Exploring in-store experience and store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry

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ABSTRACT

In order to understand the factors that affect customers' views and contribute to the allure of physical stores, this study explores the topic of in-store experience in the context of the South African fashion retail industry.

Researchers have recently become interested in consumers' preference for experience-oriented purchasing over transaction-oriented methods. The importance of offering stimulating in-store experiences with a view to promote competitiveness is highlighted by this shift in customer preferences; this idea is prevalent in both academic research and corporate practice. While several studies have explored different facets of customer experience, these studies focused on discrete features like price, variety, or convenience, creating a vacuum in our knowledge of the phenomena. The present study uses a thorough and focused methodology to investigate how several factors interact to influence customer experience in the setting of South African fashion retail.

Brick-and-mortar establishments are in danger of going out of business as the retail environment transforms, which is largely characterised by the emergence and popularity of online shopping platforms. This risk of this shift is especially evident in the fashion retail industry, as online shopping continues to be alluring. By examining how in-store experiences might improve the competitiveness of brick-and-mortar fashion businesses in South Africa, this study aims to close the gap in our present knowledge of the field.

Sensory factors, which include both physical traits and design components, have been found to be crucial in determining how customers perceive physical establishments. This study, which builds on prior research, aims to objectively investigate the interactions between these components and dimensions to provide comprehensive in-store experiences. The study adopts Pine and Gilmore's (4E) construct, which captures the customer's subjective viewpoint on the instructive, entertaining, escapist, and aesthetic experiences provided by brick-and-mortar establishments. It aims to respond to the need for thorough, subjective empirical research on consumer experiences in this sphere.

The results of this study further shed light on the reasons why customers choose physical fashion retail stores over e-commerce platforms, the types of experiences they have while shopping there, the benefits of in-person shopping, and the elements that make a physical fashion retail store attractive.

Primary research was conducted to gather data directly from participants as the empirical component of this study. The empirical component used an exploratory research technique and a qualitative approach. The technique used for participant recruitment was non-probability

convenience and judgment sampling. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted to gather the data. The data was analysed using the Morse and Field approach, and category and theme analyses were carried out using the qualitative data analysis program ATLAS.ti 23. Five themes emerged from the analysis, each with four to six subcategories.

Due to the tactile and sensory elements associated with in-store shopping for fashion items, including fitting clothing items and engaging with the physical environment, this type of shopping environment is preferred by South African customers. These establishments can fulfil and even surpass customers' purchasing expectations because they offer a hands-on experience, which provides both therapeutic as well as escape value. Participants favour the instant gratification and simplicity of returns that physical businesses offer, notwithstanding the convenience of online shopping. The atmosphere in these businesses, which includes the music, lighting, and cleanliness, has a salient impact on the shopping experience. Satisfaction is increased by thoughtful shop layouts and top-notch customer service. Participants also see value in things associated with brick-and-mortar shops such as having a variety of product options, opportunity to notice trends, promotions, and social interactions, highlighting the significance of a well-rounded and interesting shopping experience. These results point to the continued popularity of physical fashion retail establishments in South Africa and the imperative for merchants to satisfy shoppers' needs for an all-encompassing and joyful shopping experience.

This study explored several subjects that require further investigation. To ensure that findings are applicable to a wider range of retail environments, future research can use other retail concepts as the research context, conduct quantitative studies, increase the size and diversity of the sample, use a probability sampling method, and collect data longitudinally.

KEY TERMINOLOGIES IN THIS STUDY

Shopping motivation

Shopping motivation can be defined as the drivers of behaviour that conduct customers to the market to satisfy their needs (Gusti Ayu *et al*., 2021:549).

Perceived value

Perceived value is a construct that is based on customer experience and is defined as the difference between that which a customer sacrifices and the benefits derived (Zeithaml, 1988:14).

Customer experience

Customer experience, according to Lemon and Verhoef (2016:5-6), is viewed holistically from an expanded viewpoint, considering the customer's cognitive, emotional, sensory, social, and spiritual responses to all touchpoints within a company.

Experience economy

The experience economy refers to individuals or businesses whose primary goal is to produce an experience that provides customers with a distinct benefit that is a positive, emotional, and memorable experience at every touchpoint or transaction with a business (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a result of the difference between the expected and perceived performance of a product or service and whether their encountered experience surpassed their prerequisite expectations (Oliver, 1980).

Store attractiveness

Store attractiveness is widely acknowledged as a multifaceted construct that focuses on emotional, cognitive, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses to a business's offerings during the customer's purchase process (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016:69).

Fashion retail

Retailing can be defined as a set of operations that entail selling items and services directly to customers to meet their individual needs. Fashion retail can be described as a business that sells clothing, accessories, and footwear merchandise to customers (Musso & Druica, 2014:2).

In-store Experience

The in-store experience encompasses all interactions between customers and retailers, spanning various touchpoints throughout the shop, leading to customers gathering data to aid in their decision-making (Kumar & Polonsky, 2019:25).

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUALISATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to a global economic crisis that affected numerous industries, businesses and customers around the world (Santos *et al.*, 2021:101). The various restrictions placed on the movement of customers by governments, in an attempt to curtail the spread of the virus, caused the demise of numerous already struggling retailers, who were forced to close their doors due to a substantial decrease in customer footfall with a concomitant significant decline in profitability levels (Redda, 2021:2).

At present, many customers continue to shop online, and as a result, many brick-and-mortar stores and shopping centres have closed down. The fashion retail industry was one of the industries that were hit the hardest by the pandemic (Jolly, 2021). According to Smith (2021), sales in the global fashion retail industry declined by 43.5 percent during the peak periods of the COVID-19 virus in 2020, with approximately 12,000 stores closing their doors in the United States alone (Wahba, 2021). Bhasin (2021) predicts that another 80,000 stores in the United States will close by 2026. In the context of the South African fashion retail industry, MarketLine (2021) reported a sharp decline of 11.7 per cent in growth in 2020, denoting customers are rather opting to shop online.

With the bulk of restrictions lifted following the decline in COVID-19 infections around the world, brick-and-mortar stores are optimistic about welcoming customers back to their storefronts as South Africans started visiting retail stores once again (Angula & Zulu, 2021:158). However, the pandemic has had a prominent effect on customers' buying behaviour, especially with more customers still opting to shop online as opposed to venturing out to physical retail spaces (Gu *et al.*, 2021). In addition, the financial turmoil brought about by the pandemic on economies, businesses and individuals around the world, has caused customers to cut back on their spending. In South Africa, 61 percent of customers have limited their spending on both non-essential and essential items, opting for cheaper alternatives (McKinsey, 2022). Therefore, in order to keep their doors open and remain competitive, brick-and-mortar stores will need to provide a unique, convenient, and unified experience for their customers (Assosia, 2022).

One of the strategies that physical retail spaces can implement to increase customer footfall and improve profitability levels is to offer customers a unique in-store experience (Sheth, 2021:600). Schoeneberger (2019) states that customers have the need and desire to visit a physical retail store, not only to shop, but to interact. Thus, offering an educational, playful and mindful in-store

experience to customers and by keeping them engaged, surprised, and catered to on a personal level, may well lead to a substantial increase in revenue. A report by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) (2022) echoes this sentiment, affirming that providing a unique in-store experience has resulted in increased sales and customer engagement. In addition, research has shown that a profound in-store experience ultimately leads to improved customer satisfaction and store attractiveness (Hyllander & Fors, 2020:1). In-store experience has therefore become a critical factor to consider for the survival of brick-and-mortar retailers (Bagdare & Jain, 2013:799).

Brick-and-mortar retailers are, however, finding it increasingly difficult to adapt to the "new normal" and to adjust their offerings in accordance with the change in customer preferences (Hyllander & Fors, 2020:1). This is true in light of the significant role of in-store experience in improving the competitiveness of physical retail spaces (Bagdare & Jain, 2013:799), and thus further research on the topic is required.

This study aims to explore the notions of in-store experience and store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry. The results of this study will allow fashion retailers to gain a more holistic understanding of how customers experience physical fashion retail stores and if their experience plays a role in store attractiveness. The findings of this study will also provide fashion retailers with guidelines as to how to provide and enhance a desirable in-store experience to improve store attractiveness, customer footfall, and ultimately increase revenues.

1.2 BACKGROUND

1.2.1 The retail apocalypse

Retailing is defined as a set of operations that involve selling products and services directly to customers to meet individual needs (Musso & Druica, 2014:280). Traditional retail business operations comprise buying goods from manufacturers, wholesalers, and other dealers and selling them to customers directly (Fransoo *et al.*, 2019:341-353). In this regard, a relatively new term emerged that defines how the retail market rapidly advances through modern society, namely retail innovativeness. This refers to the extent to which local retailers adopt new merchandising or service ideas (Musso & Druica, 2014:384). The notion of retail innovativeness is a salient one that circumscribes recent realities in the marketplace during and after the global COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it is necessary for retailers to adapt and embrace innovativeness to remain abreast of recent trends in our age of consumerism – in order for retailers to remain profitable in the post-pandemic world with significant market changes (Musso & Druica, 2014:384).

A documented shift in buying behaviour suggests an individual customer with distinct values who prefers non-traditional retailers. Retailers of brick-and-mortar businesses thus need to provide improved customer experiences and engagement (Michelle *et al.*, 2020:263), since the shift in customer preferences is a distinct driver of the retail apocalypse.

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large part of the entire decision-making process focussed on the retail experience, where customers would actively choose to view the activity of in-store shopping as an enjoyable sensory experience (Sather, 2020:18). Contrary to the traditional view of physical retail shopping, the retail apocalypse is presented as a term to describe significant change in consumption habits, with retailer having to incorporate innovation to remain profitable (Sather, 2020:18). Customers were restricted by lockdown-related consumption habits and thus were forced to change and adapt. This meant that customer power shifted to some extent. According to Helm *et al.* (2020:2), changes in customer power are among the primary drivers that define today's retail apocalypse landscape. This is the case because as the number of alternative suppliers increased, the cost of comparison shopping around the globe became trivial, and customers gained a dominant position through the adoption of e-commerce. This indicates a customer's inclination toward e-commerce as a convenient cost-effective shopping alternative to traditional brick-and-mortar stores.

Brick-and-mortar stores have already struggled to compete in the fashion industry prior to the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent bankruptcy filings of once-popular retail stores like Toys "R" Us, Claire's, American Apparel, and Quiksilver, as well as announcements of shop closures owing to underperformance (i.e., JCPenney, Macy's, and Sears each announcing over 100 retail store closures), show that traditional retailing was already experiencing extreme financial challenges (Berman, 2019:75). According to Cavan (2016:353), store closures are a pervasive issue, affecting every part of the country, where an approximate loss of 175 million square feet of retail space occurred in 2016 due to increased competition from online sales and excess availability of retail space contributing to low sales turnover and loss of profits. E-commerce retailing and demand for online shopping has been consistently expanding since 2011, e-commerce sales have increased by 101 percent indicating a transition in retail (Helm *et al.*, 2020:1). This decline was accelerated by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing several brick-and-mortar fashion retailers to close permanently (Sumarliah *et al.*, 2021:1)

Fashion has always been a general indicator of prevailing market trends influenced by social, cultural, or economic factors (Moeng, 2012:8). In addition, fashion trends were considered to also be an indicator of customers' current point of view or emotional state. This matter conveys a well-known notion in western society: that customers are responsible for setting fashion trends while

the industry attempts to follow those trends. The fashion industry's indicator of prevailing market trends stems from the volatile and intensifying demand of customers, which leads to increased production of fashion retail goods and sales. Because of the major changes in customers' buying behaviour during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the retail apocalypse affecting physical retailers, this can be identified as a viable research gap: to investigate factors that could curtail the demise of the traditional brick-and-mortar fashion retail formats and to improve their competitiveness in a volatile market.

According to Angula and Zulu (2021:158), in-store/physical fashion retailers have to innovate and design their retail atmosphere to provide a remarkable shopping experience. McColl-Kennedy *et al.* (2015:431) affirm that customers are effectively changing their roles and behaviours in the market with a greater expectation of receiving superb value and a unique in-store experience when shopping at brick-and-mortar stores, denoting that customers today prefer experiential purchasing to that of the traditional buying of goods and services.

1.2.2 In-store experience

Considering the apocalyptic present context of South Africa's brick-and-mortar retail sector and the pending demise of the fashion retail industry (Smith, 2021). Physical retail stores are facing significant challenges in the retail industry today. Online retail rivalry can reduce client base and profit margins, in addition to ongoing expenses like property and overhead (Hagtvedt and Chandukala, 2023:505), retailers will need to adopt innovative strategies to increase customer footfall and remain competitive in a volatile market. One such strategy is to provide customers with a positive in-store experience.

According to Angula and Zulu (2021:158), during the product selection stage, customers are drawn to specific ambient aspects of the retail environment including lighting, sound, smell, and colour, eliciting that throughout the buying decision process namely a store's environment that has a significant influence on customer cognitions, emotions and overall experience. To counteract the decline of growth in brick-and-mortar retailers, environments should be designed or adapted in such a way to ensure that customers have a positive in-store experience, which could ultimately determine business success or failure (Vilnai-Yavetz *et al.,* 2021:1). Retail atmospherics can curate and strengthen customer relationships by creating tactical engagements where customers command a sensory experience in order to make a purchase decision, leading to the fundamental belief that customers do not only base purchase decisions solely on their functional aspects (De Farias *et al*., 2014:89). Retailers are effectively investing in store atmospherics engagement to curate a sensory environment where customers can participate in their shopping experience (Vilnai-Yavetz *et al*., 2021:2). Anguala and Zulu (2021:159) affirm that

purchase intention, customer satisfaction, loyalty, word-of-mouth, and repurchase intention are all positive outcomes of providing customers with a positive in-store experience. Customers can furthermore verify the store's ability to deliver on offered services through in-store experiences (Yibei & Norzaidahwati, 2023:5).

Furthermore, customers' motivation plays a major role in the experiences they have when visiting physical fashion retail outlets. Motivated consumers might actively interact with the surroundings of the store, look for goods or services, and generally enjoy a more engaging and customised in-store encounter (An & Han 2020:392)

Brick-and-mortar fashion retailers recognise that it is imperative to enhance customers' perception of value by curating positive in-store experiences to strengthen the brand or store's differentiation strategy in the fashion retail industry (Du Randt, 2015:1). This notion holds true, especially in the recent effects of COVID-19, where online shopping has seen exponential growth as COVID-19 restrictions hinder physical store shopping. In South Africa, the practice of shopping online, especially by means of using a smartphone, is at an all-time high (PWC, 2022). This highly competitive market spurs brick-and-mortar stores to be even more innovative in their attempt to attract customers to their physical storefronts. Providing positive in-store experiences to customers will allow fashion retailers to improve their competitive edge and store attractiveness (Chuchu *et al*., 2018:8).

1.2.3 Store attractiveness

Store attractiveness is a holistic concept (Angelo & Georgia, 2021:1296). Lemon and Verhoef (2016:69-96) describe store attractiveness as "a multifaceted construct that focuses on emotional, cognitive, behavioural, sensorial, and social responses to a business' offerings during the buying process". The goal of holistic marketing is to create an effective relationship with customers by means of providing them with a direct experience that elicits an emotional response from the customer toward the physical retail store (Choi *et al*., 2015:242). Therefore, store attractiveness can be encountered in multiple touchpoints a fashion retail store can offer (Angelo & Georgia, 2021:1297). The physical retailer thereby channels its communication with customers through their physical atmosphere, among others, and thereby should strive to enhance store attractiveness in order to improve customer perception and perceived value to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Ultimately, increased levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty could lead to improved attitudes toward the brick-and-mortar store and increased store visits (Musso & Druica, 2014:240).

To provide customers with a positive in-store experience and, in so doing, to curate increased store attractiveness, retailers should consider the four elements of design in the Design Ambient Social Trialability (DAST) model (Angelo & Georgia, 2021:1296). These are: (1) integrating functional and aesthetic elements such as the furnishing, layout, design, and any visual aspects displayed that are memorable of a physical retailer are known as the *design* elements; (2) understanding that the senses, including sight, hearing, smell, and touch, are influenced by *ambient* elements, as well as background cues triggering a customer's sensory reception; (3) noting that interactions with other individuals in the retail store surroundings are referred to as social qualities (i.e., store personnel and other customers) that evoke a *social* setting; and (4) a customer's capacity to try a product/service is the process of a customer physically experiencing the product/service that is referred to as *trialability*.

In addition to considering the four elements inherent to the DAST model, Calvo-Porral and Lévy-Mangin (2021:9) conclude that merchandise layout, the store's external environment, and store personnel can all positively influence customer satisfaction. As a result, the more appealing the item and product arrangement, the exterior surroundings, and the more helpful the sales personnel, the higher the customer satisfaction will be with the retailer, all of which are directly correlated to the overall attractiveness of the retail store. Retailers can thus use the elements mentioned above to provide their customers with increased value by curating a positive in-store experience and maintaining a favourable image of their physical retail stores in customers' minds (Musso & Druica, 2014:240). Consumer motivation is essential to store attractiveness since it shapes consumers' perceptions and levels of engagement with the physical retail store. Customers are more likely to stay in a physical retailer longer and are likely to increase their purchases. Retailers may improve the overall appeal of their physical retail stores and encourage great shopping experiences and customer loyalty by understanding and accommodating customer motivation (Sulaiman & Ahmed, 2017:19).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Customer experience is regarded as a critical component to the success of any business, influencing its competitiveness and profitability levels (McColl-Kennedy *et al.,* 2015). In addition, customers' preference for experience-orientated shopping over transaction-orientated shopping has become a topic of great interest amongst researchers (Bäckstrom & Johansson, 2017). As such, customer experience has received much attention over the past few years – both in practice and academia by several researchers (Chi *et al.*, 2022; Dieck & Han, 2021; Klaus, 2022; Pantano *et al.*, 2022) that have been conducted on customer experience, most of these studies focussed on various isolated aspects of customer experience such as price value, variety, and

convenience. In this light, this study conducted further investigation of customer experience from a holistic perspective by considering customer responses to multiple elements that an experience comprises (Bäckstrom & Johansson, 2017). According to Cunningham and De Meyer-Heydenrych (2021), the focus of previous studies is on isolated aspects of customer experience. This created a gap in the literature that was addressed in order to assist brick-and-mortar stores to provide a positive in-store experience for their customers in the South African fashion retail context.

The retail apocalypse is currently underway, not only in South Africa, but around the world. This provides the impetus for brick-and-mortar stores to become more competitive (Sather, 2020:18). Fashion retailers, specifically, are struggling to keep their doors open due to the increasing threat posed by online shopping platforms (Jolly, 2021). Assosia (2022) posits that to remain competitive in the online shopping environment, brick-and-mortar fashion stores will need to provide a positive in-store experience for their customers in an attempt to make their stores more attractive. Exploring in-store experience and store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry is furthermore crucial in the post-COVID context to adapt to changing consumer behaviours, revitalize physical shopping, and contribute to the economic recovery by enhancing the competitiveness of brick-and-mortar stores in the face of evolving retail landscapes.

Gultekin and Sarac (2021) propound that a brick-and-mortar store comprises various sensory impacts such as physical characteristics and design features that contribute to the in-store experience of a customer. Previous research has been conducted with a view to improve the overall understanding of the various aspects that customer experience comprises, but there was an opportunity to conduct further empirical investigations on how the elements and dimensions of customer experience combine to create the experience (Angula & Zulu, 2021:164). The 4E construct proposed by Pine and Gilmore (2011:5) focuses on a customer's subjective perspective of numerous facets of their in-store experience. This construct comprises four types of experiences that brick-and-mortar stores may consider providing to their customers, including educational, entertainment, escapist, and aesthetic experiences.

At the time of this study, to the knowledge of the researcher, no phenomenological studies have been conducted to explore in-store experience and store attractiveness in a South African fashion retail context. Furthermore, the study aimed to address the demand for more comprehensive empirical research on customers' in-store experience from a subjective standpoint. The results of the study hope to provide meaningful insights into customers' motivation for shopping at physical fashion retail stores as opposed to e-commerce platforms, how customers experience physical fashion retail stores, customer value derived from the physical shopping experience, and factors

that contribute to store attractiveness. The question that this study sought to answer is in essence: What do customers experience when shopping at a physical fashion retail store, and do these experiences contribute to the attractiveness of the retail store?

1.4 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the study expands on the various constructs used in the research. Firstly, an explanation of shopping motivation is provided, followed by a discussion on customer experience. The experience economy is then be explained with specific emphasis on the 4E construct which comprises four types of experiences, namely educational, entertainment, escapist, and aesthetic experiences. The section continues by explaining perceived experiential value with a focus on emotional value, social value, and sensory appeal value, after which the relationship between customer satisfaction and store attractiveness is elaborated upon. The section concludes with a brief overview of the South African fashion retail industry. The main constructs explored in the context of in-store experience and store attractiveness: motivation, perceived value, customer experience, and customer satisfaction, are intricately connected. Motivation prompts customers to enter a store, influenced by their needs and desires (Sulaiman & Ahmed, 2017:9). Perceived value, derived from the balance of benefits and costs (Zeithaml 1988), plays a pivotal role in shaping the overall attractiveness of a store (El-Adly & Eid, 2016:8). The in-store experience, encompassing interactions, ambiance, and service quality, directly influences customer satisfaction (El-Adly & Eid, 2016:10). Satisfied customers contribute positively to store attractiveness, fostering loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Zhang *et al*, 2020:23). Together, these constructs create a dynamic interplay that retailers can leverage to optimize the in-store experience, enhance perceived value, and ultimately make their stores more appealing to customers.

1.4.1 Shopping motivation

Motivation is defined as the forces that cause a change in behaviour in order to meet a customer's needs. Shopping motivation refers to the drivers of behaviour that conduct customers to the market to satisfy their internal needs (Gusti Ayu *et al*., 2021:549). Individuals go shopping for various reasons, apart from simply purchasing products and services – they also do this to satisfy personal and societal motives (Erdem & Yilmaz, 2021:1608).

Unmet needs create motivated urges, which may ultimately drive customers to buy and consume products and services to try to alleviate tensions by developing purchase-related goals and engaging in subsequent behaviour that they believe will meet their needs, both consciously and subconsciously (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:78). Shopping motivations can be classified into two

divisions: hedonic and utilitarian shopping motivations. In its most expansive sense, hedonic shopping motivation refers to an individual's wish to enhance their experience of pleasure while executing a particular action. Hedonic shopping motivation is a behavioural factor that positively influences core psychological requirements such as social fulfilment and personal competency, which are predicated on diminishing unpleasant experiences and boosting pleasant experiences, and improving on these (Erdem & Yilmaz, 2021:1607). Hedonic motivation refers to the impulses that drive customers to pursue imagination, happiness, pleasure, and sensuality (Kumar & Yadav, 2021:3). Task-oriented behaviour in shopping, in turn, is characterised as a utilitarian shopping motivation, where a customer seeks to obtain a practical benefit or meet an economic necessity. Such customers use the shopping excursion to discover a product they require (Zeeman, 2013:39). A utilitarian consumer is also an individual who is interested in analytically addressing problems. It is a person who does not like shopping, and who is not easily swayed by emotions when purchasing items (Vieira *et al*., 2018:426).

Identifying customer shopping motives can assist in creating meaningful customer experiences. If brick-and-mortar fashion retailers identify the motives as to why their customers have a need to buy their products, and more importantly, why their customers opt to rather visit their physical store and not shop online, then they can devise more efficient marketing strategies and communicate more effectively with their target audience (Timoshenko & Hauser, 2019:1). This will ultimately contribute towards providing a positive customer experience.

1.4.2 Customer experience

The concept of customer experience has been the subject of a significant number of research studies (Waqas *et al*., 2021:136). According to recent research, customer experience is a phenomenon that encompasses every part of a business offering as well as the customer's response to these offerings in every direct or indirect encounter with the business. Advertising, packaging, product and service features, simplicity of use, dependability, and customer service quality are all part of the business offering, denoting to the overall customer experience (Waqas *et al*., 2021:136). Customer processes and responses to the shopping environment, scenarios, and customer attributes are part of the customer buying experience (Gusti Ayu *et al*., 2021:549). Customer experience is a complex and comprehensive concept that is comprised of different components, namely emotional (feel), cognitive (think), physical (act), and social identity (relate) (Schmitt, 1999:60).

These components are described by Gentile *et al.* (2007:398) as follows: A product offering can elicit an emotional experience for the customer in order to elicit an effective relationship with the business, its brand, or products; thereby, an *emotional* component (feel) is a component of the

customer experience that involves an individual's affective system through the generation of moods, feelings, and emotions. The *cognitive* component (think) is a part of the customer experience that entails thinking or conscious mental processes; a product or service offering may encourage customers to use their creativity or solve problems. The *physical* component (act) arises from the practical act of doing something; in this sense, the pragmatic component encompasses the idea of usability and all stages of the product's life cycle, not only the post-purchase period. The validation of an individual's system of values and beliefs, frequently via the adoption of a specific lifestyle or learned habits, is referred to as the *social identity* component (relate) of a customer's experience in which the product and its consumption become symbols of adherence to specific values that the business and brand represent, and that its customers share.

Businesses have found that providing customers with only practical advantages is no longer sufficient for building lasting customer relationships. Indeed, experiences in the business world may be thought of as an unprecedented approach to offering increased value to customers (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). According to Quach *et al*. (2021:631), experiential value is a term used to describe the value generated from experiences. Customers are, in this sense, hedonically motivated individuals who desire sensory, emotional, and social stimulation. Therefore, businesses may satisfy customer demands and elicit positive responses such as customer engagement and attitudes toward a brand by offering pleasurable, pleasant, and meaningful experiences (Quach *et al*., 2021:631). It follows that innovative value can be created through pleasant experiences when a business utilises services as the stage and commodities as the props to engage a customer; this is an example of an experience offering (Pine & Gilmore, 2013:25). Pine and Gilmore (1999)'s concept for the experience economy can help to explain the relationship between consumer experience and in-store experience. According to Pine and Gilmore's model, economic value has evolved from commodity extraction to product distribution, then to service supply, and eventually to the staging of memorable events. The in-store experience becomes an important component in this transition, setting the foundation for memorable and meaningful consumer encounters. Customers seek more than just items (El-Adly & Eid, 2016:4); thus the in-store environment becomes a platform for immersive and engaging experiences, transforming shopping into an event. Thus, in the context of the experience economy, customer experience is inextricably linked to in-store experience, as retailers strive to create environments that go beyond mere transactions, providing customers with memorable and emotionally resonant encounters that add to the store's overall appeal and attractiveness.

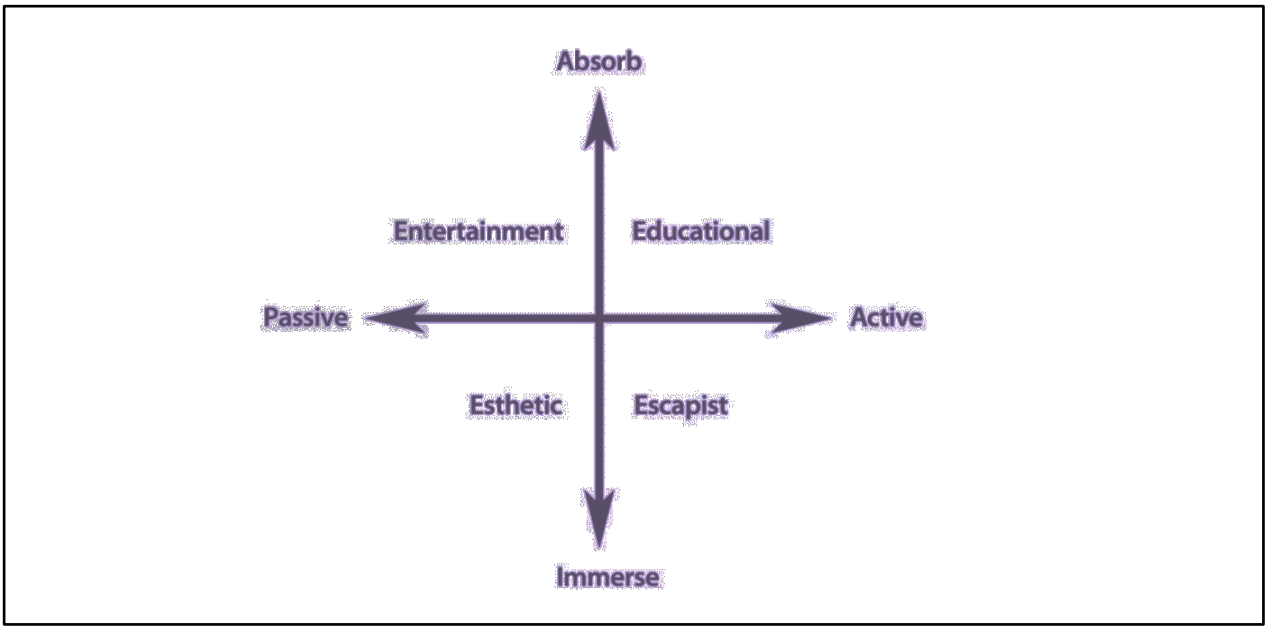
Every economy is characterised by its primary economic offering, thus representing what a seller receives in return for money from a buyer. In terms of gross domestic product (GDP),

employment, and genuine value, an experience economy is defined as one in which experiences override services as the significant economic offering (Pine & Gilmore, 2013:26).

1.4.3 Experience economy

The customer experience economy refers to persons or businesses whose primary goal is to offer an experience that provides customers with a distinct edge and benefits where customers demand a positive, emotional, and memorable experience at every touchpoint or transaction with a business, according to the experience economy idea (Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016:393). The experience economy comprises more than the creative industries and cultural economy; it also incorporates how products and services may be experiential (Sundbo & Serensen, 2013:1). Joseph Pine and James Gilmore created the 4E construct based on the experience economy approach to capture a complete view of the customer experience (Snel, 2011:24). The four realms of experiencing value, known as the 4E construct, comprise two dimensions and four types of experiences. The two dimensions and four types of experiences are depicted in Figure 1-1, illustrating the experience economy's realms.

Figure 1-1: The experience economy realms



Source: Adopted from Pine and Gilmore (2011:45).

According to the 4E experience economy construct, customers can be engaged in various ways during an experience encounter. Pine and Gilmore (2011:45) indicate that the level of customer participation is represented by the first dimension, which is displayed on the horizontal axis. Passive involvement is at one end of the spectrum. These are the customers who experience an event purely as observers or listeners and are categorised having no direct impact or control over

the event. On the opposite end of the spectrum, active involvement occurs when customers directly impact the performance or event that derives the outcome of the experience; thus, customers who are actively participating in the creation of their own experience.

The second dimension is illustrated by the vertical axis, experience refers to the type of bond, or environmental relationship, that customers have with the event or performance. Absorption at one end of the spectrum is scaled as engaging a customer's attention by bringing an event into the mind from a distance. Immersion, in contrast, is becoming physically (or electronically) part of the event (Pine & Gilmore, 2011:45). According to Kaur and Kaur (2020:240), commodification may be defeated by converting a product or service into an 'experience.' In this light, the Experience Economy explains how, despite the fact that experiences, like commodities and services, are independent offers, marketers can utilise the Experience Economy by wrapping experiences around traditional goods to boost sales via theme-based encounters. Furthermore, Pine and Gilmore (2011:45) state that customers are actively seeking new and varied directions for increasingly unexpected experiences as the experience economy ramps up. Nonetheless, few of these encounters fail to provide some form of amusement, causing individuals to grin, laugh, or otherwise enjoy themselves. There are opportunities for businesses hosting these events to incorporate elements from the other types of experiences as illustrated in Figure 1-1, including educational, entertainment, escapist, and aesthetic experiences.

1.4.3.1 Educational experience

According to Pine and Gilmore (2011:46), customers absorb events happening in the present moment through instructional encounters. An educational experience relative to the 4E Experience Economy model is defined as a consumer obtaining new knowledge while shopping, thereby encountering an experience that the consumer deems the experience as informative. The customer's active engagement in the educational experience is required to engage the mind, in the form of intellectual education – or the body, in the form of physical training – both to enlighten individuals and enhance their knowledge or abilities. Customers undergo an education experience by learning about new fashion trends, new ideas, and looking for inspiration are common educational activities in the setting of brick-and-mortar fashion businesses. Customers can thus be actively involved in educational experiences in which their mind and bodies are engaged to acquire skills and knowledge. Furthermore, customers absorb the information that is offered to them. In this sense, customers are presumed to be browsing at brick-and-mortar retail stores – not only to buy items, but also to learn about new trends by exploring (Amrut & Ann Marie, 2018:442). Kaur and Kaur (2020:240) assert that the aim of providing educational

experiences is for customers to benefit from the experience by determining where their interests are piqued and their knowledge is increased, and they can share their experiences.

1.4.3.2 Entertainment experience

Entertainment experiences are the earliest recorded type of experience where entertainment occurs when customers passively absorb the perceived experience through their senses. According to Pine and Gilmore (2019:47), when customers passively observe or absorb events and performances, they can have a positive interaction, eliciting a happy emotion. Furthermore, customers demand experiences despite a lack of tangibility. This is because the quality of experiences is fondly remembered and remains long after the experience itself, suggesting that purchasing experiences rather than commodities themselves make customers happy and give them a stronger sense of well-being.

1.4.3.3 Escapist experiences

Escapism implies that customers engage in real or virtual performances and envision themselves in a different time and location, sometimes without interacting with others, allowing them to escape reality, monotony, and demanding lifestyles (Kaur & Kaur, 2020:240). According to Pine and Gilmore (2011:49), memorable interactions are escapist experiences where customers are fully engaged in such experiences as active participants, allowing them to feel the excitement first-hand. A study by Fiore *et al.* (2000) confirmed that a link exists between escapist experiences and emotional pleasure and arousal. Customers who partake in escapist experiences depart from and actively choose to go to a specific location and activity that is worth their time. Escapist experiences can also be identified on the Internet, where customers receive value from actively engaging, chatting, and building communities and relationships on Internet platforms (Pine & Gilmore, 2011:51). Active engagement in the context of this study can be achieved by crafting the in-store experience in appropriate ways, thus immersing the consumer. This entails implementing the essential elements of escapism; the atmospheric elements within a brick-and-mortar retail environment may well provide consumers with similar escapist sensations and emotional enjoyment (Amrut & Ann Marie, 2018:442).

1.4.3.4 Aesthetic experiences

The core of customer experience is lodged in its aesthetic components; however, aesthetics must be accompanied by memorable imprints. Impressions are defined as the "takeaways" from experience, thus eliciting the characteristics that a business wants its customers to remember most about it when they leave. The brick-and-mortar store's atmospheric elements should embody the aforementioned memorable impressions (Pine & Gilmore, 2011:46).

Atmospheric elements are relevant to customer perception and are pivotal components of consumer decision-making. Atmospheric elements are integrated into physical retail stores and are displayed where the customer is aware of a problem or a need. In correlation with the customer's needs, internal stimuli trigger the customer's inherent need, which rises to a level high enough to become a driver. External stimuli can also achieve this, such as where advertisement-induced needs can also be enhanced by cohesive and fascinating atmospheric elements (Siyanbola & Ogunseye, 2021:167). External cues trigger internal needs, and a purchase decision is made. In this context, it is especially the ambience of the shopping environment that enhances customers' shopping experiences.

Schiffman *et al.* (2019:121) define intrinsic cues as physical aspects of a product, such as size, colour, flavour, or aroma. It refers to instances where customers judge a product's quality based on its physical characteristics. Furthermore, customers like to believe that their product quality evaluations are based on intrinsic cues, because these allow them to justify their purchase decisions (whether positive or negative) as "rational" or "objective" choices. Extrinsic cues are characteristics that are not inherent in the product. Extrinsic cues like packaging, price, and promotions are examples of the non-physical characteristics of a product.

To provide customers with an immersive experience, the retail environment should offer the four experience realms (educational, entertainment, escapist, and aesthetic experiences) (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). By considering and integrating these four realms when devising a marketing strategy, brick-and-mortar retail stores and shopping centres can offer improved experiences and increased value for customers (Sadachar & Fiore, 2015). A study conducted by Sadachar and Fiore (2015) investigated the effect of the 4E construct on perceived experiential value, and found that the four realms of the experience economy have a significant influence on the perceived experiential value in brick-and-mortar retail stores and shopping centres.

