Exploring Consumer Narratives of Traditional and Modern Clothing in Addis Ababa: An Interpretivist Study

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

A Thesis Submitted to Addis Ababa University, College of Business and Economics, Department of Management, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduate Studies in MBA

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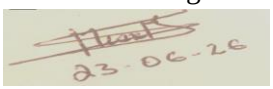
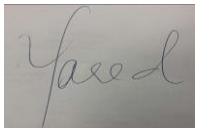
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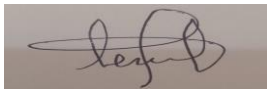
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DECLARATION

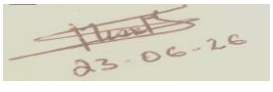
I, the hereby signed, declare that this thesis is my original work, prepared under the guidance of Meskerem Mitiku (PhD). All sources of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged. I further confirm that this research has not been submitted either in part or in full to any other higher learning institution for the purpose of earning any degree.

Declared by:

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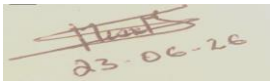
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ENDORSEMENT

This thesis has been submitted to Addis Ababa University, College of Business and Economics for examination with my approval as a university advisor.



Meskerem Mitiku (PhD) _____

Advisor Signature

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I would first like to thank the Almighty God son of Virgin Mary for lifelong support of reaching here. Afterwards I express my sincere gratitude to my academic advisor for her invaluable guidance, constructive comments, and continuous support she provided throughout the preparation of this research paper. I am also grateful to My family for assisting me both financially and psychologically throughout this academic time as well as my close friend Edomgenet who has helped in this research, lastly my thanks goes to the department for creating a supportive academic environment that facilitated the development of this study.

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Abstract

This study explored how consumers in Addis Ababa construct and narrate meaning around traditional and modern clothing, and how those meanings shape clothing choices across different social contexts. The study aimed to understand what clothing signifies to urban Ethiopian consumers, how personal histories and social interactions shape those meanings, which situational contexts drive choices between traditional and imported clothing, and what those findings mean for local producers and policymakers.

Thirty participants were interviewed using a life-history approach, drawn from a wide range of ages, genders, occupations, and migration backgrounds across three market sites: Shero Meda, Merkato, and Shola. Observation sessions ran alongside the interviews at all three sites. Trustworthiness was established through triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling.

Five themes emerged from the data. Traditional clothing functions as a cultural anchor tied to identity, ceremony, and ethnic pride. Modern and imported clothing functions as social currency signaling professionalism and aspiration. A consistent set of situational rules governs when each type fits. Life turning points such as migration and career entry restructure how people relate to clothing over time. A persistent gap exists between the desire to support local production and what people actually buy. Three broader patterns ran across the dataset: a dual wardrobe logic most participants lived without questioning, an aspiration-constraint tension felt most sharply by younger participants, and a migration recalibration narrative among those who moved to Addis Ababa from other parts of Ethiopia.

The findings show that locally produced modern clothing lacks a clear design identity and carries almost no visible Ethiopian character, placing it in a weak market position between traditional and imported clothing. The desire most participants expressed to support local production is genuine but largely inactive, waiting for products and occasions that make acting on it feel like a real choice. These findings carry direct implications for local designers, retailers, and policymakers who want to grow the domestic clothing market by engaging the cultural and symbolic dimensions of consumer behavior that production-side investment alone has not reached.

Keywords: consumer narratives, traditional clothing, imported clothing, cultural identity, situational rules, dual wardrobe, consumer ethnocentrism, life-history interviews, urban clothing consumption, Addis Ababa.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The markets of Shero Meda, Merkato, and Shola are busy with activity on a Saturday morning in Addis Ababa. While one customer bargains for used jeans imported from overseas, another stops to admire the handwoven Tibeb cloth. The tension at the center of this study on how local traditions and globalization intersect in people's fashion choices is captured in this everyday contradiction. Globalization has increased, and a variety of factors influence customer choices for products. Perceptions about whether a product is locally produced or imported are among the most influential (Ifediora, Ugwuanyi, & Ifediora, 2017; Dulal & Islam, 2018). Consumers often view local goods as more affordable and culturally relevant, while imported products are associated with higher quality and social status (Florent & Kalimang'asi, 2014; Lee & Chen-Yu, 2018; Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003).

Economic globalization has had a significant impact on consumer behavior in developing countries, especially in the textile and apparel industries. Due to globalization and the ongoing indirect economic colonization, consumers in developing countries favor imported clothing products; imports from the US, the Middle East, Asia, and China dominate trade industries and directly challenge local brands as consumers switch to buying branded imported goods (Chekol et al., 2022; Ifediora et al., 2017).

Addis Ababa presents a unique case. The city blends contemporary fashion with textile traditions. Traditional Tibeb designs and weaving patterns remain visible in markets, yet imported new and second-hand clothing increasingly shapes urban dress. Studies show that people choose clothing based on cost, appearance, fashionability, and the sense of importance it conveys (Chekol et al., 2022; Bizuneh, 2025). What remains underexplored, however, are the lived stories and situational logics through which consumers explain, justify, and alternate between traditional and modern dress in everyday life. Government and industry reports highlight initiatives to improve domestic textile capacity (Ethiopian Textile Development Institute, 2016), but they do not capture how consumers narrate identity, tradition, aspiration, and appropriateness in their choices. This interpretive gap prevents culturally grounded interventions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Anyone who spends time in Addis Ababa's clothing markets sees the tension that Imported clothing dominates shelf space, conversation, and aspiration, while locally made garments hold their ground in specific corners of the market and specific moments in people's lives. Surveys and regression models have documented this pattern clearly: price, perceived quality, fashionability, and social standing consistently predict clothing choices, and most consumers who are asked directly say they favor imports (Chekol et al., 2022; Bizuneh, 2025). But local clothing has not disappeared. It continues to show up at ceremonies, religious occasions, and in the daily ways people signal who they are and where they come from (Dessalew, 2017). What those same surveys cannot tell you is why. They can show that younger consumers prefer imported styles. But they cannot tell you whether that preference is being driven by a desire for social mobility, by what their workplace expects of them, by what their friend group signals is acceptable, or by a specific moment, a wedding they attended, a funeral they dressed wrong for, a first job that changed how they saw themselves. The interpretive processes through which people actually make sense of their clothing choices, the life histories they carry, the metaphors they reach for, the situational rules they follow without questioning, and the narrative logic that connects one decision to the next, live in a place that questionnaires and regression coefficients were never built to reach (Rayman et al., 2011; Shimp & Sharma, 1987).

This gap has real-world consequences. Policy efforts and business plans often target price reductions or quality improvements, assuming these will change behavior. Yet interventions that ignore narrative meanings risk being ineffective. For instance, improving fabric durability may not increase uptake if consumers avoid local trends for status or professional reasons (Ethiopian Textile Development Institute, 2016). There is thus an urgent need for interpretive, narrative research that captures how Addis Ababa inhabitants talk about and experience clothing across social settings. These investigations can identify recurrent concepts and identify the social actors and events driving dress choices by tracing how narratives about identity, ambition, and social norms interact with material constraints.

Research Questions

1. In their daily life, how do Addis Ababa consumers narrate the meaning of modern and traditional clothes?
2. Which personal histories, social contacts, and influences show themselves in these stories?
3. In which social contexts (work, ceremonies, leisure, migration) do consumers prefer traditional or modern clothing, and why?
4. What practical implications do consumer narratives suggest for local apparel producers and policymakers?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To investigate how Addis Ababa consumers tell the meanings of traditional and contemporary apparel and how those stories affect their clothing selections across social settings.

Specific Objectives

- To document present narrative ideas among Addis Ababa's varied people regarding modern and traditional clothing.
- To examine migration, social networks, and life events' effects on these stories.
- To find the conditions and situational norms influencing choices among traditional and contemporary clothes.
- To help designers, merchants, and lawmakers see the effects of culturally sensitive goods and communication approaches.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study has theoretical, conceptual, practical, and policy consequences. It raises the From broad clothing preference projections to interpretive tales affecting daily notes of options. It theoretically ties modernity, customs, and identity to apparel habits, therefore guiding to view consumption as meaning-making.

Regarding approach, it shows how Life-history interviews and observation provide major insights that improve surveys (Dessalew, 2017). It essentially offers designers and merchants narrative-driven recommendations for product design and marketing in line with situational meanings. It offers legislators culturally appropriate information to help projects as brand support, marketing, and training. Taken as a whole, these donations help local value chains and equilibrium(balance) between legacy and modernism.

1.5 Scope of the Study

Data will be collected from specific traditional and mixed clothing markets and adjacent areas particularly Shero Meda, Merkato and Shola to capture a range of market types and client experiences.The study is geographically situated in Addis Ababa. The research deliberately selects customers who buy, work or otherwise participate in a number of market contexts to give a number of life-history perspectives and situational narratives. The study is thematically focused on consumer stories and the meaning-making around apparel made at home vs. abroad. It explores the ways in which people talk about identity, custom, prestige and appropriateness in relation to clothes, and how such stories relate to notions of quality, cost and level. The research did not seek to determine market shares, assess demand at the national level or formulate numerical findings on the Ethiopian garment industry as a whole. Methodologically the study is qualitative and interpretive **utilizing non-participant observation** and **life-history interviews**. Sample sizes will be adequate for thematic saturation rather than statistical power to permit for variations in age, sex and occupation.

Supply chain dynamics, advertising exposure or macroeconomic policy are acknowledged but not well explored due to time and financial constraints, and other possibly important factors. The study does not cover large-scale quantitative surveys, technical supply-side assessments (e.g. factory productivity, exhaustive value-chain costing), and other product groups such as food, electronics and household goods.

1.6 Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized into five chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in building toward the study's findings and contributions.

Chapter One introduces the study. The conflict between traditional and imported apparel in Addis Ababa's markets and the interpretive gap left by previous quantitative studies serve as the background that drives the research.

The problem statement, the four research questions, the general and particular objectives, the significance of the study in terms of theoretical, methodological, practical, and policy dimensions, and the definition of the location, thematic, and methodological scope are all included. The chapter explains that this is a qualitative, interpretivist study that focuses on the stories Addis Ababa shoppers employ to make sense of their clothing selections.

Chapter Two reviews the literature that underpins the study. In order to determine what is known about clothing preferences and their determinants, it starts with a summary of consumer behavior in clothing markets, using data from Ethiopian and international sources. The key terminology used throughout the study is then defined, with definitions based on theory that connect each idea to academic literature. The Price-Quality-Value Framework, Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, Country-of-Origin Effect Theory, and Social Identity Theory are the four theoretical frameworks that are reviewed in this chapter, along with an explanation of how each relates to the research questions of the study. The empirical evaluation that follows identifies the interpretive gap that this study aims to fill by thematically combining Ethiopian and comparative information. A conceptual framework that places consumer narratives at the center of analysis and charts the sociocultural, economic, demographic and situational factors that influence them is presented in the chapter's conclusion.

Chapter Three presents the methodology. It describes and justifies the interpretivist, phenomenological research design, explains the study area and the purpose for selecting Shero Meda, Merkato, and Shola as research sites, and details the purposive sampling strategy and participant selection criteria. It then reviews the methodological precedents that justify the narrative approach including life-history interviews, and non-participant observation, before describing each data collection method in full. The chapter explains the thematic and narrative

analytical approach, including the procedures for coding, quality assurance, and trustworthiness, and concludes with the ethical considerations governing the study's conduct.

Chapter Four presents the Data analysis and presentation for the study, followed by the interview and guide used in data collection.

Chapter Five presents findings, recommendations and conclusions.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Chapter Two reviews the theoretical and empirical foundations that ground this study's exploration of consumer narratives around traditional and modern clothing in Addis Ababa. With a special focus to the Ethiopian context, the chapter starts by placing clothing consumption within the larger body of literature on consumer behavior in apparel marketplaces. It then examines four theoretical frameworks: the Price-Quality-Value Framework, the Country-of-Origin Effect Theory, Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, and Social Identity Theory. These frameworks collectively reveal the reasons why consumers attach symbolic and economic significance to locally produced apparel as opposed to imported apparel. The empirical review establishes what is previously known about clothing preferences using data from Ethiopia and similar developing-country situations. In order to demonstrate how identity, culture, and economic reasoning interact in urban Ethiopians' fashion choices, the chapter ends with a conceptual framework that places consumer narratives at the core of inquiry. The common argument in each section is that previous studies show what Ethiopian consumers prefer but not how they talk about their preferences and why they move between traditional and modern clothing according to the circumstances. This study aims to fill that interpretive void.

2.1 Overview of Consumer Behavior in Clothing Markets

Buying clothes in Addis Ababa's markets goes beyond the transaction. Clothing signals who people are, where they're headed, and where they belong. In cities, Ethiopians use what they wear to express identity and negotiate social standing. To understand why a Merkato buyer chooses an imported shirt over a local one, or spends far more on a handwoven Tibeb dress for a wedding, you need to look past price and product features.

Kotler and Armstrong (2010) put it clearly: consumer choices are never purely rational. They operate at emotional, cognitive, and behavioral levels, shaped by the society a person lives in and the identity they try to maintain within it. Urban Ethiopian clothing choices reflect all of these layers at once.

The data backs this up. Studies point to price, perceived quality, style, and social status as the top factors in clothing decisions (Chekol et al., 2022; Bizuneh, 2025). Bizuneh (2025) found that young Ethiopian consumers' attitudes toward locally made clothing predicted purchase intention more strongly than national pride alone. At the same time, limited product variety, weak promotion of local brands, and the dominance of imported apparel in stores have all held back the domestic market.

