



Understanding Fashion Buying Motivation for SME

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Abstract

This paper offers a concise view on the way in which the motivation of textile product consumers influences the activity of micro-enterprises and small and medium companies. Changes in behavior can bring benefits but also disadvantages to new entrepreneurs that are taking the first steps in building their own brand in the fashion industry. For these entrepreneurs motivation is a key factor in pushing consumers to buy clothing items, along with key-phrases such as "when do they decide to buy", "where do they prefer to buy" but also "how often do they buy". In an age that is characterized by spectacular speed, in which through a single click consumers can find a large amount of information that helps them choose their preferred clothing items. It can be easily observed that consumers are always connected to current findings in various fields and that they wish to gain more independence and become more aware of their environment, and of the way in which their actions affect society. For this reason, SMEs must create the appropriate marketing strategies that can be adapted to new demands in the fashion industry.

Keywords: motivation, SMEs, consumer behavior, brand, fashion industry

Introduction

Consumer motivation is of critical importance in the activity of micro-enterprises, small and medium companies within the field of fashion. When consumers' motivations change, small companies must adapt to these changes without missing a beat. How can this be achieved? Through adopting flexible strategies that transform chaos into opportunity, through identifying innovative materials, investments, successful partnerships and attracting and maintaining qualified and reliable personnel. In order to achieve this, micro-enterprises and small and medium enterprises must be capable of identifying external threats earlier. In Europe small and medium enterprises are referred to as being the backbone of the economy because they offer a significant employment resource, economic growth and constant innovations.

Motivations that influence the purchase of textile products

The study in consumer behavior helps us understand not only the trends in consumption that occurred in the past, but also the future trends. Motivation is the key-element that can influence this behavior through the viewpoint of psychological, economic or social factors (Kotler, 2014). Motives constitute the basis of buying behavior and they result from the merging of biological, physical and social factors (Cătoiș și Teodorescu, 2004). Experts within the field state that motivation is exerted by the individual's needs and by the state of tension that these needs cause (Solomon, 2012). Buying behavior can also be influenced by extrinsic motivation from the usage of the Internet. Many entrepreneurs prefer to take their business into an online medium because this makes it much easier for them to be in touch with new technologies and also to maintain their connection with collaborators and consumers. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is the one that maintains the interest regarding discovering

and getting to know a brand or the interest in certain products, because the time spent on identifying them is perceived as being a pleasure (Caniëls, Lenaerts, and Gelderman, 2015). Both consumer behavior and the fashion industry are characterized by change (Lewis and Hawksley, 1990). It can be observed that there is a growing tendency for consumers to purchase more varied and much cheaper clothing articles and there is also the growing number of stores that fit this profile within urban zones and even the increase of this segment in hypermarkets (Bruce and Hines, 2006).

In the case of textile product consumers we can identify the following types of motivations: the quality of the materials, the affinity for certain brands, moral values, design, innovation, the color palette, uniqueness, exclusivism, brand history or image, the offered services, distribution, entertainment and cultural motivations such as the influence of the group to which one belongs, education, the desire for knowledge or lifestyle. These aspects were highlighted by two studies (qualitative - 32 in depth interviews and quantitative with over 400 respondents) that researched the influence of motivation on the buying behavior of luxury clothing articles. The motives that were identified can be classified into hedonistic motivations and utilitarian motivations. Hedonistic motivations have to do with the aspects that bring a state of general happiness, satisfaction and fulfillment to the user. Utilitarian motivations refer to the operational part of consumer satisfaction, such as innovation, distribution, quality and high price (Diaconu, 2016, Diaconu and Cerceloiu, 2017).

The conducted qualitative study focuses on determining the particularities of clothing items users and also on identifying less obvious motivations when it comes to luxury product consumption. Luxury fashion represents a reflection of the environment in which the consumer lives and reflects their personality and social status (Arnold, 2002,

Evans, 2003). Luxury clothing products are goods that have high quality and prices with their own identity and that preserve the brand's tradition, offering extravagance, elegance, power and self esteem to their wearers (Silverstein, 2003, pp. 10-11). Among the identified purchase or non-purchase motives for luxury clothing some were temporal in nature such as: childhood, weddings, New Year parties or similar events that determined the usage of exclusivist goods. Some people have stated that they have discovered luxury products during their childhood or their adulthood when they had to attend social events; when they had to follow a certain dress code. Users stated that when wearing certain exclusivist clothing items they felt pride, a sense of prestige, respect and superiority. The content analysis that followed the 32 in-depth interviews revealed a series of motivations that can influence the purchase behavior of luxury clothing items:

- emotional motives that are based on feelings and passions: the motivation of being respected and recognized among others - *"I would wear outfits that command respect when entering a room"*; uniqueness and rarity - *"First of all, I would like to wear clothes that nobody else would wear."*; the motivation to be a model of inspiration; the desire to be in trend; the motivation for pleasure and fun - *"A luxury piece of clothing should offer me the necessary amount of fun when I am trying to stand out from the crowd"*; memories and memorable experiences; culture and family given education; extravagance and innovation; the addiction to uniqueness and innovation; and fear of social pressure;
- rational motives that are based on experience, education and culture; the motivation related to the utility of the product; the motivation for comfort; the desire for learning and improvement;
- motives with a clear set goal: the motivation to wear renown brands - *"I want to wear certain luxury clothes because they belong to world renowned brands such as Burberry, Moschino, Valentino."*; the motivation to wear superior quality materials - *"I usually wear clothes that are made out of natural fibers and I would like to invest more in such products"*; durability; timelessness; and the experience of shopping in luxury stores.

The quantitative research studied the motives that were identified during the qualitative research and their influence on the buying behavior for luxury clothing. A total of 16 attributes were analyzed during the study of the purchase behavior. These attributes were: price, the craftsmanship involved in the product's creation, the quality of the materials, the product's design, color, the texture of the materials, country of origin, durability, innovation, timelessness, uniqueness, the brand's degree of fame, the experience when visiting the store, post-purchase services, the brand's image and personality, the symbol for social and financial status. The attributes were correlated with the social class, age, gender and wage categories of respondents. The attributes that received the highest scores when it came to influencing the purchase of luxury clothing items were: design with a medium score of 8.9, the quality of the materials with 8.7 and the texture of the materials with a score of 8.6. The product's design was appreciated more by men (8.9) than women (8.6), by people aged 31 to 40 (9.4), by people with master's degrees (8.9) and people with medium incomes. The quality of the materials was almost as highly appreciated by men (8.9) as it was by women (8.8). The same attribute was equally appreciated by people with bachelor's degrees and those with master's degrees (8.8). The same can be stated about people with average incomes and those with above average incomes, both categories are equally

appreciating the quality of the materials (8.7). Within the hierarchy of attributes that were considered when purchasing luxury clothing items, the texture of the materials received a higher score from men (8.7) than from women (8.6). People aged 31 to 40 appreciated the texture of the materials more than other age groups (9.2). The texture of the materials was also highly appreciated by respondents with master's and doctoral studies (8.7) and by those with above average incomes (8.7). The attribute that was the least considered by respondents and that received the lowest score was country of origin with 6.1. This suggests the fact that people appreciate the product's quality, disregarding the place in which the product was made.

An individual who has an active lifestyle, who is oriented towards practicing sports will always choose clothing products that facilitate movement and flexibility, but that are also visually appealing from an aesthetic point of view. The same thought mechanism is used when choosing a car or a home. The choices that are made are in a close relationship with the lifestyle, but also with the individual's personality; that is why due to the increases in income, consumers will choose to buy better cars, clothes and cosmetics that are higher in quality. On the other hand, people that are oriented toward the world of art will purchase pieces of art that will build their cultural heritage (Konečnik, Ruzzier and Hisrich, 2015, p 103).

A statistical survey that was conducted online with a sample comprising of 10,000 participants from 10 countries identified 10 dimensions in regard to consumers: connected, social, do it yourself, independent, experimental, inventive, disconnected, implicated, aware and minimalistic (Accenture, 2013). These dimensions regarding consumers are strongly influenced by variables that are endogenous in their nature (the desire for better living, to improve physical and mental capabilities) but also exogenous (changing of one's status, the betterment of one's living conditions).

