

# **Small Business Apparel Retailing in Jamaica: An Exploratory Investigation into Product Development Processes and Practices**

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*While the process and practices of retail product development in developed countries have been documented, a void exists in descriptive analysis regarding retail product development in an international setting. The primary purpose of this study was to explore small business apparel retailing, and specifically the retail product development process and practices in Jamaica. Using the case study approach, five apparel retailers in Jamaica who engaged in retail product development are profiled. In-depth interviews, observations, and documents were used to collect data and results were presented after analysis. The findings revealed that the process of product exclusivity, training of workers, modern technological devices, networking, and product quality were of major concern to apparel retailers in Jamaica, which is shown to be very similar to the retail product development process carried out in the U.S.A. Key Words: Apparel Retailing, Jamaica, Small Business, Product Development, and Qualitative Research.*

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## **Introduction**

In this article, we explore apparel retail product development<sup>1</sup> processes and practices in Jamaica, a developing country. A developing country is one in which most people have lower income and standards of living, with access to fewer goods and services than do most people in higher-income countries. Globalization has impacted the apparel industry in both developed and developing countries (Paddison, Findlay, & Dawson, 1990). This has resulted in an increased need for flexibility by apparel retailers engaged in apparel retail product development.

Retail product developers globally have adapted their practices in providing customers with products they request (Miller & Blais, 1993). By practices, we mean the specific actions performed to help achieve the goals of retail product development. Factors impacting the development of apparel products include increased customer demand for new products and technological advancements. Together these factors have contributed to

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<sup>1</sup> Retail product development is defined as “the process of creating research-based private label merchandise manufactured or sourced by the retailer for its exclusive sale to an identified target market” (Wickett et al., 1999, p. 27).

shorter fashion cycle time lines (Gaskill, 1992; Lin, Kincade, & Warfield, 1994). These factors have influenced the way(s) in which suppliers, producers, and retailers coordinate their efforts to satisfy customer demands (Hunter, King, Nuttle, & Wilson, 1993). The efficiency of the retail product development process has been crucial in these coordinated efforts.

While research on the retail product development process has been conducted in developed countries, it has yet to be explored internationally and, particularly, in the Caribbean Basin. To date, no published descriptions exist, although the Caribbean Basin is currently one of the major regions in the “American trading bloc”<sup>2</sup> (Kunz, 1998, p. 43). In the Caribbean Basin, and Jamaica in particular, the process of retail product development is carried out at the manufacturing and retailing levels. However, the literature revealed that the product development process has not been documented in the Caribbean Basin. It is important to have documentation on the business strategies and response time in producing apparel in the Caribbean Basin because of the significant role played by this region in supplying apparel products worldwide that are produced at a cheaper rate as a result of the low wages paid to workers in this region. In the Caribbean Basin, including Jamaica, apparel products are supplied through small, medium, and large business establishments practicing economical business strategies.

Morris (1996) stated that developing appropriate business strategies, including the creation of new products that are responsive to the needs of the target market, as well as associated documentation of the process, are crucial to the success of small and large apparel retailers. Many small apparel retailers in Jamaica are striving to meet the needs of a changing, more demanding customer market in the apparel industry, especially at the retail level. Select Jamaican retailers involved in retail product development also are striving towards international business development. According to Cellich (1996), the competitive global marketplace is not only a demanding, but a competitive venture, especially for small business owners. In Jamaica, a small business is defined as an independently owned and operated enterprise that is not dominant in the field having less than J\$3 million (US \$82,192) in capital investment (excluding land and building). Furthermore, small businesses are seen as flexible and innovative agencies, involved in a range of manufacturing and service endeavors (The Planning Institute of Jamaica, 1998).

Carrier (1994) reported that flexibility and innovativeness are two positive attributes that characterize small- and medium-sized businesses. Aharoni (1994) found that it takes a relatively short time for small- and medium-sized businesses to (a) change their structure and form and (b) implement new plans and strategies. Thus, small businesses are able to exert a strong influence on the economies of all countries. With this ability, small- and medium-sized businesses have proven to be major sources of economic growth and technological progress (Mulhern, 1995; Paddison et al., 1990; Roper, 1997).

Small business establishments, in essence, are valuable assets to a country's economy (The Planning Institute of Jamaica, 1998). They are of value to all strata of the society and can act as catalysts to larger businesses (Roper, 1997). It is no small wonder, therefore, that there is concern in finding effective ways to extend the longevity and

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<sup>2</sup> The American Trading bloc is defined as “the combination of North America (Canada and the U.S.A.) and Latin America (Mexico, Central and South America, and the West Indies)” (Kunz, 1998, p. 43). The West Indian and Central American countries that form the Caribbean Basin (CB) constitute more than 50% of all the countries in Americas Trading Bloc.

increase the impact of small businesses in many countries of the world, countries like Jamaica.

To explore the international product development arena, this case-study profiles five small business apparel retailers in Jamaica, engaged in retail product development. The primary purpose of this study was to explore small business apparel retailing, and to describe the functional activities (processes and practices) taking place in retail product development in Jamaica. More specifically, the three research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the profile of the general business characteristics and operation of small apparel retailers in Jamaica engaged in retail product development?
2. What steps are specifically entailed in the retail product development processes and practices in Jamaica?
3. In what ways are the steps in apparel retail development in Jamaica similar to or different from the steps in the apparel retail product development processes in the U.S.A., using the Wickett, Gaskill, and Damhorst (1999) Revised Apparel Retail Product Development Model as a point of comparison?

In order to answer these research questions, the researchers took a close look at the nature and roles of the apparel retailers in Jamaica, scrutinized how retail product development was carried out in these establishments, and compared and contrasted the practices presented in the U.S.A. model with practices identified in retail establishments in the Jamaican model. This research has value at multiple levels for retailers and educators in the field of textiles and clothing. For apparel retail business owners in Jamaica, who participated in this study, the value to be gained includes a deeper understanding of the overall processes and practices of retail product development in their context. Other consumers of this research, in the Caribbean and other countries, can also benefit from the findings of this research, especially as a source of information based on the clear documentation of the current practices and process of retail product development in the apparel industry in Jamaica.

### **Focus on the Apparel Retail Industry in Jamaica**

In keeping with the three research questions posed in this research, the researchers focused on small business apparel retailing in Jamaica over the past 2 decades. During the latter part of the 1980s, the free market economy<sup>3</sup> model was introduced in Jamaica. This resulted in a barrage of imported goods, including apparel, entering the country at an alarming rate. As a result, the Jamaican small- and medium-sized apparel retailing industry was faced with considerable stress and strain that merited a large degree of restructuring (Sherlock, 1990; The Planning Institute of Jamaica, 1998). Challenges that accompanied the growth in the apparel sector included lack of bank collateral, high interest rates, high input costs, limited access to markets, and high operation costs that plagued many small-

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<sup>3</sup> In a free-market economy the government enters the economy only to provide public goods such as defense, law and order, and education, and to perform a regulatory role in certain situations (Infonautics Corporation, 2000).

and medium-sized business owners. The government intervened by providing both financial and human resources, resulting in an increase in employment in the small business sector at a time when jobs were needed to boost the economy (The Planning Institute of Jamaica).

Of great importance was the role the government played in directing the economic and social development of the country. Numerous small apparel businesses in Jamaica had to rely on the Micro and Small Business Enterprise Sector (MSE) to supply them with loans so their doors could remain open during the period of structural adjustment in the free market economy. Many of the small- and medium-apparel businesses were faced with the challenge of marketing their products effectively. As a result, the MSE devised a project that provided these small businesses with knowledgeable marketing specialists who conducted many vital activities.

Activities such as training and technical assistance were carried out by the University of Technology Entrepreneurial Extension Center and the productivity center of Jamaica Promotions Limited. Areas for training included product development, production management, marketing, quality control, record-keeping, business management, and other support services. The MSE focused on the provision of needed services to the medium and small business owners who approached the MSE for help. Many of the small- and medium-sized business owners who went to the MSE were apparel retailers (The Planning Institute of Jamaica, 1998).

### **Retail Framework in Jamaica—A Developing Country**

Jamaican retailers use a number of different processes and practices to organize their workers, tasks, and operations. In achieving the goals of retail product development, Paddison et al. (1990) suggested that retail outlets with westernized characteristics coexist with “informal” (p. 35) trading that is characteristic of developing countries. They further suggested that in order to gain a clear understanding into the retail framework existing in developing countries, it is important to (a) understand that this process is of significant importance to the country’s economy, (b) know that retailing often has culturally-embedded factors which drive it, and (c) acknowledge the rapid changes taking place in the retailing system in developing countries like Jamaica, in light of globalization.

The growing integration of economies and societies around the world has been one of the most hotly-debated topics in international economics over the past 2 decades. Developing countries like Jamaica, though small, have come onboard in the area of retail product development because of consumer demands. Based on the high patterns of consumption that are more evident in developed than developing countries, the role marketing plays has become increasingly active in encouraging the consumption of goods and services (Sherlock, 1990). This is perpetuated, particularly, through the product development process, active advertising campaigns, packaging, and branding goods.