1.4.4 Perceived experiential value

According to Sanchez-Fernandez and Iniesta-Bonillo (2007:427), customer value is viewed as a strategic imperative in establishing and maintaining a competitive advantage in the retail industry. It is strongly linked to customer loyalty and increased profitability levels, suggesting that the concept of customer value is salient when addressing marketing activities. Products, social contacts, and events are all examples of perceived value derived from a customer's shopping experience. Customers' perceived experiential value may be defined as the benefits of a shopping trip (Amrut & Ann Marie, 2018:442). The customer will purchase the product if the experienced value is favourable and equals or surpasses the customer's expectation of the product; it will equate to customer value (Musso & Druica, 2014:12).

Sweeney and Soutar (2001:216) purport that customers evaluate a product based not only on their expectations of the product's performance, but also on the pleasure or enjoyment derived from the product (emotional value) as well as the social consequences of what others may think of the person using the product, or the social interaction that occurs within a retail setting (social value). In addition, Smith and Colgate (2007:16) state that customers derive value from the consumption environment if, for example, the retail store pleases the five senses of customers (sensory appeal value). Emotional value, social value, and sensory appeal value are discussed in the sections that follow.

1.4.4.1 Emotional value

According to Pine and Gilmore (2011), one of the primary features of the experience economy is that customers are enriched in a "personal way", thus requiring high levels of emotionality from experiences provided by businesses. Customers generate emotional impressions that help them recall and identify one event from another by filtering and interpreting the experienced sensory information. This entails a process of understanding, managing, and delivering sensory service cues, many of which have a significant emotional component (Helmefalk, 2017). Considering the experience economy, customers who have had a positive emotional experience with their purchase of goods or services may choose to repurchase these specific products, even if the customer has alternative purchasing options. This notion establishes emotional value as favourable sentiments associated with using the business's product or service, concurrently improving customer loyalty (Asshidin *et al*., 2016:639).

Asshidin *et al*. (2016:640) add that emotional value is considered to be the "advantage obtained from feelings or affective states (i.e., happiness or pleasure) that a product elicits". Consequently, emotional value refers to the advantages gained from experiencing something new or unfamiliar. Businesses are expected to be capable of providing quality emotional interactions at all touchpoints, thereby asserting that if good customer service is to be provided, the attitudes and methods in emotional value must be in fulfilment of their business practice to allow for positive customer as well as employee experiences (Wrigley & Straker, 2019).

1.4.4.2 Social value

Humans are social creatures who desire to speak with individuals who share their interests, and who want to feel as if they belong to and are accepted by a group. Theoretical principles pertaining to the theory of customer values illustrate that a social environment such as image, acceptability, and peer group identity value play a role in customer purchase decisions, representing consumption's symbolic significance to societal values. This influence is known as "social value"

and refers to a customer's inherent concerns about their image and how they are seen by their peers, concurrently affecting their consumption behaviour (Reyes-Menendez *et al*., 2022:224). Individual and societal influences shift with time, necessitating the inclusion of contextual subjections when attempting to comprehend societal value judgements and, as a result, their effect on buying behaviour. The common standards and expectations that steer and guide customers' purchase decisions are referred to as social norms. In addition, to select norms functioning individually, other customers are believed to govern proper societal conduct in interpersonal interactions (Argo, 2020:126; Reyes-Menendez *et al*., 2022:224).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) was developed to decipher social value concerning buying behaviour. This process unfolds in terms of beliefs that shape attitudes, attitudes that shape intentions, and intentions that shape behaviour. The TPB theory posits that societal norms influence individuals' beliefs, which sequentially shape their behaviour. Customers' buying decisions are thereby influenced by social factors identified as societal gatherings and values where individuals can then adjust their behaviour per their social structure; moreover, susceptibility is hypothesised to be predicated on interpersonal actions. Although it is a general characteristic, it varies from person to person (Mayasari *et al*., 2022:1). Because shopping is a social experience, it is co-created, and hence social value is co-created as well. This implies that the individual participates in the shopping activity with others; socialises, and forms ties while doing so. Shopping in brick-and-mortar stores is thereby defined as a social activity that allows for these desired social contacts, creating social value for customers.

1.4.4.3 Sensory appeal value

The sensory element of customer perception is defined as the immediate response of an individual's sense receptors (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, fingers, skin) to primary stimuli like light, colour, sound, smell, and texture - categories referred to as sensation (Janina *et al.*, 2018). Whether subconsciously or consciously observed, sensory stimuli play a significant role in creating a memorable brand experience. The latter stimuli are defined as subjective; they relate to internal customer responses to sensations, feelings, and cognitions. The advantage obtained from a retail environment that pleases a customer's five senses include enjoying the design, physical attractiveness, and the beauty of the retail setting by collect information about the environment, identifying colours, forms, designs and sizes, and recognising faces, objects, and landscapes in a fashion retail store. There are also factors such as recognising and interpreting music playing in a physical fashion store setting at the time, and different scents may be detected and identified where certain smells can elicit strong emotions and recall memories linked with certain scents. Thus, utilising a constant and pleasant smell may help to build a distinct and

remembered brand identity, influencing customers' emotional attachment to the store, touching and interacting with products, as well as offering comfortable seats or tactile displays. These may make shopping more interesting for customers. In this regard, one can speak of participatory experiences, that are referred to as *sensory appeal value*. For example, visually appealing product displays add to the aesthetic appeal of a retail store's design by creating an enticing setting to engage customers in retail establishments that may be an enjoyable experience for them. This can be achieved by using opulent designs, colours, layouts, and ambience (Amrut & Ann Marie, 2018:442). The sensory aspects of any product can differentiate itself from competitors, especially if the brand creates a unique relationship with the sensation. According to Schiffman *et al.* (2019:107), there are five elements associated with sensory consumer perceptions:

- **Sight stimuli.** Brand colours, store layouts, website design, and other sensory inputs are mirrored in brand colours, store layouts, and website design, among other things. Products are displayed in stores so that customers can experience visual stimuli. The brand's customers choose, and use are influenced by what they physically observe in a store.

- **Scent stimuli.** Scent stimuli cues offer significant options for customer targeting where customers associate memories with different smells, thereby demonstrating the impact of fragrance on customers' decisions in marketing communication attempts.

- **Touch stimuli.** It has been established that customers physically touching a product and feeling its textures has an influence on customer persuasion and might thus also be a persuasive tactic.

- **Taste stimuli.** Customers experience taste stimuli when tasting the products and experiencing things through taste and texture stimuli; salty, sweet, sour, bitter, and umami.

- **Sound stimuli.** This includes musical and lyrical stimuli.

Cachero-Martinez and Vazquez-Casielles (2017:548) are of the opinion that emotional value, social value and sensory appeal value improve customer satisfaction. According to Samudro *et al*. (2020:1079), the satisfaction model integrates significant variables related to customer satisfaction. These are mainly product and service quality and pricing drivers, based on previous research that demonstrated a positive effect of perceived value on customer contentment. The research model found that perceived value and customer satisfaction had a positive relationship, which indicates that a higher level of perceived value will lead to a higher level of customer

satisfaction. Hyllander and Fors (2020:25) affirm that if brick-and-mortar stores obtain a superior level of customer satisfaction, then the store will become more attractive to customers.

1.4.5 Customer satisfaction and store attractiveness

According to Basari and Shamsudin (2020:3), customer satisfaction refers to a state in which customers are pleased with a service, a product's quality or with their overall engagement with the company. These are good indications of a customer's attitude toward a firm. Customer satisfaction is an important goal for businesses – not only from a revenue-generating standpoint, but also from a cost-cutting standpoint, because client satisfaction leads to customer retention (Muhammad *et al.*, 2016:59). Understanding customers entails more than factual reality: customer perception is a subjective concept and confirms the subjectivity of a customer's experience when measuring customer satisfaction. Two individual customers can experience identical stimuli, but how they notice, select, arrange, and interpret them as a satisfactory experience is a highly subjective and a personal process that depends on their respective wants, values, and expectations of products or services. In short, thus, customer satisfaction is quite subjective (Solomon, 2011:116).

Customers are believed to act and react based on their subjective perceptions rather than based on objective facts. "Reality" can therefore be defined in correspondence to subjective perception as a highly individualised phenomenon for each person, depending on their needs, wants, values, and personal experiences (Hulten *et al*., 2009:1). When customers are satisfied with a product or service, they are more likely to purchase it again, which results in the customer's continued behaviour and a long-term connection where customer satisfaction is a determining construct that leads to buying behaviour, according to the research (Tabaku & Kushi, 2013:225).

In summary, the experiences offered to customers by brick-and-mortar stores will generate perceived values for customers, and if these perceived values are positive, it will lead to increased levels of customer satisfaction, which in turn, will improve store attractiveness (Cachero-Martinez & Vazquez-Casielles, 2017:549; Kim *et al.*, 2014:2889; Nsairi, 2012:689-690). Fashion retailers, especially, invest a significant number of resources in improving their store attractiveness with a view to, among others, increase customer footfall (Hilal, 2019:2). The following section provides a brief overview of the South African fashion retail industry which forms the context of this study.

1.4.6 The South African fashion retail industry

Fashion is generally defined as the style or types of clothing and accessories worn by groups of individuals at a time. The fashion retail market includes clothing, casual wear and accessory items for babies, toddlers, essentials, formalwear, formalwear-occasion, and outerwear for men,

women, boys and girls (MarketLine, 2021). While the term fashion is commonly associated with the design and style of clothing, accessories, and footwear, the fashion retail industry encompasses the supply of goods, the fiscal production and interpretation methods, distribution lines, and sales of design and style items, all of which are supported by a global network of manufacturers and workforce on both the manufacturing and retail sides of the industry to streamline products to meet demand (Statista, 2022).

It has been noted that there is a clear polarity between the high end of the industry and the mass-produced side. The supply of fashion items, the production methods, distribution process, and sales of items differentiate in the fashion retail landscape today that is dominated by brands and companies in the latter group (Moeng, 2012:8). The fashion industry's indicator of prevailing market trends stems from the volatile and intensifying demand of customers, which lead to the increased production of fashion retail goods and sales. The global apparel market generated 1.55 trillion dollars in revenue in 2021, and it is expected to expand by more than 25 per cent by 2026 (Statista, 2022).

South Africa has an influential shopping centre culture rooted in society's love for community engagement. This situation allows for much choice regarding opportunities for high and lower-end businesses to open retail locations (De Klerk, 2021:9). The country's shopping centre retail industry is, indeed, as a lucrative market. The South African retail industry, in comparison to other African countries, boasts sophisticated and well-developed shopping centres that attract versatile customers from all over the continent (De Klerk, 2021:9). The global fashion retail industry is a valuable commodity; it is also regarded as a necessarily innovative sector because of it being influenced by volatile style fluctuations and trends. Indeed, fashion retailers in South Africa must continuously try to foresee what customers will want in the future, as this ability to predict clothing trends (and turn them into products in a brief enough time period to be lucrative) has become an indicator for success in the fashion retail sector (Ren *et al*., 2020:761).

The fashion retail industry in South Africa is a significant contributor to the economy, and is one of Africa's leading markets (Pather, 2015:56). The retail sales of textiles, clothes, and footwear in 2018 amounted to 175 billion Rand. The apparel and textile sector in South Africa contributes about 8 percent to the country's manufacturing GDP and 3 percent of the country's total GDP each year (De Klerk, 2021:8). The South African government reported that a rebound in average monthly earnings of employed industry workers to 9.7 percent y/y in the second quarter of 2021 from 3.2 percent y/y in the previous quarter, which has allowed household spending from South Africans to still make a significant contribution to the 1.2 percent q/q rise in headline GDP during

the quarter (IHS Markit, 2021:1) This suggests that South African customers are expected to spend more on non-essentials in the post-COVID-19 future.

Even though the demand for fashion items is on the rise in South Africa, brick-and-mortar fashion stores are losing footfall to online fashion retailers as customers are opting for the more convenient option of shopping online. The physical retail environment is transitioning from a service economy to an experience economy, and retailers are struggling to adapt to these changes in customer expectations and demand (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Therefore, brick-and-mortar retailers should strive to provide their customers with a unique and positive in-store experience instead of merely selling products and services. This study sets out to explore in-store experience and store attractiveness, in an attempt to determine how experience contributes towards store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.5.1 Primary objective

This research was conducted to explore and interpret, phenomenologically, how in-store experiences contribute to store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry.

1.5.2 Secondary objectives

To reflect on the primary objective, the following secondary objectives were formulated:

1) Provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely shopping motivation, perceived value, customer experience, customer satisfaction and store attractiveness.

2) Investigate the factors that motivate participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store.

3) Explore and describe the experience of participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.

4) Explore and describe the value derived by participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.

5) Explore and describe the factors that contribute to the attractiveness of a physical fashion retail store.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When conducting marketing research, it is necessary to define and describe a unified paradigm or lens from which the research will emerge (Creamer, 2018:54). In essence, identifying a suitable research paradigm is considered by Ling and Ling (2017:2) as a higher-order way of thinking about the strategy or logic that drives all parts of a study, from the investigation's aim or motivation through to the outcome and presentation of the findings. The notion of a research paradigm was suggested by Kuhn (1970) as a guide that directs a researcher's approach to their field of study and inquiry.

This exploratory study is conducted from the interpretivist paradigm of social theory. The interpretivist paradigm is based on the critique of positivism in social sciences, emphasising qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis (Dudovskiy, 2022). The main goal of interpretivists is to comprehend the participant's viewpoint and their perception of the environment around them, gaining a deeper understanding of the subjective nature of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Moisander *et al.,* 2020:6). Researchers typically apply the interpretivist paradigm when they would like to obtain a deeper and more precise understanding of customers' experience with a specific store, brand, product, or service (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33). Hence, a qualitative approach to conducting this study was adopted.

Qualitative research, according to Airrika (2014:16), is best used to tap into the mind of the consumer. According to Rossman and Rallis (2011), qualitative research is a systematic inquiry into social phenomena in natural settings, including how customers experience aspects of their lives, how they behave, how they function, and how interactions shape relationships amongst them. This study aimed to explore how in-store experience contributes to store attractiveness in South African fashion retail stores. A qualitative research approach was used, since it allows for the collection of abstract, intangible insights and views on customers' in-store experience and perceived value. In essence, the researcher gained a more profound understanding of customer experience when shopping in fashion retail stores, and determined how experience plays a role in store attractiveness. Once a suitable approach to conducting research has been selected (one that is congruent with the research paradigm), an appropriate research design must be identified.

The research design acts as a guide for the implementation of the study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017:49), a research design is a style of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies that offer precise guidance for processes implemented in the research process. According to Goulding (2005:295), several different designs can be used for conducting qualitative research, including ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology, amongst others. Ethnography involves the researcher becoming a part of the daily activities of individuals

in a specific social milieu and collecting data using a variety of ethnographic fieldwork techniques, particularly participant observation, and in-depth personal interviews (Moisander *et al.*, 2020:7-8). The systematic approach to conducting research that directs data collection and offers clear techniques for data analysis is known as grounded theory (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021:305). Grounded theory extends past description and toward a theoretical justification of a process or occurrence (Turner & Astin, 2021:285).

Jopling (1996) asserts that phenomenology is a critical reflection on conscious experience as opposed to unconscious drive and is intended to elucidate the fundamentally constant aspects of that experience. It is common to describe qualitative phenomenological research methodology in terms of learning "what experiences are like" (Van Manen, 2016:42; Williams, 2021:369). Once this characterisation is adopted in a qualitative context, the methodological approach that follows is one in which the researcher relies heavily on simple descriptions of an individual's experience. This is because such descriptions ostensibly convey what an experience is like (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, this study adopted an inductive phenomenological methodology, because it set out to understand customers' in-store experiences and intends to describe if and how such experiences play a role in customers' attraction to the store.

The thoughts and experiences of the participants themselves are the only reliable source of information for the phenomenologist regarding the investigative process. This presupposes that the participants' perspectives are accepted as "truth". Additionally, participants were only chosen if they have personally lived the experience under study. Therefore, sampling was purposeful and prescribed from the beginning, and the primary method of data collecting was the interview (Goulding, 2005:302). Further details pertaining to sampling and data collection for this study are provided in the subsequent sections.

1.6.1 Literature investigation

A literature review can be undertaken by reviewing books, articles, newspaper reports, journals, conference proceedings, radio and television broadcasts, reports, multimedia resources, and the Internet (Gilliland, 2014:106).

For the purpose of this study, the following platforms and databases were used to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the literature relevant to this study:

- Google Scholar: Articles
- ScienceDirect: International journals
- EBSCOhost: International journals

- Emerald Insight Journals: International journals
- Sae Publications: South African journals
- Subject-related textbooks
- LexisNexis
- JSTOR
- Juta
- EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS)
- Sabinet Online
- African Journals
- Scopus
- Web of Science
- Boloka: NWU Institutional Repository (NWU-IR)

1.6.2 Target population

A study's target population refers to all the elements that share qualities that are important to a study (Malterud *et al*., 2016). A population is a defined group that includes all of a study's prospective participants, from which a subset of this population is selected, known as a sample (Babbie & Mouton, 2011:174). The sampling *element* indicates the item from which the information is required; the *extent* indicates the geographical boundaries of the study, and *time* indicates the period during which the data is gathered.

For the purpose of the study, the sampling elements are described as individuals aged 18 years and older, who have purchased a fashion item from a physical fashion retail store in the past six months, and who reside in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The sampling extent is therefore the Gauteng province of South Africa, and the time during which sampling took place was May 2023.

The study was conducted in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Gauteng is the wealthiest province in South Africa, with Sandton being the richest city on the entire African continent. (BusinessTech, 2022; De Lange, 2022). In addition, the province is home to some of the largest and most prominent shopping centres in South Africa and (Githuri, 2022). The city of Johannesburg has become a leading city in the fashion industry and has distinguished itself as one of the fashion capitals in South Africa (Snyder, 2020).

1.6.3 Sampling

The process of extracting a subset of participants from a larger population is known as sampling and is used in statistical analysis that is usually predetermined by various observations taken from a larger population (Younus & Thalho, 2020). Furthermore, Babin and Zimund (2016:69) define sampling as any process used to generate conclusions based on measurements of a part of the whole population.

1.6.3.1 Sampling frame

Taherdoost (2016:20) describes a sampling frame as a collection of sampling elements that identify the sample group from the whole target population and must be representative of the population. For the purpose of this study, no sampling frame was specified, as the population is too large. As a result, a suitable non-probability sampling method was used to select a sample from the total population.

1.6.3.2 Sampling method

Two primary methods of sampling that can be used in a study include probability and non-probability sampling (Taherdoost, 2016:19). Probability sampling is used to create primary random samples, systematic random samples, stratified random samples, and cluster samples by selecting respondents so that they all have a known and equal probability of being included in the study (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:431). Non-probability sampling, according to Etikan *et al*. (2016:1), refers to studies where samples are collected using a method that does not afford all respondents in a population an equal chance of being included in the study. Glen (2021) affirms that the selection of a respondent cannot be calculated when using non-probability sampling, and the researcher must use their personal judgement to select appropriate respondents to participate in the study. Purposive sampling refers to a range of non-probability sampling strategies that rely on the researcher's judgement in selecting research participants (Sharma, 2017:749).

For this study, non-probability purposive sampling was used to select research participants. According to Goulding (2005:302), purposive sampling is best suited for phenomenological studies. The criteria on which prospective participants was judged are as follows:

- participants needed to be 18 years of age or older for ethical reasons.
- participants must have purchased a fashion item from a physical fashion retail store in the past six months to provide an exact account of their lived experience.
- participants were required to reside in the Gauteng province.

Participants were invited to participate in the study by means of an invitation posted on the Facebook pages of select shopping centres in Gauteng (Appendix D). These shopping centres include Sandton City, Rosebank, Hyde Park Corner, Cresta, East Gate, Melrose Arch, Menlyn Park, Brooklyn, The Grove, Kolonade, Hatfield Plaza and Woodlands Boulevard and were chosen due to their high foot traffic and diversity of customers. The researcher obtained permission from the administrators of the Facebook pages prior to posting the invitation. The invitation provided a brief description of the study, the requirements (criteria) for participating in the study, and a statement reiterating that participation is voluntary and that participants' personal information would remain confidential. The invitation also mentioned that interviews would be conducted online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom, with a duration of approximately 60 minutes. In addition, the researcher's contact information was provided for prospective participants to contact the researcher to take part in the study.

Prospective participants who wished to participate in the study received an official invitation (see Appendix B). The invitation was sent to prospective participants via the communication channel they used to contact the researcher (i.e., via email or on the Facebook Messenger application). The invitation provided clear details pertaining to the primary objective of the study, the requirements (criteria) to partake in the study, and the options available to the prospective participant regarding the platform they wished to use to conduct the interview, including Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The invitation also required the prospective participant to provide the researcher with available dates and times that would be most suitable for the participant to conduct the interview. The researcher then scheduled the date and time for the interview with the prospective participant accordingly, and via the preferred platform.

Once the participant agreed to participate in the research, a consent form (see Appendix C) was provided to them to sign prior to the interview. In addition, participants received the interview guide (see Appendix A) to gain a better understanding of the questions to be asked and discussed during the interview. A confirmation message was also sent to participants stating the date and time of their interviews, as well as the link to the interview, on the preferred platform (i.e., Microsoft Teams or Zoom).

Prior to the commencement of the interview, the researcher once again confirmed that the participant has read and signed the consent form, and reiterated that participation in the study is voluntary, and that the participant's personal information would remain confidential. The researcher reminded the participant that the interview was being audio-recorded and confirmed permission from the participant to do so. Lastly, the researcher confirmed that the participant was aged 18 years or older, that they had, indeed, purchased an item from a physical fashion retail

store in the past six months (and provided a brief explanation between the different of a physical fashion retail store and an online retail store to ensure clarify of the term “physical” fashion retail store), and that the participant resided in Gauteng province.

The interview sessions were audio recorded and transcribed prior to further analysis. To avoid human error, and due to time constraints, these recordings were transcribed by *Language Matters*, a reputable translation and transcription agency based on the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University.

1.6.3.3 Sample size

Interpretive research with a phenomenological design is an ongoing or iterative process (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012) that continue until the research reaches a point of saturation. The point of saturation is defined by Given (2016:135) as “the point at which additional data do not lead to any new emergent themes”. Uruquart (2013:194) similarly describes the point of saturation as “the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data. There are mounting instances of the same codes, but no new ones”. According to Guest *et al.* (2006:75), the researcher must consider the interview structure, content, and participant homogeneity when determining whether the point of saturation has been reached or not.

Smith *et al.* (2009:52) is of the opinion that a master’s level phenomenological research study could be limited to three participants; however, a sample size of between four to ten participants would be best. However, Braun and Clarke (2022:28) affirm that no exact sample size can be provided prior to gathering data for a qualitative study, as the sample size depends on when the point of saturation is reached. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the researcher continued to conduct interviews with participants until the point of saturation has been reached. Table 1-1 provides a summary of the sampling plan for the study.

Table 1-1: Sampling plan for the study

Design elements	Application to empirical study
Population	
Sampling element	Customers aged 18 years and older who have purchased a fashion item from a physical fashion retail store in the past six months and who reside in the Gauteng province.
Extent	Gauteng.
Time	May 2023.
Sampling method	Non-probability purposive sampling.
Sample size	Depended on when the point of saturation is reached.

1.6.4 Interview guide

The data for this study was gathered by means of in-depth unstructured interviews. In phenomenological studies, in-depth unstructured interviews are used to explore participants' experiences and to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions and beliefs on a specific topic (Ramsook, 2018:17). In-depth interviews are usually conducted by experienced interviewers, and as such, the researcher underwent the necessary training prior to conducting the interviews. The researcher was accompanied by the supervisor of the study during interviews with participants. This was done to monitor the interview and to aid the researcher in probing the participant where necessary. The first interview was used to pilot the study, using the experience and feedback of this interview to identify any possible concerns and to make amendments to the subsequent interviews.

The interview guide (Appendix A) comprised general questions regarding participants' motivation for shopping at physical fashion retail stores; participants' in-store experiences at physical fashion retail stores; as well the factors that attracted participants to physical fashion retail stores. Even though there is a general structure to the interview to guide the conversation, the interview structure was by no means rigid. Participants were probed to elaborate on topics that they felt are integral to their experiences in a fashion retail store. Interviews lasted for approximately 60 minutes.

1.6.5 Data analysis

According to Babin and Zikmund (2016:70), data analysis entails the application of computing, summarisation, and reasoning to interpret gathered data. After data collection was completed, the results were analysed and interpreted. This is necessary for information to have value and to contribute to a study's conclusions (Gilliland, 2014:104). The subsequent sections describe how the data was prepared for analysis, the approach that was used to analyse the data, and the criteria that were confirmed in order to ensure trustworthiness.

1.6.5.1 Data preparation

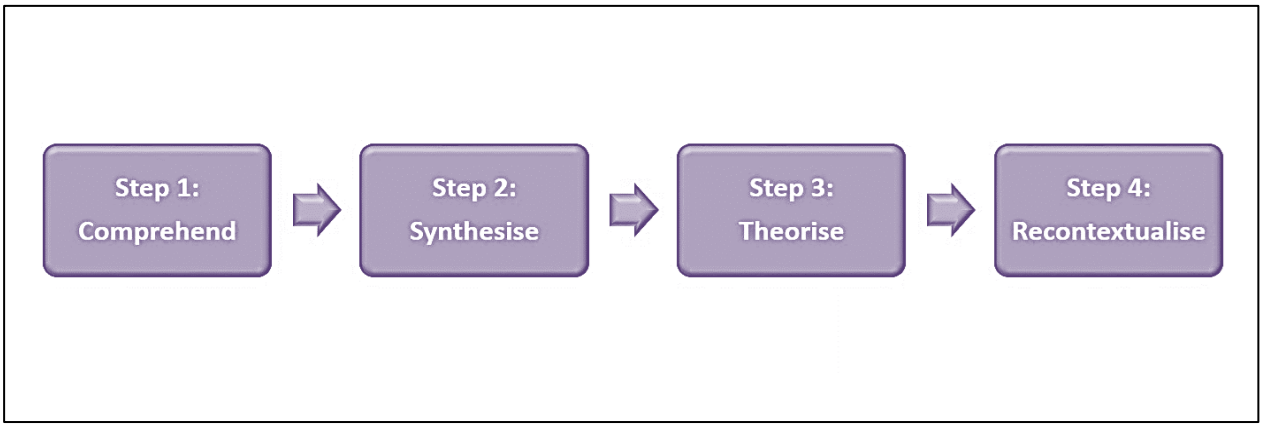
Qualitative research sometimes results in big datasets that must be transcribed and processed prior to further analysis (Grbich, 2013). To avoid human error, and due to time constraints, these recordings were transcribed by *Language Matters*, a reputable translation and transcription agency based on the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University. However, to remain "close" to the data and to ensure correctness, the researcher listened attentively to the recordings after each interview, prior to submitting the recordings for transcription. Once the data has been

transcribed, the researcher also read attentively through the transcripts whilst listening to the interview's audio recording once again to ensure correctness.

1.6.5.2 Method of data analysis: Morse and Field approach

Due to its extensive application in the marketing discipline, the Morse and Field (1996) approach was applied in this study by using content analysis. The four steps of the Morse and Field (1996) approach are depicted in Figure 1-2 and include the steps of comprehending, synthesising, theorising and recontextualising.

Figure 1-2: The Morse and Field approach



Source: Researcher's own depiction.

1.6.5.2.1 Step 1: Comprehend

Morse (1991:27) claims that credible information is required to clarify what a study comprises. As a result, it is critical to comprehend the topic at hand. To grasp the topic, the researcher must first comprehend the information acquired. For the present study, the researcher familiarised herself with the literature prior to data gathering to identify what was interesting and relevant during the data gathering process. However, during data analysis, the perspectives gained from the preliminary literature review were kept separate in order not to contaminate the evidence gathered with preconceived ideas and beliefs (Morse, 1994:26). This separation was achieved by using open coding. Open coding refers to a process where the gathered data is closely examined to identify patterns, with the goal being to be susceptible to any direction or subjective interpretation of the data (Saldana, 2021:148). In addition, to aid comprehension, the researcher listened to each recording after an interview to ensure correctness prior to transcribing the data gathered. Once the data has been transcribed, the researcher read attentively through the transcripts whilst listening to the recordings to check and ensure accuracy. A common understanding of the phenomenon under study as attained through this method. To complete the process effectively,

the researcher offered data variance up until a consensus was reached. Consequently, a summary of the findings and interpretations was created.

1.6.5.2.2 Step 2: Synthesise

The 'sifting' of information is referred to as synthesising (Morse, 1991:30). Synthesising includes the coding process which is defined as the act of seeking meaning from the dataset, developing codes, and assigning these codes to specific segments of each data item (Braun & Clarke, 2022:53). For the present study, the ATLAS.ti (version 23) programme was used to assist with content analysis. The interview transcripts were uploaded to ATLAS.ti and analysed line by line to identify inductive codes. During this stage, the researcher engaged in the process of horisontalisation of the data which is an important step in the phenomenological analytic process. Horisontalisation of data implies that the researcher must be receptive to every response provided by the participant, granting each comment equal value (Moustakas, 1994:122). Open coding was used during this stage to identify recurring latent patterns. Once recurring patterns have been identified, focused axial coding was used in which codes were clustered based on their explanatory relationship to each other (Saldana, 2021:308). These codes were then labelled to create categories. Categories were re-evaluated and gradually subsumed into higher-order categories that ultimately suggested emerging theories.

1.6.5.2.3 Step 3: Theorise

According to Babin and Zikmund (2016:65), a theory is a logical explanation of occurrences that contains assumptions and expectations about how subjects interact. Theory provides qualitative research with a framework, and makes it easier to draw all the components of the study together (Morse, 1991:32). For the present study, the literature review and the identification of higher order categories from the data collected were used to develop theories pertaining to the role of in-store experiences on store attractiveness in South African fashion retail stores. A detailed description was provided summarising what and how participants experience, and how this could contribute towards store attractiveness. During the theorising phase of data analysis, the researcher used the cognitive processes of bracketing and intuiting respectively. Bracketing can be described as the researcher's attempt to avoid over-interpretation by becoming more self-aware and not allowing pre-understanding and assumptions to influence the description of the data collected (Dorfler & Stierand, 2020:779). Once bracketing has been completed, intuiting followed. Greening (2019:90) describes intuiting as a process in which the researcher continues to concentrate on the phenomenon's meaning as determined by earlier research.

1.6.5.2.4 Step 4: Recontextualise

Recontextualising is the final step of the Morse and Field approach to analysing qualitative data. It is described as a technique for developing theoretical understandings that incorporate the study's findings and conclusions. It may be used for other research initiatives and studies (Morse, 1991:34). For the purpose of this study, the theories derived from the literature review and the results obtained from the interviews were combined and integrated.

1.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS

The trustworthiness or rigour of qualitative studies amount to the faith, confidence, and trust that the facts, their interpretation, and the procedures utilised in the study inspire (Connelly, 2016:435). Guba (1981:80) proposes four criteria to be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy and rigorous study:

- **Credibility (rather than internal validity)** is a test that determines if the study's findings indicate a "credible" conceptual interpretation of the facts derived from the participants' original data. The adoption of well-known research methods, early familiarity with the topic at hand, iterative questioning in data collection dialogues, negative case analyses, peer scrutiny, member checks of data collected, and interpretations formed, a thick description of phenomena under scrutiny, and the examination of previous research to frame findings all contributed to the study's credibility.

- **Transferability (rather than external validity)** refers to the extent to which the study's findings may be applied or transferred outside of the project. To ensure transferability, the researcher offered adequate background data to define the study's context and a clear description of the phenomenon to facilitate comparisons.

- **Dependability (in preference to reliability)** measures the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory development. Dependability was assured for the purposes of this study by giving a detailed methodological description that allowed the study to be replicated.

- **Confirmability (rather than objectivity)** is a measure of how effectively the study's findings are confirmed by the data gathered. Confirmability was achieved for the purposes of this study by admitting the researcher's beliefs and assumptions; acknowledging flaws in the study's methods and their potential effects; in-depth methodological descriptions to allow the integrity of research results to be scrutinised; and the use of diagrams to demonstrate an audit trail.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher made specific provisions in order to ensure that the study's findings adhere to each of the four criteria proposed by Guba (1981:80). These provisions are presented in Table 1-2.

Table 1-2: Provisions to be made by the researcher to address and ensure trustworthiness

Quality criterion	Provision to be made by researcher
Credibility	• Adoption of well recognised research methods. • Iterative questioning in data gathering dialogues. • Negative case analysis. • Member checks of data collected, and interpretations/theories formed. • Thick description of phenomena under scrutiny. • Examination of previous research to frame findings.
Transferability	Provision of background data to establish the context of the study and a detailed description of the phenomena in question to allow comparisons to be made.
Dependability	In-depth methodological description to allow the study to be repeated.
Confirmability	Admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions. Recognition of shortcomings in the study's methods and their potential effects. In-depth methodological description to allow the integrity of research results to be scrutinised. Use of diagrams to demonstrate "audit trail".

Source: Adapted from Shenton (2004:73).

1.8 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The economic situation associated with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the research gap, which entailed whether physical fashion retail stores have a future, and if retailers are facing opposing adversity in terms of remaining profitable as a result of changes in consumer purchase decisions in the fashion-retail industry. This referred particularly to the impact and relevance of in-store experiences and store attractiveness in the pursuit of adapting to consumers in a post-COVID-19 world (Seibel *et al*., 2021:92).

The findings of this study highlight the importance of retailers providing a unique and improved customer experience, which could ultimately improve customer satisfaction and loyalty, as well as a more profitable long-term position and corporate success. The insights obtained by conducting this study will aid brick-and-mortar stores in understanding in-store experiences, store attractiveness, consumers, and their purchasing habits. These pertain specifically to the present age of consumerism after the detrimental effects of COVID-19. The study hopes to aid firms in implementing its findings into their business models to ultimately increase profitability in a lucrative market. In addition, the study hopes to provide a better understanding of why customers are motivated to return to brick-and-mortar shops once the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted,

and also why some prefer to continue shopping online. These insights will aid fashion retailers to devise and implement improved marketing strategies, to offer unique in-store experiences, and to improve the attractiveness of their physical stores.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The proposal, interview guide and other relevant supporting documentation pertaining to the study were submitted to the Scientific Committee of the School of Management Sciences for close scrutiny and approval, after which the proposal and supporting documentation were presented to the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences and obtained ethical clearance.

Only participants aged 18 years and older was invited to participate in this study. Permission was obtained from research participants prior to interviewing. Participants were asked to sign a consent form to partake in the study (Appendix C) in which they indicated their voluntary consent to participate in the study; the form indicated that their identities and responses would remain anonymous. In cases where participants' responses were quoted verbatim as supporting evidence in an article or conference paper, participants were assigned a participant number in order to ensure anonymity. This participant number was assigned when transcribing the data, and by so doing, ensured participant anonymity during data analysis when using ATLAS.ti as well.

1.10 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS

- **Chapter 1: Introduction and overview of the study.** This chapter provides an introduction to the study and contextualised the study problem. An outline of the entire study as well as the primary objectives, secondary objectives and a brief overview of the research methodology implemented in the study is provided**.**

- **Chapter 2: Customer experience.** This chapter discuss theoretical principles pertaining to shopping motivation followed by a discussion of customer experience and the experience economy.

- **Chapter 3: Research methodology.** This chapter sets out the research methodology. Included are the methods used to conduct the literature investigation, the empirical

investigation, data collection, the various elements of the sample plan, the research design, the measurement instrument used, and the data analysis methods.

- **Chapter 4: Reporting of results.** This chapter presents the findings of the empirical study. The statistical methods that were used for interpreting the data are presented, and the results obtained from each section in the interview guide are described.

- **Chapter 5: Conclusions, recommendations, and limitations.** This chapter provides the main findings along with recommendations according to the results of the study. The various implications of the study are discussed, as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to examine store attractiveness and in-store experiences with the aim of gaining insight into the nature of the fashion retail setting in South Africa. Historically, businesses regarded customer experience as a catalyst aimed solely at increasing profit. However, academic research and practical business success examples, such as Disney and Apple Inc. (McColl *et al*., 2021:397), have demonstrated that customer experience is an effective marketing tool that businesses can utilise to reap numerous benefits and gain a competitive advantage while increasing profits. As a result, creating a unique experience for customers has become a primary objective for businesses (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016:69).

The concept of customer experience was coined by Pine and Gilmore (1999), who described it as "events that engage individuals in a personal way." They contend that each customer's emotional, physical, intellectual, or spiritual engagement is related to their respective experiences, highlighting the subjective nature of the concept of customer experience. These authors also extended their research by developing the concept of the “Experience Economy”, which is predicated on the notion of selling experiences instead of products. In order to demonstrate the significance of customer experience in this study, a definition is formulated, determinants of customer experience are established, the customer decision-making process is reviewed, and motivation and other factors are identified, together with hedonic consumption as a strong recreational motive.