Particularities of the textile industry in Romania

The textile industry in Romania comprises an important segment when it comes to exports, second only to the automotive industry. Companies from the textile industry generally operate in an assembly system or a loan system, lacking an innovative character, and competitiveness is given by the reduced cost of labor, the degree of specialization and the quality of execution and the standards are imposed by the big brands. Despite all of these aspects, the commercial balance is deficitary and has continued to fall during the 2012-2017 period, from -20% down to -30% (INSSE, 2018). Another situation that prevents the development of the textile industry in Romania to a global level is determined by frequent political and fiscal changes, poor levels of education and the decline of qualified labor force due to western emigration. Currently, there are over 9700 companies in Romania that produce clothing and textile goods, being the second largest provider of employment from this industry at the European level. The total revenue in 2017 provided by the textile industry in Romania was 3 billion euro (Eurostat, 2017, Piata, 2018). Romanians spend on average approximately 100 euro on clothing per year, coming in the last place in a study regarding clothing and textile consumption (Euratex, 2017). There are Romanian brands that have reached the global market such as Murmur, I.D. Sarrieri, Irina Schrotter etc. and that represent a real competition for renowned brands. Fashion trends are heavily influenced by changes in economical, political, social and technological environments, meaning that manufacturers must adapt to the demands of sophisticated clients. On an international level companies are investing in applications and hardware that allow the creation of smart materials that can measure speed, values of certain health indicators, fibers that emit light or materials that change their color depending on body temperature or machines that use processing and placing software applications.

All of these innovations offer the consumer not only aesthetic attributes, but also a certain degree of comfort and health. For example, the Japanese brand Descente has created a collection of ski clothes that are not at all bulky and contain a heating technology that adapts to the wearer's body temperature. Chinese scientists have developed materials that blend two types of polymeric fabrics (one that is conductive and the other that is nanogenerating) and transform mechanical energy into electrical energy, managing to provide a mean to charge a smartphone. The Waldorf Project has developed the Futuro collection; the materials of which could glow in the dark when are in the proximity of certain sensors (Trendhunter, 2016). Globalization is yet another factor that influences the textile industry and the distribution of wares is strongly correlated to the degree of specialization of the factories, the costs of production, salary levels and the distance in order to reach the chain of distribution. When it comes to the luxury textile sector, a large part of Romanian consumers prefer to shop abroad due to a preconception regarding the price of the goods. Furthermore, the lack of products in stock burdens the relationship with potential consumers that are forced to wait between 2 to 4 weeks in order to receive the product that they have ordered. The online market was still underdeveloped for the entirety of 2017 in Romania. There is a small number of manufacturers and designers that sell their product through e-commerce. Despite these facts, along with the increase of wages, the desire for a better quality of life and a better education intensifies, along with the desire to purchase products that are of a higher quality and that satisfy the consumers' superior needs (Euromonitor, 2017). In order to perform, Romanian companies must conduct a diagnosis of the current state of the business environment; find opportunities for growth; invest in new technologies; identify and attract new suppliers and clients; rationalize their available resources in a more efficient way; adopt change and seeing it through; implement project management

and create their own organizational culture (Tudor, 2018).

Particularities of the textile industry entrepreneur

Fashion entrepreneurs are different from entrepreneurs from other economic sectors. The fashion industry is very dynamic and has the capability of creating innovative goods at a high quality and with a unique character to them, being highly personalized goods that stand the test of time. Furthermore, the textile industry is one of the most profitable sectors at a global scale.

Based on previously conducted research regarding the influence of motivation on the purchase of luxury textile products, a new study has been conducted in order to better understand the issue through the perspective of SME's. An observational analysis has been conducted in order to study the issue of purchase motivation that is specific to small and medium companies. The analysis was conducted on a group of 20 Romanian designers, men and women, with ages between 21 and 45, designers that are starting out in the fashion industry. The goal of this qualitative study was to investigate the behavior of the textile industry entrepreneur and find the main variables that they seek out in order to motivate consumer buying behavior. The observational analysis was divided into 3 sections: particularities of the designer-entrepreneur, the perception of the competitive environment and aspects regarding the influence of purchase motivation of potential buyers.

The meeting with the 20 participants took place at the beginning of the year 2018 in the form of a workshop regarding entrepreneurial education in creative industries. A series of key-aspects were identified during this meeting, as well as the aspects regarding the creation and expansion of businesses within the textile industry such as: *researching the fashion market, identifying the need for a certain segment within the*

textile market, attracting the necessary resources (both material and human resources), creating a unique and innovative product that differs from the competition, clearly defining a company mission, setting medium and long term objectives, knowing and setting commercial conditions, strategies for promoting the brand and for attracting and retaining clients, post-sale services and the continual reevaluation of the companies activity and its processes.