In contrast, the pattern of retailing in developing countries is generally more concerned about supplying consumers with basic necessities. As a result, marketing as a managerial concept has not been a major issue. Furthermore, due to low incomes characteristic of developing economies, consumers in developing countries are usually more price and quality conscious rather than service and promotion conscious (Paddison et al., 1990).

Consequently, because of this consciousness many retailers are carrying out their own process of manufacturing/development of products or private label goods that are based on the needs of customers and delivered directly to their target customers. Over the years, researchers such as Gaskill (1992) and Wickett et al. (1999) have studied apparel retail product development in the U.S.A. domestic market. Gaskill offered an exploratory description of the tasks performed in two retail firms that were engaged in 100% product development. Based on case-study results, Gaskill sequenced the retail product development process as follows: (a) trend analysis; (b) concept evolution; (c) fabrication and palette selection; (d) fabric design, silhouette, and style direction; (e) prototype construction; and (f) analysis and line presentation. Intervening or secondary factors impacting these activities included internal factors (e.g., target market and merchandising process) and external factors (e.g., domestic and foreign markets). These activities were further refined by Wickett et al. who expanded the original model developed by Gaskill. Figure 1 shows the Wickett et al. Revised Retail Product Development Model.

Figure 1. Wickett et al. (1999) Revised apparel product development model.

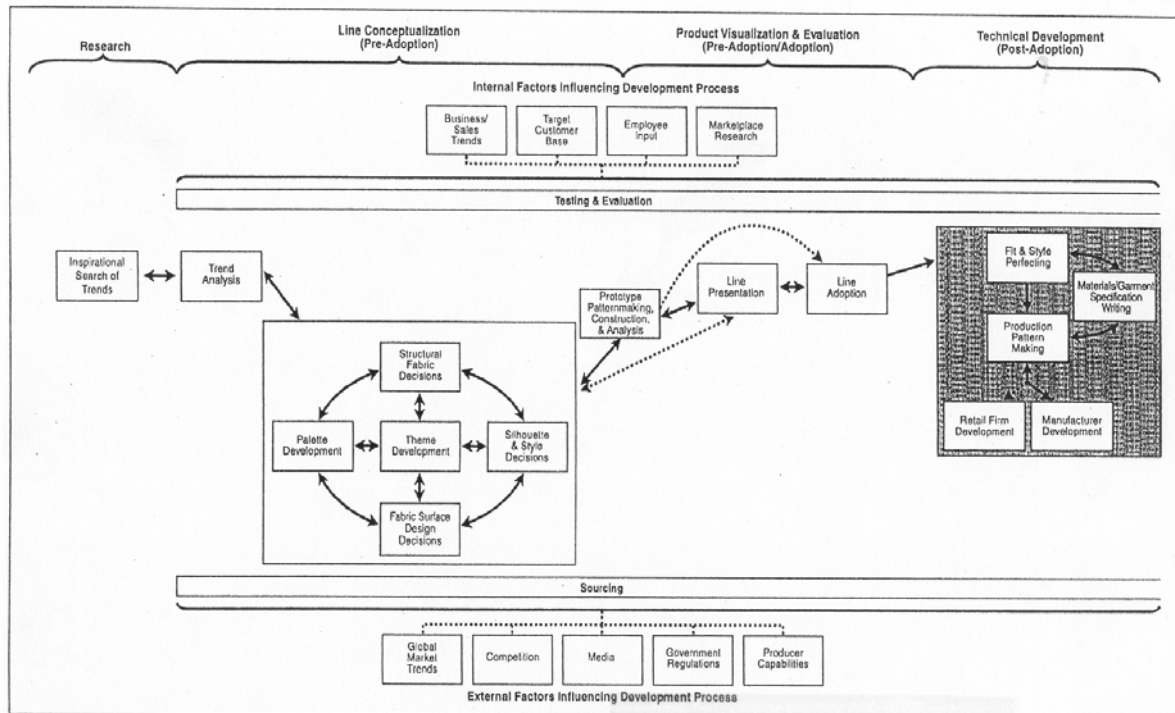


Figure 1 shows four primary activities: research, line conceptualization (pre-adoption), product visualization and evaluation (adoption), and technical development (post-adoption). Each primary activity had multiple supporting activities in the retail product development processes as identified by the Wickett et al. (1999) Model. In the U.S.A., each activity was carried out in the same order in each specialty store studied by Wickett et al. Their results revealed that (a) national brands and private label merchandise were carried extensively in specialty stores, (b) specialty store retailers could not compete directly with national branded pricing strategies used by department stores, (c) it was impossible for specialty retailers to rival the “every day low prices” of discount

merchandisers, and (d) in order to retain market niche and positioning, specialty store retailers resorted to the creative option of engaging in their own private label development.

In contrast, we explored whether or not these primary and supporting activities were even carried out in Jamaica's apparel retail industry, in order to provide answers for our research question number two, addressing the steps specifically entailed in the retail product development processes, and research question number three, focusing on the similarities and differences between the retail product development processes in Jamaica and the U.S.A. Each researcher had a specific role in carrying out this exploratory research apparel retail product development.

### **Researchers' Roles**

In conducting this exploratory study the researchers were bounded by the ethical considerations including self-disclosure. Self-disclosure adds trustworthiness and authenticity to the research, as readers can develop a clear understanding of what each researcher brings to the investigation and the role(s) played. The first author was a graduate student at a mid-western university in the U.S.A., where this research was conducted as a partial fulfillment for the master's thesis. The first author is also a Jamaican native, and will be returning to Jamaica to establish her career. As a result, she had a vested interest in exploring the retail product development process and practices in Jamaica.

The second author was the thesis advisor and has a strong track record as a qualitative researcher. Her specific role in the research was to assist in the data analysis process as well as critically assessing and evaluating the data after it was analyzed. This was an important role so that the data reported was both trustworthy and authentic, in order to generate confidence in the minds of readers of this qualitative inquiry. The second author played other supporting roles that included giving detailed feedback on each aspect of this paper, especially as it related to the research methodology.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

In this study, the researchers employed the case study design as the "most appropriate mode of analysis" (Touliatos & Compton, 1988, p. 4), since a detailed exploration into the process and practice of retail product development as carried out in Jamaica was sought. Over the years, the use of case study as a viable design has been shown to be an effective method of answering research questions of how and why events happen within a real-life context (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In fact, the research problem, purpose, and questions were formulated in order to explore the phenomenon—retail product development, in all its complexity and context rather than being shaped by operationalizing variables (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

## **Selection of Participants**

The target population for this study was all 68 registered apparel retail establishments identified in the 1998-1999 Jamaican Telephone Directory. A letter of introduction and a one-page questionnaire were sent to all 68 establishments. Of the 68 apparel retail establishments contacted, 12 responded to the initial letter, for a response rate of 17%. However, only 7 of the 12 establishments fit the five selection criteria stipulated for this study. The criteria included that each apparel establishment had to be (a) a retailing business; (b) classified as a small business, independently owned with less than US\$82,192 in capital investment; (c) performed apparel retail product development; (d) in business for 3 or more years because this time frame gave some measure of stability and credibility to the business and helped to ensure reliability of data; and (e) the owner/manager had to indicate a willingness to take part in this research investigation. A letter was sent to all 7 establishments inviting retailers to participate in the research. Five of the 7 retailers indicated a willingness to participate, and they were interviewed for this research. For accuracy, a variety of techniques were used in the data collection procedure including (a) audio-taping of interviews, (b) recording field notes and observations, and (c) gathering documentation and objects such as samples and sketches at retail establishments.

The primary instrument used in collecting interview data was a semi-structured (open-ended) interview protocol consisting of 137 questions (see Appendix A for a sample of interview questions). Content areas such as company history, employee profile, target market, quality, and technology issues were included along with processes and practices involved in retail product development. Prior to data collection, human subjects' clearance was obtained. Following this approval, the instrument was pilot tested at one of the retail establishments in Jamaica.

## **Pilot Study**

The purpose of the pilot study was to refine the interview protocol developed for this study. Based on the nature of this study, pilot testing was important for three main reasons: (a) to improve the validity of the study, (b) to test if the proposed methods and interview protocol were appropriate for the selected sample (Yin, 1984), and (c) to uncover any local problems, political or otherwise that may affect the research process (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2003). The site selected for the pilot study was based on the retailer's willingness to participate, the geographic location, and time availability. Time was very crucial, since the first author, a Jamaican native, had a specific time frame for data collection. The pilot study was conducted at the beginning of the 10-week period soon after the first author arrived in Jamaica. This allowed enough time for making modifications to the interview protocol.