To contextualise the study of store attractiveness and in-store experiences, the fashion retail setting is examined through the lens of customers by investigating global and local fashion industries. Since the purpose of this study is to explore the need for a more in-depth empirical study on customers' subjective in-store experiences, this chapter provides the groundwork for this study's findings that set out to offer valuable insights into those aspects that influence store attractiveness, customer value obtained from the physical shopping experience, and customers' motivations for purchasing at physical fashion retail stores as opposed to e-commerce platforms.

2.2 RETAILING

Retailing refers to the sale of goods and services to customers. Retailing arguably began the first time one object of value was traded for another, and thus originated millennia ago when peddlers

first began hawking their wares. Such dealings refer to when the first marketplaces were founded, in the more restricted sense of a specialised full-time commercial activity (Duignan, 2022).

According to Berman and Evans (2018:5), retailing is "the set of business operations that add value to items and services offered to customers for their personal or family use". The authors elaborate that retailing includes a variety of business activities, including store design, visual merchandising, pricing, and promotion. They emphasise the significance of recognising customer behaviour and preferences to create effective retail strategies.

Retailing is regarded as intensely competitive where the basic form of competition is price, but for brick-and-mortar retailers, it is moderated somewhat by non-price forms of competition such as the convenience of location, merchandise selection, display, the attractiveness of the retail establishment itself, and intangible factors such as community reputation (Duignan, 2022). Also, the retail industry encompasses the process of purchasing items or commodities from producers, selling those goods to customers at a higher price, and providing services in support of those products. The core tasks associated with the industry include managing how merchandise is ordered, purchased, allocated, received, stored, and distributed in a timely and accurate manner to businesses or directly to customers (Anis *et al.*, 2023:283).

Over the past few years, retail has undergone profound structural and spatial evolutions, with dramatic and radical effects in terms of functional concentration, appeal, scale, and store location. This is especially the case where these long-standing patterns have recently deteriorated by the remarkable expansion of the Internet and related e-commerce activities, as well as the consequences of more than a decade of economic turmoil (Tamini, 2018:6).

2.2.1 The retailing concept

To promote customer satisfaction and loyalty, the retailing concept highlights the significance of understanding customer requirements and preferences, and meeting these efficiently (Haitham *et al*., 2022:452). Retailers play a salient role as intermediaries between producers and customers in this environment, contributing value to the supply chain by offering a diverse range of products, services, and experiences (Elghannam *et al*., 2019:2).

One of the most significant difficulties confronting retailers today is the rapid evolution of customer behaviour and preferences, which is being driven by reasons such as technical improvements, social and environmental concerns, and changing demographics (Sima *et al*., 2020:4). As a result, businesses must embrace a customer-centric strategy that focuses on offering individualised and engaging experiences that satisfy customers' changing needs (Faulds *et al.*, 2018:4). Retailers, for example, can obtain insights into customer behaviour and preferences by evaluating data and

tailoring product offerings and marketing messages accordingly (Xiang *et al*., 2015). Similarly, by implementing an omnichannel strategy, retailers can deliver a uniform and smooth shopping experience across several touchpoints, including physical locations, online platforms, and mobile applications, hence increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kim *et al.,* 2019:622).

Retailing is a crucial part of modern business, emphasising the significance of knowing and addressing customer requirements and preferences to promote satisfaction and loyalty (Leppäniemi *et al.*, 2017:4). To reach this goal, retailers must employ a customer-centric strategy and utilise different and appropriate methods and tools to allow them to create personalised and engaging experiences that suit the needs of their customers. In this sense, retailing is profoundly linked to the retailing concept, which emphasises the significance of recognising and satisfying customers' requirements and wants through various marketing tactics (Berman *et al.*, 2018:39). The premise of the retailing concept entails communicating with customers and viewing their desires as critical to the businesses' success; maintaining a consistent strategy (such as offering designer brands, plentiful sales personnel, attractive displays, and above-average prices in an upscale store); charging prices that customers perceive as "fair" (a good value for the money); and working to achieve meaningful, specific, and reachable goals (Berman *et al*., 2018:34). The retailing concept can further be interpreted with reference to the four principles of this concept, namely, customer orientation, coordinated effort, value-driven, and goal orientation. These four principles are depicted in Figure 2-1.

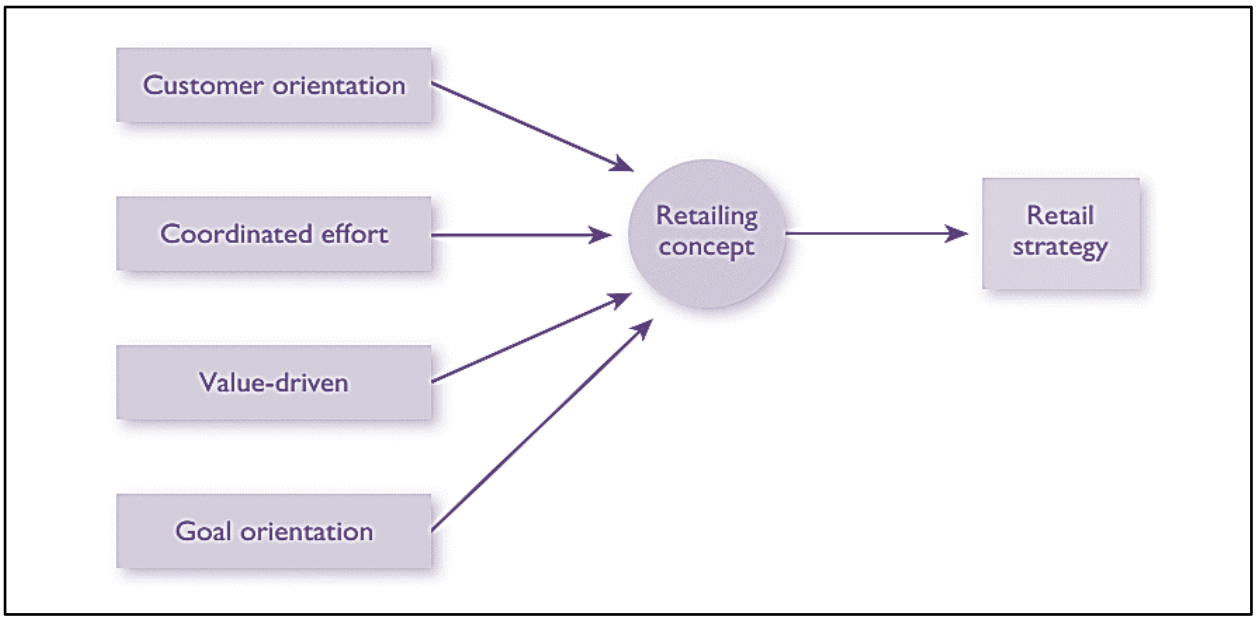


Figure 2-1: The retailing concept

Source: Adopted from Berman *et al.* (2018:34).

The four principles of the retailing concept, according to Berman *et al.* (2018:34), are:

- **Customer orientation:** The retailer firstly determines the characteristics and needs of their customers and strives to meet these needs to the greatest extent possible.

- **Concerted effort:** To maximise efficiency and optimise customer value, the retailer strives to integrate all business plans and tactics into their business operations.

- **Value-based:** Retailers aim to provide their customers with an exceptional experience. If their customers receive fantastic value from the retailer, whether it is upscale or discount, they will feel satisfied with their product or service, and will consequently be satisfied with the retailer. Value can also entail charging a reasonable price for the quality of items and services provided.

- **Goal-orientation:** The retailer establishes marketing or business-related goals and then employs an action plan to achieve them.

The retailing concept includes all the components of the retail process, from product selection to post-purchase support, and ultimately contributes to the total retail experience (Berman *et al.*, 2018:35).

2.2.2 The total retail experience

The attitudes, feelings, and strength of emotions formed in specific moments when shopping impact what people remember about their shopping experience (Manthiou *et al.*, 2020:2). Many retailers incorporate a total retail experience into their product offerings to gain a competitive advantage and to advance their position in the market (Melero *et al.*, 2016:18). Faced with rising competition from online retailers, brick-and-mortar retailers are transforming the in-store experience into something more interesting, entertaining, and informative to retain customers (Sachdeva & Goel, 2015:290).

The physical store environment, customer service, product selection, and online presence are all parts of the concept known as the retail experience (Berman *et al.*, 2018:35). The overall retail experience is significantly influenced by the physical store environment. In a retail setting, ambient cues including music, lighting, and aroma had a significant impact on customers' emotional and behavioural responses. Furthermore, Helmefalk and Hultén (2017:8) have found that multi-sensory congruent cues have a favourable effect on customer emotions and purchasing behaviour in a retail setting. In such a setting, it is clear that non-visual cues such as aural and olfactory stimuli are very powerful in a dominant environment when compared to adding new visual cues. This is illustrated by the effect of non-visual cues on valence, time spent, and

purchase at the point of sale. In addition, a store's design and layout can affect how customers perceive a brand and their tendency to make purchases (Wu *et al*., 2017).

Product selection is another crucial element of the entire retail experience. Customers anticipate retailers to offer a wide range of goods that satisfy their needs. According to Terblanche (2018:55), customers' satisfaction with their shopping experience is significantly impacted by product selection and accessibility. Moreover, the calibre and perceived worth of the products for sale can affect customers' purchase decisions. Nisar and Prabhakar (2017:143) found a favourable correlation between customer satisfaction with the online shopping experience and overall retailer satisfaction. Creating a positive retail experience requires a thorough strategy that considers each of these elements.

The total retail experience is a critical component of relationship retailing, which aims to build long-term customer loyalty and foster positive customer relationships through a variety of strategic marketing initiatives.

2.2.3 Relationship retailing

Some of the first scholars to publish on relationship marketing were Morgan and Hunt (1994). They refer to various activities aimed at establishing, growing, and maintaining prospering exchanges as relationship marketing (Morgan & Hunt 1994:21). Relationship marketing is not exclusively a customer-centric principle; it also aims to develop and manage relationships with suppliers, channel intermediates, and other market stakeholders in addition to customers and other stakeholders. Relationship marketing is described as "a method to create a long-term association with customers, monitor the satisfaction level, and develop successful programmes to retain the customer with the business" (Makhitha, 2017:649).

Relationship retailing also places a strong emphasis on personalised connections. According to Ladhari *et al*. (2017:15), customers' emotional reactions and perceptions of service quality are profoundly influenced by individualised interactions. Furthermore, customers who receive tailored retail experiences and guidance are more satisfied in the retail store (Hult *et al*., 2019:24). Another essential aspect of relationship retailing is the provision of customised services. According to Lee *et al.* (2019:280), personalised services like personal shopping and styling have a salient impact on how satisfied customers are with their shopping experiences. Moreover, retailers that provide tailored services had a better chance of attracting and retaining valuable customers (Rahimi & Kozak, 2017:3).

Relationship retailing is also associated with increased customer loyalty. By focusing on building long-term relationships with customers, retailers can create a sense of trust and loyalty that leads

to repeat business (Berman *et al.*, 2018:36). A study by Shanahan *et al*. (2019:61) found that customer loyalty in the form of brand attachment was positively influenced by the quality of personalised service and the level of customisation offered by the retailer, denoting that customer loyalty has a positive correlation with relationship retailing. Retailers may thereby foster a sense of trust and loyalty with their customers that promote repeat business and favourable word-of-mouth recommendations by emphasising the development and honing of long-term relationships with their customers. The use of technology in building customer relationships is considered crucial (Soltani & Navimipour, 2016:672). Retailers can offer personalised advice, targeted discounts, and specialised services that cater to each customer's particular requirements and preferences by utilising customer data and digital tools in their retail operations. Relationship retailing's usage of technology has been shown to have a substantial impact on customers' satisfaction and loyalty (Quach *et al*., 2022:6)

By boosting perceived value, trust, and commitment, relationship retailing methods such as individualised communication, proactive problem-solving, and after-sales care had a favourable impact on customer loyalty (Behera *et al*., 2021:13). Ahmad *et al*. (2015:566) offer another perspective by concluding that relationship retailing affected small and medium-sized businesses use of e-commerce (SMEs), stating that relationship retailing strategies, such as social media interaction, online customer support, and loyalty programmes, can help SMEs to overcome the lack of trust and familiarity that might prevent the adoption of e-commerce. However, there are identified difficulty areas in putting relationship retailing into practice, suggesting that it is challenging to customise relationship retailing strategies to specific customers and to realise an acceptable return on investment due to the huge number and diversity of customer demands (Ansari *et al.*, 2022:1409). Relationship retailing may be a useful tactic for increasing customer loyalty and e-commerce adoption, but its application may call for customisation and adaption to certain circumstances and customer categories.

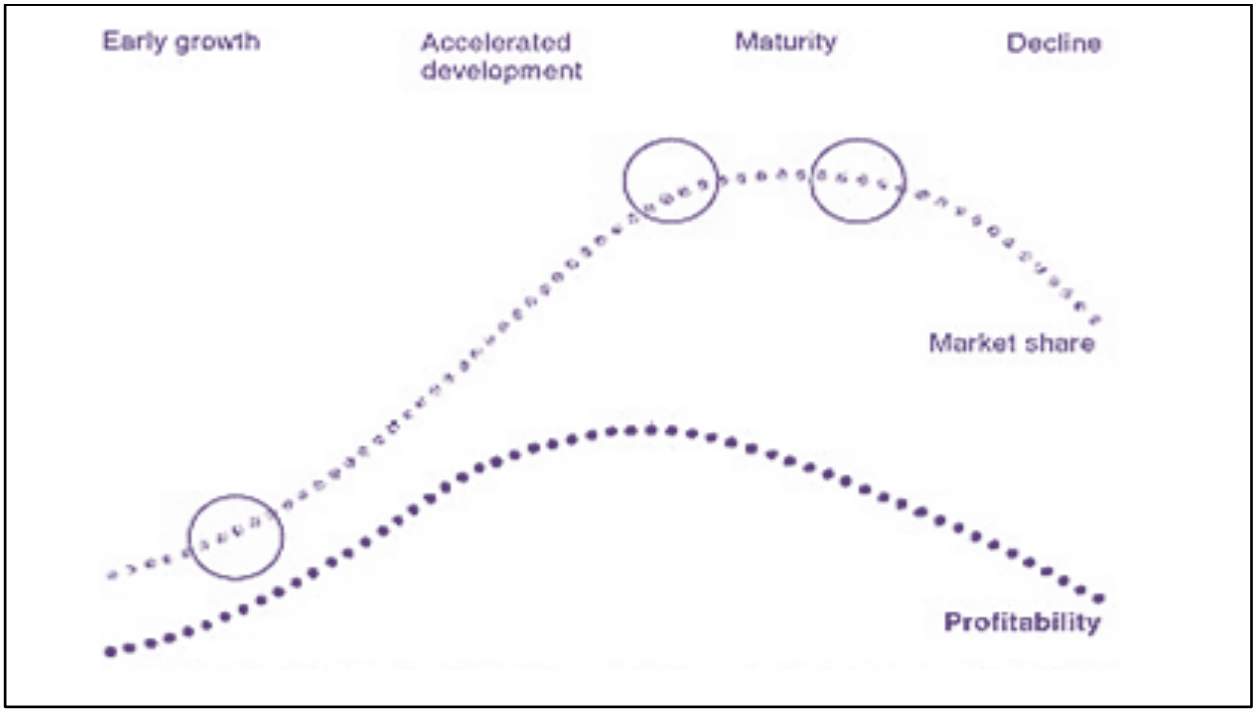
Relationship retailing is critical to sustaining customer demand and extending the mature stage of the retail life-cycle, because it enables businesses to maintain customer interest, create brand loyalty, and provide new products or services that meet evolving customer wants and preferences.

2.2.4 The retail life-cycle

The retail life-cycle refers to the different stages that a retail product or service proceeds through from its introduction to its eventual decline. By comparing a product's sales turnover to the timespan, the retail life cycle model can assist retailers in estimating the life stage and the potential future sales patterns (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015:86). The stages can vary in length and intensity, and not all products or services go through every stage. Retailers need to

understand where their products are in the retail life-cycle, as this helps to make informed decisions regarding their business strategies and marketing tactics (Berman *et al.*, 2018:135). Retailers can thus deploy resources more wisely and increase their return on investment by understanding the various stages in the retail life cycle and anticipating the difficulties and opportunities at each level. Figure 2-2 below provides an illustration of the retail life cycle.

Figure 2-2: The retail life-cycle



Source: Adopted from Palmer (2005:719).

2.2.4.1 The early growth phase

The life-cycle of a product begins with the early growth phase. During this phase, the product is launched, and the business invests heavily in marketing and advertising to raise product awareness and spark interest among customers. Building brand recognition and creating a devoted customer base are among of the main objectives of the innovation phase. The debut of a new good or service and the establishment of the retail brand in the market define the early growth phase of the retail life-cycle (Berman *et al.*, 2018:134). According to Hajli *et al.* (2020), retailers that introduce new products effectively are more likely to see expeditious growth and are more likely to take control of a market. Retailers need a differentiating unique selling point at this stage to set them out from the competition (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015:14).

2.2.4.2 The accelerated development phase

As the product achieves wider acceptance during this phase, sales begin to increase (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015:14). To better serve customers, retailers start to broaden their distribution and may even launch new product features or iterations. The product may come under pressure from substitutes or alternatives that are more affordable and/or more competitive in the current market. Retailers can use a variety of techniques to address these issues, such as product innovation, diversification, and market segmentation, to manage the retail life cycle (Berman *et al.*, 2018:134). Retailers who adopt a diversification strategy and increase their product offers are more likely to have sustained growth and lessen the consequences of the decline stage (Zhu *et al.*, 2020).

2.2.4.3 The maturity phase

The product now achieves its peak sales level in this phase, and sales growth begins to slow down (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015:14). To retain earnings, the business might try to decrease expenses and boost efficiency, and competition might get fiercer. Maximising profits and maintaining market share are the main goals in the maturity phase. Slower growth and more competition are characteristics of the retail life cycle's mature stage (Berman *et al.*, 2018:135). Retailers now need to concentrate on retaining their market share and standing out from their rivals. Retailers who make investments in product innovation and customer experience are more likely to hold onto their market position and experience sustained growth, according to (Mahmoud *et al.*, 2018).

2.2.4.4 The decline phase

Sales begin to fall at this phase in the retail life cycle, profitability is low, and the product is increasingly competing with newer or superior competitors (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015:14). The retailer might reduce marketing and advertising expenditures and try to cut expenses by either cutting prices or completely ceasing production of the product. Sales and market share decrease during the decline stage of the retail life-cycle. Retailers now have to choose whether to invest in reviving their business or leave the industry (Berman *et al.*, 2018:135).

The retail life cycle model applies to the South African retail industry, because it provides a useful framework for understanding the stages of the retail life cycle, from the introduction of modern retail formats to the current state of market consolidation and maturation, and for guiding strategic decision-making by retailers operating in this dynamic and complex environment.

2.2.5 Retail in South Africa

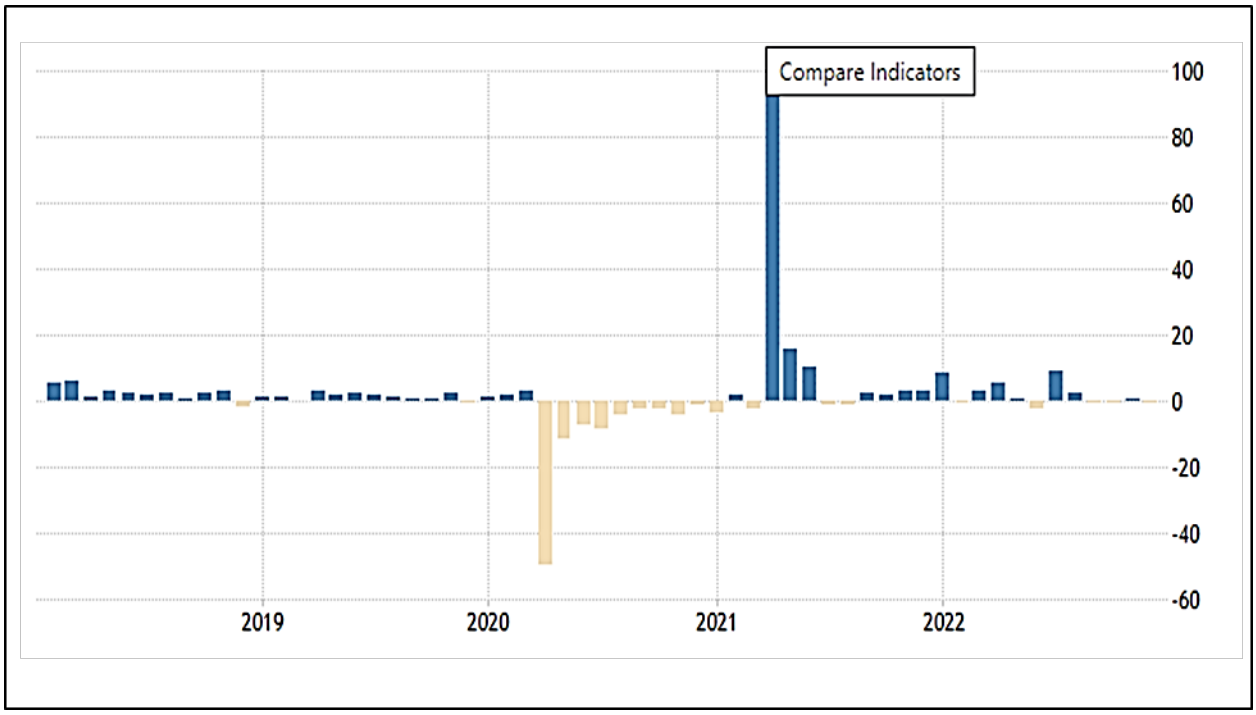
Retail is a significant sector of the economy in South Africa, contributing to employment, investment, and economic growth. Small retailers to major multinational chains make up the variety of retailers in South Africa's retail industry. According to a report by Price Waterhouse Coopers (2023), 37 per cent of South Africans have reported shopping in physical retail stores, while 20 per cent have purchased an item online in 2023. South Africa is the largest economy in Africa and home to some of the biggest retail businesses in the world. The nation's retail market is also expanding rapidly (Mafini & Dhurup, 2015:1295). According to Zwanka and Buff (2021:60), retailers in South Africa must adjust to changing consumer preferences and behaviour, including a rise in the popularity of online shopping and tailored experiences, highlighting how the substantial growth of technological innovation, such as the usage of mobile devices and artificial intelligence, is changing the South African retail sector. The prevalence of informal markets and retailers is another facet of the South African retail environment that contributes to increased internal competition (Charman *et al.,* 2016; Rogerson, 2016). Over 2.7 million people, or around 12 per cent of the labour force, are estimated to be employed as a result of the informal market in South Africa (StatsSA, 2017). There are furthermore prospects for expansion in the retail sector despite the difficulties it faces in South Africa. Retailers can use data analytics to understand their customers better and to customise their products and services to match their customers' demands, according to Deloitte (2020). This could result in increasing customer loyalty and growth for retailers.

Retail in South Africa is a key element of the country's economy, contributing significantly to gross domestic product and job creation, as well as providing an enabling environment for distributed goods and service across its different geographic areas by increasing consumer spending and investing in retailing infrastructure.

2.2.5.1 The role of retail in the South African economy

In South Africa, the retail sector is one of the most important sectors that produces income (KPMG 2018), The sector contributed positively to the country's gross domestic product in the fourth quarter of 2017, with an overall sales increase of 5.3 % over the previous year. In 2017, total retail sales in South Africa were estimated at 1,1 trillion rand, with an average spend per second across all channels of sale amounting to R 31,900 each (Stats SA, 2018).Increased retail, wholesale, and auto industry activity made the retail industry the second-most beneficial contributor to the nation's GDP (Smith, 2018). The total sales contracted by South Africa’s retail commerce are depicted in Figure 2-3.

Figure 2-3: Retail sales in South Africa from 2019 to 2023



Source: Adapted from Economics (2023).

Figure 2-3 depicts the total sales that South Africa's retail commerce from 2019 to 2023, showing that it contracted by 0.6 per cent year on year in December 2022, following an upwardly corrected 0.8 per cent increase the previous month and falling short of market expectations of a 0.1 per cent decline. Retailers in pharmaceuticals and medical goods, cosmetics and toiletries (-5.2 per cent vs -5.3 per cent in December), and hardware, paint, and glass (-3.9 per cent vs -5.9 per cent) were the greatest contributors to this reduction. Household furniture, appliances, and equipment sales declined significantly (-2.2 per cent vs. 5.6 per cent), as did food, beverages, and tobacco sales (-1.1 per cent vs. -4.4 per cent) and all other stores (-2 per cent vs. 1.5 per cent). Retailers around the country are also presently experiencing frequent power outages, with expenses skyrocketing as they seek energy solutions to keep their doors open.

Retail is salient to the South African economy, as it contributes towards employment, investment, exports, and economic growth. Moreover, the retail sector is a key driver of exports, particularly in the garment and textile industries. However, South Africa's retail sector is currently facing several issues that could influence the country's economy negatively. In particular, according to Deloitte (2020), the retail sector in South Africa is experiencing tremendous disruption as a result of shifting customer behaviour, technology advancements, and an uncertain economic situation. These difficulties have influenced customer spending habits and have also produced a more competitive economy.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial influence on South Africa's retail sector. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic on March 12, 2020. By the middle of April 2020, COVID-19 had killed over 150,000 individuals and infected over 2 million people across 210 different nations. Globally, more and more nations were implementing stringent public health measures attempting to combat the disease (Mohsin *et al.*, 2021:1). At the beginning of March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic struck South Africa, a country with a population of 59 million people, and it quickly became the continent's worst-affected nation impacted by the COVID-19 virus (Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020).

According to Sheth (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in substantial shifts in customer behaviour, with customers increasingly turning to online shopping. It has become apparent that in order to remain competitive and fulfil the changing expectations of customers, retailers in South Africa must adapt to these changes in the retail environment. Notwithstanding the obstacles that South Africa's retail sector faces, there are opportunities for growth and innovation. According to Euromonitor International (2021), the transition towards online shopping has offered chances for businesses to grow their online offers and strengthen their digital skills. The research also emphasises the opportunity for businesses to implement technology in their business activities to improve the overall customer experience and drive sales. Furthermore, the investigation suggests that retailers have a viable opportunity to develop new product categories and services, such as healthcare and financial services, that may assist retailers in diversifying their revenue streams to mitigate the effects of shifting customer behaviour and technology disruptions.

The vital role of retail in the South African economy, as a significant contributor to GDP and employment, is reflected in the country's diverse range of retail formats and types of retailers, which include large shopping centres, independent retailers, informal traders, and online retailers. These retailers cater to the needs and preferences of a diverse population, while fostering entrepreneurship, job creation, and economic growth and also contributing towards the development of local communities and promoting customer well-being.

2.2.5.2 Types of retailers in South Africa

The retail industry in South Africa is diverse and encompasses a range of sectors. As noted, South African retailers have had to adjust to the changing landscape caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many investing in their online capabilities and offering new services to fulfil their customers' needs. Various categories of retailers are suggested in the academic literature, although many retailers today stock a wide range of product categories in their stores: supermarkets, discount stores, warehouse stores, speciality stores, category specialists, e-tailers, and department stores (Hill, 2019). South Africa has a diverse range of retailers, from huge

multinational chains to local individual boutiques. Figure 2-4 depicts the major sectors in South Africa by the percentage of total retail trade sales in 2017.

Figure 2-4: The major sectors in the South African retail industry

Source: Adopted from Statista (2018).

- **General retailers:** Include all food, drink, and tobacco-dominated non-specialised retail trade, as well as other types of non-specialised retail trade (StatsSA, 2018).
- **Textile and clothing:** Include retailers in textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods, retailers in men's and boys' clothing, retailers in ladies', girls' and infants' clothing, general outfitters; and retailers in footwear (StatsSA, 2018).
- **Food and beverage:** Include retailers in fresh fruit and vegetables, retailers in meat and meat products, retailers in bakery products, retailers in beverages, retailers in tobacco; and retailers in 'other' foods such as those found in specialist stores (StatsSA, 2018).
- **Supermarkets and hypermarkets:** Supermarkets and hypermarkets are among South Africa's top retailers, and include significant chains such as Shoprite, Pick & Pay, and Woolworths. These stores sell a variety of foods, household supplies, and other items (Statista, 2021).

- **Department stores:** Department stores are large retail establishments with several separate sections. Each department store is classified to represent a particular item line, such as women's apparel and home accessories. Department shops sell a diverse range of items to a diverse range of clients. These stores are a popular type of retailer in South Africa, with chains like Edgars and Woolworths selling a wide range of fashion, home goods, and other items (Hill, 2019:20)

- **E-retailers:** Online stores that sell goods online are known as e-retailers. Although this may not seem like much, in South Africa, online shopping platforms account for about 1 per cent of all retail spending. Reaching this threshold marked an important step forward for the country's online retail industry (Hill, 2019:20).

South Africa's diverse range of retailers, including department stores, boutique shops, and online platforms provides customers with a diverse range of fashion products and services, catering to various style preferences and price points, while also contributing to the country's fashion retail industry's growth and competitiveness.

2.2.5.3 Fashion retail in South Africa

South Africa has been categorised as a price-sensitive nation, according to Struwig (2018:164). South Africa’s thriving local fashion sector also includes numerous independent designers and merchants producing one-of-a-kind and fashionable garments. Spree, Foschini, Truworths, and Woolworths are some of the most well-known local fashion retailers. South African customers are also interested in foreign fashion labels, particularly those that provide good quality and value for money (De Klerk *et al*., 2019:12).

When investigating fashion retail in South Africa, it is important to explore the recent technological advancements and trends that the South African retail industry is undergoing, where e-commerce is becoming increasingly essential in the South African fashion retail market – particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Nanda *et al*., 2021:112). Another trend in retailing in South Africa is an increasing inclination towards sustainable fashion, with many local businesses concentrating on ecologically friendly and socially responsible production processes (Oyekunle, 2020:1). The COVID-19 pandemic is another critical factor of change that have had a significant impact on the South African fashion retail industry, with many retailers experiencing decreased sales and difficulties adapting to new customer behaviours during and following the pandemic (Stiegler & Bouchard, 2020). The complexities of the South African fashion retail market, with peculiar factors influencing customer behaviour and fashion merchants' strategy, are evident in the current state of this country’s retail industry.

It appears that all apparel businesses fulfil customer expectations, but there is a perceived lack of uniqueness, and none of the companies seem to be setting a standard for excellent customer experiences. As economic conditions change for the worse, customers are increasingly looking for value, quality, and ease of shopping. Even with seemingly luxury brands riding on a 'quality' ticket customers are increasingly questioning the link between perceived quality and perceived value, and whether the pay-off justifies the expenditure. Subsequently, Figure 2-5 depicts customer satisfaction levels in South Africa.

Figure 2-5: Customer satisfaction index of clothing stores in South Africa

Source: Adapted from Statista (2018).

Statista has released South African Customer Satisfaction Index (SA-csi) as illustrated in Figure 2-5, which identifies which clothes businesses have the greatest customer satisfaction ratings. Based on highly scientific insights into customer satisfaction, the index rates Ackermans, Edgars, Jet, Mr. Price, Pep Shops, Truworths, and Woolworths. Pep Shops tops the clothes store rankings with an overall customer satisfaction score of 79.8, followed by Truworths (79.5) and Ackermans (79.5). Woolworths (78.9) and Jet (77.5) are on par with the industry (77.9), but Mr. Price (76.9) and Edgars (74.7) fall short in terms of keeping people satisfied and committed to their brands.

While trying to remain relevant and competitive in the evolving retail landscape, the South African fashion retail industry has faced challenges from the retail apocalypse. In this context, changing customer preferences and the rise of e-commerce have disrupted traditional retail models, requiring fashion retailers to adapt their strategies by embracing omnichannel approaches, enhancing their digital capabilities, and rethinking their store formats and product offerings.

2.2.6 The retail apocalypse

The phrase "retail apocalypse" refers to the perceived loss of traditional brick-and-mortar retail outlets in favour of the advent of online shopping (Helm *et al.*, 2020:3). The rise of e-commerce, shifting customer patterns, the detrimental effects of COVID-19, as well as retail industry oversaturation, have all contributed to the "retail apocalypse" (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2021:618).

When the 2020 COVID-19 outbreak struck, the retail industry had already suffered years of deterioration. Beginning in 2015, this formerly solid industry suffered large increases in bankruptcies, store closings, and layoffs (Mao, 2022). Due to the enormous number of stores that had closed, a number of shopping centres and prominent shopping malls were almost vacant (Helm *et al.*, 2020:20). Many commentators dubbed it the "retail apocalypse" because of how quickly purchasing and retail patterns changed.

The term "retail apocalypse" also refers to the demise of traditional brick-and-mortar businesses as a result of rising e-commerce rivalry, among other factors (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2021:618). The rise of e-commerce has had a substantial detrimental impact on traditional retailers, particularly those who have been reluctant to adapt to the industry's shifting landscape (Salem & Nor, 2020). In addition, businesses are increasingly relying on technology such as mobile devices and social media to remain competitive in the face of e-commerce (Abed *et al*., 2015). According to Yasaman and Sina (2022:1), the COVID-19 pandemic has hastened the downfall of traditional shops, with many customers migrating to online shopping and adopting new behaviours that may not return to pre-pandemic levels. Ultimately, traditional businesses may well survive and even prosper by implementing techniques such as improving in-store experiences, selling exclusive products, and focusing on emphasizing customer loyalty (Shahid *et al*., 2022). This highlights the retail industry's complexities, with a variety of causes that threaten traditional merchants.

The retail apocalypse can also refer to the widespread shutdown of physical retail outlets. Society has recognised the effect of the retail apocalypse following a leading number of retailers closing in 2015, and the term has since been used to characterise the demise of traditional brick-and-mortar businesses in the face of increased competition from online retailers such as Amazon and concomitant changing customer behaviour (Mazzesi & Oneto, 2020:1). The closing down of physical retail outlets has far-reaching consequences for the retail industry and the economy as a whole. Many causes, including shifting customer behaviour, technological disruption, and increased competition from e-commerce businesses, have contributed to the retail apocalypse (Hänninen *et al.*, 2021:1). According to Goolsbee *et al*. (2020:2), changing customer behaviour, specifically, the transition to online buying, has resulted in a drop in foot traffic to physical retail locations where it is evident that technological disruptions such as the rise of mobile shopping

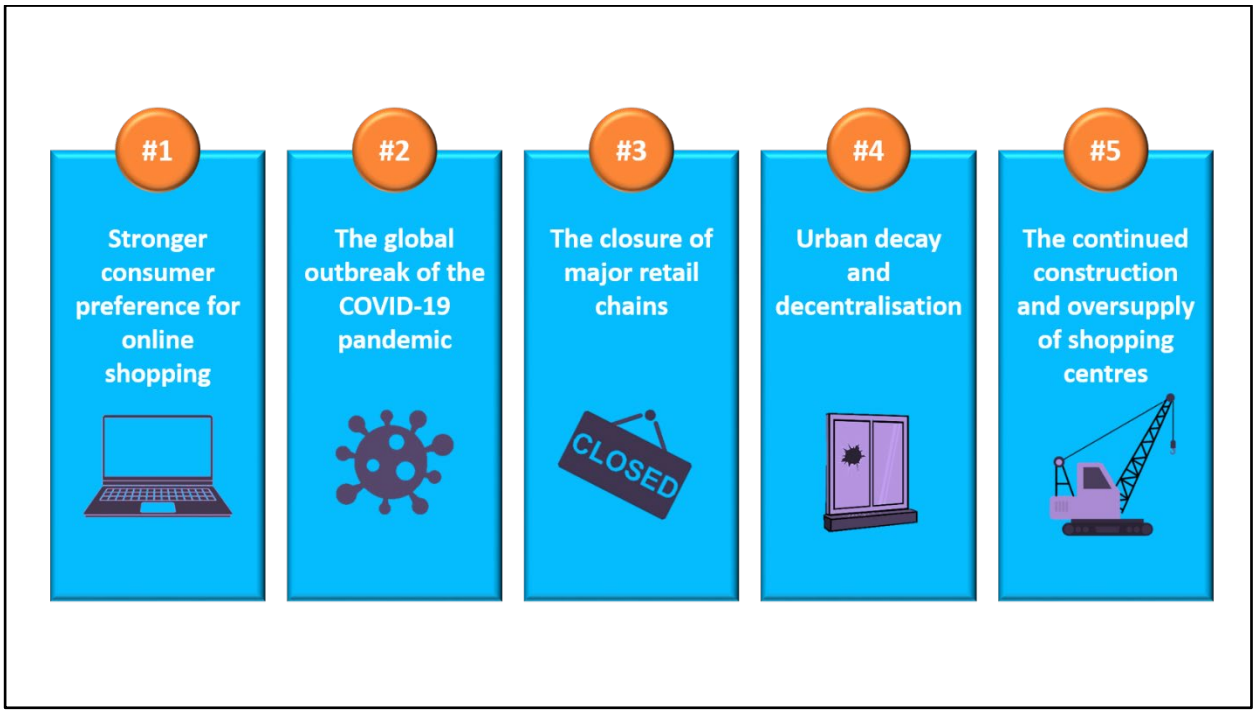
and the increased usage of artificial intelligence and automation have generated new problems for traditional retailers. In addition to these causes, rising e-commerce competition has played a significant role in the retail apocalypse. According to Krämer and Kalka (2017:7), e-commerce businesses such as Amazon have captured a major share of the retail sector by offering lower prices, faster delivery, and a wider assortment of products.

