys</i> because of...but also because of our warranties and our guarantees.”</p> <p>“They usually ask about the guarantees and warranties.”</p> <p>“They usually ask what the guarantee is on the frame and so on.”</p>
Design of the furniture item.	Style of the furniture item.	<p>“...showing them what is available in terms of styles.”</p> <p>“Yes, I mean you get your contemporary or your classical styles...so they also ask that.”</p>
	Consumers do not often ask about the design of a furniture item.	<p>“Not necessarily, because all our furniture is standard, or a standard design.”</p>

Table 1: Theme 1 – Information consumers inquire about when purchasing furniture

Category	Concept	Quotes
Performance of the furniture item.	Consumers do not ask about the rub count of a furniture item.	“No, no, not at all. In anyway, you can feel on the material whether it can take a lot of rubs or not. “
	Few consumers ask about the rub count of a furniture item.	“Very few people actually come in looking for specific rub counts and stuff.” “Especially when they inquire about material, what the price is and how many rubs it can take.
Maintenance of the furniture item.	Cleaning instructions for a furniture item.	“Occasionally they come in and ask for cleaning instructions. Not always, but occasionally they do.” “We do get phone calls (about the cleaning of an item).” “And then the odd question is how do you clean it?” “They will ask you if it is treated with <i>Protex</i> or <i>Scotchguard</i> , how you clean it if there is a stain on it.”
Care instructions for different climates of the furniture item.	Occasional questions about caring instruction for humid climates.	“People are concerned in coastal areas because it’s a lot more humid, so occasionally you get asked that sort of question on hard furnishings, but not on fabrics.”
	Consumers do not ask about caring instructions for different climates.	“I never had been asked about the caring instructions for different climates.” “No, not really. I have not been asked that question (regarding care instructions in different climates) since I’ve been working here.”
Questions regarding the colour of the furniture item.	The use of colour.	“They want to know what colours they can use with what wood.”

Table 2: Theme 2 – Compulsory information on a furniture label

Category	Concept	Quotes
The amount of information on the label.	Not too much information, only the compulsory.	<p>“As much information in as little as possible words.”</p> <p>“Because I think you can overkill a label too. If you put too much information on the label in confuses people too.”</p> <p>“And as for the information, only put the compulsory on, not a whole storybook of information.”</p>
General information on all furniture items.	Type of furniture.	<p>“Let’s use an example, like couches...what type of couch it is...”</p> <p>“What the product is, you know, whether that be a dining room table or a couch or whatever it may be.”</p>
	Style of the item.	“...the type of style.”
	Dimensions of the furniture item.	<p>“Its (dimensions) something that is actually very important to a lot of our customers, to whether it’s gonna fit in their houses.”</p> <p>“...perhaps how much material was used on the couch, the dimensions of the couch...”</p>
	Guarantees on the item.	<p>“Any guarantees that are applicable to the item.”</p> <p>“It is probably important to know...the guarantee...”</p>
	Price of the furniture item.	“And then obviously the price.”
	Care instructions for the item.	<p>“And then also the care instructions. I mean, they do it with clothing items. They’ve got a small label that states the washing instructions, so I think it would be cool if it’s on a furniture piece as well.”</p>

Table 2: Theme 2 – Compulsory information on a furniture label

Category	Concept	Quotes
Information on labels for wooden furniture.	Type of wood.	“A lot of people also ask about the type of wood...” “...just to say from what the wooden furniture piece was made of.”
	Type of stain.	“...what stains are used...” “Whether it’s an antique stain or a mahogany stain is all you put on there.”
	Price of the item.	“...and all the other things like price.”
	Dimensions of the item.	“Also the dimensions, a lot of people ask for the dimensions of a furniture item.”
	Maintenance of the item.	“...how to maintain it in order to ensure a long lifetime of the item...and then also how to clean it so that you don’t have to oil it everyday or week.”
Information on labels for upholstered furniture.	Price of the item.	“...and what the price is.”
	Dimensions/size of the item.	“...what size it is...” “...perhaps how much material was used on the couch, the dimensions of the couch...”

Table 2: Theme 2 – Compulsory information on a furniture label

Category	Concept	Quotes
	What type of item it is.	“You just want on there what it is...” “...what type of couch it is...”
	Rub count of the materials.	“Let’s use an example, like couches, rub count of the material...”
	Style of the item.	“...the type of style.”
	Fabric used.	“...the fabric, if it’s an upholstered couch.”
Information on labels for leather furniture items.	Care instructions/ maintenance of the leather item.	“For the label I think you can put care instructions on there, how to keep it clean.” “Definitely how to maintain your leather so that it looks good everyday.”
	Products to care for leather items.	“And then also something like that leather care cases (points at a <i>Wetherlys</i> Leather Care Kit). State that you can use it to maintain your leather, so that it guarantees the life of the leather item.”
	Type of leather.	“What type of leather it is... if it’s genuine leather.”
	Guarantees and warranties on the leather item.	“What its guarantee and warranty is.” “...what its guarantee and warranty is because it is leather.”

Table 3: Theme 3 –The appearance of furniture labels

Category	Concept	Quotes
General appearance of the label.	The label should be visible/ bright enough.	<p>“So you want something that is bright enough to be seen, but not over the top... But it has to be visible.”</p> <p>“...but something bright enough.”</p> <p>“If you look at it, it’s bright enough to be seen.”</p>
Colours used on the label.	Plain/neutral colours should be used.	<p>“I think ‘n plain colour such as beige or white that is striking, so that people can see that there’s a label with information.”</p> <p>“A neutral colour.”</p> <p>“...but ‘n plain colour...”</p>
	Corporate colours should be used.	“You see, ours is in corporate colours, and it’s probably a suitable one...”
	The label should not be red.	<p>“...not a dark red or so.”</p> <p>“...because if you make something red, people think its on sale, that’s just a South African thing.”</p>
Letter-sizes and font used on the label.	A plain font should be used.	<p>“...also in plain typing.”</p> <p>“You will see all our labels are printed in plain typing, no fancy curls and twists, just plain typing.”</p> <p>“...and plain. Because I feel that plain draws the attention more than curls and twists and so on.”</p>
	Letters should be large enough to read with ease.	<p>“You know, not everybody have good eyes... But it’s something that needs to be big enough that people don’t struggle to read.</p> <p>“A fairly large letter size...”</p>