The pilot study interview lasted 2 hours and 45 minutes. Minor changes made to the interview protocol based on the pilot testing included: clarification of a few questions, that is, the rewording of ambiguous questions identified; removal of repeated questions; inclusion of additional probing questions; and elimination of three questions that were not applicable to the Jamaican apparel retailing environment. After analyzing the pilot data, the researchers determined that the thick and rich quality of the data obtained from the pilot study were appropriate and complete enough to be incorporated in the final data analysis.

## Research Participants: Demographics

To preserve confidentiality, each retail establishment is referred to as retailer E<sub>1</sub>, E<sub>2</sub>, E<sub>3</sub>, E<sub>4</sub>, and E<sub>5</sub>. There were 3 female and 2 male retailers in the sample. The average age was 62 years. All retailers had some college education, and one had a graduate degree in textiles and clothing. The average number of years of retail experience was 16, and 23 years was the average length of time for business ownership. Finally, the estimated total household annual income was over J\$200, 000 (US\$5, 194.80)<sup>4</sup> for each retailer.

## Data Collection Procedures

The data collection, including the pilot study, took place over a 10-week period during the summer of 1999. The first author made numerous visits to each retail establishment to observe, interview retailers, and analyzed both artifacts and documents.

### *Observations*

The first author visited each retail establishment for an average of four times, during the 10-week period. Visits were made at different times of the work day and at different points of the fashion season. The observational schedule was important for collecting data that would provide information to address the first research question, to formulate the general profile of the retail businesses. The observational schedule focused on store ambiance, rapport between customers and workers, workers and management, management and customers, and workers and workers. See Appendix B for the observational schedule. Visits lasted from 3 to 7 hours in different apparel retail establishments. In one establishment, the first author was allowed to sit in on a staff meeting. This allowed for in-depth learning and observation of the rapport between, and among, workers and retailers engaged in retail product development process and practices. Observing multiple operations in the retail establishments was necessary in this qualitative research as a means of collecting data from multiple sources that in essence leads to triangulation of data sources, and in turn adds credibility to the case study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yin, 1984). Many areas that were observed were further clarified during the interview process.

Observation notes were transcribed and expanded shortly after each visit to reduce information decay. It is important to record observational notes quickly after observation when the information is still fresh in the mind of the observer (Creswell, 1998), thus preserving the authenticity, truthfulness, and accuracy of the data recorded. Stake (1995) suggested that “the qualitative researcher keeps a good record of events to provide . . . relatively uncontested description for further analysis . . . and ultimately [for] reporting [purposes]” (p. 62). Accurate recording of observational notes were important in this case study to help with triangulation of data sources with the documents analyzed and the interviews conducted.

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<sup>4</sup> The foreign exchange rate stands at J\$38.50 to US\$1.00. Rate given by the Bank of Jamaica. Retrieved March 2, 2000, from <http://www.boj.org.jm/financial/ts/sum/bydate/19970605.html>

### *Interviews*

In order to obtain data to answer research questions, face-to-face interviews were the primary means used to gather data for this exploratory case study. Face-to-face interviews were deemed most appropriate because of the ability to check accuracy, as well as verify and/or refute the impressions gained through dialogue and observations (Kerlinger, 1973). In fact, Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) reiterated the advantages of conducting face-to-face interviewing because it allows for direct contact with respondents. Interviews were conducted with the 5 proprietors of small retail establishments in Jamaica between May and August 1999.

Based on the results on the pilot interview, face-to-face interviews were scheduled with retailers for 2-3 hour time slots. Retailers had a copy of the semi-structured interview protocol prior to the scheduled interview. The semi-structured interview protocol was developed pulling heavily from the instrument developed by Wickett (1995), the literature reviewed, the taxonomy of apparel firms (Kunz, 1998), and input from an expert panel in the textiles and clothing department at the mid-western university. The interview protocol was divided into three major sections: 59 general business profile questions (43%), 67 questions addressing the process of retail product development questions (49%), and 11 summary questions (8%). The interview data collected were obtained from the interview protocol and consisted of a total of 137 questions that were deemed important in exploring retail product development in Jamaica. Interviews lasted an average of 2 hours; the shortest interview lasting 1 hour 45 minutes and the longest lasting 3 hours and 20 minutes. Permission was granted by retailers to tape the interviews. Therefore, all interviews were audio-taped for accuracy of transcription. Shortly after obtaining the interview data, transcription took place, while the information was still fresh in the researcher's mind. Areas that were not clear after transcription were flagged on the transcripts and clarification was sought by revisiting the retail establishment, and in one case clarification was obtained via the phone. The step taken for further clarification served as a form of member checking. Each retailer was presented with a copy of the interview transcription. They were asked for a reaction to the transcribed interview in terms of corrections and clarifications where needed. Only one retailer responded by offering clarification regarding her role as owner manager of her retail establishment. To triangulate the data sources several artifacts also were analyzed.

### *Artifacts*

Because of the nature of apparel retail development, collecting and analyzing artifacts was important and it helped to triangulate the data sources, thus adding to the rigor of the study. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to triangulate data points and sources. In fact, triangulating was used to provide confirmation and completeness (Mitchell, 1996). Archival documents evaluated included apparel product sketches from initial conception to final product. The purpose of evaluating the product sketches was for the researchers to see visual images of the specific steps of the retail product development processes.

In addition, newsletters, newspaper articles, and other documents including meeting notes also were examined. The purpose of assessing these documents was to provide a holistic insight into the retail product development processes and practices in Jamaica.

Many questions asked during the interview process were verified through the archival documents that were assessed in this case study. Together, the multiple sources of data (observation, interviews, and artifact analysis) provided adequate information to describe the general business characteristics and operations, steps entailed in the retail product development processes, and a comparison of apparel retail development in Jamaica with that of the U.S.A.

Additionally, rigor in conducting the research was evident by the use of multiple data sources. The triangulation of data sources captured a more complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the given phenomenon, apparel retail product development. Each source contributed an additional piece to the puzzle and in that way complemented each other. According to Mitchell (1996), a researcher's bias can be minimized and the validity of the findings enhanced through triangulation.

### **Data Analysis**

Preparing the data for analysis began with transcribing the audio-taped interviews. Following transcription, all responses to specific interview questions were sorted and collectively organized so that all participant responses to each question could be viewed together on a spreadsheet. This procedure was carried out for the remainder of the data analysis, since similarities and differences across participants (cross-case analysis) were more important than themes within one interview transcript. Therefore, responses to each interview question served as the unit of analysis. Using this cross-case method of analysis helped to preserve the uniqueness of each retail establishment (Meloy, 1994; Patton, 1990).

Observational notes were also input in a spreadsheet. This facilitated the process whereby similarities and differences for observational notes were easily compared across respondents. Afterwards, based on the questions asked, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs were analyzed for content themes, patterns, and categories. The relationships among the themes, patterns, and categories were explored and used to descriptively organize and identify emergent patterns in keeping with the questions asked. In this regard, emergent concepts, themes, and patterns were used to frame the phenomenon of retail product development in Jamaica. According to Sandelowski and Barroso (2003), the use of conceptual and thematic descriptions ensures for a deeper and richer analysis of the process under investigation. Finally, the resulting emergent themes and patterns also were used to compare and contrast apparel retail product development in Jamaica, with the apparel product development processes in the U.S.A., using the Wickett et al. (1999) Revised Apparel Retail Product Development Model as the source of comparison. For integrity and trustworthiness of reporting research findings, the results of the analysis are reported in the sections that follow through the use of researcher narrative and quoted content collected from the study participants.

Integrity and trustworthiness of the data analysis process was established in several ways. Krippendorff (1980) identifies two components of reliability; reproducibility and stability. Reproducibility of the descriptive analysis process was achieved by using the two researchers in this study to utilize the interpretive analysis approach. In addition to the researchers engaging in data analysis, a third person seen as an expert judge also participated in the data analysis process and verified the results by independently conducting an analysis of randomly selected interview transcripts for emergent concepts,

themes, and patterns; generating themes from the data; and confirming the inclusion of those themes in the results reported by the first author. As an added means of establishing integrity to the data collection and analysis, the researchers cross-referenced interview data with field notes, archival records, and observational notes. These procedures were followed to preserve the integrity and trustworthiness of the study, and are evident in the results and discussion section, making the research process more public and relevant (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

## **Results and Discussion**

In terms of organizing the results and discussion for this study we present them into major sections based on the three research questions. In answering each research question, direct quotes will be used to support the conclusions. Based on the sheer volume of quotes we received, only a representative sampling of relevant quotes will punctuate the results and discussions

### **Research question # 1: What is the profile of the general business characteristics and operation of small apparel retailers in Jamaica engaged in retail product development?**

From the interview data, observations, and artifacts collected and analyzed, we concluded that retailers possessed general business skills. All retailers in this investigation had some college education or had completed a college degree in the U.S.A. One retailer earned an MBA Degree from Harvard University. Interestingly, the remaining retailers had received training and/or educational experience in the U.S.A's apparel industry. Two of the 5 retailers were trained at the Fashion Institute of New York. The level of education retailers obtained in the U.S.A. influenced their networking and overall business strategies that were employed, and the retail product development practices in their establishments. For example, retailer E<sub>4</sub> suggested that

I do have a network of individuals from my training in the U.S.A., with whom I communicate and share ideas. The pattern I follow is pretty much what I learned there . . . I am a member of different committees and from that point of view I do get in contact with several other retailers here [in Jamaica] and abroad [the U.S.A.].