Minbale et al. (2024) surveyed 478 Ethiopian consumers using the Theory of Planned Behavior and found a clear gap between intention and action. People said they wanted to buy local, but their actual purchases told a different story. The researchers traced this to three factors: social expectations pushed against local buying, global brands carried a cultural prestige local clothing had not displaced, and people lacked the practical means to act on their stated preferences.

Bitew et al. (2025) found the same pattern still holds. Personal attitudes toward local clothing were positive, but what people around them wore and preferred pulled purchasing decisions away from local options. Social environment, not personal opinion, shaped what consumers actually bought.

Ethiopians show a moderate level of consumer ethnocentrism, meaning they see buying local as both economically sound and patriotic (Minbale et al., 2024; Mangnale, Potluri and Degufu, 2011). But cultural loyalty alone has not been enough to offset the aspirational pull of imported goods.

While imported design currently defines daily metropolitan attire, traditional clothing in Addis Ababa has symbolic importance for legacy and events. Shero Meda, the city's center for traditional handwoven textiles, captures this tension well. Younger consumers lean toward global fashion trends, while older ones prioritize durability and cultural meaning (Agyeman, Nyarko, & Asante, 2014; Barrera-Verdugo & Villarroel, 2022). Gender adds another layer: men tend to focus on price and utility, while women place more weight on brand image and social status (Kumar & Kim, 2014).

Quantitative data like this cannot, however, explain the interpretive processes by which these trends are seen and reported. It may show that younger consumers prefer imported goods, but not when this preference is derived from turning points in life, migrations, peer influence, or even organizational cultures. While it can evaluate ethnocentrism as a scale score, it misses the times

when a customer feels proud in wearing Tibeb fabric or uncomfortable in being seen in locally created clothes in a professional environment. The theoretical models discussed in Section 2.2 aim to close the explanatory divide between the statistical data customers provide and the actual meaning they create on clothes.

2.2 Theoretical Review

This study seeks to assist Addis Ababa customers in building and telling stories about their clothing choices. Four related theories were used: The Country-of-Origin Effect Theory, Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, Price-Quality-Value Framework and Social Identity Theory. These structures are built on two interconnected aspects of consumer importance: the cultural and identity aspects and the financial and evaluative aspects.. Together, they clarify why clothes has symbolic value outside of utility as well as how consumers apply material logic to justify their choices. Every framework relates one or more of the four research questions of this study; these relationships are noted in the next parts.

Country-of-Origin (COO) Effect Theory

According to Country-of-Origin Effect Theory, consumers perceive the goods not only by their real attributes but also by their symbolic connections with the country of origin. As first shown by Bilkey and Nes (1982), the country of origin of a product is an informative cue affecting customers' quality evaluations, trust decisions, and purchase intention. Cordell (1992) further showed that COO effects are especially salient in asymmetric information settings where consumers lack technical knowledge to directly assess product quality and therefore use origin as an indication signal. This consistent Ethiopian data on several cities and consumer groups. Chekol et al . (2022) found that about 77% of the respondents in Debre Markos District preferred to buy foreign-made clothing. The factors that influenced the tendency were advertising exposure, fashion sense, peer pressure, social status, income, occupation, and education. This is no small advantage. it shows you that there are a complex mix of social and economic factors feeding off of each other in favor of imports. Another interesting finding is exactly how these tastes get as you dig deeper. In Bahir Dar, consumers were not always choosing imported clothes over local options. Within the import sector itself, they were drawing greater differences. Second-hand clothing from Europe

and North America was preferred over boutique options, while new Chinese-made clothes were mostly rejected, not because they were foreign but because buyers found the polyester fabric unconvincing and the quality poor. That degree of prejudice reveals you that this market's country-of-origin evaluations are not universal national preferences. These are particular, product-sensitive evaluations customers are generating based on their societal knowledge and past experience regarding what various sources really provide. Retailers said that their main reasons for consumer interest were high quality, durability, low price, uniqueness, and cotton fabric (Khurana & Tadesse, 2019). Thus, COO theory is directly relevant to Research Question 1's focus on how consumers associate the meanings of traditional and modern clothing because it offers a framework for understanding how consumer narratives about clothing are shaped not only by the clothes themselves but also by the national and cultural stereotypes associated with them. Likewise, COO theory is equally applicable to Research Question 3 which examines situational apparel choices and the contextual standards that guide them. COO-based narratives are not fixed, but rather they change with the situation. For this reason, the same customer may have different country-of-origin implications at a job as opposed to a family event.

Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory

Shimp and Sharma (1987) created the Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory. This theory explains why some customers think buying imported items is not right. For these customers buying things from countries is not just about money it is also about being loyal to their culture and country. They think buying imported items can hurt the people who work in their country and make it harder for their country to grow. Shimp and Sharma said that customers use their feelings about their country to decide what to buy.

In Ethiopia this feeling is there. It is not too strong. Some research says that people in Ethiopia like to buy things but they do not feel that way all the time. They like to buy things that're good quality and make them look good. Age is also important in this. Younger people do not feel strongly about buying local things as older people do. Younger people like to try things and they like to express themselves. They do not care much about buying local things as older people do.

Some research found that younger people in Zimbabwe like to buy imported things than older people. The same thing might be true in Addis Ababa. We need to do more research to find out. The Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory is helpful because it tells us why people think buying things

is important. It is not about numbers it is about what people think and feel. Peoples thoughts and feelings are influenced by who they know and what has happened to them. This is related to why people buy clothes and what they think about when they are shopping.

The Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory helps us understand why people in Addis Ababa buy clothes. It is not about what they can afford it is about what they think is right. People have stories about why they buy things and these stories are important. These stories are influenced by who they know and what has happened to them. The Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory is useful, for understanding these stories. Why people buy certain clothes.

Price-Quality-Value Framework

Monroe's (1990) Price-Quality-Value Framework makes a lot of sense to anyone who has ever gone shopping without knowing much about the products. When you do not know what something is made of or how well it is made the price is what you use to figure out if it's good or not. A higher price makes you think it is better. A lower price makes you wonder if it is as good even if it really is just as good as something that costs more. Lee and Chen-Yu (2018) examined this idea in the clothing industry. Found out that how people think about price and quality and what they think is a good value is not simple. It changes depending on the situation, where you're what you are buying the clothes for.

In Ethiopia this is a problem for clothes that are made locally. Because local clothes are usually cheaper than clothes that are imported people think they must be quality. This makes people think less of clothes no matter how they actually feel. The price of something is not a number it is like a story that the product tells you before you even touch it.

One person said that even if local clothes are cheaper they still think they are not as good as imported clothes. Bizuneh found out in 2025 that young people in Ethiopia do not mind paying more for clothes if they think they are better.That is, the price of something is not a function of how much money you have, but what you think it says about you. The Price-Quality-Value Framework helps us understand why people choose when they buy clothes.It is especially helpful, for understanding how people think about money and what they buy when their lives change like when they get their job move to a new city get a promotion or start making more money. This framework helps us see that what people think is a good value is not always the same it changes over time.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory is based on something that most people feel but do not often think about. This is that a part of how you see yourself comes from the groups you are a part of. Your nationality, ethnicity, class, job and the time you were born are not things that describe you. They are also where you get your sense of self worth and how you see the world. They shape how you think of yourself and how you want others to think of you. What you wear is one of the ways to show people what group you belong to. It sends a message about what group you're a part of before you even say a word.

Some people named Abid and others did a study in 2026. They found out that what people wear is not about how they look. It is about who they're how they want to be seen. They found out that young people use clothes to tell stories about themselves. They use clothes to show who they are and to fit in with the people around them. They also use clothes to stand out from the crowd.

Using Tajfel and Turners Social Identity Theory we can explain why someone in Addis Ababa might wear clothes to a family event and clothes from other countries to work. This is because different situations make people think about parts of who they are. This theory helps answer the question of how people think about modern clothes. It also helps answer the question of why people wear clothes in different situations.

For example Social Identity Theory helps us understand why people make choices about what to wear. It shows that people wear clothes because they are part of different groups. They want to show that they belong to these groups. This theory is important because it helps us understand why clothes are not something we wear. They are a way to show people who we're where we come from.

The theory also supports the idea that people wear clothes in different situations. This is because different situations make people think about parts of who they are. For instance someone might wear clothes to a family event because they want to show respect for their culture. They might wear clothes from countries to work because they want to show that they are modern and part of the city.

In conclusion Tajfel and Turners Social Identity Theory is important because it helps us understand why people make choices, about what to wear. It shows that clothes are not something we wear.

They are a way to show people who we're where we come from. The theory also supports the idea that people wear clothes in different situations. This is because different situations make people think about parts of who they are.

Synthesis and Linkage to Research Questions

The four frameworks, considered together, shed light on the symbolic, moral, economic and social aspects that make fashion choices meaningful in the Ethiopian urban life. The economic reasoning layer as it evolves through life events is described in the Price-Quality-Value Framework; COO Theory considers the national stereotype layer and its situational variation; Ethnocentrism Theory explains the moral and civic layer shaped by personal histories and social interactions, and Social Identity Theory explains the identity performance layer and its sensitivity to social context . No one framework is sufficient on its own. Their synthesis provides the analytical framework for understanding the consumer narratives collected for this study, and each framework is linked to one or more of the four research questions stated above. Also the integrated framework is the conceptual foundation of Research Question 4 as it allows the findings of the study to be translated into culturally grounded recommendations for local clothing designers, retailers and policy makers who need to understand not only what consumers want but also why the preferences are formed in that way. This is so since these four ideas taken together illuminate the symbolic, moral, financial, and social forces influencing client narratives.

2.3 Definition of Key Terms

Though, before the empirical study, it is important to clarify the main concepts the paper usually uses. These definitions are theoretical since they rely on the models presented in Section 2.2 and the more general body of study on consumer behavior. They ought to provide the exact conceptual interpretations of these terms that will direct data collecting, analysis,and interpretation utilization. The various interpretations of a word in different academic lines are underlined and the one chosen for this study is made apparent.

Consumer Narrative

Consumer narrative in this study is a coherent, narrative-structured story that explains and gives significance to what a person buys, wears, and uses. Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) first

claimed that consumption is basically a meaning-making activity and that the stories consumers create about their choices expose values, social pressures, and identity aspirations not caught by aggregate preference data. A consumer narrative is a created tale with a beginning, a turning point, and a moral that relates the narrator to their society and clarifies why a certain decision was fit or necessary. It goes beyond merely reporting a preference vocally. Consumer narratives which are gathered via life-history interviews and observation sessions and analyzed for situational logic and recurring themes—are the principal analytical unit in this study.

Traditional Garments

This study defines classic attire as things of clothing linked with Ethiopian cultural legacy manufactured using local artisan techniques including netela, kemis, and handwoven textiles with Tibeb patterns. The phrase refers to physical as well as symbolic sense. It basically refers to clothing created using traditional weaving and tailoring techniques, sometimes found in places like Shero Meda markets. Symbolically, it connects to the ethnic identity, ritual appropriateness, and intergenerational continuity that those garments show. This study uses Dessalew's (2017) definition to look at traditional clothing as a genre produced by narrative instead of as a static classification. What is regarded traditional in a story reveals a consumer's relationship to cultural legacy.

Modern Apparel

Ready-made clothing, brand-name imports, and secondhand goods from outside Ethiopia linked to world fashion trends and urban modern life define modern clothes in this study. Ready-made clothing, brand-name imports, and secondhand goods from outside Ethiopia linked to world fashion trends and urban modern life define modern clothes in this study. The phrase is used as a descriptive category for the types of clothing that consumers intentionally contrast with traditional dress in their narratives, rather than an evaluative term that suggests traditional dress is outdated or that imported dress is better. Modern clothing in Ethiopia carries strong aspirational implications and is frequently referred to as a marker of global awareness, professional position and education (Bizuneh, 2025; Chekol et al., 2022).

Imported Clothing

Imported clothing, is any apparel that was manufactured outside Ethiopia but somehow has found its way into the markets of Addis Ababa. New stock from a supplier or second hand clothing that has already lived a previous life somewhere else before ending up on a shop in Merkato or Shola. Merkato and shola and other urban retail spaces are saturated with branded garments from Turkey, China, India and the UAE. Second-hand garments from Europe and North America are widely available at affordable prices (Khurana & Tadesse, 2019).

The distinction between modern and imported clothing is important as not all modern clothing is imported, some domestically manufactured clothing has contemporary styles. Not all imported clothing is perceived as high-status as new branded imports use a different symbolic register than second-hand imports (Khurana & Tadesse, 2019).

Locally Produced Clothing

Clothing that is produced locally in Ethiopia includes handwoven products, tailored clothing, and products from local manufacturing companies. Minbale et al. (2024) and Bitew et al. (2025) note that locally produced clothing in Ethiopia covers a wide range of quality, from factory-made garments that directly compete with imports on price to artisanally produced handwoven textiles of significant craftsmanship. This heterogeneity is reflected in consumer narratives of locally produced clothing. Not all locally made clothing is traditional, but all traditional clothing is locally made. In this work traditional and locally made clothes are considered as separate but overlapping categories.

Consumer Ethnocentrism

Shimp and Sharma (1987) defined consumer ethnocentrism as what people think about buying things made in other countries. They think it is right or wrong to buy these things. This study does not look at ethnocentrism as something that people are born with. Instead it looks at the way people talk about the clothes they wear. When someone says they buy Ethiopian made clothes because it helps their country they are using consumer ethnocentrism. When someone says they want to buy Ethiopian made clothes but the quality is not good they are thinking about two things: consumer ethnocentrism and the quality of the clothes. This study thinks both of these ways of thinking are important. Consumer ethnocentrism is what people think about when they choose to buy clothes. They think about consumer ethnocentrism when they decide what to wear.