Table 3: Theme 3 –The appearance of furniture labels

Category	Concept	Quotes
	Visible.	“The font must be printed and visible.”
The actual size of the furniture label.	The label should be small.	“Small, and not too overwhelming.”
	The label should not be too big.	“If the label’s too big, people don’t read it, that’s a fact.”
	The label should be between 6cm ² and 7cm ² .	“About 60mm by 60mm. Maybe a bit bigger, but about 60 or 70 would be the best.”
	The label should be about 10cm ² .	“I think that our label is about the right size (about 10cm x 10cm) for small furnishings.” “I would say it should be a little bit bigger than the price tag (points at the Wetherlys price tag).”
	The size of the label is dependent on the size of the item it is attached to.	“...for smalls obviously we’d go for a smaller label but all your big ticket items are literally the bigger ticket items.” “...like small items must have small labels.”
The layout of the furniture label.	The layout should be kept plain.	“Plain and simple.”
	The logo of the company should be on top.	“...the logo at the top is actually in a good position.”
	The name of the company should be on top.	“The name must be at the top.”
	The name of the company should be on the side of the label.	“...or (the company’s name) maybe on the side of the label.”

Table 3: Theme 3 –The appearance of furniture labels

Category	Concept	Quotes
	The information should be printed next to the name of the company.	"...with the information next to it (the company's name.)"
	The price should be clearly visible.	"The price should be prominent as well."
Pictures and images	Only the company's logo/name should be on the label.	"I would maybe just put the company's logo on, that's very important." "I think only the name..." "No, not really. If its <i>Wetherlys</i> , I would maybe put a <i>Wetherlys</i> picture or label on it to say that it is how <i>Wetherlys</i> recommend maintenance."
	There should be no picture or image on the label.	"...not a picture or so." "No, no."
	There should only be a picture of the product on the label if the furniture item is on promotion.	"You know if it's a promotional item I believe there should be a picture of the product on it. So that people know, and can identify with it straightaway." "That (a picture of the furniture item) I think is important because it highlights the promotional item right away."

Table 4: Theme 4 – The placement of furniture labels

Category	Concept	Quotes
General placement of furniture labels.	Where consumers can see it.	"It should be literally next to it or underneath it so that it's there, and the person can see it."

Table 4: Theme 4 – The placement of furniture labels

Category	Concept	Quotes
	Close to the item.	"I would still place it as close to the item as possible. Because obviously that's where the customers are attracted to it."
Not permanent labels (Temporary labels).	The label could be placed at the bottom of a couch.	"On a couch, for instance, I would place it at the foot on the left."
	The label could be placed on the armrest of a couch.	"...or on the armrest, but also something that they can remove." "Not something that is permanent on the armrest."
	The label could be attached to the price tag.	"...with the price tag. So that they see it together with the price. If they see the price they can also see how to clean it." "Clients usually read the price tag and if there's another tag they would lift it and read it as well."
Price tags.	Visible and clear.	But if it's a price label, it must be visible and clear."
Fixed labels.	Underneath the item.	"...although if you want a permanent label, perhaps under the couch next to the foot." "If it's a furniture piece you can put it underneath it..."
	Under the seating cushion of a couch.	"If it's an upholstered couch you can place it under the seating cushion. There's usually space there. " "Probably a sewn on label."

Appendix C

Consent form for participants



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
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P.O. Box x6001
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2520
Tel: (018) 299 1111/2222
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

**School of Physiology, Nutrition
and Consumer Sciences**

Tel: (018) 229 2483
Fax: (018) 229 2470

Dear Mr. /Mrs. /Miss

Date . . . / . . . /2009

Title of the research study:

Consumers' expectations and usage of a preliminary furniture label during their pre-purchase information search.

Purpose of the research study:

The aim of the study is to determine consumers' expectations of furniture labels, as well as the resulting role of furniture labels on pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process.

Participation will entail:

- Engagement in a semi-structured interview with the researcher for approximately one hour.
- Questions asked, on which you must answer truthfully and in detail.

Notifications:

1. The interview will be audio recorded for data analysis and revision-purposes. The recordings will ensure that valuable information is preserved, and will be transcribed to text after the interview. You have the right to examine the transcriptions at any given time during the course of, or after completion of the research.
2. There are no correct and wrong answers, and the researcher seeks your opinion from your own experience.
3. The interview will be kept strictly confidential and only members of the research team will have access to the data. No data in the published dissertation or journals will have information that could identify any participant of this research study. Your anonymity will be secured.

4. You are voluntarily participating in this study and have the right to withdraw at any time from this study.

Possible benefits of the study:

The results may be used by product developers and marketers to identify consumers' needs, and may lead to clear, understandable and complete furniture labels for consumers to use. Labels on furniture items may also be advantageous for the furniture industry, by satisfying consumers' needs, and ultimately increasing sales.

Information:

If you have any questions regarding this research study you can contact Adri Labuschagne (Masters' degree student) at 082 334 3639 or the study leader, Mrs. Sonna van Zyl or the project leader Prof. Daleen van der Merwe at the Consumer Sciences Department (Tel: 018 299 2470).

Declaration of consent:

I, the undersigned (Full names).....
read through the information provided about the research project and declare that I fully understand the content thereof. I was given the opportunity (if so preferred) to discuss any aspects of the project with the researchers and hereby voluntarily agree to participate in the project.

I would hereby like to exempt the University or any employee or any student of the University from any liability which I might incur during this project. I furthermore waive my right to institute any claims whatsoever against the University which may arise during the running of the project or the conduct of any person involved in the project, except for claims arising from the negligent conduct of the University or its employees or students.

I received a signed copy of the consent form.

Signature of participant:

Signed at **on**.....**2009.**

Witnesses:

1)..... **Date**.....

2)..... **Date**.....

Appendix D

Consent form for store managers



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
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Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

**School of Physiology, Nutrition
and Consumer Sciences**
Tel: (018) 229 2483
Fax: (018) 229 2470

Dear Mr. /Mrs. /Miss

Date . . . / . . . /2009

Title of the research study:

Consumers' expectations and usage of a preliminary furniture label during their pre-purchase information search.

Purpose of the research study:

The aim of the study is to determine consumers' expectations of furniture labels, as well as the resulting role of furniture labels on pre-purchase information search of the consumer decision-making process.

Possible benefits of the study:

- The results may be used by product developers and marketers to identify consumers' needs, and may lead to clear, understandable and complete furniture labels for consumers to use.
- Labels on furniture items may also be advantageous for the furniture industry, by satisfying consumers' needs, and ultimately increasing sales.