Notwithstanding the obstacles associated with the retail apocalypse, retailers can use targeted tactics to survive and thrive in the new retail landscape. Merchants must adapt to shifting customer behaviour by increasing their digital capabilities and providing customers with a seamless omnichannel experience (Hickman *et al*., 2020:22). To differentiate themselves from online merchants, retailers can focus on developing unique and personalised experiences for customers in physical retail establishments. To remain competitive, merchants can also focus on increasing operational efficiency together with cost reduction solutions in their business activities. According to McKinsey and Company (2021), merchants may do this by investing in automation and artificial intelligence, enhancing supply chain management, and implementing a data-driven decision-making approach.

The retail apocalypse, in short, refers to the collapse of physical retail businesses as a result of increased competition from e-commerce and changing consumer behaviour. The closing of physical retail outlets has far-reaching consequences for the retail industry and the economy as a whole (Mazzesi & Oneto, 2020:1). Retailers may prosper in future by understanding and responding to the changing retail scene..

The retail apocalypse, particularly fuelled by the growing popularity of online shopping, has transformed the traditional retail landscape by hastening the shift to e-commerce. This compelled retailers to develop robust online platforms, and to improve their logistics and delivery capabilities to meet the rising demand for seamless and convenient online shopping experiences. Figure 2-6 below illustrates the top five causes of the decline in shopping centre footfall in South Africa

Figure 2-6: Top five causes of the decline in shopping centre footfall in South Africa



Source: Adopted from Broll (2019).

2.2.6.1 Online shopping

Because of the Internet, customers' lives have become a great deal simpler and increasingly more innovative. The Internet allows e-commerce customers to shop online. Websites make it possible to advertise and promote items and services in the digital marketplace (Sharma & Lijuan, 2015). Online shopping refers to the purchase or sale of products and services over the Internet (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015:188). Online shopping developed as a supplement to traditional offline purchasing. Conventional offline shopping involved people going to brick-and-mortar stores to do their shopping. However, customers felt burdened by the limited availability of products and the inconvenience of being physically present in a store – thus the popularity of online shopping.

The process of purchasing goods or services over the Internet is referred to as online shopping (Rahman *et al.*, 2018:3). It entails browsing and selecting things on a computer or mobile device, adding them to a virtual shopping cart, and paying for them using a secure payment channel. E-commerce websites, mobile apps, social media platforms, and online marketplaces are some of the ways to shop online. Several merchants supplement their physical locations with online shopping, while others operate entirely online. The freedom to purchase from anywhere and at any time, of having access to a vast selection of products, and the capacity to readily compare prices are all advantages of online shopping (Duarte *et al.*, 2018:162). For retailers, Internet

purchasing can also save money by eliminating the need for physical store overheads and allowing for quick price comparison.

Yet, there are certain drawbacks to Internet buying, including the inability to visually inspect things before purchase, shipping delays, and the danger of fraud or scams. When shopping online, it is critical to be attentive and take the appropriate safeguards to protect personal and financial information. A study by Nanda *et al*. (2021:112) found that many customers adopting new behaviours and prefer to shop online rather than in physical stores, thereby demonstrating the importance of a range of factors in online shopping behaviour, including social media, trust, convenience, mobile devices, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2.6.2 COVID-19 and its consequences for retail

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on individuals and businesses worldwide since late December 2019, for the most part harmful in a variety of ways. In addition to the dread and anxiety caused by the virus because of death and illness, people have had to contend with economic setbacks, social limits imposed through social distancing tactics, and a lack of mobility (Mazzesi & Oneto, 2020:201). COVID-19 has had a significant influence on physical retailers, particularly those that rely heavily on foot traffic (Chatterjee *et al.*, 2021:618). Many physical stores were forced to close temporarily, or to limit their operations due to lockdowns and social distancing tactics, resulting in a substantial decrease in sales and revenue (Pilkington, 2021). Even after lockdown limitations were eased, many customers remained hesitant to visit retailers physically, and instead preferred to keep shopping online. The pandemic exasperated the trend of Internet shopping, with many customers using this as a safer and more convenient way to purchase products and services. According to Soto (2020:260), the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the trend of online shopping can be seen from Internet traffic increasing by 60 per cent in 2020. In this context, brick-and-mortar retailers have had to adjust to this shifting landscape by investing in their online capabilities and introducing new services such as click-and-collect and curb-side pickup.

COVID-19 has, therefore, had a substantial influence on brick-and-mortar businesses, accelerating the trend towards online purchasing – and resulting in widespread store closures and revenue losses. While some businesses could adapt to this changing landscape by investing in their online capabilities and offering new services, many battled to stay in business in the face of decreased foot traffic and growing competition from online merchants (Salem & Nor, 2020:15). Also, South African customers lowered their expenditure on non-essential items during the pandemic, with many opting to do critical purchases online (Naidoo, 2021).

Customers are thus increasingly turning to the Internet to buy goods and services, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has thus accelerated the expansion of e-commerce, with many customers choosing to online buying to avoid in-person shopping and limit the danger of virus exposure. According to (Živilė & Gintarė, 2015:74), the growth of online shopping can be linked to several factors, including the ease of buying from home, the increased simplicity of the process, and the availability of a greater selection of products and cheaper prices. Furthermore, the rise of mobile shopping and the increased usage of social media have both contributed to the rise of online purchasing (Bilgihan *et al*., 2016:102). The rise of Internet shopping has far-reaching ramifications for merchants, customers, the closure of retailers and the economy as a whole.

2.2.6.3 Closure of retailers

In today's commercial world, the closing down of retail ventures has become fairly commonplace (Panzone *et al.,* 2021:10). In an increasingly unpredictable, dynamic and complex economic climate, maintaining profitability and remaining competitive are becoming more and more difficult for retailers (Hopkins, 2023). Policymakers, entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders are very concerned about the closing of retailers since it has substantial economic and social ramifications (Ratten, 2021:91). The shutdown of retailers has major and lasting negative economic and social effects. Large businesses, including supermarkets, frequently act as important employers and sources of income, thus their closure can have a significant effect on regional economies and communities (Nicola *et al.,* 2020:190). Additionally, the closing of stores may result in a drop in property values and a decrease in foot traffic, which may be detrimental to nearby companies and urban retail (Kickert *et al.,* 2020:1).

More than ten years have passed since the crisis in Western retailing began. This came after the rapid debt-fuelled retail boom in the 2000s, which caused rent in urban centres to skyrocket. This came to an end after the 2008 financial crisis, which saw numerous retailers failing, and leading to many retail closures (Retail Research, 2023). BBC News (2023) reports that the total closures of retailers increased up to nearly 50 per cent from 2021 figures. While over 17,000 store sites closed down, the number of retail jobs lost increased as retailers attempt to cut costs. Numerous causes contribute to the closing of stores. Consumer behaviour shifting towards e-commerce is a significant factor, because consumers are increasingly turning to online shops. This means a reduction in foot traffic and revenue for conventional brick-and-mortar retailers, as is evident in online shares of retailing. These shares were 6.6 per cent in 2006, 12.7 per cent in 2013 and rose to 19.2 per cent in 2019, thus taking a slice from potential sales of many previously viable retail stores (Retail Research, 2023). Additionally, shoppers are looking for deals and becoming more

price-conscious, which has boosted competition and put pressure on businesses to cut their costs (Krämer & Kalka, 2017:1).

Competition from online shops is another significant factor causing physical stores to close, since online retailers like Amazon have upended the conventional retail industry and have seized a sizable portion of the market. (Gauri *et al.,* 2021:48) Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic's effects have exacerbated pressures on stores, causing many to close their doors. Due to the pandemic, thus many stores have had to close, not only because foot traffic has decreased, but also because online shopping has become more popular. Given the need to invest in new safety measures and to adjust to shifting consumer behaviour, the pandemic has also increased the financial pressure on shops (Retail Research, 2023).

2.2.6.4 Urban decay and decentralisation

Urban decay refers to the process where a formerly functional city, or a section of a city, deteriorates because of vandalism, high crime rates, social deprivation in the form of subpar housing, outdated schools, filthy air and rivers, persistent unemployment, an outdated port system, and substantial areas of industrial degradation. These are all characteristics of urban decay (Mutisya, 2016:18). Urban decay is furthermore used to describe the slow deterioration of urban areas as a result of a number of social, economic, and environmental issues (Wiki, 2023). Indeed, News24 (2020) reports that most of the main cities and towns in South Africa have severely decayed due to a decline in the built environment, rising crime, inadequate law enforcement, ineffective municipal service delivery, insufficient waste management, and various social issues.

When the demand for low-income individuals cannot be met by the supply of low-grade housing, higher-grade units must be made available at a lower cost per occupant by raising the occupancy per unit. Reducing maintenance will result in rates being cut more. Higher occupancy and less maintenance, however, might exacerbate deterioration and contribute to a loss in the unit's value, which in turn causes less maintenance and subsequently further deterioration. Deterioration of one unit, or worse, multiple units, has a depressive effect on surrounding properties and encourages urban decline (Swanepoel & Smallwood, 2019:3).

2.2.6.5 Oversupply of shopping centres

In recent years, the oversupply of shopping centres in South Africa has become a major source of concern, with many analysts warning of dire consequences for the retail sector and the larger economy. The oversupply of shopping centres can have a major impact on their performance, resulting in lower occupancy rates, lower rental yields, and lower profitability (Zhang *et al*.,

2016:117). It was found that the rise of e-commerce in South Africa has exacerbated the excess of shopping malls, with many customers preferring to shop online rather than in real stores (Masebe *et al*., 2020:3). There is, evidently, a complex set of reasons leading to South Africa's shopping centre oversupply, including the rise of e-commerce, growing urbanisation, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, overstock has a substantial impact on shopping centre performance and how developers and landlords must react to changing market conditions.

Many reasons contribute towards the overstock in the South African retail industry, including a lack of effective planning and coordination among developers, a failure to undertake sufficient market analysis, and high levels of investment in the sector. The over-abundance of retail complexes has also had a substantial influence on South Africa's larger economy. According to Price Waterhouse Coopers (2020), high levels of retail investment have diverted resources away from other sectors of the economy, resulting in an imbalance in economic growth. According to the report, the overstock of retail centres has resulted in a glut of commercial real estate, which can contribute to lower property prices and decreased tax revenues for local governments.

The oversupply of shopping centres in South Africa has thus been a major problem in recent years, with many analysts warning of catastrophic consequences for the retail sector and the larger economy (Cape Commercial Property, 2016). Given that South Africa ranked as the sixth-largest country in the world in terms of shopping centres in 2016, not far behind developed economies such as the USA, Japan, Canada, the UK, and China, indicates a gloomy outlook for shopping malls in the South African context. By 2018, 23.4 million square meters of gross lettable space were spread among an incredible 1,959 different shopping centres. South African malls furthermore accounted for 88 per cent of all the available space in sub-Saharan Africa (Estate Living, 2020). A lack of effective planning and coordination among developers, a failure to undertake thorough market analysis, and excessive levels of investment in the sector are all factors contributing to the oversupply. Oversupply has increased retailer competitiveness, reduced profitability for shopping centre owners, and shifted consumer behaviour. It has also resulted in a "retail desert" in some locations, diverting resources away from other sectors of the economy. To address the issue, experts advocate greater developer planning and coordination, a focus on generating unique and individualised retail experiences, and a shift toward more sustainable economic growth models.

The oversupply of shopping malls has also been found to have a detrimental impact on customers' purchasing motivation since the number of options and competitiveness can cause decision paralysis and a drop in the perceived value of shopping experiences (Singla & Rai, 2016:109).

2.3 SHOPPING MOTIVATION

Shopping motivations are defined as "the behavioural drivers that push consumers to the marketplace to meet their internal wants" whereby the internal and external forces that drive people to shop are referred to as shopping motivation (Horváth & Adıgüzel, 2018:301). Customers shop for several reasons, including utilitarian needs such as purchasing necessary items or services, and hedonic wants such as seeking pleasure or satisfaction through shopping experiences (Lee & Wu, 2017). Shopping motivation is a complicated phenomenon driven by several elements such as utilitarian and hedonic demands, social influences, and cultural values. Knowing these reasons can help us understand consumer behaviour and influence marketing tactics geared at certain customer demographics.

2.3.1 Customers' motives for shopping

According to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019:78), motivation is the innate need that drives people to act or behave in a certain way to meet a specific need. Furthermore, the processes that influence people's behaviour are referred to as motivation. It takes place when the customer feels the need to fulfil something. The consumer tries to lessen or remove the urge since it causes a condition of tension (Solomon, 2018:150). A study by Roberts-Lombard and Parumasur (2017:6) on the factors that motivate consumers to shop identified several variables that affect consumers' decisions to engage in shopping activities. The main factors influencing a consumer's incentive to shop were identified as perception, learning, customer attitude, lifestyle, and personality.

- The process through which a person becomes aware of their surroundings and interprets them in a way that is consistent with their frame of reference is known as *perception* (Roberts-Lombard & Parumasur, 2017:6). Perception in the context of buying can alter how consumers view goods and services, which may, in turn, influence their purchasing decisions (Solomon, 2018:74). Customers might be more inclined to buy things that share their views or values because they have a positive opinion of them.

- On the other hand, *learning* is the process by which people gain knowledge about what to consume and buy, as well as the experiences that will influence their behaviour in the future (Solomon, 2018:109). Marketers that want their clients to learn more about a particular product can use a variety of learning strategies to provide them with the knowledge they need to make wise selections. As a result, learning is seen as a key factor in customer incentive to shop (Roberts-Lombard & Parumasur, 2017:6).

- Roberts-Lombard and Parumasur (2017:6) point out another important factor influencing a customer's motivation to shop: their *mindset*. This refers to a person's tendency to mostly act positively or negatively toward items, events, or conditions that are important to the market. Customer perceptions of goods and services, as well as their propensity to shop, can be influenced by attitude.

- Other significant personal factors that affect a customer's drive to shopping include *lifestyle* and *personality*. Lifestyle refers the customer's way of life, whereas personality is the psychological characteristics that both shape and reflect how they interact with their surroundings or marketing stimuli (Solomon, 2018:228). These elements may have a significant bearing on consumer preferences, which may in turn affect their purchase choices.

As noted above, Roberts-Lombard and Parumasur (2017:6) identify perception, learning, customer attitude, lifestyle, and personality as the key motivators of consumer purchase motivation. These elements can be used by marketers to create tactics that are appealing to consumers and ultimately result in increased sales. Recognising these factors can also assist organisations in focusing their marketing efforts on particular customer segments and creating more specialised and successful marketing campaigns. Additionally, shopping behaviour from the perspective of consumers' motives revealed six key motivations for shopping: seeking adventure, socialising, seeking gratification, searching for ideas, buying for others, and searching for value (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015:71).

Shopping is an activity on its own in contemporary societies, and it is seen as one of the main ways that people obtain the commodities and services they require (Cambridge Dictionary). Individual needs and wants are the primary drivers of shopping, but personal and societal variables also significantly influence consumer behaviour (Solomon, 2018:326). While social motives are related to the effect of societal elements like family, friends, and cultural norms, personal motives refer to individual characteristics like lifestyle, personality, and values. Table 2-1 depicts the social and personal factors that influence consumer behaviour while they purchase.

Table 2-1: Personal and social motives for shopping

Personal motives for shopping	Social motives for shopping
Role-playing	Social experience
Recreation	Communication with others
Self-gratification	Peer group attraction
Learning about new trends	Status and authority
Sensory stimulation	The pleasure of bargaining

Source: Adapted from Bustamante and Rubio (2017).

2.3.1.1 Personal motives for shopping

According to Solomon (2018:150), motivation "refers to the process that motivates a person to behave in a certain way". Significantly, he stated that desire is the foundation of all customer activities, although customer motives vary according to product and situation. Personal buying motives refer to the reasons why people choose to engage in certain purchasing behaviour (Chang *et al*., 2016:620). Individual goals might vary greatly, and can include a desire to express one's individuality, engage in leisure activities, improve one's mood or self-esteem, stay up to date on the newest trends, experience new sensations or satisfy sensory preferences.

- **Role-playing**

Role-playing refers to a personal purchasing motivation that entails using shopping to express one's identity or to experiment with multiple identities. Haimson *et al.* (2015:3817) found that people who were more inclined to purchase for role play were also more likely to engage in "fashion play," or the use of fashion as a means of self-expression and experimentation.

- **Recreation**

Another personal motivation for shopping is recreation, which entails means that shopping is a leisure activity or kind of enjoyment. Recreational shoppers are more likely to appreciate the social components of shopping, such as spending time with friends or family members, rather than focusing on the act of purchasing products (Evangelista *et al*., 2020).

- **Self-gratification**

Self-gratification is a personal buying motivation that entails using shopping to improve one's mood or self-esteem.

- **Learning about new trends**

Learning about new trends is a personal buying motivation that entails using shopping to stay up to date on the newest fashion, technology, or other trends (Kumar & Sadarangani, 2018:344).

- **Sensory stimulation**

Sensory stimulation is a personal purchasing motivation where shopping is used to experience new sensations or meet one's sensory preferences. Those who were more likely to engage in sensory shopping are also more likely to enjoy shopping in physical stores, where they could touch and feel the objects, and to be more receptive to trying new products, according to a study by Farah *et al.* (2019:16).

2.3.1.2 Social motives for shopping

Social motives for shopping are the reasons why people choose to shop to address social demands, such as preserving connections or social standing or gaining social status. Customers who are heavily impacted by social norms are more likely to engage in buying activities to conform to their social group's expectations (Kim & Seock, 2019:85). Similarly, An *et al.* (2019:168) discovered that customers who have a strong social identity with a specific brand are more likely to engage in brand-related purchase activity. Ultimately, understanding social motives for purchasing is critical for merchants who want to provide shopping experiences that meet their customers' social demands.

- **Social experience:** Physical retail stores are social settings in which customers see, understand, and interact with service components to engage in both individual and collective processes.

- **Communication with others:** Shopping can provide an opportunity for social interaction and communication with others. Customers can also meet friendly and communicative salespeople and other shoppers with whom they can form a social bond (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017:891).

- **Peer group attraction:** Customers may be encouraged to shop to blend in with their peer group or to obtain social acceptability. Customer’s purchasing decisions are influenced by

reference groups in both positive and negative ways. Very often, customers model their behaviour after what they believe the group expects of them (Solomon, 2018:396).

- **Status and authority:** Some customers may shop to demonstrate their social position or authority. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence is a customer trait that refers to a person's desire for others to think highly of him or her (Solomon, 2018:396).

- **The pleasure of bargaining:** Bargaining is negotiating for the price where customers try to demonstrate their influence by more frequently asking for bargains or discounts in contexts that are generally non-bargaining, like conventional retail outlets (Gillison *et al.*, 2014:151).

2.3.2 Different types of customers

Understanding different types of customers is essential for retailers to create targeted marketing campaigns and to develop product offerings that meet diverse customers' needs and preferences. Although no two customers are the same, they share many of the same aims and habits. An in-depth 18-month analysis of crucial purchasing behaviours found five types of customers: the investigative customer, the frivolous spender, the experience-driven buyer, the fluctuant customer, and the conscientious customer (Davis, 2023).

Table 2-2: Classification of customer types

Customer type	Description
Investigative customers	These customers, also known as the mindful bargain shopper, view their purchases as investments and will conduct extensive research to discover the best prices and quality. This is the most common sort of shopper, especially in the present time characterised by high inflation and economic instability.
Frivolous spenders	This type of customer is characterised by impulsiveness; s/he enjoys shopping, and is not price-sensitive. While being the minority of the five tyres, these customers constitute a substantial revenue source that should not be disregarded. These customers are also drawn to rarity, so shops should cater to them by offering limited- and special-edition items.
Experience driven	For this type of shopper, the experience is everything. Travel, culture and trying new things are the main pulls that will get them to spend. Moreover, they also enjoy the opportunity to tangibly test-run products in-store. Retailers can use physical stores and virtual channels as places or avenues to provide unique and memorable experiences. it is also helpful to frame products in an experiential context, highlighting them in natural use cases.

Table 2-2: Classification of customer types (continued)

Customer type	Description
Fluctuant shoppers	This type of customer, like frivolous spenders, can be open to making large purchases — but they can also be far more conservative, depending on the circumstances. The difficulty for shops is to capitalise on the good days of the shopper. Rather than trying to forecast when a client will be more likely to spend, marketers could provide shopping experiences that encourage the customer to buy.
Conscious customers	This character personifies the expression "vote with your wallet." These customers are acutely aware of their spending habits and wish to reflect their values through their purchases.

Source: Adapted from Davis (2023).

Factors influencing in-store consumer behaviour give insight and perspective to the entire customer journey, which can be beneficial in the pursuit of understanding customers with the ultimate aim of providing them with enhanced experiences and product offerings.

2.4 FACTORS INFLUENCING IN-STORE CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

2.4.1 The customer decision-making process

Any business' ability to succeed relies on the creation of powerful marketing strategies. It is therefore crucial to examine and understand the intricate activities, both physical and mental, that clients engage in, to develop effective methods in this regard. Businesses can use individualised marketing strategies to draw in niche markets and boost profitability by understanding how customers make decisions (Roberts-Lombard & Parumasur, 2017:242).

The motivation for customer behaviour is defined as needs. The process of customer decision-making is not apparent, in contrast to customer actions, according to Roberts-Lombard and Parumasur (2017:244).

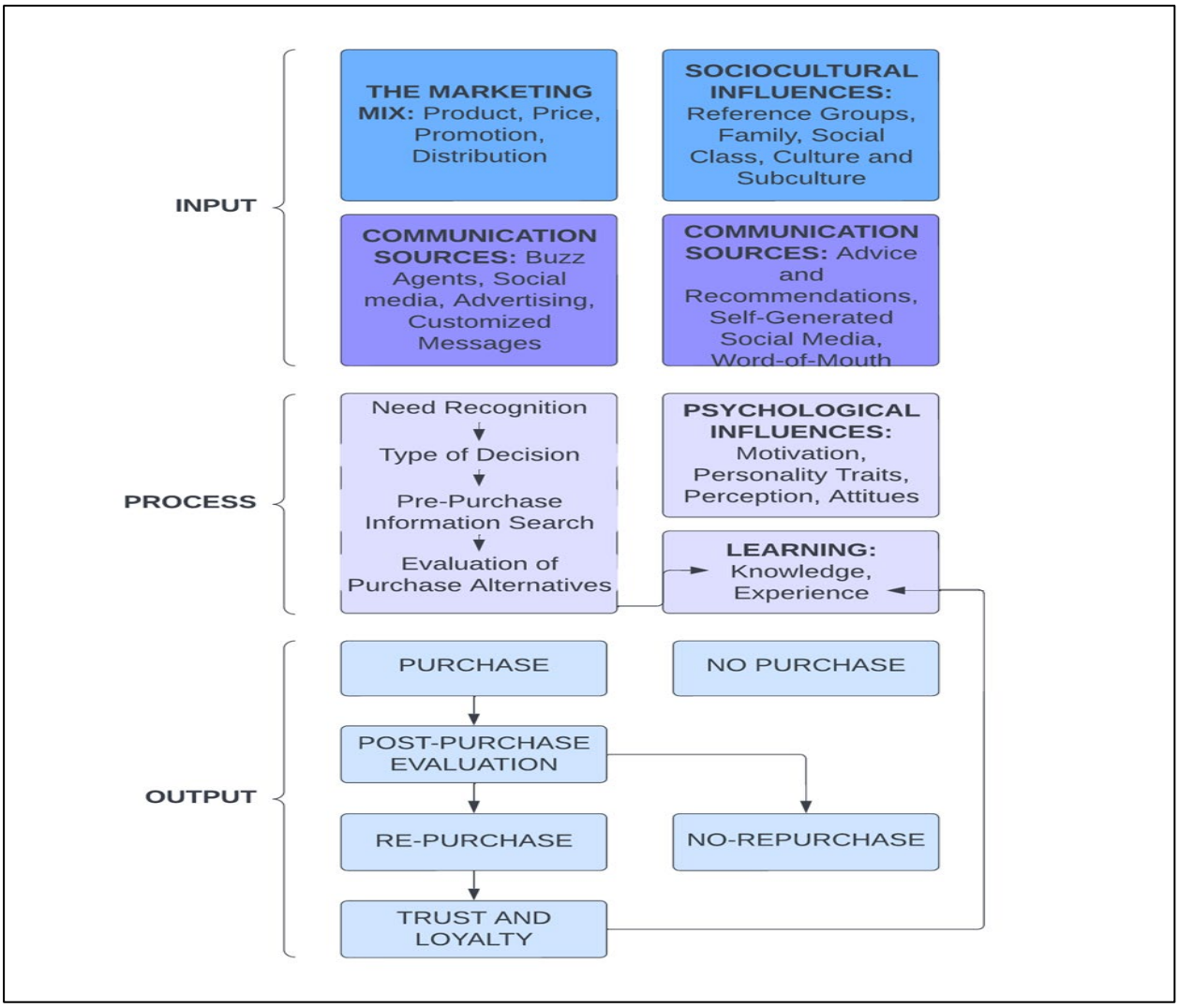
Marketing professionals can gain insight into the complexity of various customer decisions by understanding the various stages of the decision-making process. They can also learn why some decisions call for more time and consideration than others and gain a better understanding of the risks to which particular decisions may expose customers. This enables marketers to communicate more effectively and to apply more effective strategies to convince clients to purchase products or services, which facilitates sales.

The traditional customer decision-making process consists of three overarching steps: Input, Process, and Output factors are the categories for the framework that precedes and follows the

consumer decision-making process. Each phase can be used to market a product, service, or brand. These phases represent the thought processes and external influences that customers experience before, during, and following a purchasing decision. The customer process is defined as identifying a problem or need, gathering information, weighing options, choosing a product, and taking post-purchase actions. These two additional categories, input and output, encompass these activities (Islam & Chowdhury, 2018:131).

These actions can improve the overall quality of a marketing message and facilitate effective communication between retailers and customers (Rudansky-Kloppers & Strydom, 2016:135). Figure 2-7 shows the customer decision-making process.

Figure 2-7: The customer decision-making process



Source: Adapted from Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019:375).

2.4.1.1 Input

Several steps are included in the customer decision-making process, which helps with information gathering and making educated purchasing decisions. Input, which refers to the outside factors that affect a customer's decision-making process, is the foundational step in the process. The input phase is divided into three distinct categories by Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019:376): the marketing mix, socio-cultural influences, and communications.

The marketing mix is a theoretical framework that describes the crucial decisions that managers must make while creating long-term strategies or short-term tactical operations to suit the needs of clients. Price, promotion, product, and place make up the four Ps of the marketing mix. Price is the cost of the good or service, while promotion is the work done by businesses to sell and advertise their products. The term "product element" refers to the attributes and functions of the product, while "place element" refers to the channels through which the product is sold (Kotler & Keller, 2017:17).

Socio-cultural effects pertain to any of the many elements, including peers, family, reference groups, culture, and socioeconomic class, that affect a customer's purchase choices. These factors may have a substantial impact on how someone perceives a good or service and makes a purchasing choice. For instance, a person's culture might affect their preferences and choices, and their socioeconomic class can affect the things they choose to buy. Communication refers to the channels by which businesses reach out to clients, keeping in mind marketing mix and sociocultural influences. Advertising, public relations, personal selling, and sales promotion are examples of communication channels. Companies use these platforms to successfully market their goods and services to their target market (Kotler & Keller, 2017:18).

Companies may create marketing strategies that successfully target their clients and have an impact on how they make decisions by recognising these external forces. For instance, businesses can develop persuasive marketing messages that connect with their target audiences and increase their chances of closing a deal by utilising the appropriate communication channels and appealing to the sociocultural values of their clients.

2.4.1.2 Process

The process phase of customer decision-making describes how customers make their decisions. Customers go through several processes throughout this part of the buying process, from determining a need or problem to weighing their options and making a decision.

The process phase of the customer decision-making process is broken down into multiple stages, including need recognition, type of decision, pre-purchase information search, and alternative evaluation according to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019:376). Each of these phases is essential to the decision-making process and has the power to affect a customer's final purchase choice.

2.4.1.2.1 Recognition of needs

Recognition, according to Camilleri (2018:3), is an essential consumer need that customers demand to feel satisfied, as opposed to a need expressed as a conscious feeling of deprivation experienced by an individual. A need arises when customers are faced with a “problem” (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:376) A need may be triggered by either an internal or external stimulus (Hussain, 2017:15). Unmet customer requirements must be understood by marketers when they want to successfully introduce new products to the market (Bothma, 2017:30). Recognising needs constitutes the initial phase in the traditional customer decision-making process, which is triggered by customer needs brought on by internal and external stimuli. Need recognition indicates a customer's willingness to act on a desire or need (Mishra, 2018:1).

2.4.1.2.2 Types of decisions

This step in the customer decision-making process denotes that not all purchases from customers require the same amount of information gathering, cognitive processing and input. Four types of decisions require different levels of research, according to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019:376):

- **Extensive problem-solving:** Extensive problem-solving refers to purchases that happen infrequently, where the customer does not have previous experience in this type of purchase and does not have criteria to evaluate said product. An example is a customer purchasing a diamond for the first time.

- **Routinised response behaviour:** Purchases that require minimal thought and effort because of the frequency of purchases made. They are considered “automatic” like buying over-the-counter painkillers.

- **Limited problem-solving:** Limited problem-solving refers to purchases that are updated versions of previously bought products where the customer has a set criterion to evaluate this product, such as a new version of a cell phone.

- **Customer involvement:** This is the degree of personal relevance to the product and pertains to low-risk purchases.

2.4.1.2.3 Pre-purchase information search

Information gathering after recognising a need happens when a customer begins gathering data to aid in making a purchasing decision (Rudansky-Kloppers & Strydom, 2016:137). During this phase, customers look for information – both internally and externally. Internally, they look for pertinent information using past experiences with goods and services, and externally, they look for information in the physical outside environment. Customers obtain information from a variety of sources, including personal sources like friends, family, and coworkers, public sources like customer review sites and the media, commercial sources like social media, and product packaging, and experiential sources like using and handling the actual product (Hussain, 2017:16). Customers tend to be sceptical of alternatives and will take time to consider whether these will meet their demands effectively during the decision-making process. Customers proceed through this stage in search of a good or service or product that has certain qualities they think would satisfy their unmet wants (Erasmus, 2019:342). This stage, according to Terblanche (2016:75), pertains to the action taken to gather the data needed to make a choice, and is also a function of the observed risk.

2.4.1.3 Evaluation of alternatives

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2017:154), customers use available information to evaluate purchase alternatives. Depending on the individual customer and the circumstances surrounding the purchase, customers may develop varying opinions about various brands and products. Customers evaluate and compare the data they have access to on the various goods and services that are offered (Rudansky-Kloppers & Strydom, 2016:137). They evaluate each choice according to pre-established evaluation standards, weighing its benefits and drawbacks (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019). Customers frequently rank the many options in terms of their characteristics before selecting the most suitable one (Islam & Chowdhury, 2018:132). Before making a purchase, they examine alternative products using customer ratings and prices, quality, brand, placement, location, and the effects of consuming the product, customers frequently search for the greatest bargain. Therefore, it is critical for marketers to ensure that customers are aware of a brand and its benefits (Stankevich, 2017:10). The techniques used to assess various options will depend on the customer's underlying objectives, personality, and motivations (Jisana, 2014:40). Customers typically base this stage on characteristics related to their acknowledged needs (Oke *et al.*, 2016:46).

2.4.1.4 Output

The output stage of the customer decision-making process involves the physical purchase of the product, consuming the product, and ultimately the post-purchase evaluation.

2.4.1.4.1 Purchase decision

The customer makes a buying decision for a good or service after weighing the available alternatives (Amankwah, 2016:20). Terblanche (2016:76) concurs that a buying choice involves the decision to buy a certain good or service.

2.4.1.4.2 Post-purchase evaluation

During this stage, customers assess their choice and use the results of this assessment to inform future decisions (Rudansky-Kloppers & Strydom, 2016:137). Customers rely on memory and the previously perceived value of a good or service during this stage, according to Schiffman and Kanuk (2014:429), which can lead to three primary outcomes:

- The product's or service's performance can live up to customer expectations;
- The performance of the good or service may meet or even surpass the customer's expectations; or
- The performance of the good or service can fall short of what the customer anticipated.

The customer decision-making process is inextricably tied to the customer experience, as the quality of interactions, perceptions of brand image, and level of satisfaction can all influence a customer's evaluation and eventual purchase choice.

2.5 CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

In today's competitive marketplace, businesses are increasingly focusing their efforts on delivering engaging and memorable customer experiences that distinguish them from their competition and promote long-term customer loyalty (Bruijl & Gerard, 2018:2) Customer experience is a multidimensional concept that includes customers' encounters with a brand, product, or service along the customer journey, from pre-purchase activities through post-purchase experiences (Li *et al.*, 2022:2). It has sensory, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural components, and can be influenced by a variety of elements such as customer service quality, physical environment design, and communication channel efficacy (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020:1). “We see our customers as guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It’s our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better.” The foregoing quote by Jeff Bezos, founder, executive chairman and former president and CEO of Amazon, accentuates

customers and their experience at the forefront of business success. This e-commerce mogul knows that customers frequently share memories of their experiences, both good and bad, thereby emphasizing that distinguishing and refining your experiences, or rather “party”, from that of competitors will lead to business success and firm competitiveness. Academic scholars have indeed recognised this as the foundation of marketing management (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020:630).

Customers frequently refer to their memories while making judgments about what to buy and how to describe their experiences to others, since consumption decisions and memories use comparable cognitive and brain processes. Some memories of retail experiences stick with each of us so vividly that they can still be remembered in detail years later. Since extensive research has confirmed the connection between memories, attitudes, and purchase behaviour, taking cognizance of customer experiences is essential in marketing. This explains why numerous businesses, including Disney, Starbucks, and Apple, are placing increasing emphasis on developing memorable customer experiences (McColl *et al*., 2021:397).

According to Price Waterhouse Coopers (2022), businesses in the South African customer and retail sectors face a variety of difficulties. These include declining local economies, which puts pressure on their revenue and client base, new international rivals, and a shifting political and regulatory climate. These should be viewed in light of the need for business and marketing decisions to remain profitable in a volatile market. In the experience economy, a customer's in-person experiences with a brand can leave impressions that are stronger and longer-lasting than those that are made or countered by conventional marketing communications. Experience has become the trademark. Customers anticipate increasingly consistent and engaging encounters at all touchpoints. Enhancing customer experiences can therefore be harnessed to combat the aforementioned challenges.

Customer experience management is defined by Koetz (2019:10) as a complex subject with many elements characterised by a dynamic process that requires constant adaptation to new technology, customer expectations, and corporate processes. The temporal, spatial, technological and social dimensions of buying goods and services have all altered with time.

Customer experience has become a critical marketing concept to produce a distinctive, enjoyable, and memorable encounter. It a strategic method for generating comprehensive customer value, developing differentiation, and sustaining competitive advantage by academics and marketers. Consumption is gradually shifting away from commodities and toward goods, services, and experiences. Indeed, Pine and Gilmore (1999) refer to the advent of a new economy as the "experience economy" and "experiences" as the fourth wave in the economic progression. These

authors highlight that businesses must place equal emphasis on the customer experience as they do on products and services to create a seamless overall experience because the traditional product/service value proposition is no longer sufficient for reaching customers or differentiating their offerings.