Overall, each participant in this study indicated that networking, effective business strategies, and proper training were important for the survival of their businesses. This was especially in view of demographic, social, economic, and technological changes; all of which impacted both customers and retailers in Jamaica. Langreck (1999) found that networks were excellent channels for communication of ideas about business strategies and technology adoption. In this investigation, retailers did not look to networks for much support, per se, in developing new business strategies or technology adoption ideas. Rather, they looked to networks for establishing and maintaining work relationships. Retailers emphasized the importance of staff training, and each retailer had an on-going, in-service training program for employees. Training helped to ensure that quality standards were

adhered to as products were developed. Commenting on the training process Retailers E<sub>2</sub> and E<sub>1</sub> indicated,

I do have my own standards. I see what potential the worker is capable of doing and then I train workers as to how I want them [the worker] to perform on the job. . . . When employed, the work procedures carried out must be based on my standard and quality of work that is in keeping with my reputation. That is why I ensure that they [workers] are trained to my expectation. [Retailer E<sub>2</sub>]

Another retailer commenting on training indicated that

We carry out continuous training for workers. This is of paramount importance especially when we have acquired a new piece of equipment. We train our workers who will be using this new equipment so they will be able to use the equipment properly and safely. [Retailer E<sub>1</sub>]

According to retailers E<sub>2</sub> and E<sub>1</sub> interviews, like training, leadership skills impacted areas of communication, networking, and the organizational culture fostered. Retailers E<sub>5</sub>, E<sub>3</sub>, and E<sub>4</sub> indicated that

Leadership has to be strong and promote positive work attitudes. . . . It involves how we organize the staff and the work to be done. . . . It's the way we go about getting the job done. It involves getting all the elements of production rolling. . . . We have to take into consideration labor needs of the business as well as the needs of the individuals we employ. We also have to basically have a plan as to how to accomplish the organization's goals. [Retailer E<sub>5</sub>]

Retailers reiterated the fact that they had to be able to motivate workers. "My ability to motivate workers is very important. . . . I am always encouraging them to come to work with a good attitude and to do the right things at all times. . . ." [Retailer E<sub>3</sub>]. Further more, a second retailer indicated, "My ability to motivate my workers includes having a good rapport with them. . . . How they [workers] relate to me, the plant manager, and to each other also are important." [Retailer E<sub>4</sub>]

This ability to motivate workers required effective leadership skills. Embedded in the skills leaders possessed was a synergistic pattern of interpersonal and communication skills. Based on the synergistic pattern of communication observed in the retail establishments, it was clear that the communication pattern lacked a rigid top-down or hierarchical structure. Retailers noted that effective communication with vendors, customers, and workers was mandatory. Additionally, strong written communication skills were also essential for retailers to conduct their business transactions effectively and efficiently. Communication skills were found to be of great importance to the longevity and existence of business venture. Researchers such as Salmon (1989), Stemm, Jett, and Hayden (1986), and Wolfe (1989) emphasized the importance of strong communication skills (e.g., verbal and written) as well as interpersonal skills in all business pursuits.

Communication patterns were found to influence the organizational culture that existed in the retail establishments in different ways. Commenting on the area of communication, Retailer E<sub>4</sub> suggested,

We are like a family here. Workers celebrating birthdays are always recognized. If there is a death in the family or an emergency, everybody pools together to support the grieving individual. . . . Overall, I must say that the staff and I get on very, very well, and with each other too. I will give you a brief example. A worker's brother was killed last week and without any input from management, all the workers got together and my pattern maker who has very good computer skills decided to make a card and everybody signed it. They also collected money from each other and donated it to help with funeral expenses. I thought that was great. I was really touched by such a gesture.

The pattern of communication in Retailer E<sub>4</sub>'s establishment strengthened the corporate culture fostered, in that management had the interest of the workers at heart. The synergistic communication processes that were observed and that emerged from the data conveyed the importance of clear and constant communication pattern. Conversely, there were times when communication patterns were hampered in one way or another in the establishments. In two establishments (40%) retailers suggested that workers preferred to talk with supervisors rather than directly with them. Retailer E<sub>1</sub> stated, "They [workers] prefer to speak with the supervisor. Well, they see the supervisor more often than they see me." Retailer E<sub>5</sub> had this to say about workers not speaking with management openly.

First of all, there is the fact that in this culture people do not speak their minds. They go behind your back and you do not have too much up-front discussion with them. But we try our best to circumvent the lack of open discussions with workers. . . . The supervisor does a good job of dealing with and getting the workers to communicate with management. He can handle that as he works with the other supervisors and all the workers very well.

Revealed in these quotes is that communication is important in retail establishments. Based on the organizational culture, communication may be clear and transparent in some establishments between management and workers. Conversely, in another establishment the communication pattern was slightly different, whereby, workers communicated with supervisors more often when compared with communicating with managers.

From the data it was found that the retailers in Jamaica were involved in retail product development for an average of 19 years. Retailers suggested that they were engaged in retail product development to produce creative products that were exclusive and suited the expressed needs of their targeted customers. Retailers also indicated that they had autonomy and total ownership of the products they develop, which gave them a sense of pride.

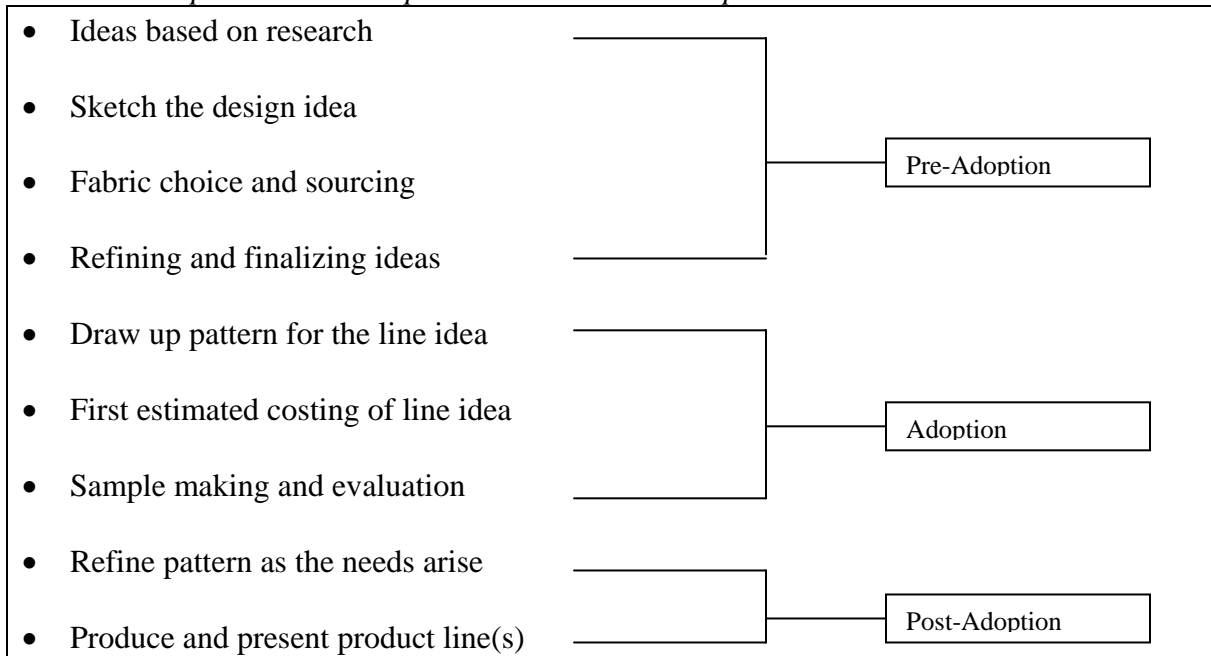
We are a small organization. All employees work with the line in one way or another. . . . I do the designs and sketches for the line. . . . I supervise the making of the samples and then we decide when to do the fitting. . . . But for the export line I have the autonomy and the ‘say so’ to pick out a group of workers who are the best. . . . So I tend to let only the most competent corkers work on the final product line. [Retailer E<sub>4</sub>]

In sum, we set out to provide a profile of the general business characteristics of small apparel retailers in Jamaica. The general profile themes that emerged from the data suggests that retailers were well educated, properly trained, motivated their workers, valued having a synergistic pattern of communication, maintained networks with other retailers in Jamaica and abroad, and were knowledgeable of the process and practices of retail product development. Our attention will now turn to the detailed retail product development process and practices in Jamaica in answering research question 2.