Notifications:

1. The data collection will take place in three stages, and will include the following:
Stage 1: One interview with the most experienced sales assistant working in your store at the moment. The interview will take approximately one hour, and could be conducted at any suitable time (including after hours).
Stage 2: A pilot study survey of 30 questionnaires, which will be completed in less than one day. The number of questionnaires for the main survey will be determined after completion of the pilot study, and a definite duration time is thus not known. It is however

expected that the main survey would consist of approximately 150 questionnaires, over three days.

Stage 3: A preliminary furniture label will be designed.

2. There will be only two to three researchers in-store during the data collection. The researchers hereby undertake that the questionnaire will be completed anonymously and only by voluntary customers as they leave the store. Customers will not be bothered while shopping and therefore sales and patronage will not be influenced.

Information:

If you have any questions regarding this research study you can contact Adri Labuschagne (Masters' degree student) at 082 334 3639 or the study leader, Mrs. Sonna van Zyl or the project leader Prof. Daleen van der Merwe at the Consumer Sciences Department (Tel: 018 299 2470).

Declaration of consent:

I, the undersigned (Full names).....
read through the information provided about the research project and declare that I fully understand the content thereof. I was given the opportunity (if so preferred) to discuss any aspects of the project with the researchers and hereby voluntary agree to allow researchers from the North-West University to collect data in my store.

I would hereby like to exempt the University or any employee or any student of the University from any liability which I might incur during this project. I furthermore waive my right to institute any claims whatsoever against the University which may arise during the running of the project or the conduct of any person involved in the project, except for claims arising from the negligent conduct of the University or its employees or students.

I received a signed copy of the consent form.

Signature of participant:

Signed at **on**.....**2009.**

Witnesses:

1)..... **Date**.....

2)..... **Date**.....

Appendix E

Questionnaire - Phase 2

For office use only
Questionnaire nr:

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NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS

Consumers' expectations and usage of a preliminary furniture label during their pre-purchase information search

*All the information in this questionnaire is confidential and
anonymous.*

Approximate time: 10 minutes

SECTION A
We would like to get to know you a little better:

Please select **ONLY ONE** option

1. How old are you?

Younger than 18 years	1
18 to 24 years	2
25 to 30 years	3
31 to 35 years	4
36 to 40 years	5
41 to 45 years	6
46 to 50 years	7
51 to 55 years	8
56 to 60 years	9
61 to 65 years	10
66 to 70 years	11
71 and older	12

Please select **ONLY ONE** option

2. What is your gender?

Male	1
Female	2

SECTION B
In this section, we would like to study how you choose your furniture:

Please select **ONLY ONE** option

4b. Do you search for information before buying furniture?

Yes	1
No	2

PLEASE MARK THE SUITABLE OPTION WITH AN "X"

Please select **ONLY ONE** option

3. What is the monthly income of the household?

Less than R3 999	1
R4 000 to R6 500	2
R6 501 to R8 500	3
R8 501 to R10 500	4
R10 501 to R12 500	5
R12 501 to R13 500	6
R13 501 to R17 000	7
R17 001 to R19 500	8
R19 501 to R26 000	9
R26 001+	10

Please select **ONLY ONE** option

4a. What are your living arrangements?

Married	1
Living alone	2
Living with parents	3
Living with partner	4
Living with friends	5

If YES in question 4, please answer questions 5 & 6.

If NO in question 4 please skip to SECTION C, question 7.

You may select **MORE THAN ONE** item

5. Where do you look for information?

Prior knowledge	5.1	Books, magazines	5.5
Friends, neighbours, relatives, co-workers	5.2	Product labels	5.6
Visits or calls to the retailer, pamphlets	5.3	Other	5.7
Advertisements	5.4	(Please Specify)	

You may select **MORE THAN ONE** item

6. What information do you look for when purchasing furniture?

Country of origin	6.1	Guarantee	6.8
Production process	6.2	Warranties	6.9
Brand name	6.3	Design	6.10
Cleaning instructions	6.4	Finish	6.11
Name of manufacturer	6.5	Materials used	6.12
Quality	6.6	Other	6.13
Performance	6.7	(Please Specify)	

SECTION C
In this section, we would like to know what information you expect to be on a furniture label:

You may select **MORE THAN ONE** item per column

7. What information would you prefer to be on a furniture label?

Materials used	7.1	Care instructions for different climates	7.9
Type of product	7.2	Warnings	7.10
Manufacturer	7.3	Price	7.11
Country of origin	7.4	Performance	7.12
Cleaning instructions	7.5	Products to clean item with	7.13
Guarantee & Warrantees	7.6	Other	7.14
Design	7.7	(Please Specify)	
Finish	7.8		

SECTION D
In this section, we would like to know what you think about the appearance of the label of different types of furniture:

Please select **ONLY ONE** item per column

How big should the label be?	Q 8 Wood	Q 9 Upholstered	Q10 Leather
Small (about 6cm x 6cm)	1	1	1
Medium (about 10cm x 10cm)	2	2	2
The size of the label is dependent on the size of the item it is attached to.	3	3	3

Please select ONLY ONE item per column			
How would the layout of the label look?	Q 11 Wood	Q 12 Upholstered	Q13 Leather
The name of the company should be printed on the side of the label, and the information next to it.	1	1	1
The name and logo of the company should be printed at the top of the label with the information underneath.	2	2	2

You may select MORE THAN ONE item per column			
Which colour(s) would you prefer on the label?	Q 14 Wood	Q 15 Upholstered	Q16 Leather
The corporate colours of the company	14.1	15.1	16.1
Neutral colours (White, Beige, Brown)	14.2	15.2	16.2
Red	14.3	15.3	16.3
Blue	14.4	15.4	16.4
Yellow	14.5	15.5	16.5
Black	14.6	15.6	16.6
Other (Please Specify)	14.7	15.7	16.7

You may select MORE THAN ONE item per column			
What picture/images would you prefer on the label?	Q 17 Wood	Q 18 Upholstered	Q19 Leather
Illustrations of the product	17.1	18.1	19.1
Photographs of the product	17.2	18.2	19.2
Business logo	17.3	18.3	19.3
Pictures of people	17.4	18.4	19.4
Symbols for care instructions	17.5	18.5	19.5
None	17.6	18.6	19.6
Other (Please Specify)	17.7	18.7	19.7

Please select ONLY ONE item per column			
How big would you expect the lettering of the information on the label to be?	Q 20 Wood	Q 21 Upholstered	Q22 Leather
Small	1	1	1
Medium	2	2	2
Large	3	3	3