2.6 THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

In their book *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*, B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore introduced the concept of the experience economy. It refers to the notion that in a contemporary, industrialised economy, businesses increasingly create value for customers through experiences that engage and enrich them rather than through actual goods or services. Moreover, it refers to a new era of economic activity in which businesses are no longer selling only products or services, but rather providing experiences for their customers. Pine and Gilmore (1999) developed the experience economy model to improve corporate performance in a variety of contexts. According to them, experiences are "events that engage people in a personal way" (Pine & Gilmore, 1999:12). The experience economy model describes many levels of customers' involvement and connection to their experienced environment. Since the experience economy model's aim is to give customers an unforgettable experience that also has a salient impact on their behavioural intentions, the notion of experiential benefits has been explored profusely. These benefits might be seen as part of the "experience economy". Education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escapism are the four sub-dimensions that make up the experience economy, which is created when the two respective views are combined (Jinsoo *et al*., 2022:3430). These four concepts are arranged along two axes: connection with offerings and participation described as active vs. passive, and absorption vs. immersion. When these experiences are balanced and merged, a "sweet spot" that represents the optimal experience impacts emerges (Lee *et al*., 2020).

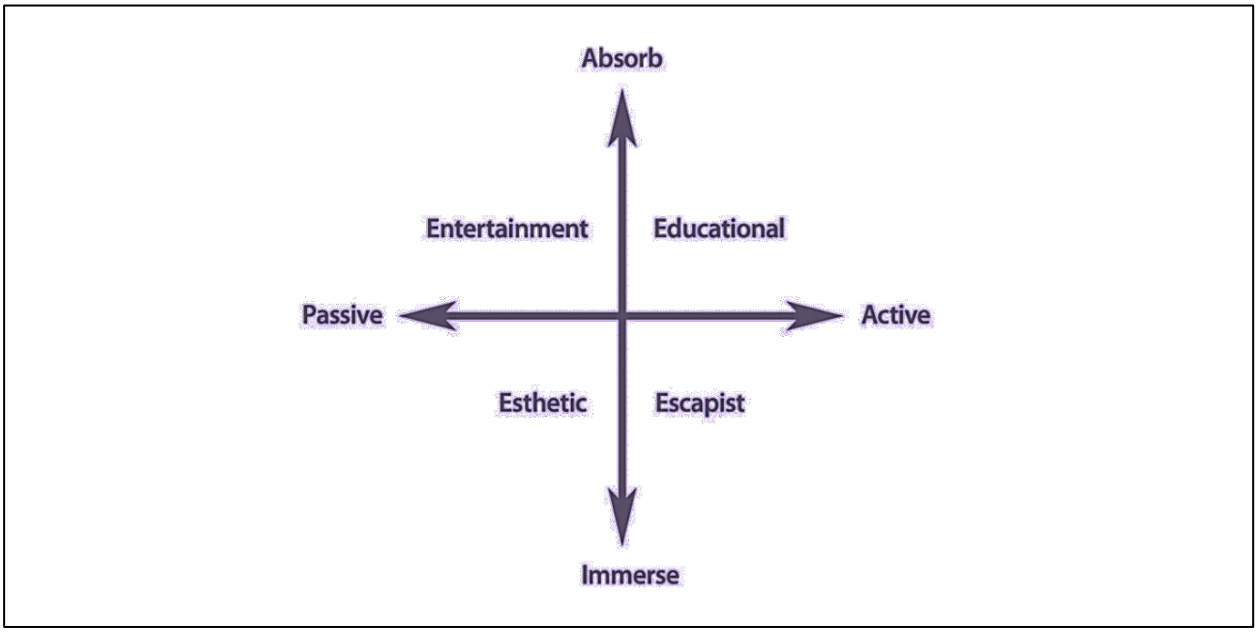
According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), a corporation creates an experience "when it consciously employs services as the stage and products as props to engage specific customers". The creators of the term experience economy contend that the "sensory engagement" that occurs between the customer and the good or service is the key distinction between a pleasing experience and a less exciting service experienced by the customer. A successful experience economy retailer should find strategies in their business model that sell their products effectively while simultaneously finding ways to stimulate customer engagement. This is what Pine and Gilmore refer to as "mass customisation." The experiences provided by businesses in the retail, leisure and entertainment industries are extensively emphasised in these authors' work. Retail examples include businesses like Apple and LEGO that facilitate a multi-sensory experience for customers by

allowing them to touch, feel, smell, examine, or try on a product (Spence, 2022:12). A "multisensory atmosphere", according to Spence (2022:4), might influence clients to purchase since it elicits a favourable cognitive and emotional reaction, according to the application of the "service scape" concept to these settings. Although Pine and Gilmore typically use examples from multinational comparison merchants, many independently owned businesses, such as vintage shops and record stores, also place much emphasis on customer experience. This leads to the notion of businesses in the experience economy striving to provide clients with unique and meaningful experiences that go beyond simply meeting a basic requirement. This notion can apply to experiences like shows at the theatre or a concert, going to a theme park, or even just having a delicious dinner. Pine and Gilmore (1998) contend that in an experience economy, businesses must create and stage events that engage customers in order distinguish themselves from their competitors and stand out in the market. Businesses and marketers must therefore concentrate on developing compelling and distinctive experiences to draw in and keep customers in the context of the experience economy.

The fact that many of the activities that fuel the experience economy are meant to be enjoyed in our free time has ramifications for how we see work and leisure. Customers have transitioned from a product-based economy to an experience-based economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), which has had a significant bearing on marketing professionals and society at large, rightfully attracting much scholarly interest (Veloutsou & Guzman, 2017). Experiences are fundamental in understanding customer behaviour. In this context, the elucidation of brand personality, increased brand awareness (Ding & Tseng, 2015), increased brand loyalty, and other brand management outcomes are all influenced by experiences. The experience economy is significant because it allows businesses to differentiate themselves from their competitors. By providing unique and memorable experiences, businesses can gain a competitive advantage in the market and attract more customers (Chevtchouk *et al*., 2021). Pine and Gilmore classify the Experience Economy into four distinct domains in their book, ranging from commodities and things to services and, finally, experiences, which are characterised as unforgettable encounters that engage customers on an emotional and sensory level (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

The concept of perceived experiential value, which is the degree to which customers regard a given experience as valuable, unique, and memorable, is strongly tied to the experience economy, and is a significant factor in promoting customer loyalty and good word-of-mouth referrals. The four realms of experiencing value, known as the 4E construct, comprise two dimensions and four types of experiences. The two dimensions and four types of experiences are depicted in Figure 2-8, illustrating the experience economy’s realms.

Figure 2-8: The experience economy realms



Source: Adopted from Pine and Gilmore (2011:45).

2.6.1 Educational experience

Customers participate in instructive encounters that include absorbing current events (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). According to the 4E Experience Economy model, an educational experience happens when a consumer learns new information while purchasing, thus producing an encounter that the consumer deems instructional. To develop a customer's knowledge or talents, educational experiences need active participation from customers' minds or bodies. Customers can learn about new fashion trends, get inspiration, and engage in other educational activities in brick-and-mortar fashion companies (Amrut & Ann Marie, 2018:442). Also, customers can learn new skills and knowledge by actively participating in educational sessions, which makes for a satisfying shopping experience. Customers are assumed to be perusing physical retail locations not only to make purchases, but also to explore and discover new trends (Amrut & Ann Marie, 2018:442). The purpose of offering educational experiences is to allow customers to gain knowledge from these, spark their interests, expand their knowledge, and share their experiences (Kaur & Kaur, 2020:240). Offering customers educational opportunities has advantages that go beyond the simple act of shopping. According to Pine and Gilmore (2011), these occasions boost client loyalty and word-of-mouth recommendations to others.

2.6.2 Entertainment experience

Entertainment experiences are one of the earliest types of experiences that have been documented, but the idea of experiential marketing has developed recently. Entertainment experiences such as viewing a movie, going to a concert or sporting event, or taking in a theatrical

performance, occur when customers passively absorb the perceived experience through their senses, according to Pine and Gilmore (2019). In this sense, customers are passive viewers rather than active participants.

However, customers may well have pleasant interactions that cause them to feel joyful when they passively observe or take in events and performances (Pine & Gilmore, 2019:47). Customers have been found to demand experiences even though they are intangible because they are fondly remembered and remain long after (Pelletier & Collier, 2018:457). This suggests that customers are happier and have a stronger sense of well-being when they purchase experiences rather than commodities. This suggestion emphasises the value of experiential marketing as a strategy for adding value and increasing client loyalty. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) furthermore provide an "experiential view" of marketing in which the consumer's pursuit of fantasies, sentiments, and enjoyment directs the consuming process rather than just following a logical and impartial process of exchange. Consumption is motivated by a need and desire for emotion, self-expression, fun, and excitement rather than by a process of impersonal inputs and outputs.

2.6.3 Aesthetic experience

Understanding the visual elements of the customer experience and how these leave a lasting impression on customers is crucial for business success. Businesses want their customers to remember certain aspects of their experiences the most. These aspects are the impressions that customers take away from their experiences. The aesthetic or ambience of a physical business captures these lasting memories, rendering it essential to the customer experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011:46). Customer perception and consumer decision-making are significantly influenced by atmospheric factors. They are incorporated into actual retail spaces and put on display in areas where customers are conscious of needs or problems. The customer's innate need is triggered by internal cues in response to their demands, and this need eventually intensifies to the point where it can act as a driver. A desire may also be triggered by external stimuli; however, advertisement-induced demands may also be suppressed by intriguing and cohesive ambient factors (Siyanbola & Ogunseye, 2021:167).

A buying decision is made after internal requirements are triggered by external factors. It is important to take both intrinsic and extrinsic clues into account when evaluating the quality of a shopping experience because the atmosphere of the retail location increases the customer's shopping experience. Intrinsic cues are described as physical characteristics of a product, such as size, colour, flavour, or scent, by Schiffman *et al.* (2019:121). Customers assess the quality of products based on their physical attributes, and they prefer to think that their assessments are based on internal cues, since it enables them to defend their purchasing decisions as "rational"

or "objective" ones. Extrinsic cues such as packaging, price, and marketing, are traits that are not inherent in the product.

Retail settings should offer the four experience worlds (educational, entertainment, escapist, and aesthetic experiences) to give clients an immersive experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Brick-and-mortar retail businesses and shopping malls could provide more memorable experiences and more value to customers by integrating these four realms when developing their marketing strategies (Sadachar & Fiore, 2015). The four realms of the experience economy have a salient impact on the perceived experiential value in brick-and-mortar retail businesses and shopping centres, according to a study by Sadachar and Fiore (2015) who looked at the impact of the 4E concept on perceived experiential value.

2.6.4 Escapist experience

Escapism is a term that describes a person's desire to engage in a different time and place, either physically or online, to escape reality, monotony, and stressful lifestyles (Kaur & Kaur, 2020:240). According to Pine and Gilmore (2011:49), memorable experiences are escapist activities in which participants are fully absorbed and experience the excitement first-hand. This assertion is supported by empirical data, which shows that escapist experiences have a beneficial effect on emotional enjoyment and arousal (Fiore *et al*., 2000). An escapist experience is not solely determined by the environment in which it takes place. Customers can have escapist experiences in the digital era on the internet, where they can join communities and relationships, participate in activities, and gain value from the experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011:51).

Active participation and absorption in the in-store experience are crucial components of escapism in the context of physical retail locations (Amrut & Ann Marie, 2018:442). Similar escapist experiences and emotional satisfaction can be offered to customers by the ambient components of a physical store, such as the lighting, aroma, and music. For instance, a high-end fashion company might design a setting that immerses customers in a glamorous world where they can feel the thrill of going down a catwalk or mingling with famous people. Marketing professionals may utilise escapism as a tool to create memorable experiences that elicit strong emotional reactions and foster steadfast consumer devotion. Customers may escape from their routine and fully immerse themselves in a new world with escapism experiences, which makes them unique and appealing, and allows them to fully enjoy their time (Pine & Gilmore, 2011:49). Escapism is a state of mind, a feeling that consumers seek in the experiences they engage in, not simply a physical place or thing.

2.7 PERCEIVED EXPERIENTIAL VALUE

The value that a customer perceives that they will receive from a good or service is known as perceived customer value. The concept of perceived customer value is crucial to the understanding of consumer behaviour, since it ultimately captures the effect of customers' perceived benefits (Yoo & Park, 2016:2). The idea behind customer perceived value is that a product or service's success mostly depends on whether or not customers think it can meet their wants and needs. This customer value is the outcome of a trade-off between costs and benefits that the customer perceives (Berman *et al.*, 2018:46). Numerous variables such as the attributes of the good or service, it is standing in the market, its cost, and the requirements and preferences of the customer might affect this outcome (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015:151). The concept of perceived customer value is crucial in marketing, because it enables businesses to understand what their target market values, and how to develop goods and services that will satisfy those needs. Businesses can leverage perceived customer value to set their products apart from those of rivals, draw in new clients, and keep hold of old ones (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:10).

Retailers must carefully evaluate the needs and desires of their target market to create perceived customer value. Following this, they must develop their products or services to meet those needs in a way that the client finds valuable. Perceived value can be viewed as a result of customers' perceived advantages, coming from the benefit theory, which maintains that products provide customers with both fundamental and extra benefits (Yoo & Park, 2016:6). Researchers have acknowledged that customers look for value in the consumer experience based on co-created social exchange as well as functional aspects of the product (Gupta *et al.*, 2019). Customers generally perceive a product's worth when its core and ancillary benefits match their own opinions and usage patterns.

2.7.1 Perceived customer value in a retail setting

Customer perceived value in a retail setting is relative (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:96). Perceived value in a retail setting is the ambience or setting of a certain store where clients buy goods or services. An inviting retail space includes a variety of elements, including appropriate lighting, music, attractive decorations and layouts, excellent architectural design, fragrance and freshness, air conditioning, comforting and stylish colour, and the number of customers, all of which have the potential to influence customer behaviour and perceived value (Hanaysha, 2018:8). A successful retail business must be customer-oriented, skilled in service, and successful in communicating with customers to establish a quality relationship that cultivates a strong understanding of the market and its needs (Berman *et al.*, 2018:48). Customers favour businesses where they are the centre of attention. Also, developing and enhancing relationships

is made possible by the interaction between service users and suppliers. This is due to lower interaction intensity, where real and quality relationships are regarded as less probable in the retail environment, in this way reducing perceived customer value (Hauser & Urban, 1986).

The relationship between a customer's perceived benefits (economic, functional, and psychological) and the resources (financial, time, effort, and psychological) they utilise to acquire those benefits is known as customer value (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:12). There has been a trend among retailers toward leveraging customer value as a result of the quick change in customer needs brought on by fast-developing technical innovations (Ibarra *et al.*, 2018:5). As a result, retail managers need to be aware of what different types of customers want and anticipate future possibilities from the value proposition (Hanaysha, 2018).

2.8 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

According to Stein and Ramaseshan (2020), customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by the customer experience. In the retail industry, market experiences that take place in an environment that is under the businesses' control are referred to as shopping experiences, Yadav *et al.* (2015) propound that in-store factors other than those that retailers can control, like atmosphere, selection, and price, can also affect customers' in-store shopping experiences. Moreover, a store's physical features such as its layout and product selection influence customers' experiences, which in turn result in a positive in-store shopping experience. The in-store environment has an impact on customers' behaviour and perceptions.

People tend to seek out satisfying experiences because they are hedonic by nature. This rule applies to experiences made when customers are shopping in-store (Paul *et al.*, 2016). According to Cachero-Martínez and Vázquez-Casielles (2017), the retail experience is a combination of pragmatic and emotional experiences. Researchers furthermore categorise additional retail environment variables into elements. These elements are divided into three groups: social aspects, design factors, and ambient factors, which include things like colour, layout, comfort, and ambient elements like smell, music, ambience, and air quality (such as other customers in the store and retail staff). According to the findings of Paul *et al.* (2016:639), the regression analysis reported that six out of the fourteen components studied are significant determinants (predictors) of customer satisfaction. The factors are Shopping Experience, Shopping Value, Social Desirability, Group Shopping, Shopping Planning, Shop-ping Ambience, Shopping Convenience, Shopping Economy, Shopping Relationship, Shop Location, Family Shopping, Staff Friendliness, Assortment and Deal Proneness. Only at the 10 per cent level are two criteria (store location and shopping experience) proven to be statistically significant.

2.9 CONCLUSION

To conclude, this chapter has provided insightful information about how crucial the retail experience is to furthermore understand the broad concept of consumer behaviour, especially, consumer behaviour in South African retail settings. The physical store environment, customer service, product selection, and online presence are all components of the concept known as the retail experience (Berman *et al.*, 2018:35). The overall retail experience is significantly influenced by the physical store environment. The subjective character of customer experiences has been highlighted by research into customer experience determinants, customer decision-making processes, and motivational factors. Furthermore, this chapter emphasises that customer experience includes all interactions between a company and its customers, including those that take place before, during, and after a transaction.

This chapter has furthermore presented valuable insights into the importance of retail customer experience in the fashion retail industry. The literature review has revealed that the traditional view of customer experience as a means of increasing profit has been challenged by recent scholarly research and practical business examples, demonstrating that creating a strong experience for customers can provide businesses with numerous benefits and a competitive advantage. The exploration of determinants of customer experience, the customer decision-making process, and motivation factors highlights the subjective nature of customer experiences, emphasising the need for businesses to understand their customers and to tailor experiences to meet their unique needs.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Research methodology is a broad concept defined by Durdella (2019:5) as a theory of how an investigation should proceed that involves the study of the assumptions, concepts, and procedures in a particular approach to methodology that, in turn, determines the use of appropriate methodologies. A research technique is a method for methodically solving a research problem. It can be thought of as a science that studies how scientific research is conducted. In this sense, one can look at the many processes that a researcher implements when examining a research problem, as well as the logic behind them.

In common usage, research refers to the pursuit of knowledge (Patel & Patel, 2019:48). Also, Durdella (2019:5) contends that the methodology of a study entails a broad set of frameworks that control what researchers do in studies. It entails the use of specific approaches implemented from the onset of the investigation, the content of research questions, and the stages through which one proceeds to acquire and evaluate information. Research can also be defined as a scientific and systematic search for relevant information on a given topic. In short, research is the art of scientific investigation. Methodology is the methodical, theoretical examination of the procedures used in a particular field of study. It consists of a theoretical examination of the corpus of methods and principles linked with a particular field of knowledge (Patel & Patel, 2019:48). Research methodology is the path that researchers must take to successfully conduct their research. It demonstrates how researchers construct their problems and objectives, and deliver their findings based on the data collected during the study period (Sileyew, 2019:1).

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

A set of presumptions, ideas, and procedures that direct research operations on a given topic is referred to as a research paradigm or philosophy where every choice made during the research process, including the selection of technique and methods, is significantly impacted by the research paradigm that outlines the researcher's philosophical orientation (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26). Research paradigms are further defined as a set of beliefs and feelings about the work, how it should be understood and studied, and fully understanding any study's research problem, questions and/or hypotheses, and design. It also informs how to interpret findings, depending on a specific set of ideas that guide the study (Durdella, 2019:5). Post-positivism, constructivism, transformative, and pragmatism are the four main paradigms of research, according to Creswell

(2022). It is important for researchers to carefully consider their research paradigm choice to make sure it is in line with their intended research goals and objectives.

According to Rehman and Alharthi (2016:51), a paradigm is a fundamental theoretical framework and belief system that makes assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, methodology, and procedures. In other words, it is concerned with how individuals learn about and understand the realities of the world. In addition, Durdella (2019:5) identifies four (other) main interpretive paradigms as positivist-postpositivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical, and feminist-structural, where he contends that these paradigms reflect fundamental beliefs held by researchers and narrow the focus of the lens through which they adopt a strategy to their research.

In this study, positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism as identified by Cassell *et al.* (2018) are described as possibilities from which a researcher can select a paradigm for their research.

3.2.1 Positivism

Positivism is a research paradigm that has been adopted from natural sciences. It involves developing predictions in the form of hypotheses followed by gathering data to test those hypotheses (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021:6). Positivism also uses the hypotheticodeductive technique, in which functional links between causal and explanatory elements (independent variables) and outcomes (dependent variables) can be deduced, to evaluate a priori assumptions that are frequently articulated quantitatively (Park *et al.*, 2020:690). According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020:41), if a researcher were to adopt an extreme positivist stance, it will follow that the researcher, organisations and other relevant social entities are regarded as “real”, just like physical objects and natural occurrences. The term "positivist" is frequently used to highlight an objectivist epistemology that seeks to explain and predict what happens in the social world by searching for regularities and causal relationships between its constituent elements. This is especially true of sociological studies that concentrate on business and management (Cassell *et al.*, 2018:2).

3.2.2 Critical realism

Critical realism is a paradigm in which researchers analyse the social structures that separate groups of individuals (such as race, class, and gender) and frame the world in respect to identificatory categories and/or social strata, which support the emancipatory aim of a study for participants (and for the researcher) (Durdella, 2019:7).

3.2.3 Interpretivism

The study paradigm known as interpretivism places a strong emphasis on the significance of understanding and interpreting human behaviour within its social and cultural environments. As humans create deeper meanings than physical phenomena do, interpretivism is more interested in in-depth variables and context-related factors where it makes the assumption that humans cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:41). According to the interpretivist paradigm, people's sense of reality and truth is shaped by their personal experiences as well as their cultural and historical contexts. Researchers' personal values and opinions will invariably influence how they gather, evaluate, and analyse data, since they can never be fully detached from themselves (Ryan, 2018:8).

3.2.4 Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a research paradigm that is founded on the idea that researchers should use the philosophical and/or methodological approach that is most effective for the specific research problem they are investigating. Thus, the focus is on the outcomes of the research and the research questions rather than on the methods. This approach is frequently associated with mixed-methods or multiple-methods. It may use both formal or informal rhetoric (Vibha & Christine, 2019:2).

For the purpose of this study, interpretivism was adopted as the primary research philosophy due to the qualitative nature of this study. This study applies the interpretivist paradigm of social theory, which seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of human experiences and perspectives. The interpretivist paradigm is grounded in a critique of positivism, which asserts that social phenomena can be studied objectively through quantitative analysis. Interpretivists, in contrast, maintain that social phenomena are inherently subjective, and that qualitative analysis is better suited to understanding these phenomena (Dudovskiy, 2022).

At the core of the interpretivist paradigm is a focus on understanding participants' viewpoints and perceptions of their environment. This approach prioritises gaining a deep understanding of the subjective nature of human experience, rather than attempting to measure and quantify social phenomena objectively (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Moisander *et al*., 2020:6). Interpretivist researchers often use this paradigm when seeking to understand customers' experiences with a particular store, brand, product, or service (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:33).

Given the goals of this study, which aim to explore and understand participants' experiences and perspectives, the interpretivist paradigm is the most appropriate one. As such, a qualitative methodology is adopted, which allows for a thorough exploration of the subjective nature of

human experience. This approach enables researchers to gain a nuanced understanding of the research participants' perspectives, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of the data collected.

3.3 APPROACHES TO THEORY DEVELOPMENT

In order to respond to research issues, research methods offer a distinctive logic or set of procedures. Inductive, deductive, and abductive research methodologies are the three main categories. Each research strategy is unique and requires particular techniques to respond to research problems (Majeed, 2019:122).

There are two key aspects in terms of which induction, deduction, and abduction can be distinguished from one another. These are the generality of the explanations they propose, and the certainty of the knowledge claims they generate (Behfar & Okhuysen, 2018:323). To support this claim, each of these are described in greater detail in the following sections.

3.3.1 Induction

A research strategy known as induction entails deriving general conclusions from particular observations or data (Rashid *et al.*, 2019). The study of empirical data is often used in qualitative research to develop theories or hypotheses. Induction, as defined by Eisend *et al.* (2019:50), entails the process of moving from the specific to the general. However, inductive and deductive methods can be considered ambiguous and can be combined in mixed-methods research designs; they are not always mutually exclusive (Mohammad Reza *et al.*, 2018:219).

Inductive reasoning can also be considered to be a working hypothesis (Behfar & Okhuysen, 2018:326). Inductive reasoning involves combining many premises that are mostly true to get a conclusion or provide evidence for its truth (Sauce & Matzel, 2017). Induction can be a useful research technique for gaining fresh perspectives and comprehension of complicated events that may not be well understood by current theories or models. The quality and dependability of the data sources and analysis techniques used must be carefully considered, because inductive reasoning may be prone to prejudice due to the researcher using their own judgement (Rashid *et al.*, 2019).

3.3.2 Deduction

Deductive reasoning is often described as moving from a broad theory to a specific prediction (Behfar & Okhuysen, 2018:325). Because it enables drawing a conclusion based on the logical ramifications of two or more asserted truths, deductive reasoning is self-referencing. Deduction

is therefore justified since the premises ensure that a conclusion is true (Cramer-Petersen *et al.*, 2019:41). Deduction can also be considered as an hypothesis (Behfar & Okhuysen, 2018:326). When certain opinions, prior research findings, ideas, or conceptual frameworks addressing the topic of interest exist, a researcher uses deductive (directed/framework) reasoning (Mohammad Reza *et al.*, 2018:220).

3.3.3 Abductive

Abductive reasoning is a conjecture-based method that produces the best and most straightforward explanation for a sequence of events. It refers to the preliminary theory that offers reasonable hypotheses and instructions of where to start investigating by selecting the most likely answer from a wide range of potential ones (Cramer-Petersen *et al.*, 2019:41). Abductive reasoning aims to understand social phenomena in terms of social actors' motives and understanding (Rashid *et al.*, 2019). Abductive reasoning can be considered as an empirical anomaly described as inconsistent and contradictory, or it can produce discrepant findings (Behfar & Okhuysen, 2018:326)

For the purpose of this study, an inductive approach to methodology was chosen, because the study sets out to understand customers' in-store experiences and to explain whether and how such encounters influence customers' attraction to the store. The only trustworthy source of information for the phenomenologist regarding the investigative process are participants' own thoughts and experiences, which implies that the participants' viewpoints are considered to be "truth." In addition, volunteers are only picked if they have first-hand familiarity with the topic of the study.

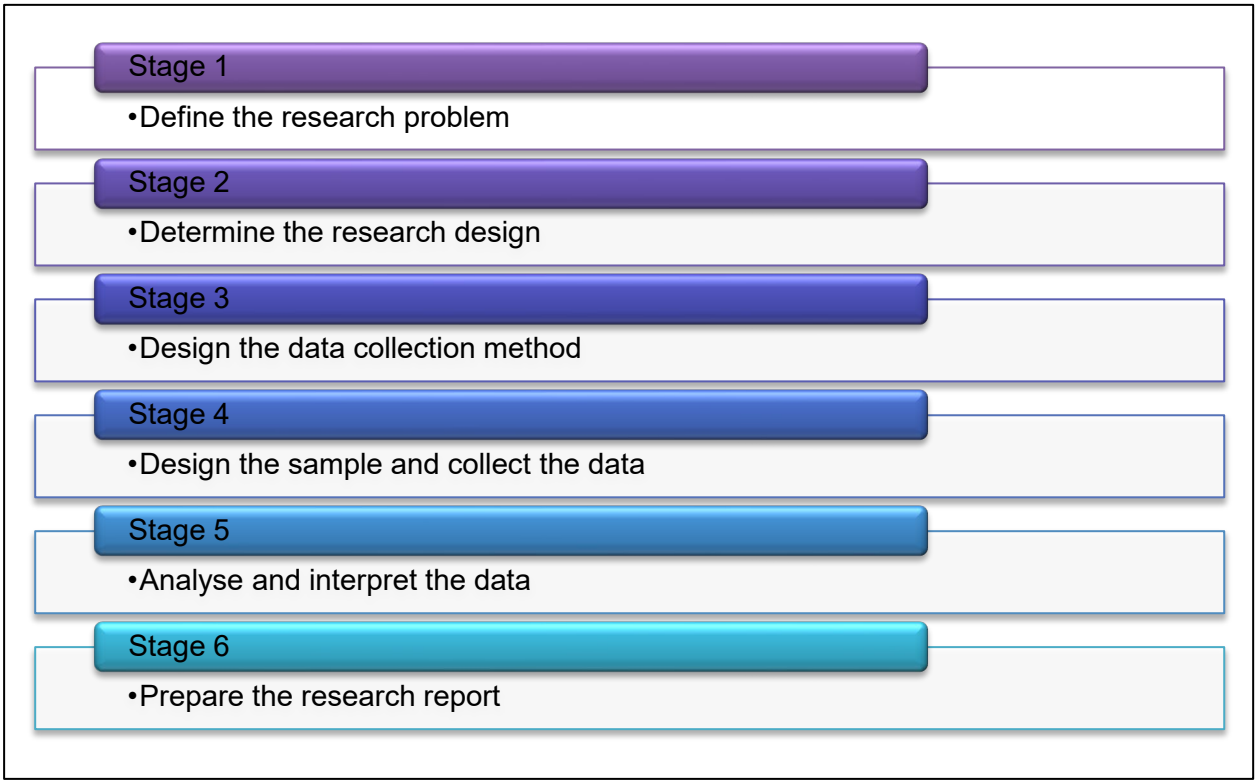
In accordance with the philosophical perspectives relevant to this study, the research followed a precise procedure to accomplish the goals specified, allowing the study to explain particular behaviour by demonstrating how it logically led from a set of theoretical presumptions.

3.4 THE MARKETING RESEARCH PROCESS

Marketing research is the process of creating, collecting, evaluating, and reporting data that can be utilised to solve a specific marketing problem (Burns & Veeck, 2020:7). Marketing research is an important tool for understanding customer wants and preferences, and is considered an important component of an effective marketing strategy. Gathering data and information to inform marketing decisions is part of the marketing research process (Hulland *et al.*, 2018:93). According to Mooi (2018:4), a clear marketing research methodology is critical for researchers wanting to attain their specific research objectives. This approach provides a structure to ensure that the research is carried out in an orderly and logical manner. The marketing research process is

furthermore ideal for basic academic research since it provides a systematic and methodical approach. Researchers can also verify that the data collected is authentic and reliable by following a well-defined methodology. Furthermore, incorporating literature into the study is critical since it provides a solid theoretical foundation, illuminates research questions, and contextualises findings within the larger academic landscape. The marketing research process is divided into six consecutive stages which serve as the framework for this chapter. Figure 3-1 depicts the six stages of the marketing research process.

Figure 3-1: The stages of the marketing research process



Source: Adapted from Babin and Zikmund (2016:62) and Burns and Bush (2014:68).

Stage 1 of the marketing research process requires the identification of a problem in the market that requires investigation. Stage 2 comprises the selection of a suitable research design, and stage 3 requires the researcher to collect the data. During stage 4 of the marketing research process, the sample is designed, and the data is collected. The data is analysed and interpreted in stage 5, after which the research report is prepared in stage 6. Subsequently, the respective stages of the marketing research process are discussed, and an explanation is provided as to how these stages were successfully implemented in this study.

3.4.1 Stage 1: Define the research problem

The first step in successfully establishing the market research process is to identify and formulate the research problem (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:12). Identifying the research problem requires identifying a research challenge or opportunity (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:51). This is the most critical phase in the marketing research process, because if the problem is not accurately defined, all subsequent steps are pointless. Marketing research should be undertaken only when a researcher must make a decision but lacks the information to do so. A sentence that concisely outlines the research problem should be developed (Burns & Veeck, 2020:43). Only once the research problem has been defined successfully, a meaningful study can commence (Babin & Zikmund, 2016:51). According to Durdella (2019:9), research problems are gaps in our empirical understanding of a topic or phenomenon under examination. Research problems can also be described as gaps in contemporary knowledge and/or practice – thus involving the constellation of techniques that concern the people, processes, and/or concerns associated with a phenomenon.

The research problem for this study was discussed in Section 1.3, where it was explained that no phenomenological studies had been undertaken to investigate the in-store experience and store attractiveness in a South African fashion retail context at the time of undertaking this study. Furthermore, the study set out to address the requirement for conducting more extensive empirical research on customers' subjective in-store experiences. The study's findings shed light on customers' motivations for shopping at physical fashion retail stores rather than e-commerce platforms; how customers experience physical fashion retail stores; customer value derived from the physical shopping experience; and factors that contribute to overall store attractiveness.

Research objectives, according to Burns and Veeck (2020:43), are objectives intended to specify what information must be acquired and analysed for researchers to make problem-solving decisions. The objectives of the research must be very clear, as they will guide the methodologies used and the nature of the measurement instrument(s). Defining the purpose of the research inevitably leads to determining its objectives. The research objectives are directly related to the topic of study and can be divided into primary (bound to be achieved) and secondary (incidental) research objectives (Doody & Bailey, 2016a:22).

Taking the research problem into account, the primary research objective for this study aims to explore and interpret through phenomenology how in-store experience contributes to store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry. The following secondary objectives have been formulated in support of the primary objective:

- Provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely shopping motivation, perceived value, customer experience, customer satisfaction and store attractiveness.
- Investigate the factors that motivate participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store.
- Explore and describe the experience of participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.
- Explore and describe the value derived by participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.
- Explore and describe the factors that contribute to the attractiveness of a physical fashion retail store.

Once the objectives of the study have been clearly stated, the second stage of the marketing research process may commence, which is to determine an appropriate research design.

3.4.2 Stage 2: Determine the research design

The next stage in the marketing research process is to decide on a research design. According to Iacobucci and Churchill (2015:53), a research design can be descriptive, causal, or exploratory. The research design is correlated to problem identification and formulation. Research problems and research designs are thereby inextricably linked (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:13).

3.4.2.1 Descriptive research

Descriptive research, as the name implies, entails characterising certain phenomena, traits, or functions. The focus of a descriptive study is on a single variable or on two or more variables at the same time (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:17). Descriptive research seeks to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015:129). Descriptive research is conducted to provide answers to who, what, where, when, and how questions. In the field of business and marketing, descriptive research is used by researchers to learn who their customers are, what brands they buy and in what amounts, where they buy the brands, when they shop, and how they acquire relevant information. Descriptive research is also used to project the findings of a study to a larger population. If the sample size of a descriptive study is representative, the data can be utilised to forecast a variable of interest, such as sales (Burns & Veeck, 2020:67). Descriptive research is classified into two categories: cross-sectional studies and longitudinal investigations (Burns & Bush, 2017:103).

Cross-sectional studies refer to observational studies in which data from a population is analysed at a specific point in time. These are frequently used to assess the prevalence of health outcomes, comprehend health factors, and describe demographic characteristics. Cross-sectional studies, unlike other forms of observational research, do not track individuals across time. They are typically affordable and simple to carry out (Wang & Cheng, 2020:65).

Longitudinal studies measure the same sample units of a population repeatedly across time. Since longitudinal studies contain multiple assessments, they can be thought of as population "movies" (Burns & Veeck, 2020:67). Understanding changes over time in an individual or a population is the goal of a longitudinal study. There are numerous data collection methods available; nonetheless, the hallmarks of such studies include time, relationships, and change. In terms of the time variable, "there is no precise definition of the meaning of 'long' in longitudinal research" (Derrington, 2019:2) where the minimum standard is two or more measurements over a period of one year or longer. The frequency of contact with participants is determined by the goal of the study.

3.4.2.2 Causal research

Causal research is performed to uncover the connections between two or more variables (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:18)**.** Although understanding the influences behind consumers' actions is challenging, there is a significant benefit in the marketplace for even a partial grasp of causal links. Experiments, which are specialised forms of investigations, are commonly used to investigate causal links (Burns & Veeck, 2020:70). Causal research should be carried out when a researcher aims to study the relationship between the causal elements and the effect they have, as well as to determine which combined variables provide answers as to why the effect occurred (Wiid & Diggines, 2015:62).

3.4.2.3 Exploratory research

Exploratory research is an unstructured, informal study conducted to learn more about the general nature of the research subject. The term "unstructured" refers to the fact that exploratory research does not follow a set of protocols. Rather, the nature of the inquiry evolves as the researcher acquires more insight. It is informal in the sense that there are no official objectives, sample plan, or questionnaire. Exploratory research is a type of casual, informal study that is conducted to learn more about the research problem, understand words and definitions, or define research goals. This type of research is often undertaken early on to assist clients in determining research objectives (Burns & Veeck, 2020:43). In exploratory research, small, nonrepresentative samples are typically used (Burns & Veeck, 2020:63). According to Doody and Bailey (2016b:21),

exploratory research investigates a phenomenon that is not understood holistically, and entails mostly employing inductive approaches to uncover and improve a notion, construct, reality, or scenario.