**Research question #2: What steps are specifically entailed in the retail product development processes and practices in Jamaica?**

Based on the data collected in Jamaica, the individuals overseeing the retail product development process in each establishment were the owner managers. Having established the roles, retailers were asked to identify the steps in the retail product development process. Table 1 provides the summary of the steps in the retail product development process identified by participants.

Table 1  
*Retailers Responses to the Steps in the Product Development Process*



As shown in Table 1, nine primary steps were identified by retailers. An in-depth presentation of each stage in the retail product development process based on the steps listed in Table 1 will be the focus of the next section.

### **Steps in the Retail Product Development Process**

#### *Ideas based on research*

The ideas for a product line were usually the results of research in the trend analysis phase. Retailers suggested that the trend analysis or sources of inspiration for line ideas were generated from (a) trade shows, (b) fashion trends seen in the media, and (c) scenes in fashion magazines. Again, it was the retailer (designer), who in four of the five establishments (80%) was the owner/manager, who did the trend analysis. One retailer created mood boards that were developed as a source of inspiration for fashion ideas obtained from the print media.

#### *Sketch the design idea*

The themes generated for the line ideas and design sketches were directly based on the trend analysis. It was the retailers who made the final decision about the theme and design sketch for the product line, and made the decisions regarding the stock plans. In establishment E<sub>5</sub>, it was the board of directors who carried out the decisions for the trend analysis and theme evolution as well as for the inventory plan.

Basically, the directors collaborate on what we are working on. One director may have an idea . . . so we would meet, look at the idea and decide if it was worthwhile and feasible. . . If we decide that it is something good we make the final plans and develop the product. [Retailer E<sub>5</sub>]

#### *Fabric choice, color, and sourcing*

All five retailers placed strong emphasis on retail product development (i.e., developing their own private label products for a specified target market). Again, the retailer made the decisions regarding the choice of colors. Common among the responses from retailers in this study was the fact that the color palette used did not change readily. Color decisions were made based on the color trends and forecasted colors observed in the fashion markets. Retailers were not engaged in developing colors specifically for the target market. Instead, it was the fashion market that to a large extent dictated the colors that retailers choose to make products for the targeted customers. "I would say the colors I work with are those that are available on the market. I just follow the color trend. . . . However, I choose colors that are reflective of the season at all times" [Retailer E<sub>4</sub>].

Basically, we do not usually base our colors on the season per se . . . we have certain standard colors that we work with. For example, when making men's suits, we work with navy, black, shades of green, gray, beige and

khakis. We also work with plaids and stripes, but to a lesser extent. [Retailer E<sub>5</sub>]

The retailers interviewed sourced all fabric from overseas. This was because, as one retailer said,

Right now we really do not have any choice but to source all the fabric from abroad. Technically, there is almost nothing here to source from . . . The selection of fabric available is really limited in the local market. [Retailer E<sub>2</sub>]

This comment implied that fabrics were not available locally, from which retailers could choose to make their product lines. Fabrics were sourced from countries such as the Canada, U.S.A., and European countries including England, France, and Switzerland. When sourcing fabrics from overseas, it is very important that there is adequate lead-time so those products will be available on time. The lead-time for sourcing fabrics from overseas varied across establishments. “. . . We keep up on having fabric in stock at all times. We always have at least two week’s supply of fabric in house. In terms of sourcing fabrics from abroad, it usually takes anywhere between one to two months” [Retailer E<sub>1</sub>].

I source all my fabrics from overseas...one hundred percent. If I am doing a collection, I like having three to six months lead-time in advance. . . . It can even be a longer or shorter time . . . . When I am sourcing from the Caribbean, I may have a shorter lead-time. [Retailer E<sub>3</sub>]

For me, I like to work with a lead-time of about six months to one year. You have to give yourself adequate time, so that you can get your fabric to the shop on time for production to keep rolling smoothly. [Retailer E<sub>4</sub>]

### *Refining and finalizing ideas*

Throughout the retail establishments it was found that the owner/manager made the decisions regarding the styles for the chosen line(s). These designs were created based on the market trends observed and the needs of customers. Additionally, samples were frequently developed for the product line ideas generated so that the style could be perfected before production took place. Retailers were asked how they went about making decisions for the styles to be produced. Responses included,

We create our own designs, and I make the final decision. Recently we decided to make a change to the silhouette of the men’s double-breasted jacket. We did a little research and saw that the trend over the years was to have the buttons place[ed] close to the edge of the lapel. . . . So, we decided to make the lapels a little wider and not to place the buttons so close to the edge of the lapel as a new style feature . . . but I am the one who makes the final decision. [Retailer E<sub>1</sub>]

In commenting on the question asked, retailer E<sub>5</sub> suggested that

We look at TV to see what people are wearing and try to get as close as possible. Lapels are sketched wider or narrower based on the trend . . . . But essentially, the variations are usually simple and sometimes not readily noticeable. [Retailer E<sub>5</sub>]

#### *Draw up pattern for the line idea*

Of the five retail establishments, only retailers E<sub>2</sub> and E<sub>4</sub> did some degree of fabric design. Retailers E<sub>1</sub>, E<sub>3</sub>, and E<sub>5</sub> purchased finished fabrics. Retailer E<sub>4</sub> was in the business of creating specific fabric design for the resort line provided for visitors to the island. Retailer E<sub>2</sub> has two textile artists who did the application of the fabric design to the greige goods.

The textile artists and I work to develop lots of designs for fabric. As a team, we then evaluate the designs and decide which one(s) would be most effective, salable and suitable for the product we will make so the target market would be satisfied with them. [Retailer E<sub>2</sub>]

The artists who work along with me in developing prints for the fabric used for the resort line. . . . I encourage the artists to come up with creative designs . . . we work together in developing some fabric designs that will be attractive to tourists when they see the garments I produce. [Retailer E<sub>4</sub>]

Free-lance artists in collaboration with owner/managers developed and applied fabric design to greige goods used by retailers E<sub>2</sub> and E<sub>4</sub>. Intricate fabric designs such as plaids and stripes were not carried out by any of the retailers investigated.

#### *First estimated costing of the line idea*

In this step, an estimated costing of the line is carried out. Cost estimation is very important for retailers, to have an idea of how much it will cost them to produce the line and the cost customers would be expected to pay. "Cost estimation is important so we have an idea about cost from early and try to source the fabric because the cost of the fabrics affects the final production . . ." [Retailer E<sub>5</sub>].

#### *Sample making and evaluation*

The pattern maker, designer, and stitchers were found to be major players in the prototype construction and development. In three establishments (60% of the cases) the pattern maker was also the designer and owner/manager. The prototype samples were sometimes made up in the final fabric if products being developed were for a collection. Otherwise the prototype/sample was made up in a less expensive fabric such as muslin or calico.

I do prototype development whenever I am producing a line or collection. You get a different reaction from the final fabric than you would normally get from a garment made from muslin or calico . . . You may have a totally different look when you make up the prototype from the final fabric especially if the weight of the final fabric is significantly different from the weight of the fabric that was used to make the sample/prototype. [Retailer E<sub>2</sub>]

Samples were usually completed with all the trims and notions needed for the final product. This was to help retailers as they carried out an in-depth analysis of the entire product. It was at this stage that corrections were made to the sample and sample pattern. Based on the corrections, the final production pattern would be made after all the corrections were in place. Retailers were asked about the technique that was used in order to develop the production pattern. Responses included, “I use both methods. I tend to go from draping to the construction of the flat pattern. This has always been a very realist and easy method for me” [Retailer E<sub>3</sub>]. “Based on our target market and the lines we produce, we only use the flat pattern method” [Retailer E<sub>5</sub>].

In 80% of the retail establishments, both flat pattern and draping methods were used for the construction of prototypes. In one establishment, only the flat pattern method was used. All retailers carried out the task of preparing samples from which the final pattern would be made. However, it was found that if owner/managers were faced with a time constraint, it was highly likely that the sample-making step would be eliminated.

#### *Refine pattern as the needs arise*

In this stage, the samples are fitted and the line is presented. This process involves sequential as well as simultaneous operations. Sometimes workers whose body measurement conformed to the size(s) of products being developed were used as “fit” models.

Sometimes we make a sample that fits the size of one of our workers if we are making garments for females. The males are less fussy about how the garment fits. . . . When we use the worker as a fit-model that is no extra cost to us. . . . [Retailer E<sub>1</sub>]

Another retailer indicated the following regarding the fitting of the sample, “we fit our garment(s) on the dress forms. In this way I am able to evaluate the garment and make the necessary corrections” [Retailer E<sub>3</sub>]. The third retailer commenting on the practice of fitting outlined the process this way.