Perceived Quality

When people buy clothes they think about how the material feels, if the design's nice if it will last, if it fits well and if it is made well. This is what we know as perceived quality. It differs from what we can quantify as it also encompasses people's ideas based on the cost, location of manufacture, and what they had hoped it would be before purchase. Some people have found that in Ethiopia people think clothes from countries are better even if clothes made in Ethiopia are just as good. This means that what people think about quality is not about what they can see but also about what they tell themselves. We want to know how people talk about the clothes they buy including the stories, about clothes that did not meet their expectations clothes that lasted a time and clothes that really impressed them and what they think about the quality of these clothes.

Social Status and Prestige

In this study the terms status and prestige refer to what clothes mean to people as signs of how well they are doing in life how much money they have, how modern they are and what group they belong to. Social status and prestige when it comes to buying clothes are connected to each other. Are based on the ideas of Tajfel and Turners Social Identity Theory from 1986. Social status and prestige are important in clothing consumption because they are related to how people see themselves in relation, to others. A garment carries prestige not in and of itself but in relation to the social groupings whose recognition the wearer desires. While traditional dress carries a different kind of prestige cultural authority and ceremonial appropriateness that operates in

different social settings, imported branded clothing has been found to function as a primary prestige marker in Addis Ababa, especially among younger and more educated consumers (Chekol et al., 2022; Shegaw et al., 2025). This study investigates how customers describe the prestige aspect of their clothing selections and how those narratives change depending on the social setting.

Situational Rules

Situational rules, as defined in this study, refer to the culturally shared norms and personal standards that consumers cite to explain why a particular type of clothing is appropriate or inappropriate in a specific social context. The concept draws on the situational layer of the study's conceptual framework and is closely related to what Braun and Clarke (2006) would call a recurring thematic pattern in qualitative data — except that situational rules are explicitly normative rather than merely descriptive: They explain not only what customers do, but also what they think they should to do and why. For example, "You have to wear traditional dress to a wedding it would be disrespectful not to," or, "I would never wear local fabric to a job interview it sends the wrong message." Because they provide a clear understanding of the social architecture of clothing choices that survey tools never do, these norms are among the most analytically fruitful components of consumer narratives.

Country-of-Origin Effect

The country-of-origin effect, which operates through intellectual associations between national stereotypes and product attributes, is the impact that a product's country of manufacture has on consumer assessments of its quality, reliability, and desirability (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Cordell, 1992). In order to better understand the constructed and contingent nature of COO effects than scale measurements can, this study is interested in how consumers narrate country-of-origin evaluations, including the moments when those evaluations are contested, revised, or complicated by direct experience with specific garments.

Purchasing Intention

In contrast to their actual shopping behavior, purchasing intention refers to a consumer's declared willingness or plan to purchase a specific item of clothing. In Ethiopia, there is sufficient proof of the discrepancy between purpose and behavior: Positive intentions toward locally made clothing were not consistently translated into actual purchases, according to Minbale et al. (2024) and Bitew et al. (2025). The main barrier to intended action was found to be subjective social norms, or the expectations of peers and family. Purchasing intention is treated in this study as a narrative concept as much as a behavioral one: the narratives consumers tell about what they plan to purchase and why those intentions are realized or not reveal the situational and social pressures that are not fully captured by quantitative intention measures.

Consumer

The term consumer refers to anyone who buys, uses or decides about clothing, in Addis Ababa. This includes people who shop at the three market sites, market workers who regularly interact with both imported clothes and individuals who talk about clothing choices in their social and professional lives. Clothing consumption is all the ways people interact with clothing like looking, evaluating, rejecting, fixing, giving, and borrowing and talking about it not just buying. The definition of consumer goes beyond someone who makes a purchase. According to Kotler and Armstrong consumer behavior includes making a purchase decision. Also what happens before and after the purchase, where people form and change their opinions? This study hopes to grasp the process of people's involvement with clothing, not only the time they purchase it.

Conceptual Framework

The idea of a framework for research is like a map that helps us understand the things we are studying. This map is made up of lots of ideas and theories that all work together to help us answer our research questions. It is not a summary of one theory but rather a combination of many theories that we put together to help us understand the specific thing we are looking at. The conceptual framework in our study emphasizes the role of consumer narratives in the analysis. We are aiming to explore the influence that such factors as the economic climate, type of individuals being interviewed and conditions they face, culture, and society have on the narratives that consumers construct. In order to get a deeper insight into these phenomena, we are using key concepts of

COO theory, Consumer Ethnocentrism theory, Price-Quality-Value framework, and Social Identity theory.

In contrast to focusing on causal relationships between different phenomena, we are aiming to discover the connections between the studied factors and how they interact in forming various narrative patterns in Addis Ababa apparel setting. Conceptual framework serves as a means of structuring our research methods as well as data analysis procedures that help us to design the necessary instruments for organizing our findings and analyzing the collected transcripts and notes.

2.4 Empirical Review

A conceptual framework is a set of linked ideas and assumptions that shapes how you approach a research problem. It differs from a theory in that it does not summarize existing knowledge but instead defines the lens through which you examine your questions.

Over the past decade, research on Ethiopian clothing consumers has focused largely on quantitative data, capturing what people prefer but not why. This section reviews that body of work alongside relevant comparisons from other countries. The findings are grouped around four themes drawn from the theoretical review, and the conclusion shows where this study departs from prior research.

Evidence from Ethiopia

Research consistently shows that Ethiopian consumers prefer imported clothing, associating it with higher quality, fashion, and social status. Chekol et al.'s study in Debre Markos found that over 60% of respondents favored foreign-made clothes, driven by advertising, style, peer influence, and the desire for social recognition. 73% reported that this preference came at a real financial cost, reducing their household savings. Despite this, the appeal of imported clothing persists. This pattern raises concerns for both household economic welfare and the broader sustainability of import-dependent consumption.

This analysis was expanded to young customers by Bizuneh (2025), who found that the main reasons decreasing purchasing intentions for locally created garments were a lack of product variety, poor promotion of local companies, and the widespread effect of social referents, friends, and peer networks.
These interpersonal and social contact channels, which Bizuneh's (2025) principal component analysis indicated to be among the highest-impact negative determinants for local apparel purchasing, are sharpened by the exclusion of media influences from the current study's scope.

Minbale (2024) used structural equation modeling within an expanded Theory of Planned Behavior framework and found that attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and consumer ethnocentrism all significantly predicted purchase intention for locally made clothing. Subjective norms stood out as a particularly strong driver, pointing to peer relationships and social circles as key forces shaping what Ethiopian consumers buy. Bitew et al. (2025) confirmed this pattern, showing that the gap between intention and actual purchase is driven more by social factors than economic ones.

Quantitative studies often miss another side of this picture. Locally made clothing, especially handwoven traditional textiles, continues to carry strong ceremonial and identity-related weight. Dessalew (2017) found that attitude, fashion involvement, social status, past experience, and value consciousness all significantly predicted purchase intention for cultural fashion clothing in Addis Ababa.

Demographics also shape these choices. Tsegaye (2025) found that young Ethiopians buy local clothing selectively, with T-shirts being the main exception. Positive attitudes toward local products and perceived quality support purchase intention, but limited variety, weak advertising, and outside cultural influence all work against it.

Other people like Khurana and Tadesse (2019) found that people in Ethiopia like to buy clothes that are brought in from countries and have been used before. These clothes are cheap. They make people feel good about themselves which is something that clothes made in Ethiopia have not been able to do yet. Admasu (2022). Fikadu (2021) also found out that people in cities in Ethiopia like clothes that are brought in from other countries more, than clothes that are made in Ethiopia.

Global Evidence

Data from Asia and Africa shows that the way people buy clothes in Ethiopia is not about the culture there. It is about how people buy clothes in developing countries. In some places like Zimbabwe and India people prefer to buy clothes from their country. This is because they think clothes from their country are better.. In other places like Vietnam it does not matter as much where the clothes come from. This means that what people think about their country and its clothes can affect what they buy.

Women and younger people tend to like clothes that're popular all over the world. They think about the brand and what it says about them.. Men and older people care more about how long the clothes will last and if they are practical. Local brands in developing countries have a time competing with big global brands. People think global brands are quality and more stylish. People buy clothes that're traditional but they also buy clothes that are fashionable. Ethiopian clothing patterns and African clothing patterns are similar in this way. People, in Ethiopia and other African countries like to wear clothes that're a mix of traditional and global styles.

The Interpretive Gap

When you look at data from Asia and Africa you can see that the way people buy clothes in Ethiopia is not about the culture there it is about how people buy clothes in many developing countries. In some places like Zimbabwe and India people are less likely to buy clothes from countries because they prefer clothes from their own country.. In other places like Vietnam this does not matter as much. This shows that how people feel about their country and its products can affect what they buy and this is different in situations.

With all the information we have there is still something missing. Most studies in Ethiopia use things like surveys and questionnaires to collect data. These methods can tell us how much people prefer things but they cannot tell us why people feel that way or what they think about when they make decisions about what to wear. They can show us that things like status and what friends think are important but they cannot tell us the stories people tell about why they wear certain clothes like what they wore on their first day of work or at their wedding.

These techniques can also help us determine whether someone says they would buy something but then don't. They cannot explain why this occurs or what causes individuals to choose one day traditional clothing and then another country's attire next. This gap isn't about applying various techniques it is, about really understanding individuals. If the policies and garment designers do not know the narratives and experiences that determine what people wear, they will not be able to make decisions. This study seeks to solve these problems.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study draws on existing research to build a model that examines how consumers in Addis Ababa think about and talk about the clothes they wear. The model is not designed to establish causation. Its goal is to understand how people perceive their clothing choices and what drives those choices. Each component of the model connects directly to one or more of the study's research questions, keeping the literature review and the investigation tightly linked.

These individuals discuss their apparels with other individuals. It is very crucial. These individuals share their stories related to the clothing they have worn. Their likes and dislikes are revealed through such discussions. For instance an individual may say that "I wear imported apparels to work because I am serious about my work." How it connects to their work and what people think of them. The study wants to know what people, in Addis Ababa think about clothes and how they fit into their daily lives.

Social context shapes the stories people tell about their clothing. Social Identity Theory explains why some people dress to signal group membership or cultural roots. Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory explains why others see buying local as a moral or patriotic act. At the same time, imported clothing carries its own appeal, often read as a sign of modernity and social advancement. These forces connect directly to the study's core question: how do social relationships and personal experience show up in the narratives Ethiopian consumers build around what they wear.

From a perspective how people think about money affects their stories. Consumers use words, like price, quality and value to describe their decisions suggested by Monroe (1990) and Bilkey and Nes (1982). These ideas change as people go through stages of life and work.

Demographic factors

Demographics like age, gender, income, occupation, and migration history shape how people interpret and talk about their clothing choices. Two people who both prefer imported clothing do so for different reasons. A young woman who moved from a rural area to the city may see imported clothes as a symbol of modernity and ambition. An older male civil servant born in Addis Ababa may associate the same clothes with status and professionalism.

Migration history matters especially in Addis Ababa, where people from across Ethiopia converge. The experience of moving reshapes cultural identity and personal aspirations, and both of these show up in how people talk about what they wear (Gill, 2020; McLeod, 2024; Minbale et al., 2025; Willett et al., 2022).

Context matters too. What people consider appropriate for a wedding, a workday, church, or a casual outing shifts how socio-cultural and economic factors weigh on their decisions. This addresses Research Question 3 and explains why the same person in Addis Ababa's markets dresses differently depending on the occasion.
Someone might wear imported clothes to work on Monday and traditional Tibeb fabric to a family event on Saturday. Each choice responds to different social expectations and identity claims. This differs from the quantitative models discussed in Section 2.4, which look for correlations among purchasing factors. The consumer narratives approach focuses on the reasoning behind choices, taking into account the circumstances, social identities, and experiences that give those choices meaning.

Research Question 4 asks how consumer narratives affect local apparel producers and policymakers. It draws on the combined explanatory power of Country of Origin Theory, Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory, the Price-Quality-Value Framework, and Social Identity Theory. Any policy or design intervention built on this framework needs to go beyond consumer preferences and address the symbolic, moral, economic, and social forces that shape them.

The parts of this chapter when you put them all together have found three things that are necessary for this study to be good. First they have shown that the current research on this topic does not really answer the questions that this study is asking. This is not because nobody has talked about this topic before. Because the ways that people have studied it in the past have not been able to capture the ways that customers think and tell stories about their behavior. Second they have shown that the theoretical frameworks that were chosen for this study are not just random but are actually very suitable for the fashion situation. Each of these frameworks explains a part of how consumers make decisions when they are choosing between traditional and modern clothing. Third they have shown that the conceptual framework is a tool that will actually be used to analyze things than just a summary of what other people have said. It will guide everything that is done in Chapter Three from collecting data to analyzing it to interpreting it. It will make a clear connection, between the work that is being done for this study and the things that other academics have talked about.

After developing this framework, Chapter Three goes further into the methodological decisions required to convert these theoretical commitments into a practical research design capable of generating the consumer narratives that this study seeks to understand.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter presents and explains the methodological decisions that translate the theoretical and conceptual foundations established in Chapter Two into explained research design. The first section of the chapter describes the research methodology and philosophical approach, the phenomenological procedure used to enact the interpretivist paradigm that directs the study. The study area is then identified, and reasons for the three chosen market locations is explained. The sample procedure is then explained, along with the particular standards by which participants are chosen and the methods by which they are selected. The methods for maintaining quality and reliability, the ethical issues that guide the study's conduct all the way through are also included.