Please select ONLY ONE item per column			
How big would you expect the lettering of headings on the label to be?	Q 23 Wood	Q 24 Upholstered	Q 25 Leather
Small	1	1	1
Medium	2	2	2
Large	3	3	3

You may select MORE THAN ONE item per column			
What lettering style would you prefer for the information on the label?	Q 26 Wood	Q 27 Upholstered	Q 28 Leather
Furniture	26.1	27.1	28.1
FURNITURE	26.2	27.2	28.2
Furniture	26.3	27.3	28.3
Furniture	26.4	27.4	28.4
Other (Please Specify)	26.5	27.5	28.5

You may select MORE THAN ONE item per column			
What lettering style would you prefer for the headings on the label?	Q 29 Wood	Q 30 Upholstered	Q 31 Leather
Furniture	29.1	30.1	31.1
FURNITURE	29.2	30.2	31.2
Furniture	29.3	30.3	31.3
Furniture	29.4	30.4	31.4
Other (Please Specify)	29.5	30.5	31.5

PLEASE MARK THE MOST SUITABLE OPTION WITH AN "X"

SECTION G

In this section, we would like to know what information you think should be on the label of different types of furniture:


Please select the MOST SUITABLE option for WOODEN FURNITURE						
43.	How important are the following attributes on a <u>wooden</u> furniture label?	Unimportant	Slightly Important	Undecided	Important	Very Important
43.1	Materials used	1	2	3	4	5
43.2	Type of product	1	2	3	4	5
43.3	Manufacturer	1	2	3	4	5
43.4	Country of origin	1	2	3	4	5
43.5	Cleaning instructions	1	2	3	4	5
43.6	Warrantees	1	2	3	4	5
43.7	Guarantee	1	2	3	4	5
43.8	Design	1	2	3	4	5
43.9	Finish	1	2	3	4	5
43.10	Care instructions for different climates	1	2	3	4	5
43.11	Warnings	1	2	3	4	5
43.12	Price	1	2	3	4	5
43.13	Performance	1	2	3	4	5
43.14	Products to clean item with	1	2	3	4	5
43.15	Other (Please Specify)	1	2	3	4	5

Please select the **MOST SUITABLE** option for **UPHOLSTERED FURNITURE**

44.	How important are the following attributes on an <u>upholstered</u> furniture label?	Unimportant	Slightly Important	Undecided	Important	Very Important
44.1	Materials used	1	2	3	4	5
44.2	Type of product	1	2	3	4	5
44.3	Manufacturer	1	2	3	4	5
44.4	Country of origin	1	2	3	4	5
44.5	Cleaning instructions	1	2	3	4	5
44.6	Warrantees	1	2	3	4	5
44.7	Guarantee	1	2	3	4	5
44.8	Design	1	2	3	4	5
44.9	Finish	1	2	3	4	5
44.10	Care instructions for different climates	1	2	3	4	5
44.11	Warnings	1	2	3	4	5
44.12	Price	1	2	3	4	5
44.13	Performance	1	2	3	4	5
44.14	Products to clean item with	1	2	3	4	5
44.15	Other (Please Specify)	1	2	3	4	5

<i>Please select the MOST SUITABLE option for LEATHER FURNITURE</i>						
45.	<i>How important are the following attributes on a leather furniture label?</i>	Unimportant	Slightly Important	Undecided	Important	Very Important
45.1	Materials used	1	2	3	4	5
45.2	Type of product	1	2	3	4	5
45.3	Manufacturer	1	2	3	4	5
45.4	Country of origin	1	2	3	4	5
45.5	Cleaning instructions	1	2	3	4	5
45.6	Warrantees	1	2	3	4	5
45.7	Guarantee	1	2	3	4	5
45.8	Design	1	2	3	4	5
45.9	Finish	1	2	3	4	5
45.10	Care instructions for different climates	1	2	3	4	5
45.11	Warnings	1	2	3	4	5
45.12	Price	1	2	3	4	5
45.13	Performance	1	2	3	4	5
45.14	Products to clean item with	1	2	3	4	5
45.15	Other (Please Specify)	1	2	3	4	5

***Thank you for your time.
Your contribution is valuable to the
study!***



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NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
POTCHEFSTROOM CAMPUS**

Appendix F

Additional results from Phase 2

Factor analysis

Table 1: Factor loadings for items in questionnaire for second stage – importance of attributes on a **wooden furniture** label (question 43)

Attribute	Factor loadings				
	Value for money	Maintenance	Appearance	Production	Construction
Warrantees	.871	.178	.023	.240	.169
Guarantee	.870	.230	.045	.211	.122
Price	.652	-.079	.238	-.133	-.080
Warnings	.043	.897	-.128	.068	-.044
Care instr. for different climates	.009	.850	.196	.086	.136
Products to clean item with	.385	.591	-.021	-.031	.319
Cleaning instructions	.374	.492	-.033	.460	.168
Design	.071	-.063	.869	.016	-.162
Type of product	.012	-.053	.753	.231	.077
Finish	.207	.214	.701	-.020	.182
Country of origin	-.052	.006	.036	.811	.285
Manufacturer	.240	.105	.222	.719	-.198
Materials used	.064	.120	-.005	.143	.907
Performance	.353	.411	.280	-.055	.469

Table 2: Factor loadings for items in questionnaire for second stage – importance of attributes on **an upholstered furniture** label (question 44)

Attribute	Factor loadings			
	Maintenance	Appearance	Value for money	Production
Care instructions for different climates	.773	.157	-.084	.160
Products to clean item with	.766	.110	.296	-.216
Warnings	.661	-.057	.060	.503
Cleaning instructions	.649	-.038	.324	.090
Materials used	.575	.385	.059	.069
Performance	.485	.376	.191	.074
Design	-.047	.836	.151	.099
Type of product	.106	.761	.134	.157
Finish	.328	.734	.061	.073
Price	-.065	.299	.767	-.054
Guarantee	.417	.059	.727	.194
Warrantees	.522	.100	.692	.177
Country of origin	.122	.176	-.089	.831
Manufacturer	.019	.178	.359	.738

Table 3: Factor loadings for items in questionnaire for second stage – importance of attributes on **leather furniture** label (question 45)

Attribute	Factor loadings			
	Value for money	Maintenance	Appearance	Production
Guarantee	.868	.223	.021	.167
Warrantees	.825	.276	.073	.194
Price	.622	-.226	.412	.005
Cleaning instructions	.578	.538	.027	.013
Care instructions for different climates	.085	.821	.143	.096
Warnings	.210	.767	-.100	.280
Products to clean item with	.515	.617	.097	-.051
Materials used	.026	.564	.445	.146
Type of product	-.145	.278	.802	.126
Design	.068	-.160	.794	.269
Finish	.259	.073	.663	.065
Performance	.344	.336	.492	.084
Country of origin	.084	.217	.120	.870
Manufacturer	.169	.078	.312	.811