I will use a worker who is the size of the sample to do a little modeling. This is the best method for me to use. I can see how the garment reacts to movement and stress. When I place the garment on the dress form, I can evaluate how it hangs . . . on the live-models you see how the garment operates. [Retailer E<sub>4</sub>]

Based on the responses of retailers, it can be seen that samples are fitted on both live-models and on dress forms. It is the retailer who evaluated the fit of the garments. In order to reduce costs, workers are used as fit-models in these retail establishments. The evaluations from the fitting session(s) lead to necessary alterations. In altering the sample pattern, retailers aimed at (a) achieving accuracy in the final production pattern and (b) improving utilization of fabric when the pattern pieces were spread for cutting. Retailers were asked what activities were carried out to perfect the sample patterns in order to come up with production patterns, and the responses suggested by retailers included,

The production pattern is made after we are fully satisfied with the sample. It can be a tedious procedure. . . . I do some adjustments between fitting garments on a mannequin and on a live model. This helps me to get the perfect fit that I am looking for to be present in the final product. [Retailer E<sub>2</sub>]

. . . First of all, when the sample pattern is made up we try to ensure that all the technical elements are on it. . . . I make the necessary adjustments based on the analysis I have been carried out, then I develop the final pattern for production. [Retailer E<sub>4</sub>]

At this point the pattern would be graded, and specs confirmed, resulting in the perfecting of the final pattern before production. Analyses of this procedure in each establishment studied indicated that fabric specification was also a means of communicating quality requirements of fabric. The specs confirmed had to be in keeping with the overall industry specs regulations and were determined by the owner/managers in all cases before production sourcing began.

#### *Produce and present product line(s)*

The final production of garments may be carried out by retailers having their own manufacturing facilities. In the formative years, retailer E<sub>3</sub> sourced the handwork activities, such as cut-work embroidery for the product line. However, this means of production sourcing was no longer carried out because this retail establishment currently employs workers to complete such processes. “In formative years we had to contract embroidery work done for us. Now we have full-time employers who do all the cut-work embroidery in-house.”

Following the responses to steps in the retail product development process, participants were asked about the order in which these steps took place (sequentially or simultaneously) in Jamaica. Responses across retailers suggested that some steps were sequential whereas others were simultaneous. Comments from retailers regarding the order in which the outlined steps were carried out were as follows. “That is dependent on the type of product being developed. We work sequentially and simultaneously. . . as I said before” [Retailer E<sub>1</sub>]. “Some steps are definitely sequential whereas others are simultaneous. . . . You have to be flexible” [Retailer E<sub>2</sub>].

As you go along you find that some steps have to be carried out in a sequence for example, you need to have your pattern before your sample is made so you can check how your garment fits . . . and be able to make your product line afterwards. Thinking about your fabric, the cost, and design usually go on simultaneously. [Retailer E<sub>3</sub>]

When a second retailer was asked about the steps in the retail product development process, she indicated that “some of the processes have to go on simultaneously, whereas others are carried out sequentially” [Retailer E<sub>5</sub>].

In essence, participants clearly indicated that it depends on the step, there were times when some steps were carried out simultaneously and other times sequentially. In sum, the steps in retail product development in Jamaica include a series of operations that are carried out sequentially and/or simultaneously. At the forefront of the steps you find the targeted customers for whom the products are developed. Thus, steps in the retail product development process begins with generation of the idea for the line; moving into theme development; concept development; fabric selection; prototype and sketching the design idea; estimated cost for the line idea, sample making and evaluation; refining of the pattern; and ending with production and presentation of the line on the sales floor for the target market.

**Research question # 3: In what ways are the steps in apparel retail development in Jamaica similar to or different from the steps in the apparel retail product development processes in the U.S.A., using the Wickett et al., (1999) Revised Apparel Retail Product Development Model as a point of comparison?**

Tables 2 shows a comparison between the three primary stages in the retail product development identified by retailers in Jamaica and the Wicket et al. (1999) Revised Apparel Retail Product Development Model. These stages are (1) pre-adoption; (2) adoption; and (3) post-adoption.

Table 2  
Comparison Table of Respondent's Participation in Retail Product Development (Adapted from Wickett et al., 1999, p. 33)

Stages in the Wickett et al. (1999) product Development Model	Steps Identified by Jamaican Retailers
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Pre-Adoption</b></p> <p><u>Trend Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Buying area (buyers, general merchandise managers)</li> <li>▪ Design teams, fashion director</li> <li>▪ Product development manager</li> <li>▪ Chief executive officer</li> <li>▪ Merchandising manager</li> <li>▪ Product manager</li> </ul> <p><u>Concept Involvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Perceptions gained from traveling markets</li> <li>▪ Evaluation of overall trend information</li> <li>▪ Assessment of past trend sales</li> <li>▪ Information gained from fashion services</li> </ul> <p><u>Palette Selection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Color services</li> <li>▪ Historical color data</li> <li>▪ Color testing results</li> <li>▪ New "emerging color stars"</li> <li>▪ Purchased garments and trends</li> <li>▪ Yarn samples</li> <li>▪ Color swatches and shows</li> </ul> <p><u>Fabrication Selection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quality, appearance, draping, weight, hand</li> <li>▪ Criteria used in selecting product fabrications</li> <li>▪ Structural fabric characteristics (performance)</li> </ul> <p><u>Fabric Design</u>-Source of fabric design:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Original designs (prints/plaids) created by company</li> <li>▪ Both pre-developed designs and original designs</li> <li>▪ Pre-developed designs from fabric companies</li> </ul> <p><u>Source of fabric design ideas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Books and magazines</li> <li>▪ Fabric services (fabric libraries, print services, design services, forecasting services)</li> <li>▪ Fabric samples, mills</li> <li>▪ Market trends, textile studies</li> </ul> <p><u>Silhouette and Style Directions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Original designs</li> <li>▪ Branded merchandise "knock-offs"</li> <li>▪ Both original designs and current trends</li> <li>▪ History (past successful basic style blocks)</li> <li>▪ Market place (domestic and</li> <li>▪ Silhouette and style inspiration provided by:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--Knock-offs international</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Ideas based on research</p> <p><u>Sources:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ International market (fashion capitals)</li> <li>▪ The Internet</li> <li>▪ Media (print and written)</li> <li>▪ Trade shows</li> </ul> <p>Employers not involved in search for trends</p> <p><u>Sketch the design idea</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Instinct</li> <li>▪ Preference</li> <li>▪ Based on trend analysis</li> </ul> <p><u>Fabric Choice, Colors, Styles</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Information from inspirational trend</li> <li>▪ Source of color information</li> <li>▪ Based on fabric colors available on the market</li> <li>▪ Seasonal colors available</li> </ul> <p><u>Discuss Idea(s) including Fabric Choice</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Suitability of fabric for the design chosen</li> <li>▪ Availability of fabric quality, appearance, draping etc.</li> <li>▪ Criteria used in selecting product fabrications</li> <li>▪ Structural fabric characteristics</li> </ul> <p><u>Source of fabric design</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Designs available on the market</li> <li>▪ Original designs for specific line</li> </ul> <p><u>Source of fabric design ideas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nature</li> <li>▪ Fabrics in the market</li> <li>▪ Books and magazines</li> <li>▪ Initiative and imagination</li> </ul> <p><u>Interpret needs of customers and refine ideas</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Original designs</li> </ul> <p>▪ Both original designs and knock-off</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Adoption</b></p> <p><u>Prototype Construction and Analysis</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prototype samples constructed</li> <li>▪ Prototype samples not constructed</li> </ul> <p><u>Line presentation</u></p> <p>Line presentation incorporated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prototype samples</li> <li>▪ Sketch boards, Storyboards</li> <li>▪ Computerized renderings</li> <li>▪ Paintings, Pictures</li> <li>▪ Swatches, Fabrications</li> </ul> <p><u>Line decisions based on:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Testing results</li> <li>▪ Fashion and trends observed</li> <li>▪ Salability judgments</li> </ul>	<p><u>Draw up pattern for the line idea and do initial full costing of line idea</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prototype samples constructed</li> <li>▪ Prototype samples not constructed</li> </ul> <p><u>Presenting of line</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Line presentation incorporated:</li> <li>▪ Prototype samples</li> <li>▪ Storyboards</li> <li>▪ Pictures</li> </ul> <p><u>Line decisions based on:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Owner/managers preferences</li> <li>▪ Choice of the Board of Director</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Post-Adoption</b></p> <p>Fit and style perfection</p> <p>Materials/Garment Specification Writing</p> <p>Production Pattern Making</p> <p>Firm Development</p>	<p><u>Do up sample and evaluate for fitting and style perfection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use of live models and dress forms</li> <li>▪ Final production patterns</li> </ul> <p><u>Refine pattern as the needs arise</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Based on specifications by owner/managers</li> <li>▪ In keeping with industry standards</li> </ul> <p><u>Produce and present line</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Production Pattern Making</li> </ul> <p><u>Place product line on the sales floor</u></p>

In keeping with the purpose of this study, which was to explore the retail product development processes and practices in Jamaica, and specifically research question # 3 of this study, the processes and practices were found to be similar.