Small freshly-started companies are bound to come across numerous problems that are due to factors such as the lack of professional experience from the owner or manager, not knowing the competition or the consumer that they are addressing and a faulty relationship with its personnel or the clients. Very few designers from the fashion industry have the entrepreneurial and economical knowledge, most have no economical justification in making business decisions and rely solely on creativity, having no knowledge of how to promote themselves. Whatever degree of success is achieved in such cases can more or less be attributed to favourable external circumstances that are beyond the entrepreneur's control: *"I am an artist and I don't have to know these commercial details."; "It doesn't matter that I don't know how to sell correctly, clients will seek me out when I least expect them."; "I only work with purchases that come from recommendations, I don't recruit new clients."; "I never stopped to analyze the amount of production I generate, I just buy cheap raw materials and then figure out what to create and produce."; "I lack visibility in the online medium, I only sell directly from my workshop or at fairs and expos."*

Some entrepreneurs that have textile micro companies admitted that although they have art studies they refuse to take care of the administrative side of the business. However they want to know the necessary information regarding their company and delegate it to a specialist. *"I am an artist and I'm not good at finance or economy, but I'd like to know what to ask a specialist when I hire him." "I'm*

attending this workshop in order to find out how to better coordinate my company and my employees' activity."; "I'm attending this workshop in order to find out how to raise my sales numbers and how to promote my brand."

When asked about the policies regarding price that they practice within their companies, the participants admitted that they have tried to use the highest price possible, arguing that the product that they are selling is a piece of art that is meant to convey *"quality", "innovation", "uniqueness", "sensibility", "femininity", "power", "pride", "modernity", "inspiration" or "freedom"* to the client. Some of them tried to place the products that they created at a price level that is similar to their closest competitors, the companies that they meet frequently at fairs within the fashion industry or the ones that they compete with online (e-shops such as *welovecouture, bandofcreators, moleculef, moja, endra*). Another aspect that was revealed by the observational analysis was the fact that designers tend to position their own brand within the market depending on the degree of innovation or depending on a high price. *"When I attended the last fair my stand was not positioned correctly. Instead of being next to other designers that use innovative materials and that have high prices, I was positioned to the side, very close to brands with more accessible prices."* On the other hand, some designers, prior to creating their own company, preferred to gain some experience within the field of creating patterns, modeling and creating products, thus having an advantage when forming their own team of tailors and technicians. Furthermore, designers who have a technical certification (for using specialized machines and creating patterns or materials) and not just creative certifications have developed a second field of business for their company, that of consulting other young designers that lack experience when it comes to fashion production and logistics.

Thus, designers represent a distinct category of entrepreneurs, the particularities of which are strongly correlated with the type of

activity that takes place within a creative industry. The analyzed discussions took part during the workshop lead to the identification of four categories of small and medium company entrepreneurs within the fashion industry:

- **entrepreneurs that have a specialization in the field of design and who act from a project manager perspective** having accumulated social and professional experience as former employees of other companies that provide products or services;
- **entrepreneurs that have no specialization in the field of design, but who act from a project manager perspective** having accumulated social and professional experience as former employees of other companies that provide products or services;
- **entrepreneurs that react based on instinct and rely on their creative prowess** whether they have completed any form of art studies or not.
- **entrepreneurs that lack experience** or the ones that face the biggest difficulties in achieving their set goals when launching their company.

In Romania, art schools and universities do not offer their students courses in entrepreneurship, marketing brands or products, sales techniques or client retention. The purpose of these institutions is to create and train scholars or artists in different fields of art and the development of their social and professional skills falls under the students' responsibility. The approach of these institutions is focused on building and developing a code for interpreting and understanding art, understanding artistic currents, the methodology of fashion collections, aesthetics and design and concepts regarding clothing merchandising. It is important that specialists from this field have at least a basic level of knowledge that

helps them create their own businesses after graduating, which also implies specialized programs in which they get to work as interns in multiple fields, along with receiving mentoring from fields adjacent to fashion.

The study revealed that due to the lack of entrepreneurial experience and economical knowledge there is the state of stagnation of newly founded companies, coupled with a lack of knowledge when it comes to resolving the problems that relate to customer service. Furthermore, these newly founded companies lack knowledge regarding their competitors. The fact that entrepreneurs do not have the means to search in their business environment as they do not have a network, is severely limiting the number of potential collaborators, in addition to the fact that they do not accept constructive criticism. All of these factors often lead to misplaced or unjustifiable investments. Small and medium enterprises that are founded by entrepreneurs that have a minimum of experience when it comes to production and logistics processes have higher chances of making the right decisions in developing their businesses and attracting consumers to their brands and products.