Table 4: Internal consistency of questions 43 to 45 of questionnaire

Questions	Cronbach's Alpha
Question 43.1 to 43.14 (information on wooden furniture label)	0.798
Question 44.1 to 44.14 (information on upholstered furniture label)	0.832
Question 45.1 to 45.14 (Information on leather furniture label)	0.851

Demographic results

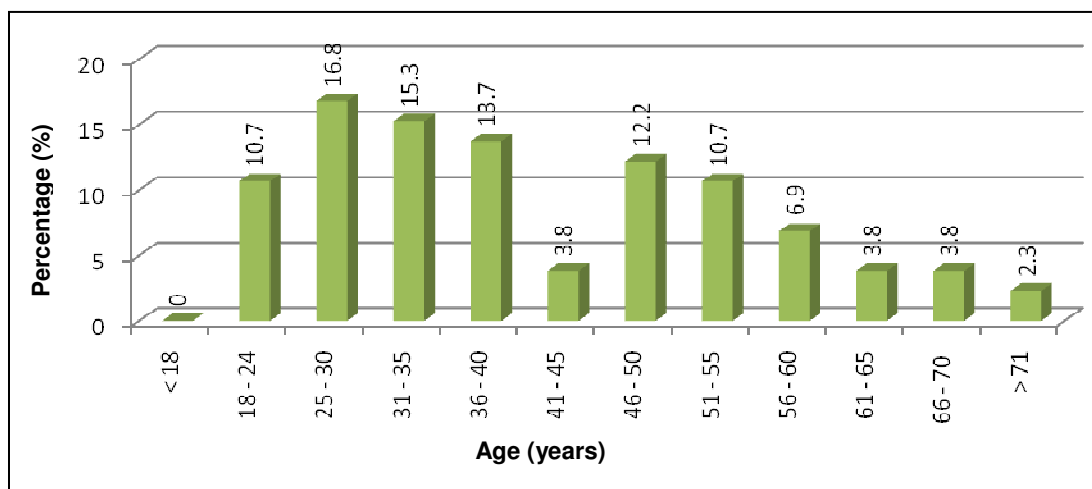


Figure 1: Age of respondents

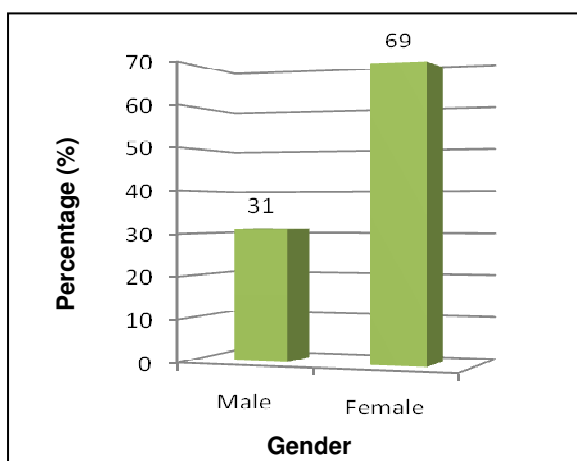


Figure 2: Gender of respondents

Table 5: Average household income of respondents

Income	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Less than R3 999	2	1.6
R4 000 to R6 500	6	4.8
R6 501 to R8 500	7	5.6
R8 501 to R10 500	6	4.8
R10 501 to R12 500	6	4.8
R12 501 to R13 500	3	2.4
R13 501 to R17 000	9	7.1
R17 001 to R19 500	5	4.0
R19 501 to R26 000	14	11.1
R26 001+	68	54.0