According to Brown *et al*. (2018:16), exploratory research is conducted to gain a new perspective on an issue, generate new ideas, and to provide insight into a specific scenario. Exploratory research can furthermore aid in precisely formulating problems accentuating the goal of exploratory research, which is to investigate an issue or condition. As a result, exploratory research has various important applications in the solution of ambiguous situations. (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:14). Surveys, focus groups, case studies, and in-depth interviews are four prominent exploratory research methodologies (Brown & Suter, 2014:29). Table 3-1 below provides a summary of the three research designs.

Table 3-1: A summary of research designs

Element	Exploratory research	Descriptive research	Causal research
Objective	Clarify a problem	Provide detailed information	Determine cause-and effect relationships
Characteristics	Not structured flexible, low-cost, open-ended, time-consuming	Quantitative research, uncontrolled variables, cross-sectional study, basis for further research	Neutrality reliability, validity generalisation
Application	Different perspectives, new ideas, create hypotheses, identify the problem, establishing priorities, formulating courses of action, consider hazards	Making predictions, respond to inquiries like "who," "what," "where," "when," and "how.", quantifying data trends, compare data and confirm current circumstances, carry out study at various times	Recognise the connection between the causes and the effects they had, and recognise the combination of variables that provides an explanation for why that effect occurred.
Methods	Secondary data (literature research, online research), and primary data that include interviews, focus groups, surveys, and case studies.	Qualitative and quantitative observations	Descriptive design, experimental design, correlation design, diagnostic design, explanatory design

Source: Adapted from Brown and Suter (2014:29).

For the purpose of this study**,** an exploratory research design was used. The research problem emphasises that at the time of this investigation, based on the available knowledge, no prior phenomenological studies have been conducted to examine the in-store experience and store attractiveness within a South African fashion retail context. The study attempts to meet the desire for more extensive empirical research that analyses customers' in-store experiences subjectively.

The findings of this study hope to provide salient insights into why customers prefer shopping at physical fashion retail stores over e-commerce platforms, how customers experience these stores, the value customers derive from shopping in-store, and the factors that contribute to these stores' attractiveness. Thus, to gain insight into and obtain relevant information about the research problem, an exploratory research design was adopted.

3.4.2.4 Qualitative research designs

A study's implementation is guided by the research design. A research design, according to Creswell and Creswell (2017:49), is a method of inquiry used in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies that provides clear direction for steps taken during the research process. Goulding (2005:295) asserts that a variety of methodologies, such as ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology, are available for carrying out qualitative research.

3.4.2.4.1 Ethnography

Ethnographic research design uses cultural experiences to study the thoughts, actions, and output of a group through individual or group ethnographic interviews, participant observations, records, and artifacts (Durdella, 2019:12). Gaudet and Robert (2018:36) define ethnography as richly written research that respects the irreducibility of the human experience, acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher's own role, and views the study as interactive-inductive research. Such a study’s design evolves throughout the course of the study, and involves direct and sustained contact with human agents, in the context of their daily lives and respective cultures. Furthermore, ethnology is derived from the field of anthropology. Finally, it can be considered as both a product and a process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:29).

3.4.2.4.2 Grounded theory

Sociologists Glaser and Strauss first described grounded theory in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory,* published in 1967. In this theory, the researcher, who serves as the main tool for data collection and analysis, adopts an inductive position and seeks to extract meaning from the data, as is true in other types of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:31). Grounded theory uses processes, events and experiences to develop a model to explain the relationships between factors that shape outcomes using semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents (Durdella, 2019:12). Grounded theory focuses on developing theories that are "grounded" in data that has been systematically gathered and examined. It is used to elucidate social processes, also referred to as group behaviours and social interactions (Noble & Mitchell, 2016).

3.4.2.4.3 Phenomenology

Established by Edmond Husserl (1859–1938), the phenomenological method aims to examine subjective experiences called phenomena, also referred to as the study of unadulterated phenomena (Gaudet & Robert, 2018:6). Phenomenology focuses on lived experiences to examine various things: the format of a conversation, an event, or an experience through in-depth, sequenced interviews with a small group of participants (Durdella, 2019:12). Phenomenology focuses on the experience itself, and how experiencing something transforms it into consciousness. This approach stems from the phenomenological philosophy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:26). In terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced, phenomenology seeks to explain the significance of this experience (Neubauer *et al.*, 2019:91)

For the purpose of this study**,** a phenomenological qualitative research design was chosen. The only trustworthy source of information for the phenomenologist regarding the investigative process are the participants' own thoughts and experiences. This implies that the participant's viewpoint is considered to be the "truth." In addition, volunteers are only picked if they have first-hand familiarity with the topic of the study. The task of the phenomenologist is to depict the essence or basic structure of experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:26), therefore the phenomenology research design is suitable for this study regarding customer experiences. The sections that follow provide more information about sampling and data collecting for this study.

3.4.3 Stage 3: Design the data collection method

Once the research design has been determined, the sampling strategy must be designed and the method for collecting data must be selected. This entails selecting whether to rely on existing (secondary) data or do primary research (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:23). Data collection begins after the study problem has been defined and the research design has been chosen. The third step in the marketing research process is to select an appropriate data collection method. Data collection is the procedure used to obtain information for the specific objective of a study (Joubert *et al.*, 2016:112).

According to Burns and Bush (2017:110), a distinction can be made between two types of data-collecting methods that can be used to collect meaningful data: secondary and primary data collection.

3.4.3.1 Secondary data collection

Secondary data is defined as data that has previously been obtained by someone other than the researcher for a reason other than the current research project. Secondary data has therefore

already been collected with the goal of resolving a specific problem (Brown *et al*., 2018:60). Applying secondary data includes projecting economic trends, monitoring competition, selecting international markets to penetrate, and recognising consumer concerns during a crisis. Secondary data may offer insight into the demographic information that researchers may require to anticipate the size of the market in a newly proposed market territory, or can be used when a researcher wants to determine the population and growth rate in almost any geographical area (Burns & Veeck, 2020:90).

For the purpose of this study, secondary data was acquired by conducting a literature review (Chapter 2) to explain and state the objectives of this investigation. Chapter 2 presents a perusal of the theoretical constructs to investigate store attractiveness and in-store experiences to understand the nature of the fashion retail environment in South Africa. To fully comprehend the significance of customer experience in this study, a definition was established, determinants of customer experience were analysed, an in-depth review of the customer decision-making process was explored, motivation and other factors were identified, and hedonic consumption was identified as a strong recreational motive. In addition, the fashion retail context was evaluated through the perspective of customers by researching the global and local fashion sectors, which supports the analysis of shop attractiveness and in-store experiences.

As the goal of the present study is to discuss the need for a more in-depth empirical study on customers' subjective in-store experiences, this literature review lays the groundwork for the findings of this study. The findings provide valuable insights into the factors that influence store attractiveness, consumer value obtained from the physical shopping experience, and customers' motivations for purchasing at physical fashion retail stores as opposed to e-commerce platforms. For the purpose of this study, the following platforms and databases were used to collect secondary data:

- Google Scholar: Articles
- ScienceDirect: International journals
- EBSCOhost: International journals
- Emerald Insight Journals: International journals
- Sae Publications: South African journals
- Subject-related textbooks
- LexisNexis
- JSTOR

- Juta
- EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS)
- Sabinet Online
- African Journals
- Scopus
- Web of Science
- Boloka: NWU Institutional Repository (NWU-IR)

3.4.3.2 Primary data

Burns and Bush (2017:112) define primary data as information gathered to obtain specific information for a study. Primary data thus refers to information that has been developed or gathered by the researcher specifically for the current research project (Burns & Veeck, 2020:90). According to Mooi *et al.* (2018:62), there are two methods for collecting primary data. Consumer behaviour can be observed through observational studies or test markets, for example. Alternatively, one can directly question consumers using surveys, in-depth interviews, predictive techniques as well as focus groups.

A research methodology has a bearing on data gathering techniques as well as data processing and interpretation, according to Creswell (2014:3). The various data methods used in both qualitative and quantitative research relate to diverse research philosophies, as discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

3.4.3.2.1 Quantitative research

Quantitative research provides one with a set of tools and approaches for gathering data and contributing to what we know as well as what we do with what we know. Quantitative research methods are concerned with determining variables, testing hypotheses, and explaining relationships. It emphasises numerical data, data classification, the objectivity principle, logical reasoning, representativeness, and the generalisability of conclusions (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2021:4). Quantitative research approaches, according to Burns and Bush (2017:120), include self-administered survey questionnaires, in-office surveys, telephone surveys, mall intercept surveys, and in-home surveys.

- **Self-administered surveys**

Self-administered survey questionnaires are an important data collection technique. They are optimal for providing broad geographic coverage of the target population, dealing with sensitive themes, and requiring fewer resources than other data collection methods. Such survey questionnaires can be sent electronically, increasing scalability and speed while decreasing costs. (Marcano Belisario *et al.*, 2015:1). According to Burns and Veeck (2020:163), self-administered surveys have three major advantages: lower costs, greater respondent control, and less interview evaluation anxiety. According to Burns and Bush (2017:120), a self-administered survey can include an office survey, a group self-administered survey, a postal survey, a drop-off survey, and a completely automated survey.

- **In-office surveys**

In-office surveys, sometimes known as "executive interviews," are typically conducted in person while the respondent is in his or her workplace or even in a company lounge. Face-to-face interviews with entrepreneurs have essentially the same benefits and downsides as in-home consumer interviews (Burns & Veeck, 2020:169). The disadvantages of an in-office survey are primarily that it is not cost-effective in terms of transport and time, which may be substantial. Waiting times may be long, and participants may cancel appointments (Burns & Bush, 2017:120).

- **Telephone surveys**

Survey data can be collected over the phone at a low cost. The cost of a telephone interview is substantially lower than the expense of a face-to-face interview. According to Wiid and Diggines (2015:65), telephone surveys could yield a high-quality sample. Furthermore, a telephone survey approach may provide a better sample than any other survey procedure if the researcher uses random dialling procedures and suitable call back metrics. A third significant advantage is that telephone surveys are completed fairly quickly. Most phone interviews are brief, and a skilled interviewer can conduct many interviews per hour (Burns & Veeck, 2020:170).

- **Mall-intercept survey**

Postal surveys are paper-based surveys that are distributed to respondents. They are a more expensive sort of survey research, and should only be used for sensitive topics (Mooi *et al.*, 2018:68). A mail survey is mailed to prospective respondents, who are requested to complete it and mail it back to the researcher. Part of its allure arises from the fact that it is self-administered: there are no interviewers to recruit, train, monitor, or compensate (Burns & Veeck, 2020:177).

3.4.3.2.2 Qualitative research

According to Flick (2018:2), qualitative research is comprehensively defined as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

Qualitative research also entails gathering, evaluating, and interpreting unstructured data by witnessing what individuals do and say (Burns & Veeck, 2020:122). In-depth interviews, projective tests, and focus groups are examples of qualitative data collection approaches, according to Burns and Bush (2017:144).

- **In-depth interviews**

In-depth interviews are a typical strategy used in qualitative research to acquire rich and thorough data from participants. In-depth interviews, according to Moser and Korstjens (2018:12) are a "conversation between the researcher and the participant in which the person's perspective, experiences, and feelings are investigated in depth". Furthermore, Rosenthal (2016:510) notes that in-depth interviews can provide valuable insights into underlying reasons, attitudes, and motivations behind various human behaviours since they allow participants to convey their own opinions and experiences. Personal in-depth interviews furthermore reduce normative pressures and allow for the collection of a variety of information types (Matyas, 2020:3). Thus, in-depth interviews are a valuable tool for examining complex phenomena in qualitative research, but their usefulness depends on the researcher's skills and reflexivity.

- **Projective tests**

Projective tests have been used in qualitative research to investigate people's unconscious impressions and attitudes (Mesías & Escribano, 2018). Projective assessments, according to Eldesouky *et al.* (2015:361), allow participants to communicate their thoughts and feelings indirectly, providing rich and complex data for qualitative analysis. The use of projective tests in qualitative research, on the other hand, necessitates careful consideration of the ethical implications as well as potential biases that may develop from the interpretation of the data (Mesías & Escribano, 2018).

- **Focus groups**

Focus groups are a frequently used qualitative research approach for gathering data from a group of participants in a structured conversation format (Rosenthal, 2016:510). Participants in focus groups can build on one other's ideas and provide a variety of viewpoints on the topic at hand, allowing for the examination of complex social phenomena. Furthermore, focus groups can be used to create hypotheses for future research or to delve deeper into participants' experiences and views (Davis *et al.*, 2019:3). Moreover, focus groups are an effective method for getting information from a small group of respondents. The data can be used to spark ideas, understand the respondents' "vocabulary" when it comes to a specific sort of product, or obtain insight into basic wants and attitudes (Burns & Veeck, 2020:127). Table 3-2 provides a comparison between quantitative and qualitative research.

Table 3-2: A comparison between quantitative and qualitative research

Quantitative research	Element	Qualitative research
Measuring variables, testing hypotheses, and explaining relationships	**Focus**	Understanding experiences, discovering meaning, and building working theory
Objectivity, deductive reasoning, representativeness	**Values**	Subjectivity, inductive reasoning, depth
Content analysis, lab-based experiments, and survey methods	**Examples**	Interviews, focus groups, textual analysis
Validation of facts, relationships and estimates	**Purpose**	Learn new thoughts, feelings, and emotions; comprehend concepts and ideas; and come to understand them
Descriptive or causal	**Research design**	Exploratory
Large sample	**Sample size**	Small samples
Long time frame	**Time frame**	Short time frame
Limited probing	**Types of questions**	Probing
Self-administered surveys	**Methods**	In-depth interviews, projective tests and focus groups
Closed (fixed response)	**Question format**	Open-ended (semi-/ unstructured)
Less-in depth, but more information across many cases	**Type of information**	More in-depth information
Objective	**Approach**	Subjective
Number-based	**Results**	Text-based
No interviewer	**Administration requirements**	Interviewer with research skills
Questionnaires, printouts, or computers	**Tools**	Interview guides, tape- and audio recorders, or pictures

Source: Adapted from Burns and Bush (2017:161).

For the purpose of this study**,** a qualitative research approach was used to obtain primary data. This is because the study is exploratory in nature, requiring fresh insights and hypotheses to be produced on previously unexplored territory. To obtain new insights and content-rich information, interviews were used to collect data from research participants. In an interactive setting, participants were asked questions on a variety of topics and were invited to freely share their opinions with the researcher. The interview discussions were guided and directed by a moderator's guide. As a result, pertinent questions were posed, and participants' responses were recorded on an audio recorder. The section that follows discusses the design and content of the moderator's guide used to gather data for this study.

3.4.4 Interview guide

The research design selected for this study is exploratory in nature, and therefore primary data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews with selected participants. An in-depth interview, or IDI, is a series of probing questions addressed to a subject one-on-one by a qualified interviewer to obtain insight into what the respondent thinks or why he or she behaves in a certain way. The goal of in-depth interviews is to obtain unfettered remarks or opinions, and also to ask questions that can assist the marketing researcher to better understand the many dimensions of these opinions and the reasons for them. The collection of data into a summary report to discover common patterns is critical (Burns & Veeck, 2020:137).

In-depth interviews were chosen as a qualitative data collection approach to gain insight into participants' views and perceptions regarding their motivations for purchasing at physical fashion retail stores, their in-store experiences at physical fashion retail stores, and the variables that draw them to physical fashion retail stores. The initial interview served as a pilot study, and potential issues in terms of clarity were identified and alterations made where relevant to improve the quality of the successive interviews.

The interview guide (Appendix A) includes general questions about participants' reasons for purchasing at physical fashion retail stores, their experiences while in-store, and the things that draw them to these establishments. Although the interview has a general structure to help the conversation, it is not rigid. Discussions focused on issues that the participants felt were crucial to their experiences at a fashion retail store. The average interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interview guide comprised the following sections:

Section A: Introduction to the study (five minutes)

The participants were first thanked for their willingness to participate in the study. The interviewer then introduced herself, and described the research being conducted. The researcher mentioned that the interview session was being audio-recorded and stated that the recording would remain confidential. The participants were then asked if they have any questions regarding the study at that moment. The following screening questions were asked to confirm that they met the necessary criteria to participate further in the interview:

- Have you read and signed the interview consent form?
- Are you older than 18 years of age?
- Have you purchased an item from a physical fashion retail store in the past six months?
- Do you reside in Gauteng province?

Section B: Motivation to frequent physical retail spaces (20 minutes)

This section of the interview guide aimed to gain insight into the participants' motivations for physical retail visitation. The participants were first asked when the last time was that they decided to rather visit a physical shopping centre or store to buy something in store and not from an e-commerce platform. They were also asked why they made that particular decision.

Section C: In-store experience (ten minutes)

The primary aim of this section of the interview guide was to establish the significance of the participant's experiences in a physical retail store. The participants were thus asked to explain their last encounter at a physical retail store experience from the moment they entered the retail store.

Section D: Customer value (ten minutes)

This section of the interview guide aimed to gain a more profound understanding of the value that the participants derive from shopping at a physical retail store. The participants were asked what personal benefits they thought they derive from shopping at a physical fashion retail store instead of buying their items online.

Section E: Store attractiveness (ten minutes)

This section in the interview guide aimed to determine the factors that attract consumers to physical fashion retail stores. The participants were asked to explain what they find attractive about shopping at a physical fashion retail store, and to note a few factors that draw them towards a physical store.

Section F: Closure (five minutes)

Participants were asked if they would like to add any closing statements regarding fashion retail stores, customer value, store attractiveness, in-store experiences or shopping motivations. Lastly, participants were thanked for their time and welcomed to contact the researcher or supervisor at any time should the participants have any questions or queries regarding the study.

3.4.4.1 Steps followed in conducting the in-depth interviews

To conduct productive in-depth interviews, the following measures and steps were taken:

- **Identification:** For this study, non-probability purposive sampling was used to select research participants. Purposive sampling is best suited for phenomenological studies. The criteria on which prospective participants are selected are:
  - participants needed to be 18 years of age or older for ethical reasons.
  - participants must have purchased a fashion item from a physical fashion store in the past six months to provide an exact account of their lived experience.
  - participants were required to be residing in Gauteng province at the time of the study.

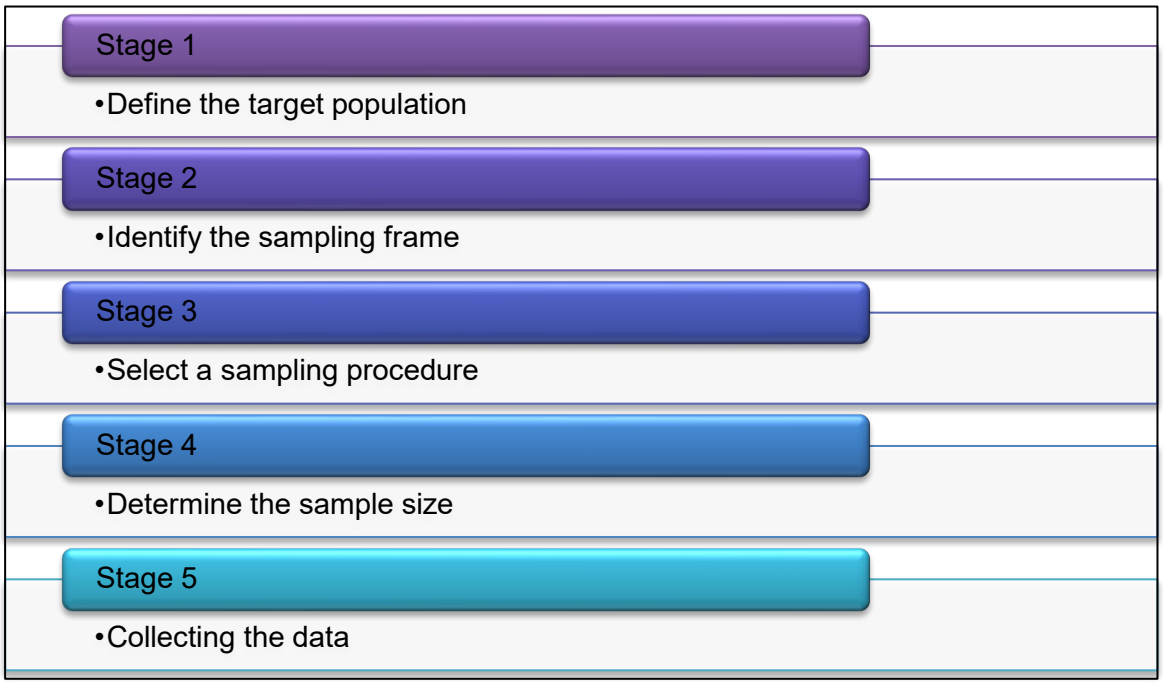
- **Invitation:** Participants were invited to participate in the study through posts on the Facebook pages of select shopping centres in Gauteng. These shopping centres included Sandton City, Rosebank, Hyde Park Corner, Cresta, East Gate, Melrose Arch, Menlyn Park, Brooklyn, The Grove, Kolonade, Hatfield Plaza and Woodlands Boulevard and were chosen due to their high foot traffic and diversity of customers.. The invitation provided participants with a brief overview of the study, the purpose of the study, sample methodology, requirements that participants must meet to participate in the study, participants' rights (specifically their right to confidentiality), and the venue, date, and time of the focus group session.

- **Appointment:** Once the individual has agreed to participate in the study, the consent to participate in the study form (see Appendix C) was given to them to sign before the interview. In addition, participants received an interview guide (see Appendix A) to help them understand the questions and topics to be covered during the interview. A confirmation message with the date and time of the interview, as well as the link to the interview, was provided to the participant, depending on the desired platform (i.e., Microsoft Teams or Zoom).

3.4.5 Stage 4: Design the sample and collect the data

The next step in the study process is to design the sample and gather the necessary data. Babin and Zikmund (2016:342) describe a sample as a subset of a population that must be distinguished from the rest of the population to conclude. As shown in Figure 3-2, there are five phases involved when selecting a sample from a population. These include to define the target population, identify the sample frame, select a sampling process, determine sample size, and collect data (Iacobucci & Churchill, 2015:267).

Figure 3-2: The five stages of sample selection



Source: Adapted from Babin and Zikmund (2016:340)

3.4.5.1 Step 1: Define the target population

The target population is an important step in qualitative research because it allows researchers to select and recruit participants who can offer relevant and meaningful data. The target population in qualitative research, according to Nestor *et al*. (2017:1612), is a group of persons who have common qualities and experiences that are of interest to the study. These authors note that the target group should not be determined only by demographic features, but also by the phenomenon under investigation. Similarly, Mweshi and Sakyi (2020:183) propound that the target population in qualitative research should be carefully defined to guarantee that the sample is representative of the population of interest. A summary of the target population for this study is presented in Table 3-3.

Table 3-3: Summary of the target population

Design elements	Application to empirical study
Population	
Sampling element	Customers aged 18 years and older who have purchased a fashion item from a physical fashion retail store in the past six months and who reside in the Gauteng province.
Extent	Gauteng.
Time	May 2023.
Sampling method	Non-probability purposive sampling.
Sample size	Depended on when the point of saturation is reached.

For this study, individuals aged 18 years of age and older who have purchased a fashion item from a physical fashion retail outlet in the last six months and live in South Africa's Gauteng province constituted the sampling elements for the study. The sampling area was thus limited to the Gauteng province of South Africa, and the sampling took place during November 2022. The research was conducted in South Africa's Gauteng province. Gauteng is South Africa's wealthiest province, with Sandton being the wealthiest city on the African continent. The assumption was that this would imply that customers may be able to spend more of their discretionary income on fashion-related items.

3.4.5.2 Step 2: Identify the sampling frame

The selection of a sampling frame is an important stage in qualitative research, because it specifies the pool of participants from which the final sample will be drawn (Martínez-Mesa *et al.*, 2016). A sampling frame is defined by Brown *et al.* (2018:206) as a list of all the sampling units available for the selection of the actual sample.

For the purpose of this study, because the population is too large for this investigation, no sampling frame has been selected. Therefore, in order to select a sample from the entire population, an appropriate non-probability sampling approach was used.

3.4.5.3 Step 3: Select a sampling procedure

Choosing a sample procedure is an important stage in qualitative research, since it influences how participants are drawn from the sampling frame. Qualitative research sample processes entail selecting participants based on specified criteria or traits relevant to the study subject. The sampling technique should be driven by the research objectives as well as the required amount of data richness and complexity. In the same vein, Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasise that

choosing a sampling strategy should include a careful examination of the available possibilities, including purposive sampling, snowball sampling, and maximum variation sampling. Probability sampling and non-probability sampling are the two basic sampling strategies (Burns & Bush, 2017:251).

3.4.5.3.1 Probability sampling

Probability sampling is a sampling technique in which each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen for the sample (Sharma, 2017:750). Probability sampling, according to Alvi (2016:12), is a commonly used technique in quantitative research that is used to ensure that the sample is representative of the target population. The author also proposes that probability sampling techniques, such as simple random sampling and stratified random sampling, can be used to estimate population parameters and calculate statistical measures of precision and error. In short, probability sampling is a popular technique in quantitative research because it ensures the sample's representativeness and validity. There are four kinds of sampling methods that one can use in the context of a probability sample: simple random sampling, systematic random sampling, stratified random sampling, and cluster sampling (Hair *et al*., 2012:60)

- **Simple random sampling:** Simple random sampling is a probability sampling technique in which each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen for the sample (Alvi, 2016:16). The researcher uses computer-generated random numbers, random digit dialling, or some other random selection method that ensures that each member of the population in the sample frame has an equal chance of being chosen into the sample (Burns & Veeck, 2020:233).

- **Systematic random sampling:** This sampling method is also used for homogeneous populations. It is not quite the same as simple random sampling. In contrast to simple random sampling, not every element has an equal chance of being included. The elements in this type of sampling are chosen at regular intervals (Alvi, 2016:18). The researcher chooses a random beginning point for the first sample member using a sample frame that lists members of the population. A constant skip interval is calculated by dividing the number of population members in the sample frame by the sample size, and this number is then used to select every other sample member from the sample frame (Burns & Veeck, 2020:233).

- **Cluster sampling:** Cluster sampling is a probability sampling method that involves dividing the population into clusters or groups and randomly selecting a sample of clusters to include in the study (Sharma, 2017).

- **Stratified random sampling:** Stratified random sampling is concerned with dividing the population into smaller sub-groups (strata), which are formed based on members' shared characteristics and attributes, such as educational attainment or income (Sharma, 2017).

3.4.5.3.2 Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling is a sampling approach in which participants are chosen based on an inherently biased selection process (Burns & Veeck, 2020:243). Non-probability sampling approaches, according to Vehovar *et al.* (2016:328), are often used in qualitative research where the focus is on studying and understanding a specific phenomenon or community. The authors also recommend that non-probability sampling methods, such as purposive and convenience sampling, can be used to identify individuals who are likely to contribute rich and insightful data. Similarly, Alvi (2016:14) advocates for the use of non-probability sampling when the target population is difficult to contact, or when the research topic demands certain features or experiences. Non-probability sampling methods include convenience sampling, judgement sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling (Burns & Bush, 2017:255).

- **Convenience sampling:** A convenience sampling method is a quick, easy, and low-cost way to collect a sample. The researcher includes those people who are simple or convenient to approach in a strategy that is also known as incidental sampling or opportunity sampling. The strategy is useful when the target audience is defined by a broad category (Alvi, 2016:29).

- **Quota sampling:** The researcher identifies quota features such as demographic or product use criteria, and uses these to establish quotas for each respondent class. The researcher's belief about the relative size of each class of respondent in the population determines the size of the quotas (Burns & Veeck, 2020:244).

- **Snowball sampling:** This is a selective design technique that is typically carried out using networks. It is useful when the researcher knows nothing about the group or organisation being studied; contact with a few persons will lead him to another group. The study sample selection can be beneficial in terms of communication, decision-making, and knowledge dissemination to people (Etikan & Bala, 2017:2).

- **Purposive sampling:** This refers to a range of non-probability sampling strategies that relies on the researcher's judgement when selecting research participants (Sharma, 2017:749). Here, the researcher uses his or her own or another educated person's judgment to choose who to include in the sample. Subjectivity and convenience come into play, and as a result, some individuals in the population will have a lower likelihood of being selected than others

(Burns & Veeck, 2020:244). This sampling strategy is also based on the researcher's assessment of who will provide the best information to achieve the study's objectives. The individual performing the research must concentrate on persons who share the same viewpoint to obtain the necessary knowledge and be willing to share it (Etikan & Bala, 2017:1).

For this study, non-probability purposive sampling was used to select research participants was motivated by the desire to specifically target a particular group or individuals who possess unique characteristics or experiences relevant to the research objectives set in the sampling plan section. This approach was employed because this research seeks to gain in-depth insights from a specific subset of the South African population that can provide valuable information or perspectives to this study.

3.4.5.4 Step 4: Determine the sample size

A critical part of qualitative research is determining the right sample size. According to Creswell (2015), the purpose of qualitative research is to obtain an in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon rather than to generalise the findings to a community. When using non-probability sampling, the only reasonable method for deciding sample size is to balance the value of the data collected with that sample against the expense of doing so. The researcher may place high importance on the information for a variety of reasons, making determining the sample size ultimately a subjective pursuit (Burns & Bush, 2016:283).

To fully understand the phenomenon being examined, a sufficient number of participants and/or observers must be gathered for qualitative sampling. Sample size in qualitative research may refer to numbers of persons, numbers of interviews and observations conducted, or numbers of events sampled where the goal of qualitative sampling is to recruit enough participants and/or observations that provide rich, in-depth data, in order to understand the phenomenon studied (Gill, 2020:580).

In terms of the sample size of interviews, certain qualitative research methodologists offer general criteria. There is a significant amount of overlap across the many recommended ranges, even if these guidelines differ from methodologist to methodologist; occasionally, the same methodologist may offer different ranges at different times. For instance, Creswell (2007) advises at least 20 to 30 interview subjects for grounded theory studies. This author (2007) also advises limiting the number of cases to four or five, while also suggesting using three to five respondents for each case study. One issue is that, even when qualitative methodologists do provide number ranges for the right sample size, they never truly provide a justification for these (Marshall *et al*., 2013:13)

The phrase “point of saturation” was first used by Glaser and Strauss (1999) to describe a particular continuous comparison element used in Grounded Theory (GT) research. The researcher compares successively added events throughout data collection until exhaustive saturation of category features and relationships is achieved When the researcher no longer receives data that supports the proposed theory, saturation sets in (Malterud *et al*., 2016:1758). However, data quality requires adequate sample sizes, which are related to sampling techniques and sample sizes.

The sample size in qualitative research is determined by the research question, the study's objectives, and the data collection and analysis procedures used (Malterud *et al.*, 2016:1). The following factors, according to Malhotra (2019:374), have a bearing on the sample:

- While quantitative research studies demand larger samples than qualitative studies, the nature of the investigation will affect the sample.
- The sample will be affected by data analysis, because a more extensive and sophisticated investigation will require larger sample sizes.
- Sample size can be selected based on what other studies used for their sample size, but the study should be of a similar kind.
- The sample size will also be influenced by the availability of resources.

When determining the sample size, the scope of the study and the nature of the subject should be referenced, as should the contact time that will be spent with each individual research participant, as well as the homogeneity of the population under consideration. Practically speaking, even when the population may be very narrowly defined or uncommon, efforts should thereby be made to ensure that the sample is as representative of the population as feasible (Boddy, 2016:430). Braun and Clarke (2022:28) purport that no exact sample size can be offered before data collection for a qualitative study because the sample size is determined by when the point of saturation is achieved. Although there is much misunderstanding about what saturation means, qualitative researchers frequently claim to have "reached saturation" after gathering enough data. When no fresh information is gleaned from observations and/or interviews, a point of saturation has taken place (Gill, 2020:580). Data saturation is thus the idea of continuously adding new participants to the study until the data set is complete, as shown by data replication or redundancy. As a result, for the purpose of this study, the researcher continued to interview participants until saturation was reached.

3.4.5.5 Step 5: Collecting the data

The data is obtained in the final step of the sampling process. In this regard it is worth noting that according to McDaniel and Gates (2015:56), in-depth interviews should be led by an experienced interviewer. Participants were invited to participate in the study by means of an invitation posted on the Facebook pages of select shopping centres in Gauteng (Appendix D). These shopping centres include Sandton City, Rosebank, Hyde Park Corner, Cresta, East Gate, Melrose Arch, Menlyn Park, Brooklyn, The Grove, Kolonade, Hatfield Plaza and Woodlands Boulevard. The researcher obtained permission from the administrators of the Facebook pages prior to posting the invitation. The invitation also mentioned that interviews would be conducted online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom, with a duration of approximately 60 minutes. In addition, the researcher's contact information was provided for prospective participants to contact the researcher to take part in the study. Table 3-4 provides a summary of the abovementioned aspects of this study, namely the sample plan used in the present study.

Table 3-4: Sampling plan for the study

Design elements	Application to empirical study
Population	
Sampling element	Participants aged 18 years of age and older who have purchased a fashion item from a physical fashion retail store in the past six months and who reside in the Gauteng province.
Extent	Gauteng.
Time	May 2023
Sampling method	Non-probability purposive sampling.
Sample size	Depended on when the point of saturation is reached. The point of saturation was reached at 10 participants.

3.4.6 Stage 5: Analyse and interpret the data

Data analysis is an essential step in the research process that takes place after data has been collected. Marketing researchers typically input data obtained from data collection forms into specialised software programs that facilitate data analysis (Burns & Veeck, 2020:45). However, conducting data analysis is not merely a matter of data input. It requires specialised technical skills, as indicated by Mooi *et al*. (2018:23). In order to obtain meaningful insights from the collected data, researchers must carefully analyse and evaluate it in the context of the research question or problem at hand. As noted by Iacobucci and Churchill (2015:26), data that has been collected but not analysed in relation to the research challenge is essentially useless. Therefore, effective data analysis is crucial for yielding accurate and relevant research findings. By applying

appropriate statistical methods and techniques, researchers can transform raw data into meaningful information that can inform marketing strategy and decision-making. As such, data analysis is a critical component of the marketing research process.

3.4.6.1 Data preparation

Market research is a complex and multifaceted process that involves collecting, analysing, and interpreting data to gain insights into customer behaviour, preferences, and attitudes (Burns & Veeck, 2020:7). Once the data has been collected and analysed, the immediate goals of market researchers are to interpret, discuss, and present their findings in a manner that is clear, concise, and actionable. To achieve these goals, it is essential for researchers to provide detailed responses and actionable recommendations based on the data and analysis approaches used. This requires a deep understanding of the research question or problem at hand, as well as a thorough knowledge of the relevant market dynamics and customer behaviour.

As noted by Mooi *et al.* (2018:23), providing detailed responses and actionable recommendations is critical for ensuring that the research findings are meaningful and relevant to the needs of the client or organisation. By carefully analysing the data and using appropriate statistical techniques, researchers can identify key insights and trends that can inform marketing strategy and decision-making.

For the purpose of this study, data was gathered using audio recordings, which were transcribed by Language Matters, a professional digital audio and video transcription service provider based in Potchefstroom, South Africa. The transcriptions' correctness was determined by comparing the transcripts to the original recordings.

3.4.6.2 Data analysis: The Morse and Field approach

This study's data was analysed using the Morse and Field (1996) technique, which is commonly used in the marketing field and is relatively user-friendly. To analyse qualitative data, this approach includes four steps: (1) comprehend - the information collected from participants is discussed and analysed, (2) synthesis - the findings of the information are categorised, (3) theorise - theories are created from the identified categories, and (4) recontextualise - theories are combined into the context of knowledge.

3.4.6.2.1 Step 1: Comprehend

The audio recordings from the in-depth interviews were transcribed, checked, altered, and coded for the researcher to interpret the material once the focus groups have been conducted and the

data collected (Morse & Field, 1996:104). Thus, accurate data was gathered to explain and describe the subject of the study and what it comprises (Milnor, 2016:56). The researcher listened to each audio after an interview to confirm accuracy before typing the information acquired to further enhance comprehension. After the data has been accurately transcribed, the researcher carefully examined the transcripts while paying close attention to the recordings to check for accuracy. This approach results in a shared knowledge of the topic under research. In order to complete the process successfully, the researcher engaged and committed to the current study in order to provide data variance up until a consensus was obtained. As a result, a summary of the conclusions and explanations could be produced.