3.1 Study Area

The largest urban hub and capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, is the location of this study. With a population of about 5.2 million, Addis Ababa represents Ethiopia's ethnic variety, with Amhara, Oromo, Gurage, and Tigray-Tigrinya tribes all heavily represented (Weldeghebrael, 2021). It also functions as the country's economic, political, and educational center. The amount of this internal migration is significant: according to a national survey carried out by Ethiopia's Central Statistics Agency with assistance from the International Organization for Migration, 42.2 percent of Addis Ababa's total population are migrants, with rural-to-urban migration being the most common type and 2/3 of internal migrants being between the ages of 15 and 39 (CSA & IOM, 2021).

As such, Addis Ababa presents an excellent opportunity to explore the interaction between traditions, modernization, and globalization among consumers' behavior in terms of fashion. In the case of Addis Ababa's clothing industry, it is evident there is a struggle between the two aspects. The second-hand clothing business in Addis Ababa has expanded rapidly, and now offers all income groups access to affordable Western clothing. Buyers of second-hand clothes range from shopkeepers and street vendors to those moving into the city from rural areas and longtime residents in search of lower prices (Endale, 2019).

On the other hand, manufacturers within the traditional clothing industry note their products have been replaced by cheaper clothing imported from China. Consumers opt for cheaper products made in China that mimic traditional designs, although they understand that the handwoven versions are better quality (VOA News, n.d.). US imports, those imported from the Middle East, Asia, and China, dominate the clothing trade market. Local products have to compete directly with the imported branded ones since the customers prefer branded products (Chekol et al., 2022).

Three Addis Ababa marketplaces serve as the primary research sites. Rather than being compared to one another, these places are selected as complimentary points of entry that together provide access to the whole spectrum of consumer narratives and market contexts pertinent to the study.

Shiro Meda is identified as the primary market for traditional Ethiopian dress in Addis Ababa such as handwoven textiles, Tibeb-patterned cloth and ceremonial clothing (Waples Gibson, 1998; Asrat, 2018).It is the most productive place to understand the cultural identity and the heritage features of consumer narratives because it attracts consumers who are actively engaged in the culture of traditional dress and consumers who visit especially to purchase items related to ceremonies.

When you spend time in Merkato, you get to see one of Africa's largest outdoor markets. Noisy, crowded and relentless, domestic and international goods are piled up and hung up over a price range that ranges from barely affordable to moderate comfort. Price consciousness is reflected in the movement of customers, the length of their haggling and what they return. There's a ton of new imports and used apparel, and the competition between the two is visible in every aisle.

Chojnacki and Kaplinsky (2018), Khurana and Tadesse (2019), argue that among all the sites used in this research, Merkato is one where the consumers' reasoning regarding price and quality and the economic rationale behind their narratives on clothes has proven to be the most productive.

The moment you set foot in Shola Market in the Megenagna area, you realize that something unique awaits you there. In comparison to Shero Meda or Merkato, it is more neighborhood-focused, smaller, and calmer. As was directly seen during fieldwork, the majority of the customers are locals who are familiar with the market and move between clothes stalls, traditional crafts, fresh fruits and vegetables, and everyday necessities in a single visit. Shola is a natural place for ordinary rather than ceremonial shopping because of its approachability and accessibility, which the other marketplaces lack. Shola is an ideal location for regular rather than seasonal shopping because of its convenience and accessibility, which the other marketplaces lack. It was especially

useful for our investigation because of such feature. Depending on the occasion they are getting ready for, Shola consumers switch between traditional and modern attire with ease. Observing and hearing this behavior in a laid-back, comfortable environment provided the research with some of the most convincing evidence for Research Question 3.

3.2 Research Design

Every research effort is supported by a set of logical presumptions about the nature of reality and how it may be known, which methodologists refer to as a research paradigm. Being explicit about these presumptions is more than simply a formality; it defines what constitutes a reasonable conclusion, what kinds of inquiries can be addressed, and what kinds of information are deemed important. The paradigm, strategy, and design that serve as the foundation for this study are described in this section along with how they differ from the quantitative approaches that are currently prevalent in the literature on Ethiopian clothing. It also demonstrates why this particular set of methodological and philosophical commitments is the most appropriate for the research questions that are being investigated.

In order to learn more about Addis Ababa consumers' opinions of locally made versus imported apparel, this study uses qualitative research methods. Since clothes wear can be very symbolic in terms of culture, class, and good business sense, rather than mere transactions, a qualitative research design would be fitting in order to uncover the story behind the customers' choices. The objective here is to find out why they choose what they choose rather than perform hypothesis testing or indicator tracking.Theme research into how sociocultural, demographic, and financial concerns impact Ethipians' choices regarding their city clothes becomes much simpler.

The Interpretivist Paradigm

The interpretivist framework, which is the cornerstone of this research, contends that reality in society is not an objective or unchanging framework waiting to be evaluated, but rather a constructed and enriched world that people actively create through their lived experiences, relationships, and norms of communication (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Instead of finding general guidelines or causal relationships, interpretive research aims to comprehend the unique interpretations that certain people, in specific contexts, attach to specific events. This is clearly at odds with the positivist mindset that underpins most quantitative research,

including the surveys and regression models that are prevalent in the Ethiopian clothing literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

Which factors strongly influence the decision between locally produced and imported apparel, according to a positivist study of clothing consumption? The way do customers describe that decision, and what did their story imply about the principles, social factors, and life events that provide it meaning, according to an interpretivist study? Both are legitimate problems, but they require quite different strategies. Since the interpretivist question has not been addressed in the corpus of recent work, this study aims to address it.

Phenomenology as a Method for Research

This study uses phenomenology as its research methodology within the interpretivist paradigm. Husserl developed phenomenological in the early 20th century, and scientists like Heidegger(1927) and Merleau-Ponty (1945) developed it. The architecture of the human experience is the exclusive focus of this tradition. According to Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994), it explores how events manifest in human awareness, how people interpret them internally, and the particular meanings that these experiences have for them. In order to understand what it is like to be a specific person navigating a specific phenomenon in their specific life rather than what is happening in the social world from the perspective of an external observer, phenomenology as a research strategy instructs the researcher to surround their own assumptions as much as possible and pay close attention to the first-person accounts of participants.

Phenomenology in this study refers to treating each participant's clothing practices as lived experiences to be understood on their own terms, shaped by their cultural background, life history, social relationships, sense of self, and aspirations.

This study is different in the field of Ethiopian clothing research since it combines an interpretivist paradigm with a phenomenological approach. All relevant Ethiopian studies of clothing consumption rely on quantitative survey tools, which are meant to measure the strength of preference predictors across large samples, as the empirical review in Chapter Two showed. The methodological gap left by previous studies is filled by this study. The goal is not to generate statistically significant results on the proportion of Addis Ababa consumers who choose imports. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it seeks to generate theoretically transferable insights on how consumers in a particular, well-documented context create, narrate, and justify their clothing

choices. These insights can then be applied to other contexts that have similar characteristics. Because each of the four research questions in this study asks regarding a story, meaning, situation, or implication all of which cannot be sufficiently addressed by a questionnaire or a regression coefficient making this approach is more suitable for these questions.

3.3 Research Approach

The phenomenological strategy mentioned above directly guides the research methodology used in this study. By viewing the world through the eyes of lived experience, phenomenological research treats meaning as something that participants create rather than something that researchers find. Phenomenology is one of the most suitable qualitative approaches, according to Creswell (2013), when the researcher wants to better understand the basic elements of a common human experience, in this case, the experience of navigating both traditional and modern apparel in a rapidly globalizing urban setting. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological research requires bracketing, which is the methodical effort of the researcher to put aside their presumptions and interpretations in order to be open to the meanings that come from participant narratives.

In this study, bracketing is implemented by keeping a journal of reflection during fieldwork and analysis, where the researcher records and challenges their own presumptions, responses, and interpretive tendencies as they develop.

By focusing on the narrative structures, rhetorical devices, and situational logics found in individual narratives rather than counting the number of people who brought up a specific theme, research favors significance over frequency. Quality criteria are not criteria for research validity and reliability, which are qualitative, but those for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as recommended by Lincoln & Guba (1985). All of these make sure that the findings drawn from the study will have a deep contextual understanding, comprehensiveness, and relevance to the research problems under investigation.

3.4 Sampling Strategy

The main purpose of this study is to gain an insight into the experiences of the people. Therefore, it should be noted that the aim of this research is not obtaining a sample representing the population of Addis Ababa, but rather, gaining insights from the participants on the topic under discussion. The researcher aims at conducting interviews and having discussions with people capable of providing their perceptions regarding the mixing of the two types of clothing mentioned. Thus, this study requires interviewing those people whose life experience, social relations and interaction with the clothes can offer diversity in their attitudes towards the issue.

Purposive Sampling

However, during the process of sampling, there is more than just a hope that everything will turn out well. We decide who is included in our research and who is excluded. We pick people because of what they can bring to the study like their experiences and viewpoints. We also think about the circumstances of their lives. This is important because the goal of qualitative and interpretivist research is not to use statistics to make statements, about a whole population. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) call this the natural sampling technique. The main goal is to get a deep understanding of things, which is called theoretical richness. We want to talk to people who have stories to tell so we can get a lot of different perspectives and really understand what is going on. Purposeful sampling helps us do this by letting us choose people who can really contribute to the study and purposeful sampling is what makes this possible.

We wanted to make sure the people in our study were chosen for a reason. So we picked them based on a things. We looked at what kind of clothes they like to wear. Clothes from their own culture or clothes that are popular in other countries. We wanted to make sure we did not just get people who like the type of clothes. We also wanted people of ages because older and younger people have different relationships with clothes.. We wanted men and women because they have different ideas about what they should wear. We chose people with amounts of money too because that affects what clothes they can buy.. We picked people who moved to Addis Ababa from other places because moving to a new city can change the way you think about clothes. The goal was to get a group of people that was big enough to show all the ways that people, in Addis Ababa think and talk about clothes and how they decide what to wear. In order to achieve maximum variation across the demographic moderators identified in the conceptual framework, purposeful sampling

decisions in this study are criterion-based. Participants must meet specific screening conditions related to their active engagement with both locally produced and imported clothing.

Purposive sampling is implemented through a criterion-based screening and within each market site. Initial contact with potential participants is made by the researcher during observation periods at each of the three market sites, with a brief explanation of the study's purpose and an invitation to participate. Participants who express interest are screened using three questions prepared to check that they have relevant experience with both locally produced and imported clothing:

1. Over the past three months, have you purchased or considered purchasing both locally made and imported clothing?
2. Do you shop at more than one type of clothing market in Addis Ababa i.e: for example, both traditional textile markets and Modern apparel markets?
3. Would you be willing to talk with me for about an hour about your experiences with clothing?

Only individuals who answer the first two questions strongly and agree to the third proceed to full participation.

Sample Size

In this study, topic(thematic) saturation is used instead of a fixed number determines the sample size.

Thematic Saturation

When no new themes, patterns, or conceptually important information emerges from further interviews, or observations, the researcher can be fairly certain that further data collection would result in diminishing analytical returns. This is known as thematic saturation. Since its development in the setting of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the idea has been widely accepted as the standard criterion for selecting an appropriate sample size throughout qualitative research traditions (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017).

In this study, the end of data collection is defined by topic saturation rather than a fixed sample size, with a minimum of 30 participants established as the threshold below which saturation is unlikely to be attained based on the methodological literature. This study focuses on the latter, deeper form of saturation because of its interpretive and narrative focus. Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi (2017) distinguish between code saturation, which is the point at which no new codes emerge, and meaning saturation, which is the point at which the entire range of meanings associated with existing codes has been exhausted.

Selection Criteria

Participants are selected purposively to ensure maximum variation across the following dimensions, which correspond directly to the demographic moderators identified in the study's conceptual framework.

Age diversity is focused across three general generational groups: younger consumers, who are typically in their twenties; middle-aged consumers, who are typically in their thirties and forties; and older consumers, who are typically in their fifties and above, in order to reflect the widely acknowledged generational differences in clothing orientation found by Agyeman et al. (2014) and Barrera-Verdugo and Villarroel (2022). Age categories are estimated and self-reported by participants rather than verified by documentation.
In order to achieve a reasonable balance between male and female participants given the gender-differentiated apparel attitudes documented by Kumar and Kim (2014), gender diversity is sought by aggressively recruiting both men and women across all three market sites.

For both practical and conceptual reasons, occupation was given precedence over income as a factor of variation. In practical terms, people will tell you their occupation honestly and directly throughout a conversation. Income is more difficult to verify, more sensitive, and more likely to be misreported. From a conceptual standpoint, your actions have greater narrative significance in Ethiopia than your income. Being a student, an informal trader, a government employee, a private sector worker, a self-employed artisan, or a homemaker all have an impact on the social settings you encounter, the dress codes you must adhere to, and the everyday clothing choices you must make in ways that an income bracket cannot fully account for. So when I started each interview I

would ask the person what they do for a living. This is a way to begin a conversation. Then I would ask them about the clothes they wear. This helps the conversation flow . The people I chose to talk to were from backgrounds. I wanted to learn about their experiences when they moved to Addis Ababa from parts of Ethiopia. Moving to a city is not just about changing where you live. It is also about changing how you dress and how you see yourself. When you come from a culture you have to get used to the way people live in Addis Ababa. You have to learn about the citys pace and what people think is beautiful. You also have to figure out how to balance your culture with your new life.

I talked to people who were born and raised in Addis Ababa and people who just moved there. I even talked to people who moved to Addis Ababa from parts of Ethiopia. Clothing is a part of who we are and I wanted to hear all the different stories, about clothes and how they relate to Addis Ababa and the people who live there. To make sure the sample did not tilt toward the type of consumer concentrated in any single market environment, participants were drawn from all three sites: Shero Meda, Merkato, and Shola.