Respondent's involvement with furniture purchasing

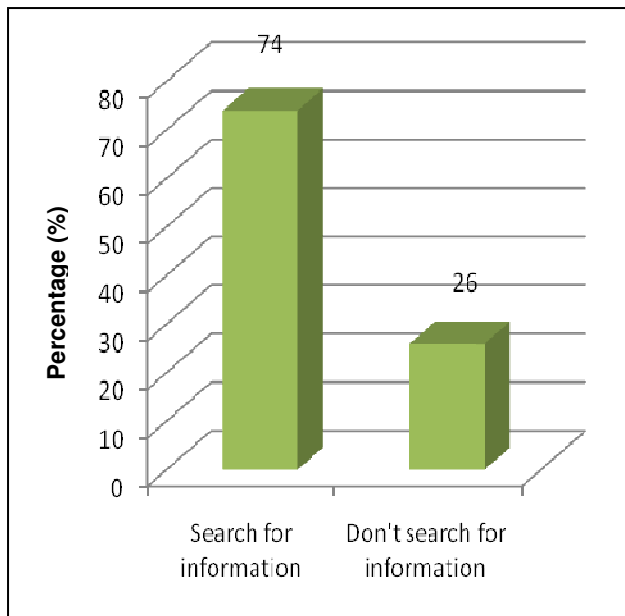


Figure 3: Respondents' pre-purchase information search

Respondents' expectations of the information on furniture labels

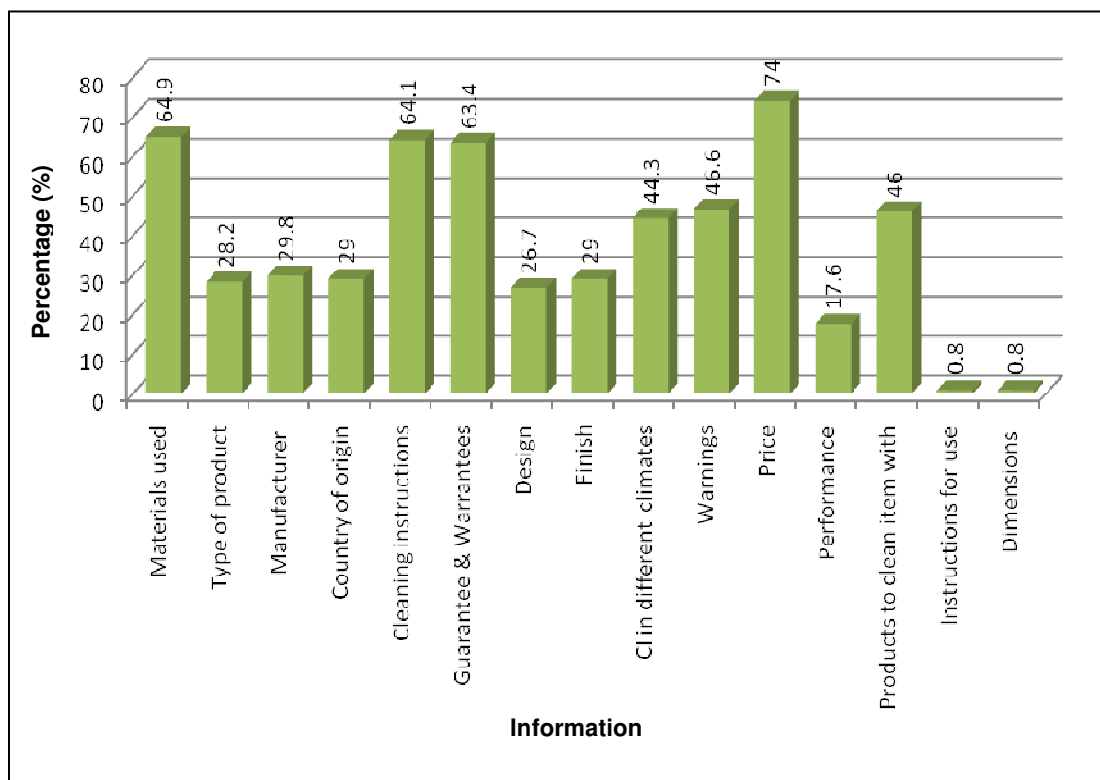


Figure 4: Information respondents regard as important on general furniture labels

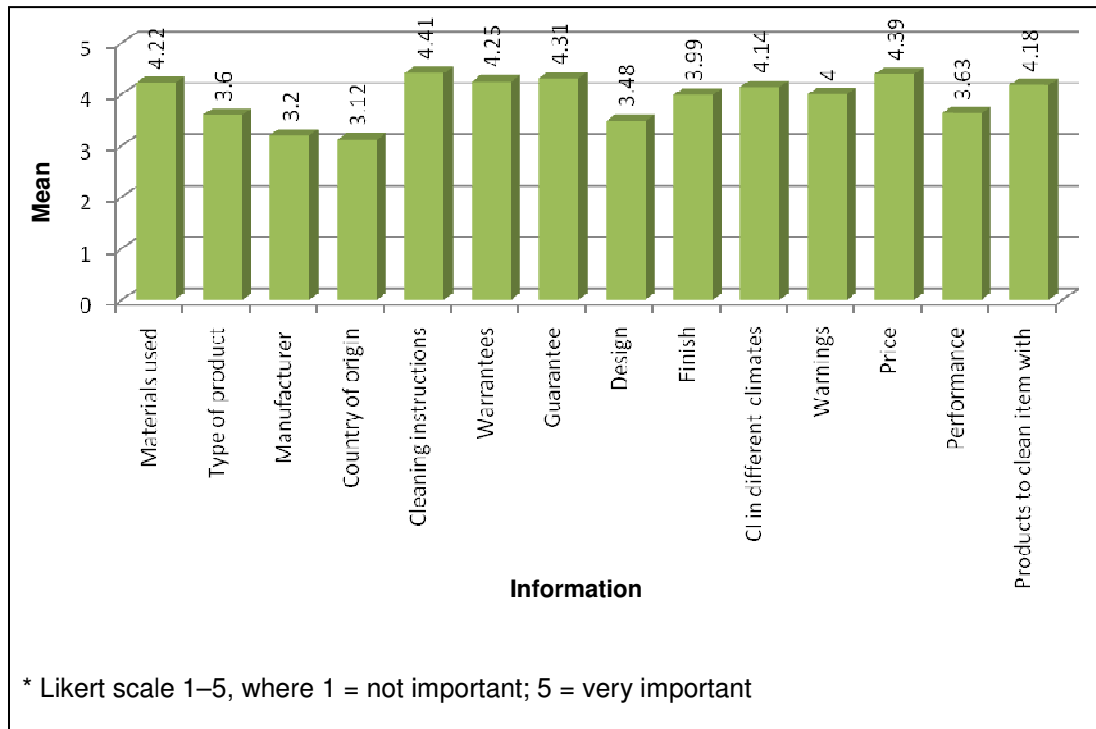


Figure 5: Mean importance of information on all furniture labels

Table 6: The relationship between consumers' expectations of the information of general and specific furniture labels

Variable	Phi value Wood	Phi value Upholstery	Phi value Leather
Materials used	.236*	.032*	.158*
Type of product	.251**	.224*	.226*
Manufacturer	.383**	.254**	.212*
Country of origin	.391**	.399**	.423**
Cleaning instructions	.273**	.122*	.152*
Warrantees	.121*	.151*	.262**
Guarantee	.130*	.230*	.198*
Design	.200*	.268**	.265**
Finish	.236*	.236*	.200*
Care instructions for different climates	.214*	.272**	.282**
Warnings	.338**	.283**	.206*
Price	.431**	.483***	.453***
Performance	.241**	.190*	.221*
Products to clean item with	.308**	.228*	.280**

* Small effect: w=0.1; **Medium effect: w=0.3; ***Large effect: w=0.5 (Cohen, 1969:111)