For the purpose of this study**,** the literature review presented in Chapter 2 allowed for a thorough understanding of the theories and concepts already in use for this study's purposes. Each line of the transcripts was read in order to gain comprehension, and then a code was given to it, followed by a grouping into pertinent groups. For purposes of comprehension, this technique is treated as the Morse and Field (1996:104) line-by-line analysis approach (McDaniel & Gates, 2015:366).

Common speech patterns in the transcripts were found before they were coded. The transcripts were edited to remove any noises and phrases that were extraneous to the determined core topic, along with any queries and irrelevant comments. This process was improved until each research participant's essential information was produced with a minimal loss of significance.

The data was coded after the focus groups' transcripts were cleaned up. The data were coded using the line-by-line analysis method proposed by Morse and Field (1996:104). In order to categorise certain lines in the transcripts, specific codes were assigned using the ATLAS.ti 23 qualitative data analysis program (McDaniel & Gates; 2015:366).

3.4.6.2.2 Step 2: Synthesise

Information "sifting" is characterised as synthesising (Morse, 1991:30). The act of seeking meaning from the dataset, creating codes, and assigning these codes to certain regions of each data item is known as the coding process, which is a component of synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2022:53). The ATLAS.ti 23 program was used to aid in content analysis for the sake of this study. To determine inductive codes, the interview transcripts was uploaded to ATLAS.ti 23 and examined line by line. The researcher worked on horizontalising the data during this phase, which is a crucial step in the phenomenological analytic process. The horizontalisation of data suggests that the researcher must be open to any participant’s answer and accord each comment equal weight (Moustakas, 1994:122). When synthesising qualitative data, there are two methods to choose from (Morse & Field, 1996:105): Firstly, analysis between participants can be conducted,

and to identify differences and similarities, transcript comparison is used. Secondly, analysis by category can be conducted. This is the process of grouping gathered data into groups based on found similarities. Thus, a researcher can evaluate data, find links, and validate findings using qualitative synthesis.

For the purpose of this study, synthesising was accomplished by comparing interview transcripts of all participants' responses. It was also accomplished by pointing forth various contrasts and parallels. Data synthesis was used to apply category analysis. Data synthesis was facilitated by the coding that was applied in the initial step. The initial phase was creating the codes, which made it possible to classify the transcript results into different groups. The outcomes were then categorised to highlight differences and similarities.

3.4.6.2.3 Step 3: Theorise

Theorising is a methodical approach to processing qualitative data that entails the choice and fitting of several models to the data It is an essential phase in the study of qualitative data, and also the third stage of Morse and Field's qualitative data technique. Theorising is the act of comparing the data to possible explanations until the best fit is discovered, as noted by Morse and Field (1996:105). In order to determine which theoretical model or framework best describes the facts, thorough and repetitive testing and refinement are required. Theorising is also crucial for guaranteeing the reliability and validity of qualitative data analysis. Researchers can ensure that their conclusions are supported by the data and are not simply the outcome of preconceived notions or biases. This can be achieved by systematically examining various theoretical models and methodologies.

Babin and Zikmund (2016:70) point out that theorising demands both analytical and creative abilities. The researcher must be able to analyse the data critically while remaining flexible and open to the possibility of discovering novel insights.

For the purpose of this study, to establish ideas about the impact of the in-store experience on shop attractiveness in South African fashion retail outlets, the literature review and the identification of higher order categories from the data collected were used in this study. Here, an overview of the experiences of participants was developed, with a view to determine how these might enhance store allure. The researcher used the bracketing and intuiting cognitive processes, respectively, throughout the theorising stage of data processing. Bracketing is the researcher's attempt to avoid over-interpretation by increasing self-awareness and preventing preconceptions and assumptions from influencing how the data collected is reported (Dorfler & Strierand, 2020:779).

3.4.6.2.4 Step 4: Recontextualise

Recontextualizing is a crucial step in qualitative research. It entails developing an hypothesis based on the findings and recommendations of the investigation. Recontextualising is necessary for generalising the findings of a study to various contexts and groups, and for using the findings in subsequent research projects. According to Morse (1991:34), recontextualising entails developing a theory from the study's findings that may be used to guide future research projects. This calls for in-depth comprehension of the issue at hand, as well as in-depth familiarity with the pertinent literature and theoretical frameworks.

Van Niekerk (2020:102) also points out that the third-step ideas need to be written in a way that is explicit about the people and circumstances they pertain to. This entails carefully analysing the study's findings in the context of broader research and pinpointing the crucial elements that can affect the results' generalisability.

For the purpose of this study, the theories derived from the literature review and the results obtained from the interviews were combined and integrated.

3.4.6.2 Trustworthiness of research design

The goal of this study was to develop credibility throughout the research process by reducing mistakes and providing reliable results. According to Connelly (2016:435), developing credibility depends on using data-collecting instruments that can measure the targeted variables correctly (validity) and regularly produce congruent findings (reliability). It is critical to demonstrate rigour in qualitative research investigations so that the research findings have the "integrity" to influence practice and policy or either one (Hadi & José Closs, 2016:641). The major objective of this study was to produce reliable results while preserving credibility throughout the research process. According to Guba (1981:75), credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are the four essential standards that qualitative researchers should follow when assessing credibility.

(a) Credibility

Credibility asks the question of how consistent one's results are with reality. This issue is frequently interpreted in quantitative research as: Are we observing or measuring what we think we are observing or measuring (Merriam & Grenier, 2019:25). According to Saunders *et al*. (2018:1902), the statistical reliability of the instruments utilised determines how credible the results and suggestions are. This study used a variety of strategies, such as peer debriefing, ongoing involvement, and member verification, to increase credibility.

- **Member checking:** Member checking is generally considered the single most critical way to ensure a research's credibility and refers to the verifying of study findings and conclusions by the respondents from whom the data (interview, observation) was originally gathered (Hadi & José Closs, 2016:643). For the purpose of this study, the research was checked multiple times by different members of the academic community in the North-West University.

Background, qualifications, and experience of the researcher: For the purpose of this study, the researcher was inexperienced, they thus completed the data analysis manually: The researcher first utilised lean coding, limiting the collection to five or six categories, but expanded it to include more codes as they grew more familiar with the data and comfortable with the method.

(b) Transferability

Transferability is a term used by researchers such as Adams *et al*. (2016:3) to describe the extent to which a study's findings might find resonance in larger settings. It raises the fundamental question: "To what degree can the insights gained from a particular investigation be applied in diverse settings or with distinct participants?" (Guba 1981:79). The goal of this research was not to make broad generalizations but rather to determine the practical benefit of gamification marketing in the retail business.

- **Provision of a thick description of the phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made:** The extent to which the findings gathered are transferable to different contexts can be tested by properly explaining phenomena. This study ensured transferability by thoroughly detailing the research procedure and empirical findings, allowing other researchers to compare and conclude what they believe to be fundamentally relevant and thus transferable to different situations (Maree, 2016:124).

- **Recording and the transcription of the in-depth interview sessions:** The focus groups for this study were recorded using a variety of audio recording equipment. To correct any mistakes and fill in gaps, all transcripts were matched to the recordings. The transcripts were utilised for additional coding and categorising analysis ATLAS.ti 23 was used for thematic analysis.

- **Purposive sampling:** Participants were recruited at random for this study, with the emphasis solely on those who had recently purchased fashion products from a South African fashion retail institution during the previous six months.

(c) Dependability

The consistency of findings across time. Dependability entails participants' judgment of the research's findings, interpretation, and suggestions, all of which are backed by data collected from study participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). Several strategies are used to ensure dependability, including keeping an audit trail, engaging in peer debriefing, recording focus group meetings, and transcribing these recorded sessions (Belk *et al*. 2013:33).

- **Audit trail:** This study has been subjected to several audits by independent researchers to assure the dependability of the research study by analysing the research technique to evaluate the correctness of the findings and ensure the quality.

- **Interview session recording:** This entails using audio recording devices to capture the talks that take place during focus group sessions (Belk *et al*. 2013:33). To capture the interview sessions in this study, multiple audio recording technologies were used.

- **Peer debriefing**: In this procedure, peers who have experience with the results are consulted and asked to provide their thoughts and opinions on certain topics and categories (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3). For the purpose of this study, the researcher was able to fine-tune their study techniques and enhance their arguments thanks to feedback from several sources (Moules *et al*., 2017:3). The in-depth interview results and findings were given to experienced qualitative researchers to confirm and contribute to the study's findings. Their inputs have been included in the study's various phases. Prof. Alfed Henrico and Mr. Johan Gouws, seasoned researchers in the field of qualitative research, examined the study's analysis, results and findings to verify its conclusions and get their professional opinion (see Appendix F).

- **Interview session transcription**: Data gathered from audio recordings was transcribed into text for further research. This stage also includes documenting behavioural subtleties displayed by individuals, particularly if these behaviours are significant (Harding & Whitehead, 2013:154). Language Matters, a digital audio and video transcription firm located in Potchefstroom, South Africa, transcribed data from all three focus group sessions. To correct any mistakes or omissions, the transcripts were cross-referenced with the original recordings. The data was then further analysed using the ATLAS.ti 23 computer tool for qualitative data analysis, which included coding, classification, and theme analysis.

(d) Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which the research study's conclusions can be validated by other researchers. Confirmability is concerned with demonstrating that the facts and interpretations of the findings are not only figments of the inquirer's mind but are drawn from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). Objectivity refers to the consistency and repeatability of findings, which ensures that other researchers can duplicate the findings (Ary *et al*., 2019:448). Elo *et al*. (2014:6) emphasise the importance of objectivity in ensuring that the outcomes are based on reliable facts and can be believed. To achieve objectivity, many strategies are used, including reflexivity and an audit trail (Creswell, 2015:218).

- **Reflexivity:** Recognises the impact of the researcher's background and interests on the qualitative research process (Creswell, 2015:218). Prof. Roland Goldberg, the study's supervisor, meticulously studied and assessed the data. Furthermore, the data and findings from the focus groups were scrutinised by two experienced researchers, Prof. Alfred Henrico and Mr. Johan Gouws (see Appendix F), to corroborate the study's conclusions. The researcher also kept an open line of communication with the participants, actively attempting to eliminate any potential biases.

To avoid bias, the judgments made during the study process were meticulously documented and explained, as was the strategy followed for dependability. This included taking thorough notes, being unbiased, and closely sticking to the research questions stated in the moderator's guide in this study.

3.4.7 Stage 6: Prepare the research report

Stage 6 entails reporting the findings and the results, and formulating conclusions for fashion retail industries and businesses. This stage of the research process is presented in Chapters 4 and 5 of the study.

3.5 CONCLUSION

The research methodology applied in this study were presented in this chapter, with a discussion of each of the stages of the marketing research process. The research problem and objectives were determined. The research design was explored, and the process of selecting a suitable research method was described. The sampling method was justified, and an explanation of the methods used to collect, interpret and examine the research findings was provided. Chapters 4 and 5 provide the findings and the conclusions of the study. The interpretation categories of this study identified in Chapter 4 are used to report the findings.

CHAPTER 4 REPORTING OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Using the structured methodological approach discussed in the Chapter 3, this chapter sets out to convey the empirical findings from the research investigation. The chapter begins by giving an overview of the questions that were asked during the in-depth interviews, and then details the categories and themes found in the second stage of the Morse and Field technique to qualitative data analysis. The results related to each category are revealed in the subsequent sections, followed by a summary of the key findings.

4.2 RESEARCH RESULTS

This section focuses on the study's findings and provides a thorough explanation of the objectives of the in-depth interview questions. This clarification entails drawing links between each of the in-depth interview questions, the body of prior research, and the overall objectives of the study. A clarification is also given as to how these questions relate to the various categories and themes that emerged from the investigation from the participants in Gauteng.

4.2.1 Aims of in-depth interview questions and relation to literature, objectives and interpretation categories

The connections between the questions posed during the in-depth interviews, the research goals, the literature (Chapter 2), as well as the categories and themes identified (as were determined using the Morse and Field approach) are presented in Table 4-1 as a starting point for presenting the empirical research findings.

Table 4-1 illustrates the connections between the in-depth interview questions, the research objectives outlined in sections 1.5.1 and 1.5.2, the relevant literature covered in Chapter 2, and the categories and themes discerned via the Morse and Field methodology, as well as the presentation of empirical research findings.

Table 4-1: The aims of in-depth interview questions and their relation to literature, objectives and interpretation categories

In-depth interview question 1: Thinking about the last time you chose to rather go to a physical shopping centre or store to buy something and not to buy it from an e-commerce platform like Amazon or Takealot, please explain to me why you made this decision.			
Aim	To investigate the factors that motivate participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store.		
Research objective	Secondary research objective 2		
Literature	Chapter 2, section 2.3		
Theme	1	Category	A, B, C, D, E, F
In-depth interview question 2: Please tell me about your experience from the moment you walked in the door the last time you bought something from a physical fashion retail store.			
Aim	To describe the experience of participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.		
Research objective	Secondary research objective 3		
Literature	Chapter 2, section 2.5 & 2.6		
Theme	2	Category	A, B, C, D, E, F
In-depth interview question 3: What personal benefit, if any, do you think you derive by shopping at a physical fashion retail store instead of buying your items online?			
Aim	To describe the value derived by participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.		
Research objective	Secondary research objective 4		
Literature	Chapter 2, section 2.7		
Theme	3	Category	A, B, C, D, E, F
In-depth interview question 4: What are some of the factors that draw you towards a physical store?			
Aim	To describe the factors that contribute to the attractiveness of a physical fashion retail store.		
Research objective	Secondary research objective 5		
Literature	Chapter 2, section 2.2, 2.4 & 2.8		
Theme	4 & 5	Category	A, B, C, D

The methodology used in the next section is based on the Morse and Field method and the Atlas.ti 23 software for qualitative data analysis. On the associated CD-ROM are detailed insights into the data analysis process, including the methods used for determining categories within each subject and the accompanying code book. Table 4-2 outlines the theme and categorical framework that govern the empirical study findings as a first step, laying the groundwork for the discussions that follow in the subsequent sections.

Table 4-2: The thematic and categorical framework for empirical research results

	Category (A)	Category (B)	Category (C)	Category (D)	Category (E)	Category (F)
Theme 1: *Motivation* for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.	Browsing	Fitting	Timeliness	Therapeutic	Socialising	Expectation
Theme 2: *Experience* when frequenting physical fashion retail stores.	Atmospherics	Fitting Rooms	Store Design	Displays	Customer Service	Hygiene
Theme 3: *Value* received when frequenting physical fashion retail stores.	Utilitarian	Financial	Time	Experiential	Social	Service
Theme 4: *Attractive* factors of physical fashion retail stores.	Products	Assistance	Music	Touching		
Theme 5: *Unattractive* factors of physical fashion retail stores.	Layout	Variety	Staff	Cleanliness		

The categories that were determined in relation to each subject are discussed in depth below. Additionally, the findings from the research for each indicated theme are dealt with. The key findings with regards to each theme are summarised after the results are provided in relation to each category.

4.2.2 Theme 1: Motivation for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores

This section provides a detailed discussion pertaining to the motivation for customers to visit physical fashion retail stores.

4.2.2.1 Category 1(A): Browsing

Category 1(A) considers the motivation for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores based on their ability to browse fashion items in-store before or during purchase.

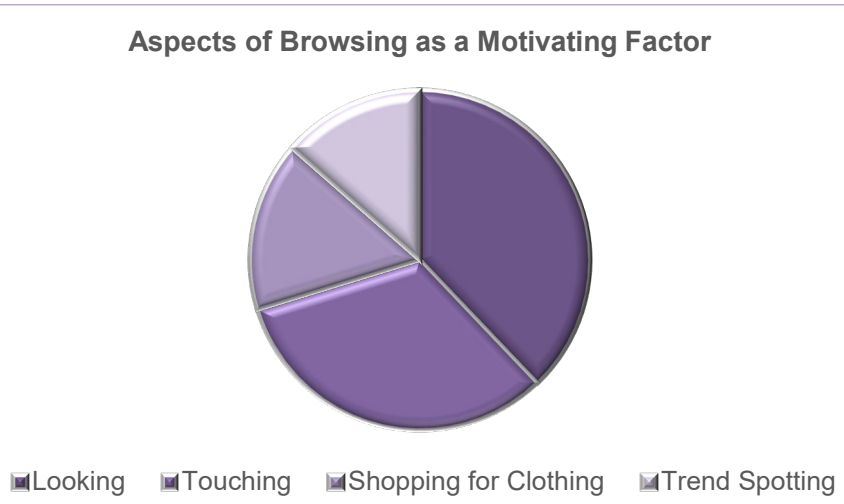
The study's results indicate that most participants enjoy looking at and examining a physical product when shopping at a physical fashion retail store. A large majority of the participants also indicated that they prefer touching and feeling a product when shopping, as opposed to merely viewing these items online. A few participants indicated that they specifically shop at a physical fashion retail store when they are shopping for clothing. Some of the participants also mentioned that they enjoy shopping at a physical fashion retail store to identify the latest fashion and trends, whether it is from in-store displays or by observing fellow customers, paying attention to what they are wearing or buying at the time.

Figure 4-1: Category 1(A) research results – Theme 1

Motivation to frequent physical fashion retail stores: Browsing

Explanation of category:

This category specifically considered browsing as a motivation for participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store as opposed to shopping online. Most of the participants indicated that they enjoy looking at and touching the physical products when shopping. A few of the participants mentioned that they specifically shop for clothing items at a physical fashion retail store, with only some of them indicating that they frequent physical fashion retail stores to identify the latest trends and fashion by looking at in-store displays, items available for sale, or what fellow shoppers are wearing or buying at the time.



Supporting verbatim quotes:

"You can actually see what the colour really looks like…"

Participant 7

"…seeing maybe even what other people are picking out, and so that also gives me an idea of what is currently the fashion or like in style."

Participant 1

"It is important for me to feel the fabric, for example, to touch it."

Participant 5

4.2.2.2 Category 1(B): Fitting

Category 1(B) considers the motivation for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores based on their ability to fit fashion items in store prior to or during purchase.

The results of this study indicate that most of the participants preferred to try on clothing prior to the purchase of such products in physical fashion retail stores. One participant indicated that they disliked fitting on clothing prior to purchase indicating a generalization to fitting stereotypes.

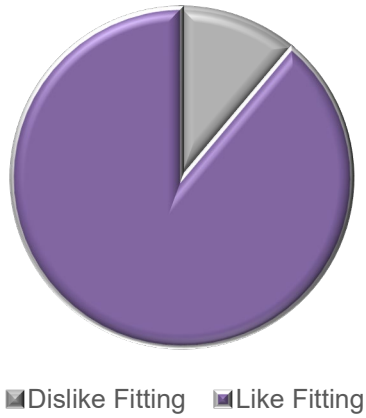
Figure 4-2: Category 1(B) research results – Theme 1

Motivation to frequent physical fashion retail stores: Fitting

Explanation of category:

This category specifically considered fitting clothes on as a motivation for participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store as opposed to shopping online. Most of the participants indicated that they enjoy trying on clothing prior to purchase when shopping. One participant mentioned that they specifically dislike fitting clothing prior to purchase at a physical fashion retail store.

Aspects of Fitting as a Motivating Factor



Supporting verbatim quotes:

"*…I like when I decide to purchase something I like to try it on and see what it looks like on me before I choose to purchase it…*"

"…its easier for me to try it on and see the item before me."

Participant 1

"…clothes I rarely like buy online, just because I never know if it will like fit on me."

Participant 2

"*I don't really like fitting clothes at the store. I feel like it is going to take too long and I just feel uncomfortable."*

Participant 4

4.2.2.3 Category 1(C): Timeliness

Category 1(C) considers the motivation for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores based on the timeliness aspect associated with purchasing a fashion item from a physical fashion retail store.

The results of the study indicate that most participants preferred to shop at a physical fashion retail store in order to take immediate ownership of a product instead of waiting for delivery. A few participants indicated they preferred to shop at a physical fashion retail store because it is easier and more convenient for them to exchange or return products to a physical fashion retail store. One participant noted that they dislike shopping online instead of in-store because of the time it takes to find a product and navigate the websites.

Figure 4-3: Category 1(C) research results – Theme 1

Motivation to frequent physical fashion retail stores: Timeliness

Explanation of category:

This category specifically considered timeliness as a motivation for participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store as opposed to shopping online. The majority of participants indicated that they prefer to purchase items directly from a physical fashion retail store rather than waiting for delivery, since they could use the product right away. Due to the simplicity and convenience of exchanging or returning items in person, a few participants stated a preference for shopping at actual fashion retail establishments. Due to the time-consuming nature of website navigation and product discovery, one participant stated that they dislike shopping online.

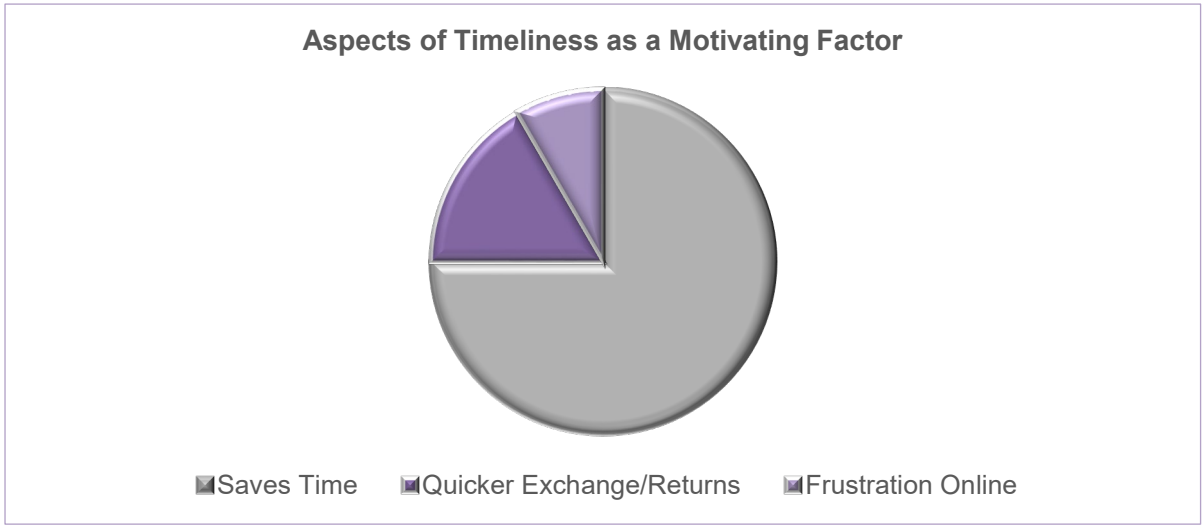


Figure 4-3: Category 1(C) research results – Theme 1 (continued)

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"…sometimes you need an item of clothing tonight or tomorrow and then you need to just drive and, ja, get it."

Participant 3

"And when the stuff arrives, it is so much effort to return it."

Participant 6

"…convenience in a sense of like needing it right now, driving to a store is like really helpful."

Participant 2

"…being able to buy it immediately."

Participant 8

4.2.2.4 Category 1(D): Therapeutic

Category 1(D) considers the motivation for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores based on their ability to try on fashion items in store prior to or at the time of purchase.

The results of the study indicate that most of participants preferred to shop at physical fashion retailers as it provides an experience and also a sense of escape to them. Two participants mentioned that that they prefer to shop at a physical fashion retail store, because they find it therapeutic in some sense.

Figure 4-4: Category 1(D) research results – Theme 1

Motivation to frequent physical fashion retail stores: Therapeutic

Explanation of category:

This category specifically considered shopping being a therapeutic experience as a motivation for participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store. Most of the participants indicated that shopping at a physical fashion retail store provides them with a sense of escape. Two participants mentioned that they find shopping at a physical fashion retail store therapeutic.

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"…it is a whole experience going out there and buying something to wear."

Participant 7

"It's, for me, very therapeutic."

Participant 5

4.2.2.5 Category 1(E): Socialising

Category 1(E) considers the motivation for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores based on their ability to socialise in physical fashion retail stores.

The results of this study indicate that a large majority of participants enjoyed socialising in a physical fashion retail store, whether it be with friends, other customers, or with the sales staff.

Figure 4-5: Category 1(E) research results – Theme 1

Motivation to frequent physical fashion retail stores: Socialising

Explanation of category:

This category considered socialising a motivational factor for participants at a physical fashion retail store. Most participants indicated they enjoy socialising with friends, staff, or other customers when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"For me, it's very beneficial if I can speak to an assistant, and even if there are other clients in the store fitting with me, I like to converse with them and maybe get their opinions."

Participant 5

"…I love getting out of the house and seeing people. I like the interaction with other people."

Participant 8

"… maybe going out with a friend for shopping…"

Participant 2

"I also like people, so I like having a chat about something absolutely irrelevant to them."

Participant 7

"Human interaction. So, just to get out sometimes and not just be on your phone."

Participant 4

"…they can tell me like how I look if I look good in whatever I am picking out…interacting."

Participant 1

4.2.2.6 Category 1(F): Expectation

Category 1(F) considers the motivation for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores based on their expectations being met at a physical fashion retail store.

The study reveals a compelling insight into why a substantial majority of participants favour shopping at physical fashion retail stores, with a distinct contrast to the potential disappointments associated with online fashion purchases. The primary driving force behind this preference lies in the participants' confidence that, when they shop at a physical store, they have a clear and accurate understanding of what to expect with the items they purchase. This assurance is rooted in two critical factors.

Firstly, physical stores offer the advantage of visual and tactile inspection, allowing customers to closely scrutinise the colour, fabric, texture, and overall quality of the clothing. By trying on the items, they can gauge the fit, comfort, and suitability of the products, ensuring that their expectations align with the actual merchandise they are considering.

Secondly, when shopping in person, customers can confirm that the product matches their expectations right on the spot. Unlike online shopping, where the purchased items are unseen until delivery, there is no risk of receiving a fashion item that deviates from what was pictured online. This eliminates the common disappointment that arises when the actual product does not meet the mental image created during the online shopping process.

Figure 4-6: Category 1(F) research results – Theme 1

Motivation to frequent physical fashion retail stores: Expectation

Explanation of category:
The study underscores the strong preference of a majority of participants for physical fashion retail stores over online shopping, attributing this preference to their confidence in knowing precisely what to expect with in-store purchases. This assurance stems from two vital factors: the ability to visually and tactilely inspect items, enabling them to assess colour, fabric, texture, and quality, as well as try on products to gauge fit and suitability, and the in-person confirmation that ensures purchased items match expectations, eliminating the disappointments often associated with online shopping where products may not meet the mental image created during the online selection process.

Figure 4-6: Category 1(F) research results – Theme 1 (continued)

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"It doesn't like catch me by surprise if it's nothing that I would expect."

Participant 2

"And when the stuff arrives, it is so much effort to return it."

Participant 6

"I end up spending more time or money than I intended to. That is why I prefer to go to a shop and just look for the stuff I really need."

Participant 6

"…I find buying from an e-commerce store…scary…I don't know if it is going to fit, I don't know if it's going to look nice, I don't know if I am going to like the colour because the colour could be different and I don't like – I don't know if I'm going to like the material even. So, I did recently buy something online and I absolutely hated the material."

Participant 7

4.2.3 Theme 2: Experience when frequenting physical fashion retail stores

This section provides a detailed discussion pertaining to the experience customers receive when frequenting physical fashion retail stores.

4.2.3.1 Category 2(A): Atmospherics

Category 2(A) considers atmospherics a factor that plays a pivotal role in their overall experience at a physical fashion retail store.

The results of this study indicate that most of participants mentioned that the type of music played at a fashion retail store influences their experience when shopping at such a store. A large majority of the participants indicated that they disliked harsh and overwhelming lighting in a store, and that this impacted their experience of the physical fashion retail store. A few of the participants indicated that the music playing in the store at that time had a positive effect on their overall experience in a physical fashion retail store. Some of the participants mentioned that they dislike the smell of a particular store, and that this impacted their experience at a physical fashion retail store. A few of the participants mentioned that they like the lighting and find it to be an attractive feature in a physical fashion retail store. Two of the participants indicated that they did not detect any smell when they are shopping for clothing. Also, two participants mentioned that the music playing in a physical fashion retail store promoted a calming effect for them when shopping. Two participants indicated that they do not enjoy shopping at a physical fashion retail store when the

temperature is too cold outside. Two participants mentioned that the temperature in a physical fashion retail store plays a significant role of the overall experience when frequenting a physical fashion retail store. One of the participants find upbeat music playing in a physical fashion retail store to be a positive experience. On the other hand, one participant mentioned that they desire a calm atmosphere when shopping at a physical fashion retail store over a busy and crowded environment. One participant indicated that they find the smell in a physical fashion retail store to be an attractive factor. One participant mentioned that they did not notice the music while shopping. One participant indicated that the music they played in a physical fashion retail store helped them with brand or store recall.

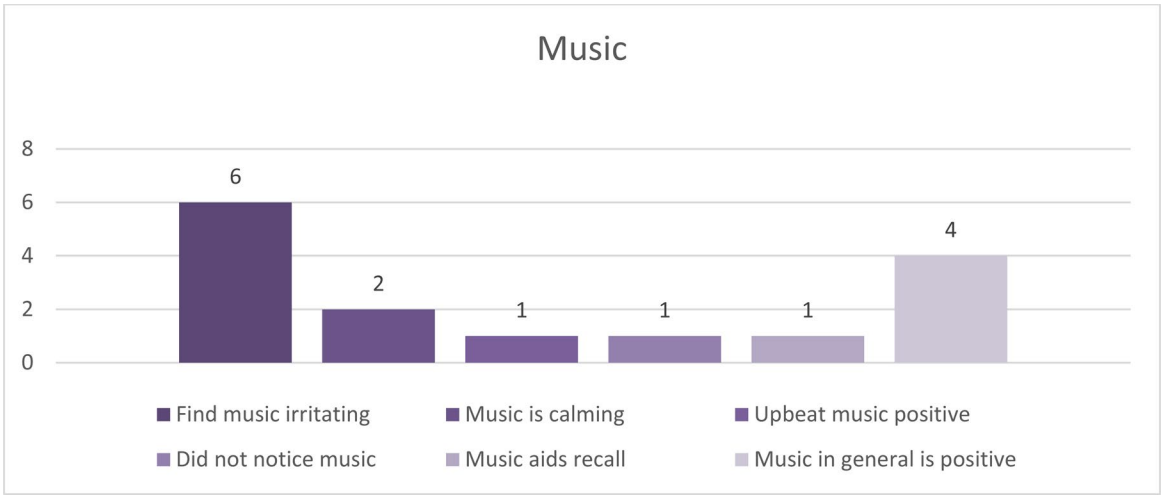
Figure 4-7: Category 2(A) research results – Theme 2

Experience when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Atmospherics

Explanation of category:

This category specifically took atmospherics into account as an experiential factor when shopping in a physical retail setting. The majority of the participants stated that the type of music and its definition affects their shopping experience. Most participants said they didn't enjoy the lighting in the store and that it had negatively influenced their shopping experience. A few of the participants said that their entire experience at a physical fashion retail store was improved by the music that was playing at the time. Some of the participants noted that they didn't enjoy the smell in a store, and that it had affected how they felt about going to a physical fashion retail store. A few participants noted how attractive they found the lighting to be, and how they found this to be an attractive feature. When they were shopping for clothes, two of the participants claimed that they did not detect any smell when shopping. Two of the participants indicated that they find shopping to have a calming effect when there is music playing in a physical fashion retail store. Two participants indicated they do not like going to a physical fashion retail store to shop when it is very cold outdoors. Two of the participants indicated that a physical fashion retail store's temperature has a major impact on the entire experience. One of the participants finds it an attractive feature to hear upbeat music playing at a physical fashion retail store. One participant said they prefer a calming atmosphere than a busy and packed one when they are shopping at a physical fashion retail store. One participant mentioned how attractive they found the smell of a physical fashion retail store. One participant indicated they were shopping and did not notice the music that was playing at the time. One participant mentioned how brand or store recall was assisted by the music played in the store.

Figure 4-7: Category 2(A) research results – Theme 2 (continued)



Supporting verbatim quotes:

"Music does affect the shopping experience..."

Participant 9

"...if the music is soothing, it helps; it's enjoyable."

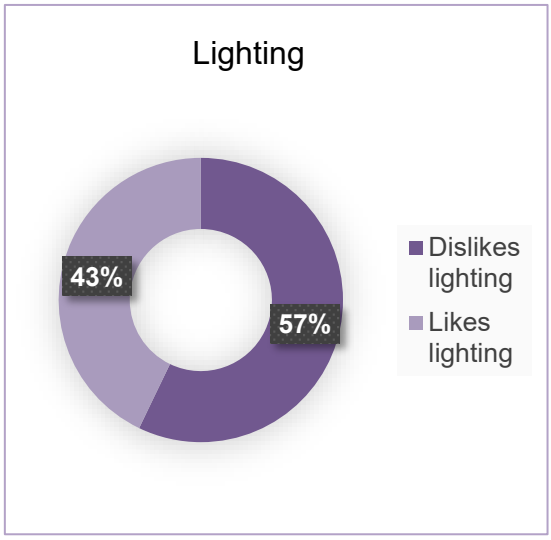
Participant 5

"When you walk into a store and the music is too loud, it would definitely affect me – I won't like it."

Participant 9

"If it's very irritating music, I'll definitely shop faster, and it affects my duration that I stay in the store."

Participant 10



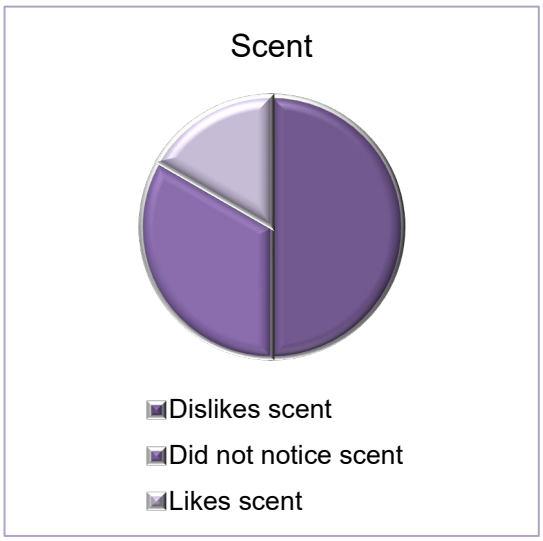


Figure 4-7: Category 2(A) research results – Theme 2 (continued)

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"I think if it is dark, you can't see the clothes that well, so the lighting should be pretty bright."

Participant 4

"It mustn't be too bright and not too dim. Ja, very real, like, it would be outside – the light you see outside."

Participant 8

"...the lighting was so harsh that we actually ended up not buying the clothes."

Participant 6

"…you almost want the lighting to be the same as what the lighting would be outside but you don't really get that because of the fluorescent lighting. So, a lot of times I would actually take the garment kind of outside of the shop and just see what the colour does if I am not sure about it."

Participant 7

"I can actually distinctly recall the shops that I have been to that has had a scent, you know, because it definitely draws my attraction. And you go in and you want to find out what the smell is and then you see the other things as well."

Participant 8

"I think if the smell is horrible, you wouldn't want to be in there, so the whole experience would be bad."

Participant 4

"…there's a certain shop that I never go into because of this plastic smell that you get."

Participant 6

4.2.3.2 Category 2(B): Fitting rooms

Category 2(B) considers fitting rooms as a factor that plays a pivotal role in their overall experience at a physical fashion retail store.

The results of this study indicate that a few of participants noted that they regard the design of the fitting rooms to play a significant role in their overall shopping experience when frequenting a physical fashion retail store. Some of the participants indicated that they generally dislike the fitting rooms' lighting when they are shopping in a physical fashion retail store indicating a generalization to fitting room lighting stereotypes. A few of the participants mentioned that they generally dislike the mirrors in the fitting rooms, stating that they are unflattering or present a

distorted view. A few participants mentioned that they generally experience bad service when using the fitting rooms at a physical fashion retail store. Some of the participants mentioned that hey generally dislike the fitting rooms' temperature, considering it to be too hot. Two of the participants indicated that they find the fitting rooms to be too busy when they are shopping for clothing. Two of the participants mentioned that they regard the cleanliness of the fitting rooms to play a significant role in their overall experience in a physical fashion retail store. One participant mentioned that they regard the neatness of the fitting rooms to play a major role in their overall experience of the physical fashion retail store. One of the participants indicated that they like the fitting room mirrors, and that it had a positive impact on their overall shopping experience. One of the participants mentioned that they regard the temperature of the fitting rooms to play a significant role in their overall experience in a physical fashion retail store.