The selection criteria Purposefully do not include s any attempt to pre categorize participants by their presumed cultural orientation toward traditional versus imported clothing, or by estimated income level. Cultural orientation toward clothing is itself one of the phenomena this study seeks to investigate. It cannot be evaluated before an interview, and trying to screen for it would bring bias into the sample and could overlook the most analytically interesting instances of varying opinions and shifting. The goal is to select participants who can provide narrative accounts, not to construct a demographically proportional representation of the Addis Ababa population.

3.5 Data Collection

This study employs three qualitative data collection methods: life-history interviews, and non-participant observation are used in combination to ensure that consumer clothing narratives are captured across multiple dimensions of experience. No single method is sufficient on its own: life-history interviews access biographical and temporal depth; accesses sensory, embodied, and material dimensions; and observation accesses the behavioral and environmental context within which narratives are enacted. Together, they constitute a triangulated, multi-method approach aligned with the interpretivist paradigm and phenomenological design.

Life-History Interviews

In a life-history interview, the researcher uses open-ended questions to encourage deep, narrative-structured responses rather than short, factual answers. In regard to a certain phenomenon in this example, clothing participants are asked to describe significant events, pivotal moments, and formative moments in their lives. The method is based on the phenomenological tradition in consumer research that Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) established. The people showed how the long stories of our lives can tell us about how we buy things over time and how our lives affect what we buy. It is like our lives are a book and the things we buy are a part of that book. The book is written as we grow up and things happen to us like our family and where we come from and the jobs we have. These things help make us who we are. They help us decide what we like to buy. The people said that it is not about what we buy now but, about all the things that happened to us that made us want to buy those things. Extended life-history accounts can reveal the biographical dimension of consumption and this is what the people demonstrated.

The main way we collected information for this study was by doing life history interviews. We started each interview with a question. We asked people to tell us about their life and clothes. We wanted them to start with the clothes they could remember and go all the way to the present. From there the person being interviewed was in charge of the conversation. We had a list of questions that we could look at if we needed to. We did not read from it like a script. If someone started talking about something that seemed important we let them keep going even if it was not what we had planned to ask about. We did life history interviews because we wanted to hear peoples stories, about clothes and their life. Life history interviews were a way to do this. Instead of forcing a framework on them from the outside, the objective was to learn how people spontaneously arranged their clothing tales. Depending on the participant's preferred language, either Amharic or English were used for the interviews. Each session was audio recorded with the participant's full and informed consent. To safeguard participant confidentiality from the outset, recordings were moved to encrypted storage right after each session and given an anonymized participant ID before any transcription work started.

Non-Participant Observation

A methodical approach to gathering qualitative data, non-participant observation involves the researcher observing social interactions, environmental conditions, and naturally occurring behavior in a real-world situation without actively taking part in the events under observation. The method has a long history of being used to document the differences between people's declared and actual behaviors in anthropological and consumer research traditions. Because post-hoc explanations and socially acceptable responses can distort survey and interview data, this distinction is particularly crucial in consumer research (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Non-participant observation is used in this study at three market locations: Shero Meda, Merkato, and Shola.

Consumer behavior, social interactions between buyers and sellers, clothes arrangement and presentation, and symbolic techniques used to evaluate and select apparel are all meticulously documented by the researcher.In addition to signaling the researcher to behavioral patterns that participants might not have thought to mention in interviews, such as how customers physically handle clothing or react to price tags and labels, observation data primarily serves a triangulation function by offering an independent source of contextual evidence against which interview and focus group narratives can be checked and enriched.

Alongside the interviews, observation sessions were carried out regularly at all three market sites throughout the data collection period. Meaning It was non-participant: the researcher was present, watching, and taking note, but not joining conversations, entering negotiations, or drawing attention to the observation process. What was being watched included how consumers moved through the market, how they physically handled garments before deciding whether to engage further, how buyers and sellers interacted, how clothing was arranged and displayed, and the small symbolic gestures people used to evaluate what they were looking at, checking fabric between fingers, holding items against the body, reading labels, putting things back without a word. The observation data was not meant to be used by itself.

The main goal of the observation data was to help the study by giving it another way to look at peoples behavior and the context in which they made choices. This other way of looking at things was called triangulation. The observation data and the interview data were used together to check what the participants said about their wardrobe choices. The observation data helped to make the participant descriptions more accurate. It also helped to show things that were not immediately

apparent. Sometimes the observation data showed that what the participants said was not entirely correct. The observation data was useful, for finding patterns that people do not usually talk about when asked about what they wear. The observation data and the interview data were used together to get an understanding of the participants and their wardrobe choices.

3.6 Methods of Data Analysis

Thematic analysis and narrative analysis, two complimentary techniques that together address the content and structure of consumer apparel narratives, are used to analyze the qualitative data collected from life-history interviews, observation sessions, and observations.

Data Handling

All audio recordings are transcribed strictly and translated into English where interviews were conducted in Amharic, with translations checked by a bilingual research colleague for accuracy. Transcripts, field notes, are stored in password-protected files on an encrypted device, assigned anonymized participant IDs, and backed up to a secure cloud locationThe analytical process proceeds through two linked phases.

Phase One: Thematic Coding

Braun and Clarke (2006) developed a six-phase approach for thematic coding, which includes familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes; generation of initial codes by identifying meaningful units of text; searching for themes by grouping related codes; reviewing and refining themes against the entire dataset; clearly defining and naming themes; and producing the final analysis. An inductive-deductive technique is used, which means that while certain codes are mapped onto the socio-cultural, economic, demographic, and situational conceptual framework domains developed in Chapter Two, others are derived directly from the data without any prior theoretical anticipation.

Eventually, a codebook is created and applied uniformly to every transcript. In addition to capturing the substantive substance of participants' narratives, codes also record their metaphors,

situational norms, rhetorical devices, and evaluative language, all of which function as the narrative building blocks from which themes are developed.

Phase Two: Narrative Analysis

The second phase of analysis turned to the life-history interview transcripts and asked a different kind of question. However, it is not only the content of the narratives but also the form in which the narratives were told, and what this form says about how meaning is constructed. This was precisely what narrative analysis involved, based on the models developed by Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989), as well as Thompson (1997). The essence of the narrative paradigm lies in analyzing the structural aspects of narratives. In other words, this approach goes beyond simply identifying patterns within the data collected. It looks at where they set up milestones. It looks at how they resolve conflicts. It looks at what's important to them and what makes them feel certain ways at different moments.

The narrative approach also looks at what people say about themselves. It looks at how people compare themselves to others. It looks at how people show themselves as a type of person by the choices they make. For example when a participant says "I used to wear clothing every day but then I got my first office job and everything changed" they are not just saying they changed what they wear. The narrative approach looks at how people like the participant're telling a story about who they were before and who they became after. They are explaining why this change happened and why it makes sense to them. The participant is telling a story, about their life and the narrative approach is looking at this story. Thematic coding captures that a change happened. Narrative analysis asks what that change meant to the person living it, and how the story they tell about it shapes the choices they make today.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance measures include double coding of a selection of transcripts by the researcher and a peer reviewer, with discrepancies discussed and resolved through dialogue; periodic analytic memos in which the researcher reflects on emerging interpretations and their relationship to the data also peer debriefing sessions with the research supervisor at key stages of the analysis; and

member validation, in which a selection of preliminary findings are shared with a small number of participants to check whether the interpretations resonate with their experience.

Analytical Tools and Rigor

Manual coding is the primary analytical tool, ensuring close and sustained engagement with the data. Qualitative data analysis software may be used to organize and manage codes and themes where the volume of data makes manual tracking unwieldy. Trustworthiness is established following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility through member checking, prolonged engagement, and triangulation; transferability through thick description of the research context and participants; dependability through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting all analytical decisions; and confirmability through the researcher's reflection journal, which documents and interrogates the assumptions and positionalities that the researcher brings to interpretation throughout the study.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Throughout each phase of this study, from initial contact with participants to the storage of information and dissemination of findings, ethics is of utmost importance. Considering the nature of the qualitative study, which includes prolonged, personal interaction with participants and recording of life stories that can encompass very sensitive aspects of their identities, ambitions, and experiences, great emphasis is placed on protecting their ethical, dignified, and private status throughout the entire process.

Informed Consent

Before any data collection begins, participants are fully informed in plain, accessible language and in their preferred language of the study's purpose, methods, expected duration, potential benefits. Written consent is sought from participants who are literate; oral consent, recorded on audio, is sought from participants who prefer not to sign a form. Consent is entirely voluntary and participants are clearly told that they may withdraw from the study at any time, and for any reason, without any negative consequence to their relationship with the researcher or their access to the markets where data collection takes place.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

All personal identifiers such as names, specific workplaces, residential addresses, and any other information that could link data to a specific individual are removed from transcripts, field notes, and at the point of transcription. Pseudonyms are assigned to all participants and used exclusively in all reporting, presentations, and publications. Data are stored securely on encrypted devices and are accessible only to the researcher and the research supervisor.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary. No financial incentives or material inducements are offered that could unduly influence a person's decision to participate. Participants are reminded at the beginning of each data collection session that their participation is voluntary and that they may stop, skip any question, or withdraw at any time without explanation.

Respect for Cultural Context

Data collection is conducted with full respect for the cultural norms, social practices, and market customs of each research site. The researcher takes care not to disrupt market activities, to dress and behave in ways that are culturally appropriate to each setting, and to be sensitive to the social dynamics including gender dynamics that govern interaction in each market context.

Researcher Reflexivity

Throughout the study, the researcher keeps a reflexive notebook in which they record their own presumptions, feelings, and interpretive inclinations as they appear throughout fieldwork and analysis. This method guarantees that interpretations stay based on participant voices and experiences rather than the researcher's presumptions, which is in line with the phenomenological tradition of bracketing discussed in Section 3.1. Additionally, the journal is a crucial part of the confirmability audit trail for the study.

Trustworthiness

In quantitative research, validity and reliability determine whether a study holds up. In qualitative research, the equivalent concept is trustworthiness, which asks whether findings can be believed and relied upon. Lincoln and Guba (1985) built a framework around this question, organized around four criteria.

Credibility asks whether the findings accurately reflect what participants experienced and thought. Transferability asks whether someone in a similar context could apply the findings, and whether the study provides enough detail to make that possible.

Trustworthiness is important, for research and credibility and transferability are part of this. Dependability asks whether the research process was consistent and stable enough that another researcher following the same path would arrive at broadly comparable conclusions. Confirmability asks whether the findings are grounded in participant accounts rather than in the researcher's own assumptions and inclinations, and whether there is enough of an audit trail to demonstrate that. These four criteria shaped every quality assurance decision made in this study, from how field notes were kept to how emerging interpretations were challenged and checked.

A combination of member checking with a sample of participants, extended interaction with the three market sites, triangulation across interview, and observation data, peer debriefing with the research supervisor, and keeping track of a reflective diary in which the researcher records and challenges their own presumptions throughout the fieldwork and analysis process are used in this study to establish trustworthiness.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents and analyses data collected through life-history interviews with 30 participants in three market sites in Addis Ababa; Shero Meda, Merkato and Shola. The chapter is divided into five sections. First it introduces the participants, so that we know who was interviewed, and how they represent the diversity the study wished for. Second, it outlines the main thematic findings that arose from inductive and deductive coding of interview transcripts. Third, it tracks the story paths of each individual participant, showing how identity constructions, social settings, and life events influence clothing stories across time. Fourth, it disucsses these findings within the theoretical frameworks developed in Chapter Two.

The analysis is based on the two-phase approach described in Chapter Three. Repeated codes across transcripts were identified using thematic coding, and were clustered into themes. Thematic coding was conducted according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. Narrative analysis of individual accounts was used to identify plot structures, turning points, and rhetorical devices. Throughout, the names of participants are replaced with assigned codes. All Amharic terms are given in their original form, with a brief explanation in context at first mention.

4.1 Profile of Participants

Thirty interviewees were found from the three market sites. The sample satisfied the maximum variation criteria, as detailed in the sampling strategy. The age range was from 19 to 60 years, and the generational groupings ranged from younger consumers (19 to 28 years), middle-aged consumers (29 to 45 years), and older consumers (46 to 60 years). Seventeen participants were female and thirteen male. Jobs included nursing, banking, government work, law, owning a restaurant, retail and clothes sales, driving, auditing, teaching, event organizing and student life, and several participants were looking for jobs at the time of interview. Birthplaces included Addis Ababa and Debre Markos, Debrebirhan, Hawassa, Harar, Gambella, Semen Wollo, Fiche, Bale, Shire, Eastern Gojam and Debre Tsige, thereby offering a narrative sample of both lifelong urban dwellers and migrants from across many parts of Ethiopia.

The number of years the participants live in Addis Ababa ranged from 2 years (Code 202) up to life long (Codes 001, 005, 101 etc.). In order to analyze the different perceptions of the participants who migrated from different cultural backgrounds to the city and who have been born and grew up in Addis Ababa in traditional clothes, migration is considered as a narrative moderator in the conceptual framework and therefore not as a background variable.

Participants were selected from all three markets and represented all the different positions regarding clothing that the study had anticipated: those that in one way or another identified with traditional dress, those that wore most imported clothes and those that oscillated between the two depending on the circumstances (occasion, company, etc.) and their own history.