Challenges faced by micro firms and small and medium enterprises due to changes in purchase motivation

Policies regarding regional or international affairs, globalization and the changes within consumption behavior have led to an increase in competitiveness not only on a local scale, but also globally. In order to withstand these changes, small companies center themselves on the creating of strategies that are based on knowledge, creativity and technological innovations. Changes in purchase motivation of consumers can be identified due to a series of factors: insufficient financial resources, lacking access to a certain brand or product, the lack of information regarding a certain brand or product, the presence of new brands or more attractive products, the *do it*

yourself trend, the improvement in social status and the change in lifestyle.

When a new SME is created, one must take into account the value that the goods that are produced or sold can have for potential consumers (Atkinson, 1964). When creating a clothing product it is important to mention that it must reflect the consumer's identity starting with the reality that surrounds us and that the one who is creating it must be a keen observer (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, value can also be given by the consumer's expectations and preferences regarding a brand or a certain product. Value is a motivational force that can also be represented by the psychological experience of being attracted by a brand or a product (Higgins, 2007) due to the story that was created around these elements, the offered services and the quality of the materials.

Micro-enterprises and SME's must know their competitive environment well, but must not lose track of the most important player within the market, the client or the potential consumer. In order to achieve this, a series of objectives must be established and constantly be maintained during the entrepreneurial activity:

- Identifying the consumer segment that they address;
- Establishing the type of product that best suits this consumer that is always in motion;
- Establishing the innovation factor that can attract the consumer;
- Creating and maintaining products that are attractive from an aesthetic and design point of view;
- Establishing the correct price threshold at which the brand wishes to place itself in regards to its competitors;
- Identifying local suppliers that can quickly respond to the company's needs;
- Identifying well-prepared employees that know the technological process and motivating them;

- Maintaining the profile of an expert within the field of fashion in order to increase the consumer's trust in the brand and its products.

Furthermore, in order to cope with changes in consumer motivation, SME's must direct their actions more and more toward the online medium. This medium offers, freely or with very low costs, solutions for gathering data regarding the textile market, consumers, trends, online consumer behavior. One of the given challenges within the online medium is an apparent chaos, that can be easily controlled by experts or influencers that have earned the consumers' trust. Consumers are online 24/7 and want to receive feedback quickly from companies with which they interact. Unlike the case of big companies that require a bureaucratic process and numerous internal policies regarding the resolving of public relation, acquisitions or ethics, SME's have the advantage of being much more involved in the solving of problems that are signaled by consumers. Generally, SMEs are run by members of a family or by entrepreneurial organizations and associations and the environment is less rigid, informal and much more flexible (Spence and Essoussi, 2010). The manager of such an organization must have experience in coordinating a team and must gain expertise within the field in which the company is active in order to understand what it is that he asks from his employees that are involved in the production process and also from the ones that are involved in the administrative activities. If the manager does not have leadership skills, does not have solid knowledge about the fashion industry or about the technological processes in which clothing items are obtained, the company's activity will be hindered. The lack of managerial expertise and also of specific knowledge can lead not only to poor business development and chaotic and unstructured activities (Gilmore, 2001) but also to a weak understanding of business relations with collaborators or investors, or even a failure to understand the relation between entrepreneur - producer - buyer (Reijonen

and Laukkanen, 2010). A good manager must develop and maintain business relations and must adopt marketing strategies that are personalized and very oriented toward satisfying consumers.

Another challenge faced by entrepreneurs from micro-enterprises and small and medium enterprises can be of finding

qualified personnel and keeping them using motivation. An employee that is properly motivated for the effort that he or she spends within the organization will continue to maintain a high standard both on the production line and also during logistic processes, negotiations, sales or the counseling of clients.