### *Pre-adoption*

Activities in the pre-adoption phase of retail product development, shown in Table 2, were carried out in Jamaica, but not in the same depth and breath as in the U.S.A. There are many similarities between the two countries in the activities carried out in the trend analysis phase. However, unlike retailers in the U.S.A., who involved their employees in this stage, retailers in Jamaica did not involve their workers in the first step of the pre-adoption process (idea based on research).

I begin with evaluating what my customers need. . . . We also observe the fashion trends in the media. We always discuss design ideas as the directors. . . . Cost is important, so we have an idea about the cost from early and try to source fabric before the cost of the fabric negatively affect the final costing of the garment. [Retailer E<sub>5</sub>]

During the concept evolution stage, retailers in Jamaica made the decisions based on their instinct and personal preferences. In the U. S.A., concept evolution involved a number of individuals and constituencies. Thus, the overall theme or decisions regarding line concept represented the collaboration of a team or group members in the U. S.A.

Palette selection or palette development in the U.S.A. can be an intensive area of activity. Several color-related decisions have to be made before the final colors are identified that best fit the theme for the line to be developed. Wickett et al. (1999) found that retailers could review up to 1,000 shades and tones of colors before the final selection is made. In Jamaica, retailers selected colors based on color palettes already developed and available on the market. Retailers in Jamaica spent significantly less time in making the final decision regarding colors, since color decisions were made independently and retailers reviewed fewer colors.

In the area of fabrication selection, both U.S.A. and Jamaican retailers selected fabrication using very similar factors, such as suitability, availability, market trends, and price. However, retailers in the U.S.A. had more options and took more factors into account when making decisions regarding fabrication selection than retailers in Jamaican. Retailers in the U.S.A. sourced fabric samples domestically and internationally. By way of contrast, retailers in Jamaica sourced all their fabrics internationally. Countries from which fabrics were sourced included Canada, U.S.A., and European countries including England, France, and Switzerland.

Fabric design was carried out in both the U.S.A. and Jamaica. In Jamaica, retailers generally used finished fabrics in making their product lines. Only two of the five retailers (40%) were actually engaged in developing their own unique fabric design for selected product lines. For most retailers (60%) it was more economical to use finished fabrics than to develop unique fabric surface designs. Conversely, in the U.S.A. the development of fabric surface design and the determination of plaids and prints required time, effort, and skilled staff members who had the ability to develop ideas from a wide variety of sources for the final fabric design.

In determining the silhouette for the product line, it was common for retailers in the U.S.A. and Jamaica to develop original as well as knock-off designs. In the U.S.A., retailers developed a large number of silhouettes (up to 400), in some instances. After a selection process, the silhouettes to be used in making the final product line were selected.

Wickett et al. (1999) stated that after the silhouettes have been chosen, then the styles are sketched in detail. Noteworthy was the fact that retailers in Jamaica usually develop fewer silhouettes, and the style ideas were not usually sketched to the level of detail, as indicated by U. S.A. retailers, during the refining and finalizing of ideas stage. Finally, inspiration for the development of silhouette and styles were obtained from similar sources in both countries, that is, the domestic and international markets.

### *Adoption*

Common among Jamaican and U.S.A. retailers was the construction of samples in the prototype construction and analysis phase, outlined in Table 2. However, Jamaican retailers were likely to eliminate sample making when faced with a time constraint for line development. In the U. S., line presentation was an elaborate process, whereas in Jamaica this process and practice was rather simple and straightforward.

Basically, the directors collaborate on what we are working on. One director may have an idea . . . we would meet, look at the idea. We create our own designs, and I make the final decision. Recently we decided to change the men's double-breasted jacket. We did a little research and saw that the trend over the years was to have the buttons placed close to the edge of the lapel. . . . So, we decided to simply make the lapels a little wider and not to place the buttons close to the edge of the lapel as a new style feature . . . But, I am the one who makes the final decision. [Retailer E<sub>1</sub>]

In both countries, the purpose of line presentation was to make the final decision as to which products would be adopted for the final product line. In Jamaica, decisions regarding the product line were based on the preferences retailers had for styles chosen to be refined for the final line, whereas in the U.S.A. the decisions regarding the product line were made based on consensus from several team players within the retail firm.

### *Post-adoption*

During this stage, activities such as fit and style perfection, production pattern making, materials specification, production sourcing, as well as final cost and estimation were carried out, as shown in Table 2. The data collected confirmed that Jamaican retailers carried out all but one of the post-adoption steps.

Like retailers in the U.S.A., Jamaican retailers carried out fit and style perfection (refining of pattern) with care. In both cases, this stage was described as a time consuming (depending on the number of pieces for the collection), but important step, in the post-adoption phase of retail product development. During this stage, a detailed assessment or evaluation was made of each style. Recommendations were made regarding the refinement of the styles chosen. Whereas U.S.A. retailers used professional fit models whose body measurement was based on standard body measurement(s) and proportions, in Jamaica it was common for retailers to use their female employees as fit models. Retailers in Jamaica solicited feedback from other workers as fitting of garments was carried out. Therefore, the group approach was used by Jamaican retailers in evaluating the fit of garments, which was

similar to the group approach used by U.S.A. retailers during this stage of retail product development.

After scrutinizing garments during the fitting session, retailers in Jamaica and the U.S.A. made the necessary corrections to the sample pattern before production patterns were developed. According to Wickett et al. (1999), U.S.A. production pattern making was a highly specific activity as U.S.A. retailers made alterations so that the “style would be more compatible with the equipment available, improving fabric utilization, and increasing efficiency of the assembly sequence” (p. 31). Similarly, retailers in Jamaica corrected the sample pattern based on the evaluation carried out in the fitting stage.

Unlike U.S.A. retailers, in Jamaica production sourcing was eliminated. Retailers in Jamaica had their own manufacturing facilities in which all production took place. The final costing for the product line was determined by retailers in three (60%) retail establishments investigated in Jamaica. In the remaining two establishments (40%), it was the financial controller who determined final costing and estimates for the product line.

In sum, our analysis of the similarities and differences between retail product development in Jamaica and the U.S.A. revealed many similarities and few differences. The process of U.S.A. apparel product development described by Wickett et al. (1999) also reflected the product development practices reported by the Jamaican retailers. The main difference was in the area of production sourcing. In Jamaica, the small apparel retailers did not outsource the manufacturing of garments because they had their own manufacturing facility on site. According to Wickett et al., in the U.S.A. outsourcing was a common practice in specialty stores they studied.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the processes and practices of retail product development. The profile of the five apparel retail establishments in Jamaica revealed that Jamaican retailers were all educated in the U.S.A. apparel industry. Thus, the practices and process were similar to that of the U.S.A. apparel industry. The Jamaican retailers networked, practiced effective business skills, and trained their workers to be effective in their businesses, hence, leading to a return on their investment. Specifically, Jamaican apparel retailers are engaged in similar steps from trend analysis to technical development (post-adoption) of the apparel. These processes were impacted by internal factors (worker input) and external factors such as government policies and regulations. There were more similarities than differences in how Jamaican apparel retailers conducted their retail businesses. Similarities were very strong in that all primary steps identified in the Wickett et al. (1999) retail product development model were carried out in Jamaica. The main differences were cost, size, and production sourcing.

In the area of sourcing, in Jamaica, apparel retailers did not source the production of apparel, whereas in the U.S.A., production sourcing was prominent. Rather, Jamaican retailers carried out production sourcing in their own establishments, having production capacities. Jamaican apparel retailers do carry out similar processes and practices as their counterparts in the U.S.A.

It is also worth noting that Jamaican retailers in this study were faced with the challenge of cost when competing on the global market place. The Jamaican economy is currently unstable, the rate of foreign exchange is exorbitant, and cheap imports especially

from the Asian Bloc continue to enter the Jamaican market because of the free market economy model adopted by the Jamaican government since the 1980s. Even though these challenges continue to mount, retailers are hopeful as they continue to be engaged in retail product development activities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In retrospect, there are specific limitations in this research which should be addressed. The first limitation highlights the fact that this study was based on the qualitative views of only five participants. A larger sample, including workers who participate in retail product development process, would yield different results and conclusions. The most important implication of this limitation is that readers should refrain from drawing any conclusions about the prevalence of specific concerns, attitudes, or beliefs among the larger target audience of apparel retailers in Jamaica.

A second limitation reiterates the points that the results of this study provide insight into one region of a country. As in any other qualitative research, the generalizability of this case study's results to other populations may be limited. The third and probably most important limitation associated with this research is researcher bias. The subjective viewpoints of the researchers have to be considered when interpreting the results.