Table 1: Profile Summary Participant

Code	Age	Gender	Place of Birth	Years in A.A.	Occupation
Code 001	24	F	Addis Ababa	24	Psychologist
Code 002	45	F	Addis Ababa	45	Gov't Worker
Code 003	51	F	Fiche/Selale	47	Local Merchant
Code 004	33	F	Debre Tsige/Selale	10	Gov't Worker
Code 005	24	M	Addis Ababa	24	Barista
Code 101	20	M	Addis Ababa	20	Student/Tour Guide
Code 112	37	M	Semen Wollo	18	Museum Worker
Code 113	50	M	Addis Ababa	40	Auditor
Code 201	29	M	Gambella	5	Law Student
Code 202	19	F	Harar	2	Private Trading
Code 203	22	F	Addis Ababa	22	Job-seeker
Code 204	24	F	Debre Markos	9	Cloth Sales
Code 205	52	M	S. Wollo	45	Driver
Code 206	19	F	Merkato, Addis Ababa	19	Job-seeker

Code 207	28	M	Addis Ababa	28	Video Editor
Code 301	20	F	Addis Ababa	20	Nursing Student
Code 302	24	F	Adama	6	Student/NGO Employee
Code 305	29	M	Addis Ababa	29	Construction
Code 306	25	M	E. Gojam/Enemay	7	Banker
Code 308	48	F	Hawassa	38	Housewife
Code 309	31	M	Addis Ababa	31	Salesperson
Code 310	28	F	Bale	6	Accountant
Code 313	54	F	Debrebirhan	49	Marketing
Code 401	39	F	Addis Ababa	39	Gov't Worker
Code 402	43	F	Derra/Semen Shoa	18	Business Owner
Code 403	60	M	Addis Ababa	40	Retired
Code 404	39	F	Debrebirhan	32	Event Organizer
Code 405	23	M	Addis Ababa	23	Job-seeker
Code 406	38	M	Shire	12	Restaurant Owner
Code 407	48	F	Bale	26	Cashier

4.1 Thematic Findings

Five main topics surfaced during the coding process. Each subject is described here, along with participant accounts that bolster it.

Wearing traditional clothes as a cultural anchor

Research Question 1, which explores how Addis Ababa consumers explain the meanings of traditional and modern clothing in their day-to-day lives, is directly addressed by this theme. This information highlights how people perceive their traditions and culture through their traditional dress and explains why such perceptions continue even in cases where such dresses are not commonly worn.

The Habesha kemis, a traditional white dress for women, the netela, a handwoven shawl, and Tibeb-patterned fabric, a handwoven cloth with vibrant geometric borders, all carried significant symbolic weight that almost all participants described as being different from the emotional register of imported clothing. Identity, culture, pride, Ethiopianism, and likeness were the most often used terms by participants.

"Traditional clothing expresses Ethiopianism and my identity," stated by Code 003, a 51-year-old Fiche native. Long before I relocated to Addis Ababa, I understood that concept. According to Code 112, a 37-year-old man from Semen Wollo, traditional clothing symbolizes "society resemblance," a relationship between the item and the group identity of its wearers. Hawassa housewife Code 308, 48, stated: "I feel proud when I wear it. Code 313 and Code 404, both from Debrebirhan and both in professional jobs, nearly exactly defined traditional clothing as "expressing ethnic resemblance and promoting culture." It also promotes the nation and demonstrates the beauty of what indigenous sewers can do. People from various places, ages, and professions grabbed for the same terms, indicating that this is a shared cultural concept rather than a personal perspective.

Participants' placement of traditional attire inside particular events rather than seeing it as daily wear was similarly constant. Festivals where traditional clothing was either a requirement or very appropriate included weddings, Epiphany, Timket, Meskel, Orthodox church services, family get-togethers, baptisms, and Nations and Nationalities Day. "I choose traditional dress for Epiphany and formal exhibitions," stated Code 002, a 45-year-old government employee. I wear imported

clothes for the majority of other occasions since traditional attire necessitates a certain level of caution, but imported apparel does not." Code 004, a 33-year-old Debre Tsige government employee, claimed that she wore Tibeb only on national holidays and weddings: "Boldness (uniqueness) is given." That's what those situations require.

It's critical to comprehend this thoroughly. The participants did not claim that traditional attire is outdated or unimportant. They were arguing that it belongs to particular social moments and that the proper placement of those times determines its significance. Because they wear traditional clothing sparingly, it retains its worth in their eyes. One aspect of its meaning retention is its selectivity.

Imported and Modern Clothing as Social Currency

By demonstrating how participants create meaning around the contrasting register of contemporary and imported apparel, this subject also responds to Research Question 1 and expands the narrative picture. The entire symbolic environment that was the subject of Research Question 1 is mapped by Themes One and Two taken together.

The vocabulary of quality, professionalism, and social positioning was used to describe modern and imported clothing, whereas the language of culture and ritual was used to describe traditional clothing. These two clothes registers were not considered competitive by the participants. The majority viewed them as having completely different roles in their lives.

The most common justification for selecting imported apparel over non-traditional, locally made alternatives was quality. "I chose the import because of the cotton quality," stated Code 001, a 24-year-old psychotherapist from Addis Ababa. That's what I search for. "I go for imported because of quality and durability," stated Code 113, a 50-year-old auditor. However, Code 204, Code 302, Code 309, Code 310, and Code 407 all put quality at the core of their justifications for selecting imports because I have observed a real improvement in the local market over time.

An additional layer was added by the professional context. Code 306, a 25-year-old banker from Eastern Gojam, stated that he wore "a suit without a coat, aligned with my organization's code of conduct" for work every day and saved traditional attire for religious activities and customer week. Code 204, a 24-year-old Debre Markos clothes salesperson emphasized that dressing professionally is not only a rule she abides by but also a tool she employs: "Putting on the right clothes helps the clients respect me with their money." Code 313 a marketing specialist often

worked with people from countries. So she wore a suit dress that made her look professional and put together. She said: "I need to look professional and make sense at the time." For people the clothes they wear are not just about looking good they also mean something more. Code 206 is a 19-year- dancer who is looking for a job and her mom is a fashion designer. She said: "When I think of clothes I think of style being cool and the feeling I get when I take pictures with my friends." Wearing clothes from a known brand makes people think you are important. Code 101 is a 20-year- tour guide and student. He said: "I wear white and silver clothes when I am working.". When he is, at home he can wear whatever he wants. He likes to plan what he wears when he goes out in public. This shows that he thinks carefully about what he wears and it is not just random.

Situational Rules Governing Dress

Research Question 3, which explores whether social circumstances consumers choose traditional or modern clothes in and why, is addressed by this theme. The information here shifts from the definition of clothes to the proper and inappropriate times and locations for each type of clothing. The existence of what the conceptual framework refers to as situational rules was one of the dataset's most consistent findings. These are common normative expectations regarding what kind of attire is appropriate for a given social setting. These are not individual tastes. Participants acknowledged and generally accepted these social responsibilities as a part of being a part of their communities.

Funerals were the subject of the most common rule. Almost all of the participants stated that they would not attend a funeral dressed traditionally. According to Code 002, a 45-year-old government employee, "You are low in energy at a funeral." Wearing traditional clothing there would be inappropriate since it brings a higher cultural and ceremonial atmosphere that is simply inappropriate for the occasion. Without prompting one another, Codes 005, 113, 203, 207, 301, 405, and 403 all verified the same standard. Aesthetics are not the main focus of the funeral rule. It is about avoiding adding festive symbolic weight to a grief-defined zone.

A complementary but opposing regulation emerged in the workplace. According to Code 003, a 51-year-old Selale local businessman, "Traditional dress gets dirty quickly at work and needs frequent laundering." It is not feasible. Code 305, a 29-year-old construction worker, was straightforward: "Non-traditional attire is functionally required for my line of work." There isn't a choice.

The largest drive in the opposite direction, toward traditional attire, came from religious holidays and rituals. Orthodox church events, Timket, Meskel, and epiphanies were frequently cited as instances that demanded or highly justified traditional clothing. Code 313 a marketing specialist often worked with people from countries so she would wear a suit dress. She said: "I need to look professional and also be clear about what I mean at the time." There is a 37-year- woman named Code 112 who lives in Semen Wollo. She said: "When we go to Orthodox church celebrations we have to wear clothes. That is what we do." A 25-year-old banker from Gojam named Code 306 thinks that certain clothes are for events like church weddings, the Kurban and the Maskel celebration. He said: "We have to wear clothes for these spiritual events. It helps me connect with what the event means." Code 207 wears clothes on special days even though he does not wear them every day. He said: "I wear them on holidays and that is all." When people say "That is how it is" it shows that they follow these rules on special occasions even if they do not really care about traditional clothes in their daily life.

Codes 313, 112, 306, and 207 all recognize the importance of wearing traditional attire for occasions. This is because this is what is done on such occasions. The fact that such principles appear consistently within the sample gives them greater analytical value. Age, income level, occupation, and place of origin were similar among them. It appears that the social structure determining whether one wears traditional or modern clothing is common among everyone, acting more as norms and expectations which they fulfill rather than personal preferences.

While observing everything that was happening at all three markets, I realized something about what people were wearing. People do not go to the market to look around and then decide what they want to buy. They already know what they are looking for before they get there. At Shero Meda market people walk to the traditional and handwoven sections they do not even look at anything else. It is different at Merkato and Shola markets, where people do not stop at the stalls they just keep walking through the sections, with modern and imported clothes. Few people go from one section to the other in one visit. This is something to think about. It shows that the market does not help people decide between modern clothes. This decision is made before they even leave their house they think about the person they want to be the event they are going to and what they need to wear for that. They just go to the market to buy what they already know they need based on what's expected of them.

Life Turning Points and Narrative Restructuring

Research Question 2, which explores what life experiences, social connections, and personal histories show up in consumer apparel narratives, is addressed by this theme. The turning points participants described are the biographical raw material through which those narratives were built and rebuilt over time.

A recurring feature of the life-history interviews was that participants did not describe their clothing choices as stable preferences. They described them as the product of specific events that changed how they thought about what to wear. These turning points were not dramatic in every case. But they were consistent, and they were the moments where participants' clothing narratives shifted direction.

Migration to Addis Ababa was the most commonly mentioned turning point among participants who came from other parts of Ethiopia. Code 003 said simply: "My clothing style changed when I arrived in the city. The city has its own expectations and you adjust to them." Code 112, a 37-year-old man from Semen Wollo, described growing up wearing a kumta, a type of traditional short covering common in rural northern Ethiopia, before shifting to jeans and urban clothing: "When I moved to Addis Ababa and started formal schooling, the kumta stopped making sense. I put on jeans. It was a choice. The city needed it. Code 306 a 25-year- banker from Gojam talked about getting to Addis Ababa University. He found it weird that there were no school uniforms. He said, "There was no rule on what to wear. I had options for a bit. Then my job in banking gave me a way to dress." For these people the city was like a push. It changed what clothes meant and what they said about you.

Getting a job worked in a way. Code 204 a 24-year-old from Debre Markos said moving from church to job interviews was a change. He said, "I went from dressing for church to dressing for a bank interview. It felt like a change, to a new job, not a problem." Code 305 a 29-year- construction worker was not so sure. He said, "When I started working for the organization I changed to a suit and shirt. Although it's not my own personal style, I took it on as a requirement. You dress according to what organization you represent. The 50-year-old auditor Code 113 explained what he learned from studying overseas: "Every office worker wore a suit and tie." I returned to Addis

Ababa with that knowledge. While dressing professionally, it's important to show respect for both your work and those around you.

Other significant events were more intimate. After delivering birth to her first child, Code 308, a 48-year-old housewife from Hawassa, started dressing in wide, comfortable clothes, claiming both comfort and assistance from her family. Code 206, a 19-year-old job seeker, demonstrated how who you spending time with affects how you represent oneself by altering her style as she started dating and switched friend groups. Code 203, a 22-year-old job seeker, modified her wardrobe selections in response to changes in her body weight and the hotter climate of Bahir Dar while attending university. These cases highlight the fact that the concept of ideology is not the only basis on which the narratives concerning fashion are built. Similar to the body, weather, social context, occupation, city, and ritual, these narratives are built out of experience.

The Discrepancy between the Consumers' Patriotic Intent and Actual Behavior

This topic actually covers Research Question 4 and tries to understand how consumer stories matter to those who produce clothing locally and regulate clothing industry. At the same time, this research question is associated with the primary objective of studying how sensitive approach of designers, shopkeepers and lawmakers results in their product and discourse. The major issue that emerges here is the gap between consumers' intentions and actual behavior. This is what any solution would have to fix. The information we have shows this problem clearly. It is the issue that local clothing makers and policymakers need to think about.

The thing that really stood out from the interviews was that people did not usually say they were worried about something even when it was clearly a problem. Out of the thirty people who were interviewed twenty-six said they believed that buying clothes made in Ethiopia would help the country. Most of these people also said that this idea did not actually change what they bought.

People were not just not caring about this issue. They thought about it a lot. They really believed that it was important to buy things made in their country.. They also said that the quality of these products was not as good which made buying them feel like a sacrifice rather, than just a normal decision. One person, Code 001 said "I think buying products helps the nation.". They also said that when they were actually shopping the right products were not available because they were not

good enough. The same thing was said by people with the codes 002 004 101 202 203 207 301 309 and 402. They all thought that buying clothes was a good idea but the clothes themselves were not good enough.

The pricing issue was articulated by Code 207, a 28-year-old Addis Ababa video editor: "Local clothing is priced at roughly the same level as imported goods." However, in terms of comfort, cloth quality, and sewing quality, it falls short of imports. There is no financial justification for selecting local if they are same priced yet perform better when imported. I think it's patriotic to buy locally, but that doesn't help me when I'm making decisions." For him, the price signal provides no direction; if the cost of local and imported clothing is same but the performance of the imported apparel is superior, there is no financial justification for choosing the local. Although it appears in his story, the ethnocentric moral argument that purchasing locally is patriotic does not resolve that gap.