Consumers' expectations of the appearance of furniture labels

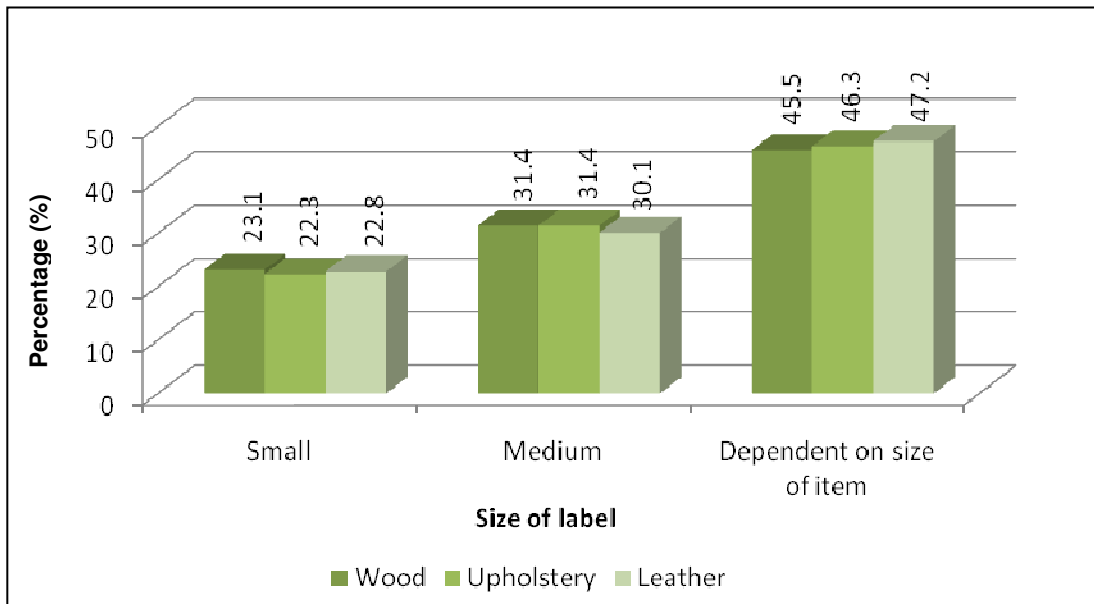


Figure 6: Respondents' expectations of the sizes of furniture labels

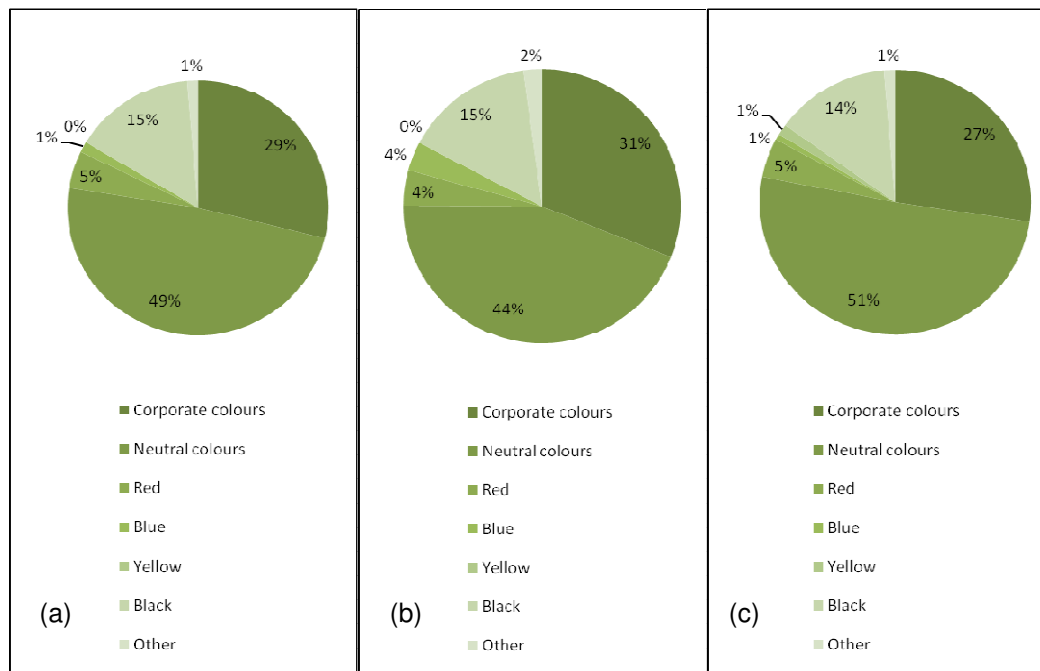


Figure 7: Respondents' expected colours on furniture labels for (a) wooden furniture, (b) upholstered furniture, and (c) leather furniture

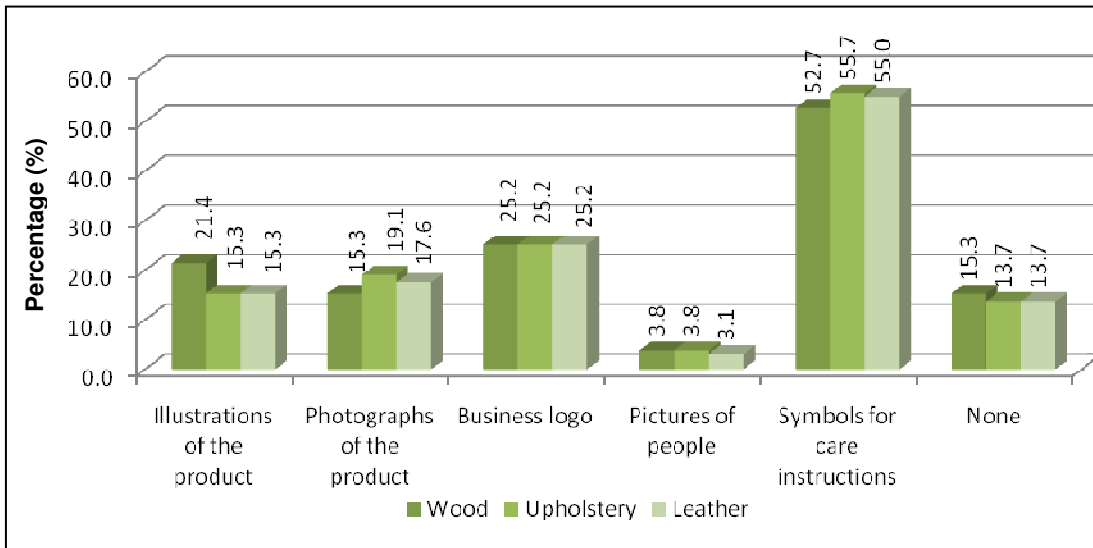


Figure 8: Respondents' expectations of the images or pictures on furniture labels