### **Assessment of the Research Approach**

In using qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, the researchers were able to obtain data that were both thick and rich based on the responses from participants. The multiple methods of collecting the data (Touliatos & Compton, 1988) through face-to-face in-depth interview procedure, informal telephone conversations, many visits to the retail establishments, and rapport with employees in these establishments have contributed to the breadth and depth of the data collected. Wickett (1995) recommended the case study method as one way of getting focused attention from participants, and to increase the probes into various areas. The researchers also attempted to achieve triangulation as recommended by Touliatos and Compton as a validation technique. This was achieved by the on-site visits made, obtaining supporting reports and documents, and the physical examination of artifacts, such as patterns and mood boards.

### **Issues for Further Research**

Due to the exploratory nature of this research investigation, a much broader scope for future research has emerged. Several areas of interest and utility for researchers in the field of textiles and clothing can benefit from future research that emerged from this case study inquiry to include, but not limited to:

1. A duplication of this research in another developing country to determine if there is consistency of findings
2. Using the focus-group method in order to obtain more in-depth information about retail product developers. Groups can be a helpful means of stimulating ideas and encouraging more commentary

3. Conducting face-to-face interviews with not only owner/managers, but also with other workers in retail establishments to get their views on business operations on the whole.
4. A comparison study could be carried out between the product development processes in retail establishments and product development carried out in manufacturing firms
5. The contributions apparel retailing makes to the economy of Jamaica
6. The effect of new technologies on retail product development processes and practices in developing countries
7. An in-depth investigation into the effect of globalization on small apparel retail establishments in developing countries could also be carried out to contribute the existing body of literature.

### **Implications**

The Wickett et al. (1999) Revised Apparel Retail Product Development Model provided valuable theoretical framework for this research investigation. First, the model provides a systematic mapping of the stages that takes place during the retail product development process. Second, this model shows dynamic and alternative ways of carrying out various stages in the retail product development processes; sequentially and simultaneously. Third, this model proposed that the process of retail product development is continually impacted by diverse internal and external factors, including environmental factors such as societal, economical, and technological changes.

The study results have the potential to contribute to apparel retail scholarship as it provides insights into retail product development practices in an international setting. Based on the study results, two hypotheses were developed for future research investigation:

H1: For Jamaican retailers, carrying out retail product development, to remain viable in the retail business they need to: (a) remain focused on the needs of their customers, (b) continue to develop products of a high quality that are unique using their creative skills, and (c) attract knowledgeable and talented employees in order to remain competitive in the global marketplace.

H2: Successful Jamaican apparel retailers will be distinguished from unsuccessful retailers because they possess skills such as: (a) the ability to form and sustain strong networks, (b) effective leadership and business skills, and (c) adapting to new forms of technologies in the apparel industry.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Sample of Interview Questions**

#### **Company history**

1. What is the history of this company?
2. How has this company changed over the years?
3. Describe the challenges that accompanied the changes?

#### **Company profile**

1. Please describe the current organizational structure of your company.
2. What products do you offer to your customers?
3. What are your company's goals and objectives?

#### **Employee profile**

1. How many people (males and females) are employed in this company?
2. Are they full-time or part-time workers?
3. Where do you recruit/find your employees?

#### **Target market and customer service**

1. Please describe your target market
2. Has your target market changed over the years?
3. Why do your customers come here to shop?

**Business environment**

1. How would you describe your business environment?
2. What is the role of your business in the local community?
3. Who are your competitors?

**Marketing and managerial functions**

1. What are your current marketing and goals and objectives?
2. Are they clearly stated or implied?
3. Does your marketing strategy differ depending on your market position?

**Organizational culture**

1. What does the term “organizational culture” means to you?
2. Is this culture consistent with the current objectives and policies of your company?
3. Do employers help to formulate these rules and regulations?

**Retail product development process and practices**

1. What does the term product development means to you?
2. What products do you develop?
3. Do you have a specific person or department that does product development?
4. Describe the role of this/these persons overseeing this process.
5. How much does your company follow overall market trends?
6. Who is involved in exploring and determining what major trends will be used?
7. Who makes the final decision on what theme/concept the line will follow?
8. Do you make model stock plans?
9. How are color decisions for the season made?
10. Who makes decisions about color?
11. How do you acquire fabric for making products?
12. What sources of inspiration do you use for fabric design (prints, plaids)?
13. Do you use outside sources (free-lance artists, etc.) to create different print designs?
14. How does your company create designs?
15. Who is responsible for developing sketches for the line ideas?
16. Can you describe your sources of inspiration for silhouettes?
17. Who determines the line concept and assortment balance?
18. Do you make up actual samples for the line ideas generated?
19. Who is responsible for prototype development?
20. How involved are designers or buyers in monitoring outcomes of prototypes?
21. What method(s) do you use for the development of your first patterns?
22. Who presents the line for adoption?
23. What techniques are used to visually present the line?
24. How do you approach the issue of fit?
25. Who is involved in perfecting fit?
26. Is perfecting fit done for every style chosen for a line?

- 27. How much time is spent on this process?
- 28. Are materials tested as they come in?
- 29. What percentage of inspection is done?
- 30. Do you conduct materials testing at your company?
- 31. Do you own your own manufacturing facilities or do you source production?
- 32. What do you look for when sourcing?
- 33. Who estimates costs for the styles after production decisions are made?

**Technology**

- 1. What type of technology is currently used in your business?
- 2. Do you have any plans to upgrade your operation with more modernized equipment?
- 3. Technology wise, what is your dream for technology upgrade?

**Process perspective**

- 1. What advantages does developing your own merchandise have over selecting private labels products obtained from manufacturers and other retailers?
- 2. How do you evaluate success of the product development process?
- 3. Do you see the trend in retail product development as continuing to grow?

**Summary questions**

- 1. Can you share with me any conflict and/or challenges you have faced in your business?
- 2. What strategies did you use to minimize or overcome these challenges?
- 3. What do you consider to be the most important characteristic of a successful apparel retailer?
- 4. What would you do differently (if any) in your business if you were to start all over again?

**Appendix B**

**Observation Schedule**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interviewee: Owner # \_\_\_\_\_ Employee # \_\_\_\_\_  
 Photographs: Exterior \_\_\_\_\_ Interior \_\_\_\_\_ People \_\_\_\_\_

**Appraisal of Interviewee**

Overall appearance: Good \_\_\_\_\_ Average \_\_\_\_\_ Poor \_\_\_\_\_  
 Personal grooming: Well-groomed \_\_\_\_\_ Clean and neat \_\_\_\_\_ Sloppy \_\_\_\_\_  
 Style of dressing: \_\_\_\_\_

Dressy \_\_\_\_\_ Casual \_\_\_\_\_ Sporty \_\_\_\_\_ Business \_\_\_\_\_  
 Fashionability:  
 Update \_\_\_\_\_ Contemporary-conservative \_\_\_\_\_  
 Unfashionable \_\_\_\_\_  
 Personality descriptive: (Check all that apply)  
 Friendly \_\_\_\_\_ Outgoing \_\_\_\_\_ Talkative \_\_\_\_\_ Bubbly \_\_\_\_\_  
 Reserved \_\_\_\_\_ Unfriendly \_\_\_\_\_ Hostile \_\_\_\_\_ Shy \_\_\_\_\_  
 Pleasant \_\_\_\_\_ Quiet \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Helpful \_\_\_\_\_ Snobby \_\_\_\_\_  
 Harsh \_\_\_\_\_ Rude \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Sarcastic \_\_\_\_\_ Sweet \_\_\_\_\_  
 Loud \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Others \_\_\_\_\_  
 Additional observations and  
 comments: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appraisal of Store Atmosphere/Ambiance

Overall impression of persona interaction:  
 Friendly/open \_\_\_\_\_ reserved \_\_\_\_\_ unfriendly \_\_\_\_\_  
 Interactions observed this date:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Employee --customer(s):  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Owner  
 --customer(s):  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Owner  
 --employee:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Employee --employee:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Other interactions:  
 Customers observed:  
 How many? \_\_\_\_\_  
 How dressed \_\_\_\_\_  
 Perceived attitude:  
 Friendly \_\_\_\_\_ reserved \_\_\_\_\_ unfriendly \_\_\_\_\_  
 How was customer greeted?  
 How did customer respond?  
 Did customer make a purchase?  
 Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appraisal of Store Atmosphere/Ambiance

Overall impression or feeling:  
 Bright/inviting \_\_\_\_\_ Pleasant/nice \_\_\_\_\_ Oppressive/dark \_\_\_\_\_  
 Overall appearance:  
 Great \_\_\_\_\_ Average/OK \_\_\_\_\_ Bad/poor \_\_\_\_\_  
 Comments:  
 Very orderly/neat and clean \_\_\_\_\_ Mostly orderly and clean \_\_\_\_\_

Fixture and wall displays:

Well-done/impressionable \_\_\_\_\_ Attractive \_\_\_\_\_ Poor \_\_\_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_\_\_

Window displays:

Well-done/impressionable \_\_\_\_\_ Attractive \_\_\_\_\_ Poor \_\_\_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_\_\_

Lighting:

Impression of floor layout:

Layout of equipment

Extra effects/features for ambiance:

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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### Author Note

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