Another point of view was given by a 52-year- driver from South Wollo, Code 205. He said, "Local goods are sometimes more expensive than imports. I think that's not right. The cost goes against my wish to support producers. As one customer I can't do anything about it."

Time spent at Shola and Merkato showed something that interviews alone couldn't fully convey. When you walk around areas that sell local items it's hard to ignore a pattern. The clothes look similar. There aren't colors. The designs are repeated. There are clear signs that the clothes are from Ethiopia like special prints or design elements that make you think of Ethiopian culture.

When you look at the imported section the contrast is clear. There are colors, more variety and more differences between each item. This shows a problem that people kept mentioning. It's not about the fabric and stitching. Modern local clothes also don't have a style. They are in a spot because they are not traditional enough to have cultural meaning, not stylish enough to compete with imports and not cheap enough to win on price alone. There isn't much to interest a customer who already has doubts, about the market.

The people who actually bought something because of their views were important to look at. When it came to buying clothes some people mentioned it in Codes 113, 201 302 305 310 313, 404 and 407. These people were not necessarily richer or more loyal to their country. Sometimes buying clothes was what people expected them to do or it meant something to them personally so they chose local clothes over better quality clothes. This happened on occasions like exhibitions, national events, customer weeks or holiday seasons. This is important to think about because when people are buying for a reason it is easier for them to choose local clothes even if they are not the best quality. The data, in this chapter answers each of the four questions of the study and it uses specific stories to make its points.

Traditional apparels enable customers in Addis Ababa to express their identities, ethnic affiliations and relation to ceremonies. Quality, credibility, and social status are terms used to explain imported apparels. These definitions vary according to the context. Individuals. Adjust themselves according to their role in social interaction and requirements of the specific context. Several critical life events appear to affect peoples perception of apparels. Such events include migration, employment, marriage, parenthood, conversion to religion, and forming new social relations.

These events make individuals consider the costs and sentimental significance of their clothing. Social rules guide appropriate apparel in specific contexts. At funerals, individuals wear clothes. On religious occasions, people wear traditional dresses. Foreign apparels are preferred by individuals at workplaces. Individuals feel obligated to wear particular apparels at marriages. Social rules about clothing influence the choice of apparels to a greater extent than financial capability and personal tastes. A number of crucial aspects emerge when individuals discuss purchasing apparels. Local apparels must improve their design and become attractive. Prices of local apparels ought to be affordable to enable their competitiveness with imported apparels. Traditional apparels should undergo designs that will result in apparels which are light and comfortable to wear.

4.2 Narrative Patterns Across Participants

Three more general story patterns emerged regularly throughout the dataset in addition to the five themes. These are not only recurrent themes. These are the frameworks that participants used to arrange their clothing narratives.

The first is the dual clothing logic, which the data consistently demonstrated. The majority of interviewees talked about keeping two unique clothing registers. One is for daily and work life: trendy styles, jeans, business suits, and apparel from abroad. The other is for ceremonial and cultural events: netela, Habesha kemis, traditional Ethiopian clothing, and clothing with Tibeb patterns. These two registers were perceived as complementing rather than antagonistic.

The transition between them was easy, guided by rules, and taken for granted. Code 113, a 50-year-old auditor, dressed traditionally at Epiphany, wore a suit to work, and jeans on the weekends. Code 308, a 48-year-old housewife from Hawassa dressed comfortably at home in light clothing, at work in a wide dress, and at weddings in a shufon, a kind of exquisite dress or wrapper used during celebrations.

Code 306, a 25-year-old Gojam banker, alternated between his professional suit, spiritual occasion wear, and informal weekend attire without encountering any conflicts. The decision to wear two different outfits is not a compromise. It is a useful and identity-consistent method that enables people to honor several social roles at once.

The second type, which is most prevalent among younger people and those with lower incomes, is the ambition constraint story (what they desire and what limits them). Despite actual financial and access constraints, these individuals talked of desiring to wear specific clothes, especially those connected to well-known brands or worldwide fashion trends. To them, dressing was not only a pragmatic choice but an activity that could serve as a tool of social interaction that they were trying to accomplish within the limits of possibility. Code 206, a 19-year-old jobseeker in Addis Ababa, revealed that dressing up in branded clothes made one look better socially speaking, showing that dressing was seen as a social instrument that carried weight.

Code 101, a 20-year-old student and tour guide in Addis Ababa, noted that many people chose not to wear the traditional Ethiopian attire since it made it hard for them to fit in with their peers. For the younger participants especially, the issue of being socially disadvantaged through inappropriate dressing in the wrong places showed in their accounts.

The third story that emerged from our discussion relates to migration recapturing experiences, a unique narrative belonging only to the participants who had migrated from another part of Ethiopia into Addis.

4.3 Discussion

This section examines how the findings from Chapter Four relate to the four theoretical frameworks established in Chapter Two, and to the empirical studies conducted in Ethiopia before this research.

Country-of-Origin Effect Theory

Bilkey and Nes (1982) and Cordell (1992) argue that consumers use a product's country of origin as a quality signal, especially when they lack the technical knowledge to assess the product directly. The findings from this study largely agree with that position. Participants consistently associated imported clothing from Europe, North America, and the Middle East with higher quality, durability, and social legitimacy than locally produced modern clothing. This confirms what Chekol et al. (2022) found in Debre Markos, where 77% of respondents preferred foreign-made clothing, and what Khurana and Tadesse (2019) found in Bahir Dar, where second-hand imports were preferred over locally available alternatives.

Where this study's findings differ from both the theory and previous Ethiopian work is in the level of specificity participants applied to their COO judgments. Chekol et al. (2022) and Khurana and Tadesse (2019) treat COO preference as a relatively uniform tendency toward imported goods. The participants in this study were more discriminating than that.

Code 112, a 37-year-old male from Semen Wollo, rejected new Chinese-made clothing while accepting second-hand imports from Western countries, distinguishing between regions of origin and product types within the same broad import category. Code 113, a 50-year-old auditor, accepted locally made plain white cotton T-shirts but avoided locally made dress clothing. These are not general pro-import preferences. They are product-specific and origin-specific judgments that the COO survey instruments used in previous Ethiopian studies were not designed to detect.

This difference matters because it shifts the policy implication. If COO effects were uniform, the recommendation would be to improve the general image of Ethiopian-made clothing as a category. Because COO effects are selective and product-specific, the recommendation becomes more targeted: local producers need to identify the specific product types and quality signals where consumers are already open to domestic alternatives, and build from there.

Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory

Shimp and Sharma (1987) define consumer ethnocentrism as the moral conviction that buying imported goods is wrong because it harms local employment and the national economy. The findings agree that this moral sentiment is present among Addis Ababa consumers. Twenty-six of the thirty participants expressed genuine belief that buying locally made clothing supports Ethiopia.

This confirms the moderate ethnocentrism levels that Minbale et al. (2024) and Mangnale, Potluri, and Degufu (2011) documented quantitatively in Ethiopia. Both of those studies found that Ethiopian consumers hold ethnocentric attitudes but do not act on them consistently. This study agrees with that finding. The gap between belief and behavior was one of the most consistent patterns in the entire dataset.

Where this study's findings differ from Shimp and Sharma (1987) and from the quantitative Ethiopian work is in explaining why that gap exists and when it closes. Shimp and Sharma (1987) treat ethnocentrism as a stable individual characteristic that either predicts purchase behavior or does not. Minbale et al. (2024) and Bitew et al. (2025) confirm through structural equation modeling that the intention-behavior gap exists but attribute it primarily to subjective social norms and lack of perceived behavioral control.

This study agrees that social norms suppress local purchasing, but adds a finding that the quantitative work could not produce: the gap closes in specific social occasions. Participants who did purchase local clothing consistently did so at national celebrations, exhibitions, customer weeks, and religious holidays, not as a general habit but as a situationally activated behavior. Ethnocentrism in this population does not function as a stable personality trait. It functions as a sentiment that activates under specific social conditions and stays dormant the rest of the time. No previous Ethiopian study using the CETSCALE or regression-based approach was positioned to find this because those approaches measure ethnocentrism as a fixed score rather than as a context-dependent attitude.

Price-Quality-Value Framework

Monroe (1990) argues that price functions as a proxy for quality when consumers cannot assess products directly. Lee and Chen-Yu (2018) extended this to the apparel industry, showing that price-quality-value judgments are nonlinear and context-dependent. The findings from this study agree with the basic premise. Participants consistently read lower prices on local clothing as a signal of lower quality, which is exactly what Monroe (1990) predicts.

Chekol et al. (2022) found the same pattern in Debre Markos, where consumers correlated high product cost with high quality and high purchase intent. Bizuneh (2025) found that affordability alone was not the main barrier to buying local among young Ethiopian consumers, suggesting that the price-quality link operates at a symbolic level rather than a purely financial one. This study agrees with both of those findings.

The difference this study adds is a specific structural problem that Monroe (1990), Lee and Chen-Yu (2018), and the previous Ethiopian studies did not identify. Locally produced modern clothing in Addis Ababa is caught in a positioning problem that goes beyond the general price-quality dynamic. It is not cheap enough to win on price, and it is not reliable enough in quality to justify its cost relative to imports. Code 207, a 28-year-old video editor, described local clothing as priced similarly to imports but falling short on sewing quality, textile quality, and comfort. Code 205, a 52-year-old driver, described locally produced goods as sometimes priced higher than comparable imports, which he found unfair.

Monroe's (1990) framework predicts that consumers use price as a quality signal. What this study adds is that when two products are priced similarly but perform differently, price stops being a useful signal at all. The consumer is then left with no rational basis for choosing local, even when they want to. Previous Ethiopian studies measured the preference gap but did not map the specific pricing and design trap that produces it. This study does.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner (1986) argue that people derive self-worth from group membership and perform different identities in different social contexts. Clothing is one of the primary tools for that performance. The findings from this study agree strongly with this framework. Every participant in the study described switching between traditional and modern clothing depending on social context, which is exactly the identity management behavior that Social Identity Theory predicts.
This confirms what Minbale and Seife (2024) found in Addis Ababa, where cultural identity was shown to shape clothing decisions, with traditional garments retaining symbolic importance for ceremony even as imported fashion dominated everyday urban dress. Dessalew (2017) also confirmed in Addis Ababa that attitude, social status, and fashion involvement all shaped purchase intention for cultural clothing, which aligns with the identity-based reasoning participants described in this study.

Where this study's findings differ from Tajfel and Turner (1986) and from previous Ethiopian work is in adding a biographical dimension that neither the theory nor the empirical studies fully addressed. Tajfel and Turner (1986) describe identity as shaped by group membership, but treat group membership as relatively stable. The participants in this study showed that which identity is salient in daily life is not stable. It is shaped by specific life events. Migration to Addis Ababa restructured which identities participants performed on a daily basis. Career entry introduced a professional identity that competed with or displaced regional and cultural identities in many everyday contexts. Having a child, changing friend groups, and starting relationships all shifted the social groups whose expectations participants felt.

Abid et al. (2026) found a similar biographical dynamic in a qualitative study of young consumers in a socially restrictive society. Previous Ethiopian studies, which used survey instruments and structural equation models, could document that identity influences clothing choices but could not show how identity itself is built, reshaped, and managed through life events over time. This study fills that gap directly.

Synthesis

Across all four theories, the pattern in the findings is consistent. Where previous Ethiopian studies using quantitative methods confirmed that the theories predict the right variables, this study confirms those predictions and then adds the layer of meaning that surveys cannot reach. Chekol et al. (2022), Minbale et al. (2024), Bizuneh (2025), and Bitew et al. (2025) all established that quality, social norms, ethnocentrism, and identity influence clothing choices. This study agrees with all of those findings. What it adds is the how: how quality judgments are product-specific rather than categorical, how ethnocentrism activates situationally rather than operating as a stable trait, how the price-quality trap is structural rather than simply perceptual, and how identity is biographical rather than fixed. These additions do not contradict the existing Ethiopian literature. They deepen it, giving producers and policymakers a more precise set of entry points than the quantitative work alone provides.

Chapter Five draws on these findings to develop specific, evidence-based recommendations for local clothing producers, retailers, and policymakers.

Chapter Five

Summary, Recommendations, and Limitations

This chapter closes the study. It draws conclusions from everything that was found in Chapter Four, connects those conclusions to the four research questions this study started with, and turns what participants shared and what was observed in the markets into recommendations that are practical and specific enough to actually be used. Those recommendations are addressed to two groups: local clothing producers and designers, and policymakers. The chapter also reflects honestly on what this study could not do and what questions are still sitting open, waiting for the next researcher to find answers for them.

The study's overarching theme has been a straightforward but crucial insistence: knowing what Addis Ababa consumers want is not as helpful as knowing why they prefer it, where that preference originates, and what would need to change for them to make different decisions. The conclusions that follow adhere to that insistence.

5.1 Conclusions Tied to Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do consumers residing in Addis Ababa explain what traditional and modern clothing imply in their day-to-day lives?

The most important result of this study is that Addis Ababa based consumers do not have a choice between traditional and modern apparel. They intentionally and logically handle each as two distinct registers that fulfill two quite different functions in their life. Cultural identification, ethnic pride, ceremonial belonging, and what participant after participant simply referred to as Ethiopianism are all conveyed through traditional attire. Professional respectability, aspirational posture, and everyday practicality are all conveyed by modern and imported apparel. Neither register is superior than the other in terms of authenticity or worth. Participants realized that each is appreciated in its own right without having to be questioned about it.