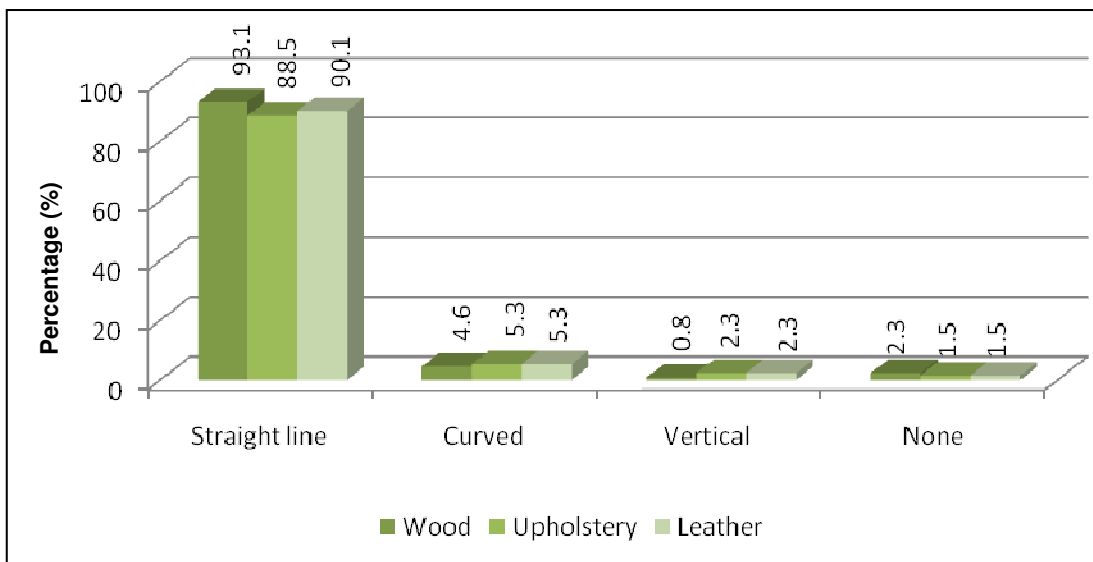


Figure 9: Respondents' expectations of the graphic form of headings on furniture labels

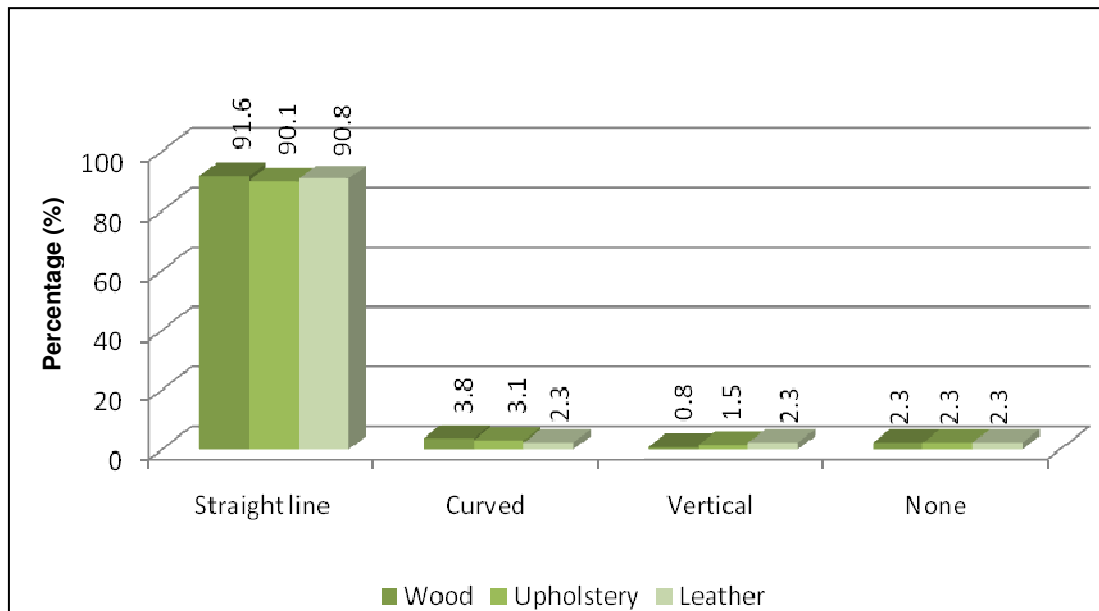


Figure 10: Respondents' expectations of the graphic form of information on furniture labels



Figure 11: Respondents' expectations of the type of furniture labels

Respondents' expectations of the placement of furniture labels

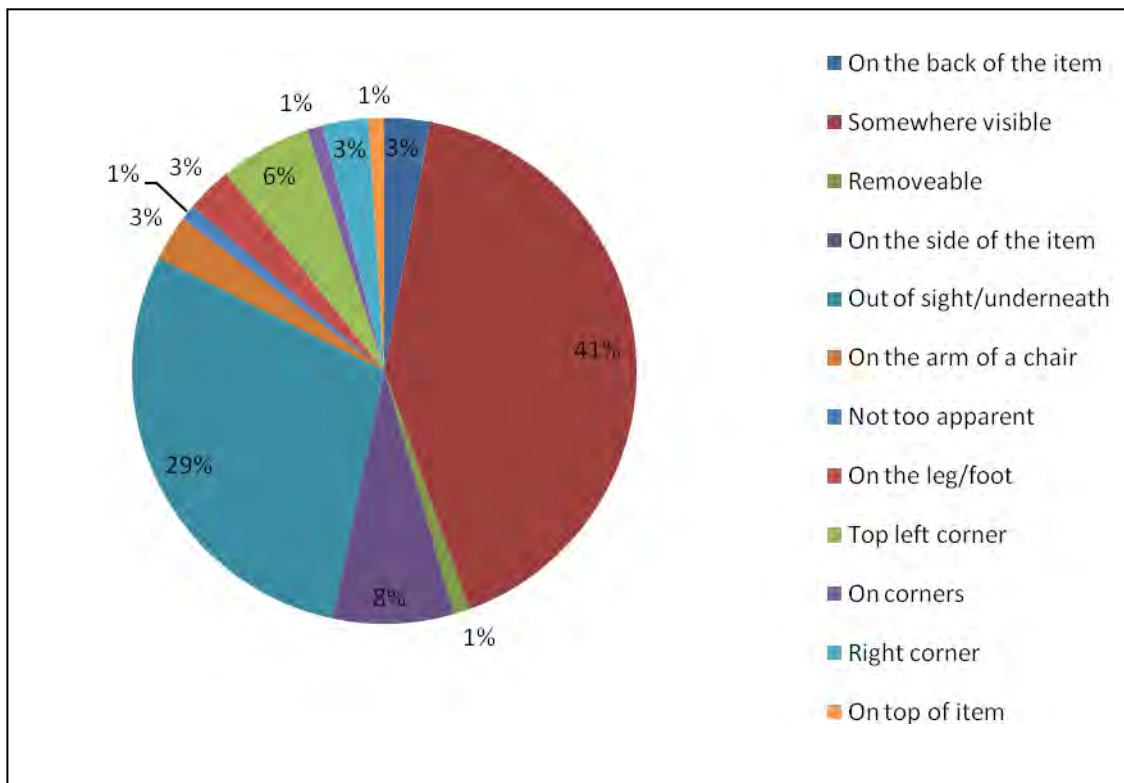


Figure 12: Respondents' expectations of the placement of furniture labels