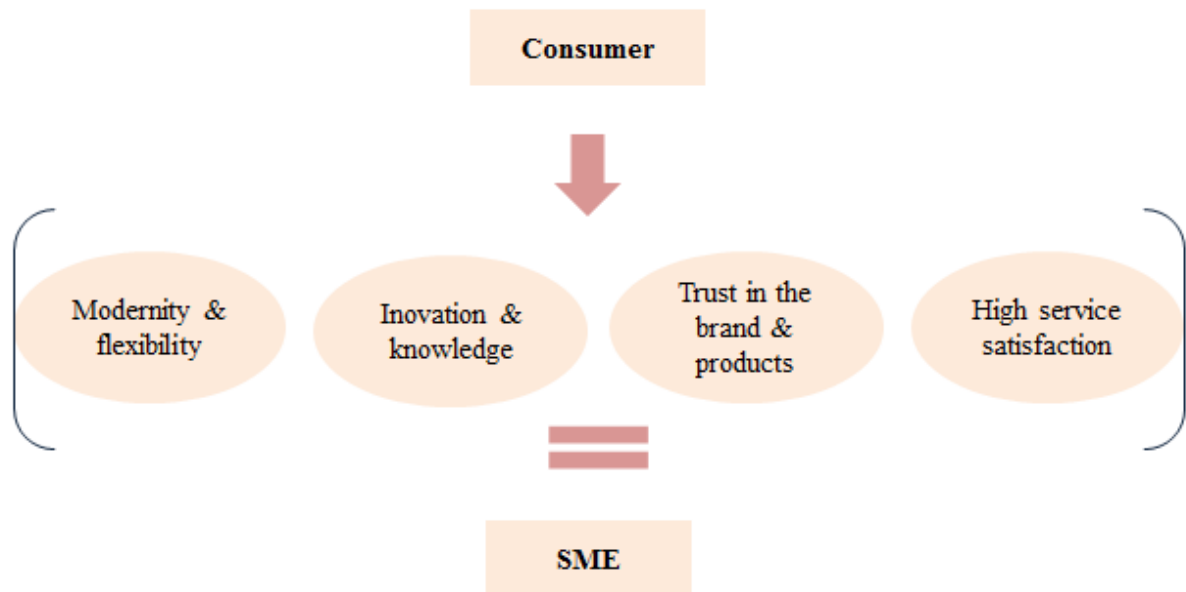


Fig. 1: Key attributes for SME's in attracting consumers

Source: proposed by the authors

As it is shown in the previous figure, the key-attributes with which micro-enterprises, small and medium companies can attract consumers are strategies that imply positioning themselves toward modernity and innovation, flexibility in consumer and collaborator relations, expertise and knowledge within the field of textiles from which trust in the brand and its products can converge, followed by the offered services at the highest possible quality. Modernity can be given through an approach that is characterized by timeless design or through marketing campaigns that attract young and old consumers alike, through the same

message. Flexibility can be achieved through the same degree of customization that is offered in creating a collection or when creating "sur mesure" pieces according to customer size and body measurements. Along with these elements, the visual component that most attracts potential buyers within the fashion industry. Some specialists from the textile industry state that a clothing item, such as a dress, can be an efficient way for conforming or masking, but also differentiating. When a person wears a dress that has a common design or fading colors, that person can easily disappear or blend in a crowd, but if the person choses an

innovative design or bright colors, the person can stand out (Cumming, 2004, p 99).

Limitations & conclusions

The textile industry in Romania will remain dynamic, but in order to continue its development it needs to be closely monitored, to identify possibilities for expansion and to make better use of the opportunities of entering new markets and consolidate the relation with consumers. The limitations of this paper are represented by the relatively small collectivity on which the two qualitative studies have been conducted and by the impossibility of gathering a more encompassing analysis of the problems that face small and medium enterprises in the textile industry.

The challenges faced by micro-enterprises and SMEs can be easily overcome if these companies try and value the resources that they possess, maximizing their limited marketing budget and recovering their investment through an appropriate market research, business planning and the constant evaluation of their activities.

The consumer represents the central point in developing small and medium enterprises. If individuals used to purchase clothing in the past only to wear them on certain occasions or only when previously owned clothing items got too worn out, the current day situation is a different one. Consumers are willing to spend frequently on the purchase of new clothes, whether it is for satisfying basic needs or more sophisticated needs.

Some of the solutions that entrepreneurs can have in order to motivate consumers are:

- The ability to anticipate fashion trends or the ability to create new trends;
- The creation of products that are very attractive and that go well with the style and the personality of consumers;

- Adapting collections based on the segment of consumers that they are addressing;
- Maintaining a certain standard of quality;
- Communicating an emotion through which consumers feel better with themselves;
- Choosing a design and a certain chromatic theme that help clients create outfits that have a high degree of personalization;
- Adapting clothes depending on utility and also on positioning through a price this is according to the quality of the products.

The results that were obtained by the authors following the conducted researches can be expanded and interpreted in a future, more ample paper that can cover a larger collectivity of consumers of textile products and possibly other fields that require examination of pertaining resources and also profitability and investment return in order to attract consumers and develop both local and international markets.

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