Practically speaking, this means that the question of what Ethiopian consumers like is the wrong one. What social setting this person is currently in and what is expected of them in that situation is a more helpful inquiry. The material is not what gives a garment its meaning. It is present in the connection between the clothing, the situation, and the persona the wearer portrays at that specific time.

Research Question 2: Which societal contacts, influences, and personal histories are present in these stories?

Participants shared biographical clothing stories. They weren't vague declarations of preference. They depended on actual experiences, such as relocating from another area to Addis Ababa, landing one's first job, having a kid, switching friend groups, beginning a romantic connection, graduating from college, and being moved to a different city for work. Transformation of one's perspective on his/her own clothing and its implications came after the experience of all these events.

Migration was seen to be the most transformational event among the dataset subjects. This was because those individuals who migrated from other regions in Ethiopia to Addis Ababa had gone through a process where they still held onto their cultural dress in order to maintain a sense of connection to their native culture even while they adapted their dressing in response to the pace of life in Addis Ababa. Career start had a huge influence on how you dress yourself, regardless of your personal choice.

Although it was more subtle, social influence from friends, family, and coworkers persisted. Participants hardly ever felt pressured. It worked more like a continuous background signal about what fits in and what the people around you expect. The majority of individuals took it in without realizing it.

Research Question 3: Which social settings influence customers' preferences for traditional or modern apparel, and why?

Among the research's most trustworthy and practical conclusions were the contextual rules. They were true for people of all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, professions, and places of origin. One can tell that they are not personal preferences because of their consistency. The majority of

Addis Ababa's population has assimilated and generally accepted these common societal norms. Unconventional attire is required at funerals. In a setting characterized by mourning, traditional ceremonial attire conveys an intensity of cultural pride and exuberance that is socially inappropriate. Almost all of the participants were aware of this and sensed it without being informed.

Orthodox church events and religious holidays necessitate traditional attire because they ask for a collective and visible display of Ethiopian cultural and spiritual identity. The wearing of formal or modern dress should be preferred in professional situations since it indicates institutional respectability and competence. Since weddings are seen as instances of collective cultural expression instead of mere individual expression, they trigger the biggest appeal towards traditional dress of all events analyzed here.

These rules constitute the true basis of the clothing exchange cycle within this city. Knowing them is far more valuable than knowing a consumer's aggregate preference rating since it explains how a person who wears imported pants almost daily can come to Shero Meda on a Saturday morning with a purpose in mind and actually pay for handwoven fabric.

Research Question 4: In what way can customers' narratives influence local clothing producers and decision makers?

The following sections offer the recommendations. The primary message from this research question is that approaches focusing only on saving money or boosting the technical qualities will not work. The barriers to choosing modern local apparel do not lie in practicality alone. They lie in design and society.

The most significant behavioral drivers will remain entirely unaffected by any approach that ignores those characteristics.

5.2 Recommendations

For Local Producers and Designers

These recommendations come directly from what participants said and from what was visible in the markets. They are specific because the findings were specific.

- **Close the design identity gap in locally produced modern clothing.**

The most obvious issue in Merkato and Shola was the very identical modern apparel made locally. The clothes had a similar appearance. The selection of colors was limited. The cuts were repeated. There was no indication on the rack that this apparel originated from a particular, significant location. A short distance away, apparel from abroad gave greater diversity, color, and visual distinction between items. In order to avoid creating clothes that feel like costumes or copies of traditional attire, local manufacturers of contemporary apparel must develop an own design language that incorporates Tibeb patterns, Ethiopian cultural features, regional color traditions, and needlework allusions.

The goal is to create apparel that is distinctly Ethiopian in its aesthetic roots, obviously contemporary, and easily wearable in both daily and professional settings. A number of attendees expressly requested T-shirts and sweaters with cultural prints. Instead of waiting for further restructuring, the designers could opt to make changes starting from that affordable and clearly noticeable starting point.

- **Fixing the issue of weight and comfort in traditional clothes.**

Participants stated that they felt uncomfortable wearing the traditional clothes since they were too hot for long-term use. As Code 308, a housewife aged 48 years from Hawassa, explained, most of the Habesha kemis are made up of heavy tile, which is uncomfortable to wear. This issue can no longer be ignored since it has become an obstacle to dressing traditionally. Therefore, those designing traditional clothes should consider materials that will keep their characteristics but allow them to be worn comfortably in summer.

- **Build the dual clothing into how you think about your customer.**

There is no need to define the market in terms of an opposition between tradition and modernity. This is not how market actors see things. They update both registers and regard them as performing entirely separate roles. The chance is not to convince consumers to move between the two, but to serve both registers adequately. An entrepreneur making high-quality traditional ceremonial clothes and excellent everyday modern clothes that reflect an Ethiopian design philosophy has understood how people really dress in this town.

- **Show up at the occasions where local purchasing already happens naturally.**

In some instances, like during national festivities, exhibits, consumer weeks, religious days, and weddings, people who bought local clothing on a regular basis participated in them. These are not just minor or insignificant occasions. They are social occasions where many customers, who happen to be strong-willed, gather together. For local producers and sellers who base their marketing strategy, visibility, and availability of goods around such occasions, they get the consumers precisely at a time when they are halfway through making a decision to purchase local goods. This would prove more productive than spending money to influence people's opinions.

- **Make quality gains visible and credible.**

The most frequently and continuously mentioned barrier by participants was quality. However, quality enhancements are only significant if buyers can perceive and experience them prior to making a purchase. Consumers can base their assessment of quality on improved labeling, unambiguous information about the fabric's composition and place of origin, obvious handmade features, and uniform size. Code 113: A 50-year-old Addis Ababa auditor claimed to have seen a real improvement in the local market over time, indicating that work is being done but not being reported. Before acting on their moral desire to purchase locally, consumers the majority of whom were in this study need a reliable signal.

Recommendations for Policymakers

These suggestions deal with the institutional and structural factors that influence the setting in which producers and consumers make choices.

Instead of focusing only on production goals, reframe support for the local apparel industry around cultural narrative.Production capacity, export statistics, and technical training have been the main areas of government support for the textile and apparel industry. These items are important. However, this study makes it abundantly evident that symbolic meaning influences customer behavior just as much as price and quality. Through national campaigns, sponsorships of cultural events, public sector dress initiatives, and school-based cultural programming, policies that invest in the cultural narrative of locally produced clothing work on a level of consumer decision-making that production-side interventions alone cannot reach. In this study, 26 out of 30 individuals acknowledged a genuine and underutilized social resource: patriotic purchase intent. Policy has the option to either activate it or leave it idle. Because there isn't a constant public signal reminding consumers that taking action is beneficial or that the products that are waiting for them are good enough to justify it, it is now mostly lying there. Use the events when wearing traditional attire is already expected as entrance points for the policy.

In this dataset, situational rules are the most reliable behavioral drivers. It is not necessary for policymakers to alter consumer perceptions in order to boost local apparel consumption. Support must be coordinated with the times when consumer behavior is already favorable. Local producers have a recurrent, publicly backed demand moment that they can plan around when events like Nations and Nationalities Day, Timket public festivities, and national exhibitions are expanded and promoted as occasions where Ethiopian attire is visibly celebrated. Customers' underlying tastes wouldn't need to change in order to establish regular purchasing cycles if customer week programs were expanded to more public sector organizations.

- **Address the pricing gap directly**.

Code 205: The 52-year-old driver from Soth Wollo's observation that locally made goods are occasionally more expensive than comparable imports was not unique. It represents a structural market issue that can be addressed by policy. The tools offered include import taxes, tax breaks for regional businesses, and subsidized access to high-quality raw resources. The intention is not to artificially lower the cost of local apparel. The goal is to reduce the disparity to the point where customers who already wish to purchase locally do not feel penalized financially for doing so.

- **Invest in design education and cultural product development.**

Both a skills issue and an infrastructure issue contribute to the design identity gap that is evident in the markets. Stronger and more focused funding is required for Ethiopian fashion education and design training programs, with an emphasis on producing designers who can successfully work in both traditional and modern aesthetics. Designers who exclusively create traditional or modern garments are not the target. Ethiopian cultural visual languages can be used into modern, everyday, and internationally competitive clothing by designers. When asked what would make them select local, a number of participants gave this identical description: something that is contemporary, fits well, and has a distinctively Ethiopian design style.That product exists in small numbers among individual designers already working in Addis Ababa. It does not yet exist at the scale and price point that would make a real difference in the market.

- **Protect handwoven traditional clothing producers from replica competition.**

Shero Meda's handwoven garment producers face real competitive pressure from cheaper Chinese imitations of traditional designs. The price gap is wide enough that many consumers choose the replica even when they recognize the quality difference.

Quality certification and clear labeling could give authenticity-conscious buyers a reason to act on that preference. When consumers understand what they are buying and why it costs more, especially for personal occasions where authenticity matters, they are more willing to pay the higher price.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The results of this interpretive research, where depth is emphasized over breadth, are not supposed to yield statistics generalizable to the entire market for clothing in Ethiopia. The translation into Amharic may miss some nuances. Consumers whose major purchasing activity occurs online or through informal social ties, outside the market context, may be underrepresented in the sample, potentially overrepresenting individuals who stand out and are easily accessible within the three markets. This is offset by harmonization of several data collection techniques, deliberate sampling, designed to maximize diversity, and the honesty and self-reflection shown by the researcher about his/her own role in constructing the research.There were certain trade-offs associated with this research being conducted for depth rather than scale, which have important negative implications.

It is impossible to generalize statistically from these results to apply them to the overall clothing market in Ethiopia. The total variation in consumer behavior among the diverse range of markets in Ethiopia cannot be captured by the experiences of thirty people in three different markets in Addis Ababa. This was not the intent of the research. However, this means that the results should be understood not as facts but as guidelines when examining other related contexts.

As can be seen, the sample consists primarily of consumers who are active in and around official markets, regardless of the use of the purposive sampling method. Those who prefer to purchase via the internet, informal channels, and less often use the selected sites do not appear here. This gap will widen with the growth of Addis Ababa's digital retail sector.

Some degree of loss was anticipated during translation from Amharic into English. Despite the utmost efforts put into maintaining meaning, some of the argumentative nature of the language used by the participants, as well as certain metaphors and emotions carried by the use of certain Amharic terms cannot fully be conveyed through English.

Unlike in other methods of data gathering, in a life history interview, the participant is never an unbiased respondent. According to their perceptions of the interviewer and what he or she needs from them, as well as the amount of information that they think is safe enough to give out loud, the participant tends to alter what they reveal.

The demand side of the apparel industry was investigated in this study. While all of these issues were recognized as being critical in literature, they were not explored adequately in this study. The discussion of the supply side is equally essential to understand the whole picture of the market.

5.3.1 Suggestions for Future Research

This study raised some issues that the research data was unable to answer sufficiently. Conducting a similar survey among secondary cities of Ethiopia like Bahir Dar, Hawassa, Dire Dawa, and Mekelle would show if the rules of scenarios discussed here apply specifically for the environment of Addis Ababa or also to other places. Addis Ababa is not Ethiopia, and in another place where there is another cultural and economic milieu, what works in the markets of Addis can be quite different.

To identify the restrictions in manufacture that caused the lack of quality and diversity of designs reported by the consumers, it would be necessary to conduct the research from the side of the producers. It is crucial to talk not just with consumers but also with manufacturers of local contemporary clothes.

As opposed to recreating transitional periods in life using interviews, a longitudinal study over a period ranging from three to five years would give a better idea of how clothing stories develop during such periods. This is an entirely new topic of research, which differs greatly from asking people about the effect that a career change, marriage, or moving has on their dress code after a few years.

Studying young Ethiopian designers who work at a convergence of traditional and modern aesthetics would reveal a creative approach that several participants identified as the kind of clothing they desired but found difficult to locate. Both academic and practical goals would be served by such research, which would provide the design community with a better understanding of the current need for their work.

Lastly, this study mentioned but did not explore how social media is changing the narratives surrounding clothes among Ethiopian youth living in metropolitan areas.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Institution: Addis Ababa University, Department of MBA

Opening and Consent

I'm called Leul Taye. The topic of this interview is your thoughts on and experiences with clothing in day-to-day life. There are no right or incorrect responses. With your consent, an audio recording of the about thirty-minute interview will be made. Your identity won't show in any reports, and everything is kept private.

- Do you consent to audio recording? **Yes / No**

Background

- Participant ID: _____
- Age: _____
- Gender: _____
- Place of birth: _____
- Years in Addis Ababa: _____
- Occupation: _____

1. Tell me about your life with clothing — start from your earliest memory of a garment that mattered to you, and bring me to where you are today.

2. Has there been a turning point in your life — a move, a new job, a ceremony, a relationship — that changed how you dress? Tell me that story.

3. Who has most influenced how you dress, and how did that happen?

4. What does wearing traditional Ethiopian clothing mean to you? What does wearing imported or modern clothing mean to you?

5. Walk me through a typical week — what you wear for work, home, and social occasions. Why those choices?

6. Are there occasions where you would always wear traditional dress, and occasions where you would never wear it? What makes those occasions different?

7. Tell me about a time you chose imported clothing over locally made, or the other way around. What was your reasoning?

8. When you describe clothing to someone else, do you mention where it came from or its brand? What do you say?

9. Have you ever felt pressure from family, friends, or colleagues to dress a certain way? What happened?

10. Do you ever think about buying locally made clothing as a way of supporting Ethiopia? Does that thought actually change what you buy?

11. What would a locally made garment need to look like, feel like, or cost for you to choose it over an import for everyday wear?

Is there anything about your experience with clothing that you feel I have not asked about?