Figure 4-8: Category 2(B) research results – Theme 2

Experience when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Fitting Rooms

Explanation of category:

This category examined the significance of fitting rooms as a crucial experiential factor in physical fashion retail settings. While some participants emphasised the considerable influence of fitting room layouts on their overall shopping experiences, the feedback regarding fitting room conditions varied. Many participants expressed their discontent with the lighting, and some found the mirrors unattractive or distorting. Furthermore, there were reports of poor service in fitting rooms, highlighting a need for improved customer service practices. Discomfort with the room temperature, often perceived as overly hot, was also a recurring concern, while overcrowding troubled two participants. The cleanliness of the fitting rooms held significant weight for several participants, impacting their perception of the entire physical fashion retail store experience. One participant praised the mirrors, citing their contribution to an enhanced shopping experience, and another participant underscored the importance of fitting room temperature. In summary, fitting rooms encompass a range of factors that collectively shape the shopping experience, including layout, lighting, cleanliness, temperature, and customer service, all of which can significantly influence customers' overall satisfaction and perception of a physical fashion retail store. Addressing these elements effectively can lead to enhanced customer experiences and potentially increased sales in physical retail settings.

Figure 4-8: Category 2(B) research results – Theme 2 (continued)

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"…dressing rooms are extremely hot and I like start to sweat and I'm like, okay I'm done shopping, I'm getting out of here now."

Participant 2

"…the lighting in the changing rooms could be absolutely horrific the way they set that up sometimes all you see is every little roll and dimple in your body and it is not a good experience."

Participant 7

"…what a lot of stores do is they do have mirrors where you just look that little bit skinnier than what you actually are, that is a very nice experience."

Participant 7

"It was quite busy in there."

Participant 3

"Some fitting rooms are extremely small so when you walk into a fitting room and the room, the cubicle is just that little bit bigger it actually…it makes me feel like luxury."

Participant 7

4.2.3.3 Category 2(C): Store design

Category 2(C) considers store design a factor that plays a pivotal role in participants' overall experience at a physical fashion retail store.

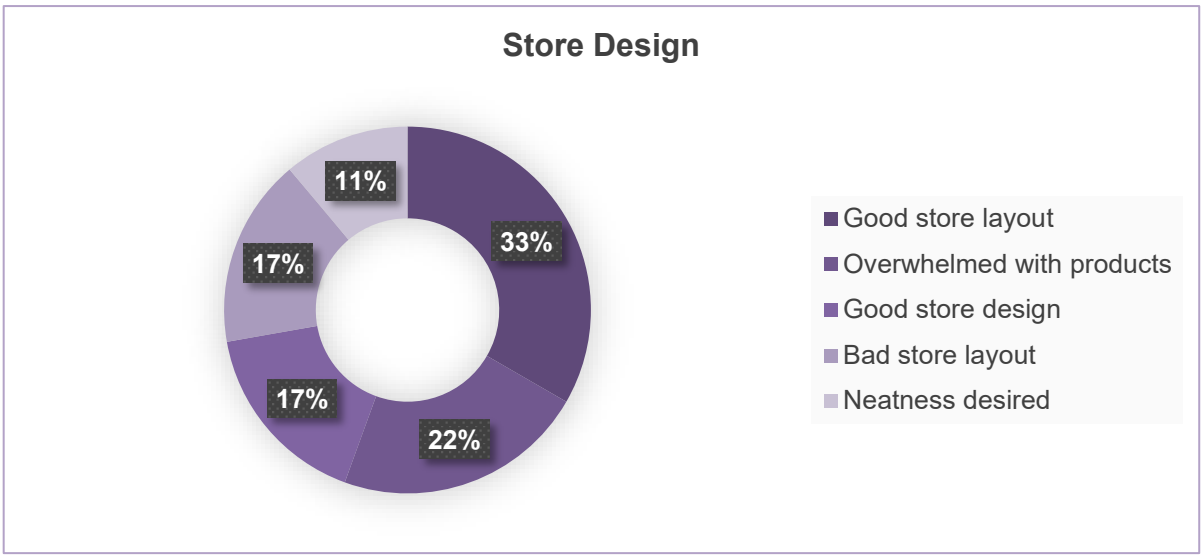
The study's findings highlight that a well-structured store layout positively contributes to the overall experience for the majority of participants when they visit a physical fashion retail store. However, a few participants expressed feelings of being overwhelmed when faced with an excessive number of products on display during their shopping trips. Additionally, some participants emphasised the significance of a well-planned store design in enhancing their overall shopping experience. On the contrary, a minority of participants conveyed their aversion to disorganised and poorly navigable physical store layouts when shopping. Notably, two participants revealed a preference for a tidy and orderly environment while frequenting a physical fashion retail store, underscoring the importance of a well-kept and accessible shopping space.

Figure 4-9: Category 2(C) research results – Theme 2

Experience when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Store Design

Explanation of category:

This category specifically explored store layout as an experiential factor when shopping in a physical retail setting. The majority of the participants felt that a good store layout contributed to their in-store shopping experience. A few of the participants noted that they feel overwhelmed by too many products on display. One participant mentioned that a good store design contributes to their overall experience. Some participants indicated that they generally dislike a difficult to navigate store layout when shopping. Two participants desire a neat environment when shopping.



Supporting verbatim quotes:

"…the look of the store makes a difference whether I feel welcome and the products are displayed nicely."

Participant 10

"There should be enough space for people to pass each other."

Participant 3

"When I walked through the door it was very big and there was lots of stuff. So, that was a bit overwhelming."

Participant 4

"Overwhelming because I see there are like so many options in front of me."

Participant 1

4.2.3.4 Category 2(D): Displays

Category 2(D) considers displays as a factor that plays a pivotal role in their overall experience at a physical fashion retail store.

The results of this study indicate that a few of the participants felt that sales and promotion signs contribute to the overall experience when frequenting a physical fashion retail store. Two participants mentioned that a pleasant in-store display contributed to the overall experience when frequenting a physical fashion retail store. Two of the participants indicated that they find a nice window display to contribute to their overall shopping experience. One of the participants mentioned that they generally dislike the in-store displays when shopping at a physical fashion retail store. One participant indicated feeling generally overwhelmed with all the sales and promotion signs in-store when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.

Figure 4-10: Category 2(D) research results – Theme 2

Experience when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Displays

Explanation of category:

This category specifically took the displays into account as an experiential factor when shopping in a physical retail setting. A few participants indicated that sales and promotion signage enhance the overall shopping experience. Two of the participants indicated that a welcoming in-store display enhances their whole experience. Two participants felt that a pleasant window display enhances their entire shopping experience. When shopping at a physical fashion retail store, one of the participants indicated that they typically find the in-store displays to be unappealing. One participant reported feeling generally overwhelmed by all the sales and promotion signage in-store.

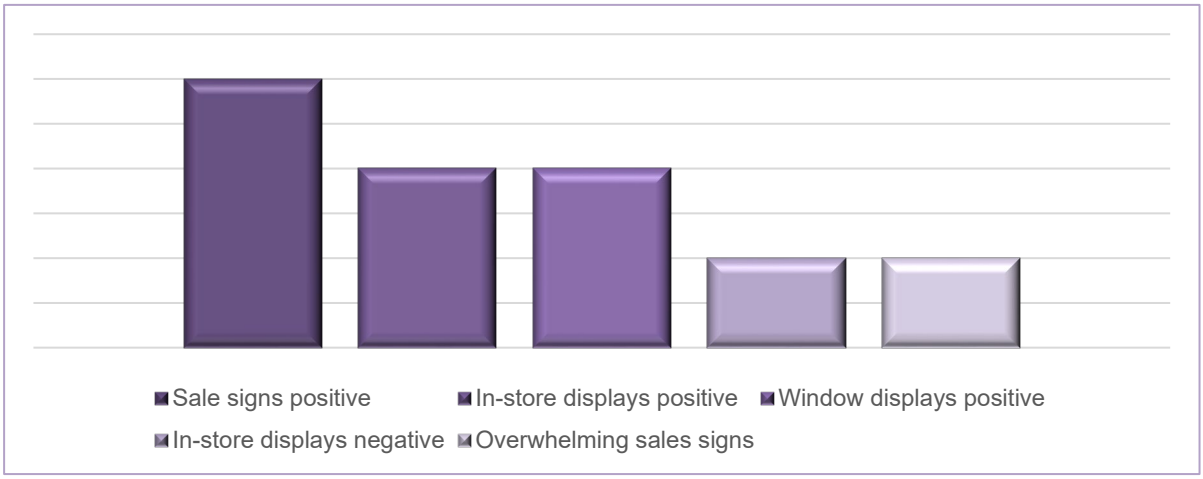


Figure 4-10: Category 2(D) research results – Theme 2 (continued)

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"…a big factor that draws me into a store is number one, probably the window displays…and probably like the big sale signs outside to go see where I can save some money."

Participant 2

"The look of the store makes a difference whether I feel welcome and the products are displayed nicely."

Participant 10

"But that store was just very big and there were signs everywhere, so it was a bit overwhelming ."

Participant 4

"I think also by walking into a store you can actually also see by how they dress up the mannequins that how you can do this."

Participant 7

4.2.3.5 Category 2(E): Customer service

Category 2(E) considers customer service as a factor that plays a pivotal role in participants' overall experience at a physical fashion retail store.

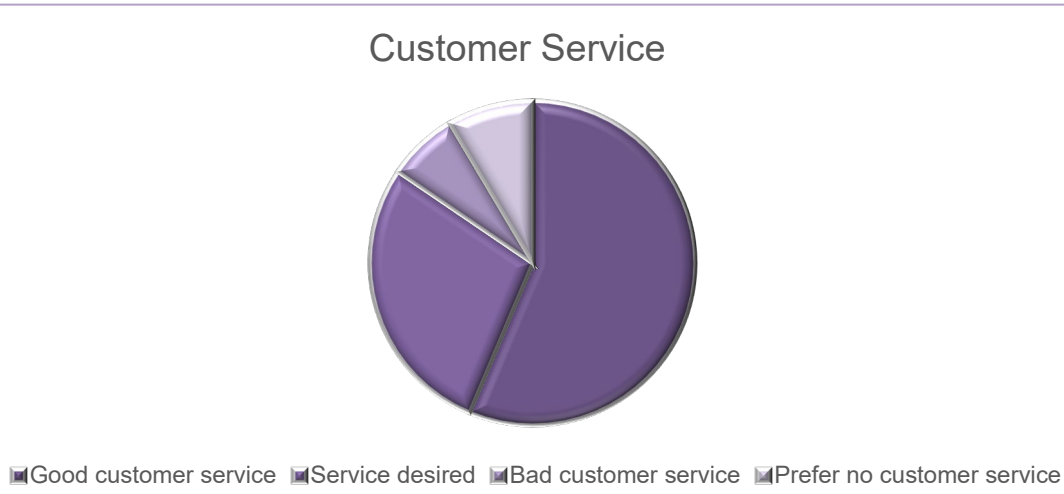
The results of this study indicate that the majority of the participants felt that good customer service contributes to their overall experience when frequenting a physical fashion retail store. A few of the participants indicate the need for improved customer service when shopping for clothing. One of the participants indicated that they generally dislike the customer service received when shopping at a physical fashion retail store. On the other hand, one participant mentioned that they prefer no customer service when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.

Figure 4-11: Category 2(E) research results – Theme 2

Experience when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Customer Service

Explanation of category:

This category specifically took customer service into account as an experiential factor when shopping in a physical retail setting. The majority of participants indicated that good customer service contributes to their overall experience. A number of participants indicated the need for good customer service. One participant disliked customer service when shopping, and one participant indicated that they prefer no customer service when shopping at a physical fashion retailer.



Supporting verbatim quotes:

"If it's unfriendly staff, then there is not really a desire to hang around there if they are not helpful. And if there is somebody there to help me; help look for sizes or if there is something specific that I want to ask someone to help me, so, that makes it nice."

Participant 10

"If there is people to assist and friendly then yes that makes it a lot better."

Participant 9

"There must be someone to attend to your needs if you need them. I get annoyed when there is not someone to help me if I need them."

Participant 7

"I sometimes don't like the interaction of people trying to convince me. I'm one of those shoppers that need to consider things myself."

Participant 6

4.2.3.6 Category 2(F): Hygiene

Category 2(F) considers hygiene as a factor that plays a pivotal role in participants' overall experience at a physical fashion retail store.

The findings from this study offer a glimpse into the prevailing perceptions of hygiene in physical fashion retail stores across South Africa, revealing a notable trend of dissatisfaction among the majority of participants. The revelation that participants often perceive these stores as being less than stellar in terms of cleanliness and tidiness paints a vivid picture of the challenges faced by retailers in maintaining optimal hygiene standards.

A particularly intriguing aspect highlighted in the results is the paradoxical behaviour exhibited by consumers. Despite acknowledging the subpar hygiene conditions, participants admitted to continuing their browsing and even making purchases during their visits. This nuanced consumer behaviour suggests that while hygiene is a concern, other factors, such as product appeal or urgency, may override the immediate impact of a less-than-immaculate store environment.

However, the reluctance to return and the inclination to share their negative experiences with family and friends reveal the lingering consequences of poor hygiene perception. This ripple effect emphasises the lasting impact that a negative first impression can have on customer loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing, key elements in the success of any retail establishment.

An interesting insight surfaces from the comment of one participant, who astutely connected the dots between perceived hygiene and the perceived quality of items sold in the store. This correlation suggests that, for a segment of consumers, the visual cues of cleanliness extend beyond the store's physical appearance to influence their judgments about the overall quality of the products available. Retailers, in light of this finding, may find value in not only addressing hygiene concerns for aesthetic reasons but also for the potential impact on perceived product quality.

Figure 4-12: Category 2(F) research results – Theme 2

Experience when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Hygiene

Explanation of category:

The study reveals widespread dissatisfaction with hygiene standards in South African physical fashion retail stores. Participants perceive these stores as lacking in cleanliness and tidiness, posing challenges for retailers. Interestingly, consumers exhibit paradoxical behaviour—acknowledging subpar hygiene but still engaging in browsing and purchasing, indicating that factors like product appeal may overshadow immediate cleanliness concerns. Despite this, the reluctance to return and the tendency to share negative experiences underscore the enduring consequences of poor hygiene perceptions, impacting customer loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing. A participant's insight links hygiene with perceived product quality, suggesting that cleanliness influences judgments about overall item quality. Retailers are advised to address hygiene not only for aesthetic reasons but also for its potential impact on perceived product quality.

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"I think if I go to a changing room that feels very dirty like I might still choose the clothes or buy them that particular time if I like them but I would definitely be less likely to come back again to that place…I think that definitely has an impact on my overall impression and also if I want to tell anyone else to go shop there. Ja, that would definitely play a role."

Participant 1

"It definitely does also make an impact because you obviously feel, you know, if it's not tidy and it's not looked after…it has an impact on your thinking of the quality of clothes you can buy is also going to be the same quality, you know, not good."

Participant 6

"There are some occasions where you like not going to take my – you hope you have socks on because you don't want to stand on the floor…then you leave some of your clothes on the floor to actually stand on and then they get all dusty."

Participant 3

4.2.4 Theme 3: Value received when frequenting physical fashion retail stores

This section provides a discussion pertaining to the value that customers received when frequenting physical fashion retail stores.

4.2.4.1 Category 3(A): Utilitarian

Category 3(A) considers the utilitarian value factors relating to customers wanting to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

The results of this study indicate that the majority of the participants find value in the ability to try on clothing and other fashion items when shopping at a physical fashion retail store. A few of the participants indicated that they find value in the variety of clothing and other fashion items available when shopping at a physical fashion store. Two of the participants mentioned that they find value in spotting the latest trends when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.

Figure 4-13: Category 3(A) research results – Theme 3

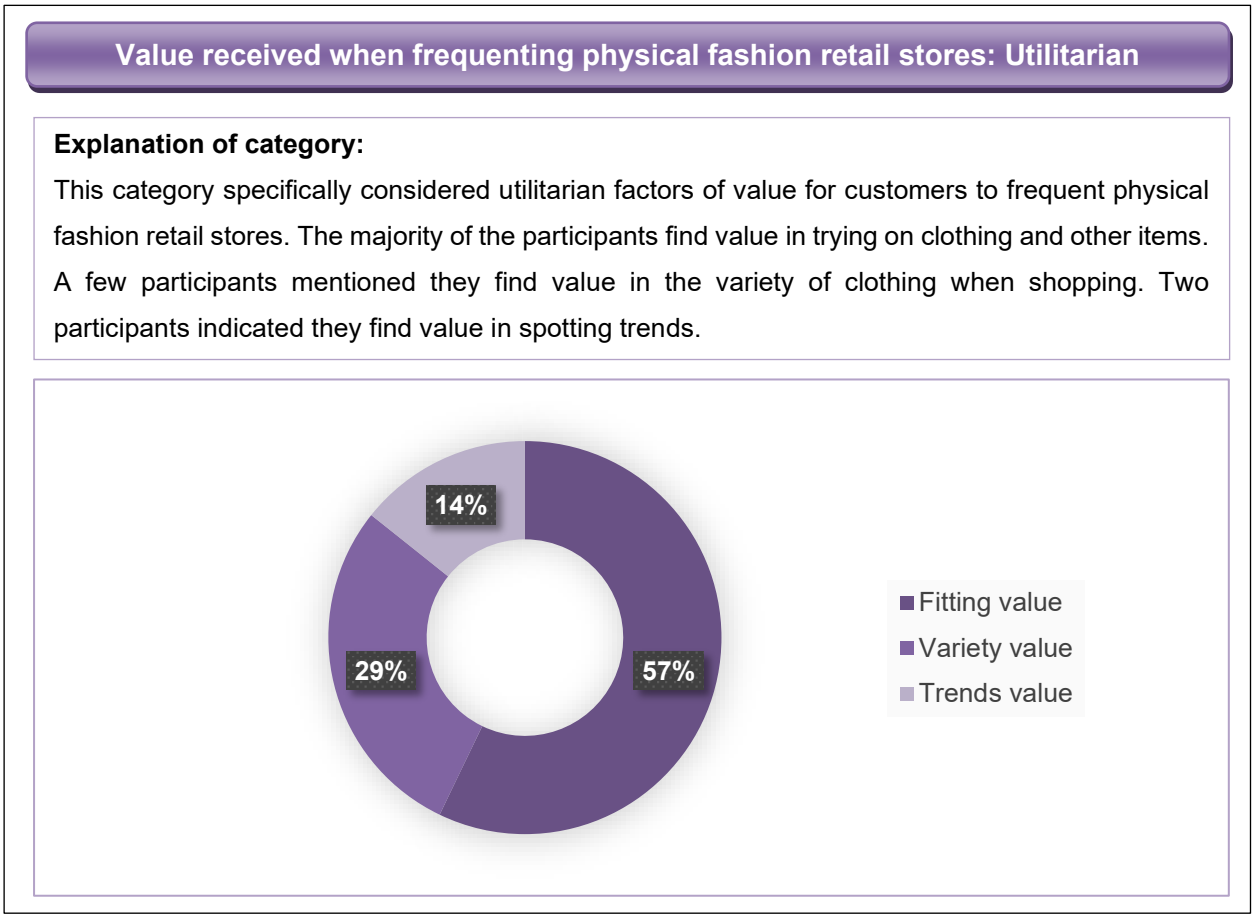


Figure 4-13: Category 3(A) research results – Theme 3 (continued)

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"You can see the size of everything better, like a shoe. Shoes are much easier to shop for at a physical store because you would like to fit them because some shoes won't fit your feet. So that's good to shop, just to check the sizing and how it would fit your body."

Participant 4

"Because shopping online, you see what fits another person's figure. You don't know what it's gonna look like on you. And when you try it on, you can immediately see, Wow, it looks good on the model but on me it looks terrible. You know, so I think especially if you consider your body shapes, it's much better to try something on immediately."

Participant 8

"The only thing that really attracts me of buying in-store is definitely feeling the product, feeling the quality of the product because sometimes online is very conceiving [deceiving?], so you can buy something, and the material is not that great. So, then you have to return it, but in-store you can feel it, experience it, and know immediately if you like it or not."

Participant 9

"I think it makes it easier for me to choose because I can be more sure of my purchase because I can see it, I can touch it, I can try it on; so, the more sure, where if I buy online, I lots of time have to send it back or it's not what I thought it was. So, there is definitely more surety in it for me."

Participant 10

"…to look at everything and see all the variety they have, as opposed to an online store where you don't see everything."

Participant 4

"I've also been able to walk maybe to another store and just check the prices and see what kind of boots have they've got that I saw that I liked."

Participant 7

"it's nice to see what other people wear nowadays."

Participant 3

"…the shop normally, it's like a mannequin, I think who likes let us say is wearing the clothes and then you can sort of see but obviously you- everybody is built differently or has a different body type, so the way it looks on you is very- so I think it really helps to be able to try it on, whereas with online shopping I think, I know they do have models normally that are wearing the clothes on online platforms, but once again, that is like in perfect lighting."

Participant 1

4.2.4.2 Category 3(B): Financial

Category 3(B) considers the financial factors of value for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

The results of this study indicate that a few of the participants find value in saving costs on delivery when shopping at a physical fashion retail store. Two of the participants mentioned that they find value in partaking in different promotions and sales when shopping at a physical fashion retail store. One participant indicated that they find value in receiving loyalty points or rewards when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.

Figure 4-14: Category 3(B) research results – Theme 3

Value received when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Financial

Explanation of category:
This category specifically considered financial factors of value for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores. A few participants found value in saving costs on delivery. Two participants found value in promotions and sales while shopping. One participant found value in loyalty points or rewards at a physical fashion retail store.

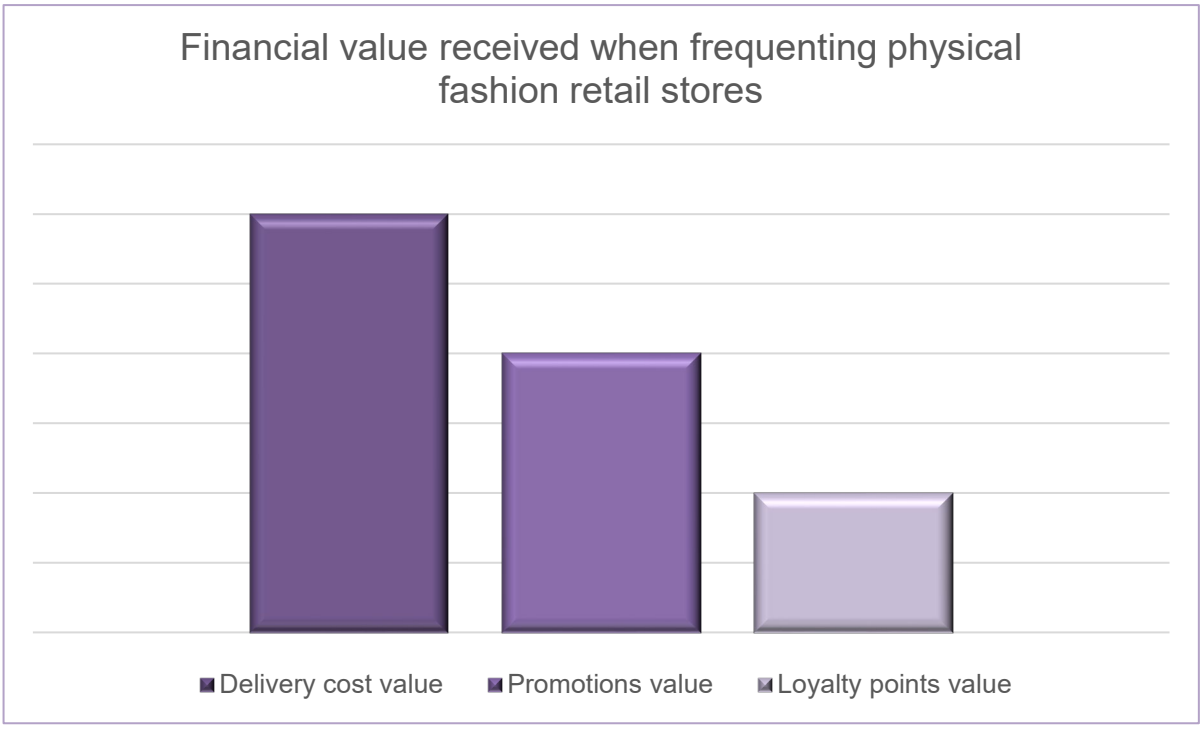


Figure 4-14: Category 3(B) research results – Theme 3 (continued)

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"you've got a postage most of the time, so you definitely have a saving on the postage cost, which makes a difference"

Participant 10

"Well see, it's very difficult for me to pay shipping charges for something that I could go buy from the shop"

Participant 8

"In stores they do have a lot of specials – if you buy two or three products, then you get a discount, that sort of thing. Obviously, if you go in-store- because a lot of time in-store, they offer three for two or if you buy two items you get twenty percent discount, which is not necessarily online available."

Participant 9

"If I want to go like really go for bargain shopping or seeing like what sales on specials and all the things, they don't always list all the items on like online stores. In a sense of like not being like- like looking for bargains like going into a store like you usually find the cheapest deals."

Participant 2

"So the more you come in and like buy, the better your perks are. So, you, like they motivate you to come back and like buy things and they give you discount or whatever."

Participant 2

4.2.4.3 Category 3(C): Time

Category 3(C) considers the time of value for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

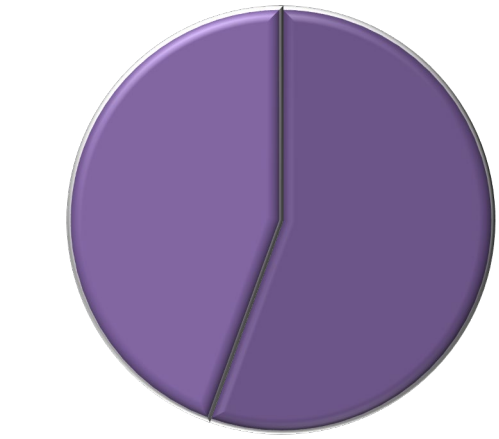
The findings of this study suggest that a subset of participants derived tangible benefits from the time-saving aspect associated with shopping at brick-and-mortar fashion retail stores, as opposed to engaging in online shopping. Specifically, some participants expressed appreciation for the expedited delivery process experienced in physical stores, which minimised the waiting time for item receipt. Additionally, another notable observation was that certain participants perceived value in the time efficiency associated with returning or exchanging products at a physical fashion retail store, contrasting with the potentially more cumbersome processes involved in online returns or exchanges.

Figure 4-15: Category 3(C) research results – Theme 3

Value received when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Time

Explanation of category:

The study's key findings reveal that a segment of participants favours the time-saving advantages inherent in shopping at physical fashion retail stores over online alternatives. Specifically, these individuals appreciate the expedited delivery processes offered by brick-and-mortar stores, reducing waiting times for item receipt. Furthermore, there is a notable preference for the efficiency associated with returning or exchanging products at physical stores, as compared to the potentially more cumbersome procedures involved in online transactions.



Supporting verbatim quotes:

"…being able to look at it immediately and maybe even wear it the same day or the next…"

Participant 7

"…I don't like waiting for something that I need."

Participant 8

"I think that quite like definitely a benefit for me, and I also think even though you may have tried it on, if you decide to return something, it is also more of a process, I think if it is online because now you have to like log back in, it has to be picked up and delivered again, where there [at a physical store] you could just go and immediately pick something new. So, I think this, for me, it is a lot less of a risk sort of when I go to a physical shop and purchase something."

Participant 1

4.2.4.4 Category 3(D): Experiential

Category 3(D) considers the experiential factors of value for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

The study's findings underscore a predominant sentiment among participants, revealing that a significant majority derives substantial value from the immersive and tangible experiences associated with frequenting physical fashion retail stores. Participants consistently characterized these visits as more than mere shopping excursions; rather, they described them as enjoyable outings, providing a pleasurable escape from their routine lives. The physical retail environment was perceived as a multisensory stimulation, enhancing the overall experience beyond the transactional aspect. This collective perception emphasises the importance of the in-store experience as a source of entertainment and sensory engagement for consumers, showcasing the store not just as a commercial space but as a destination for leisure and enjoyment.

Figure 4-16: Category 3(D) research results – Theme 3

Value received when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Experiential

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"Like the outing that you get to do something, you can plan it into your day, and it's pretty fun to do that, walk around and look at everything."

Participant 4

"I prefer the physical old-fashioned shop experience…I think sometimes it's a great escape."

Participant 5

"I think it's safe to say that your senses, it's- shopping to me is an escape. You know, I sometimes just go to the shop quickly because I just want to get away from my busy day or over a weekend. It's a nice thing to do."

Participant 6

"The smell, the seeing, the hearing, feeling, touching, yes."

Participant 7

"Feeling a vibe, feeling the atmosphere, talking to different people, and it's amazing what you'll talk about if you're in a shop and looking at the same clothing items."

Participant 8

4.2.4.5 Category 3(E): Social

Category 3(E) considers the social factors of value for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

The study's results reveal a prevailing sentiment among the participants, highlighting that a substantial majority places significant value on the social aspect of their visits to physical fashion retail stores. Participants consistently expressed a genuine desire for human interaction, whether it be engaging with store staff or interacting with fellow shoppers. The findings underscore the notion that beyond the utilitarian act of shopping, these physical retail spaces serve as social hubs where individuals seek meaningful connections and interpersonal engagement. The significance placed on these interactions suggests that, for a considerable number of customers, the allure of a physical fashion retail store extends beyond the products on display, emphasising the role of social connections and shared experiences in shaping their retail preferences.

Figure 4-17: Category 3(E) research results – Theme 3

Value received when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Social

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"…I think like the human interaction really is important when you go into a store, because I mean, you're so use to like buying everything online."

Participant 2

"I think we are actually created to be interactive beings. So, I think it is nice to see other people and to feel the energy of other people around you, it's nice to see what other people wear…"

Participant 3

"it's fun. It's like an outing you get to- It's like a motivation to get up, get ready, and do something, go somewhere, as opposed to just lying in bed and maybe shopping online instead. And you can also, like you said, make an event with your friends and have them all come with, and it's a whole like kuier, it's a whole get-together.

Participant 4

"I like the human interaction."

Participant 8

4.2.4.6 Category 3(F): Service

Category 3(F) considers the social factors of value for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

The results of this study indicate that a significant majority of participants place considerable value on receiving good customer service and assistance when visiting a physical fashion retail store. Participants consistently emphasised the importance of personalised support, highlighting that the quality of their shopping experience is greatly enhanced when they receive attentive and knowledgeable assistance from store staff. This underscores the pivotal role that customer service plays in shaping consumer satisfaction and loyalty within the context of brick-and-mortar fashion retail. The findings suggest that beyond the products on display, the level of service and assistance provided by staff significantly contributes to the overall value participants derive from their physical shopping experiences, creating a positive and supportive environment that fosters a sense of trust and satisfaction among consumers.

Figure 4-18: Category 3(F) research results – Theme 3

Value received when frequenting physical fashion retail stores: Service

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"I think sometimes, especially like in the shops, you know, where there is good customer service, they definitely like also hype you up a bit and say oh, like this is nice, and then you just feel even better about your purchase or like if it's just a delivery, I mean, they don't even see what you buying so I think it is that additional sort of confidence boost that also just sort of makes likely to come back again because you remember like the friendliness of the people and the vibe."

Participant 1

"That's something I also like about physical shopping, is you can ask the people that work there questions about the clothes, what they think, like suggestions. I don't know. It's a much more pleasant experience."

Participant 4

"The fact that you can ask for assistance, and get an opinion on maybe the detail around your neck or the length or the waist, that is very beneficial."

Participant 5

"I like it when the shop attendants acknowledge me when I walk in. They must see that I'm there."

Participant 8

4.2.5 Theme 4: Attractive factors of physical fashion retail stores

This section provides a detailed discussion pertaining to the attractive factors of physical fashion retail stores.

4.2.5.1 Category 4(A): Products

Category 4(A) considers the products as an attractive feature for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

The results of this study indicate that a large majority of the participants found the variety of stock, colours and sizes as an attractive factor when frequenting a physical fashion retail store. The majority of the participants also mentioned that they found the displays in a store attractive when shopping. One of the participants indicated that they find the opportunity to spot the latest fashion and trends as an attractive factor when frequenting physical fashion retail stores.

Figure 4-19: Category 4(A) research results – Theme 4

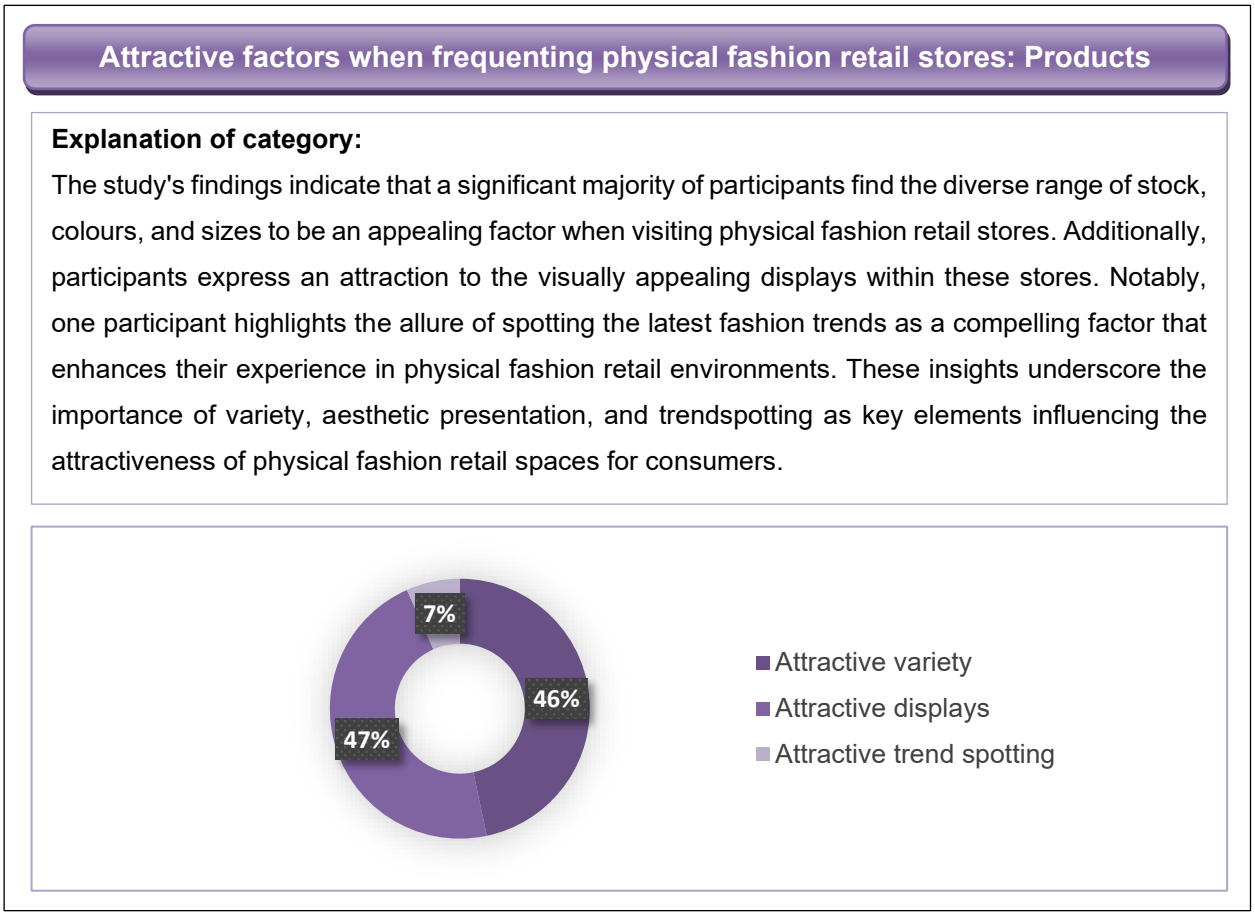


Figure 4-19: Category 4(A) research results – Theme 4 (continued)

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"The one thing is I'm drawn to the fact that they've got a variety and that I can see a variety and that I can touch the fabric. But also, that there are sizes."

Participant 6

"I definitely buy all items when I go into the physical store, because I see more stuff that catch my eye."

Participant 10

"I mean definitely the way that the clothes are set out, like if there's hangers by the door with like the newest additions, that's more likely to draw me in 'cause then I see that and then I wanna like go into the store and look, you know, further."

Participant 1

"One specific shop that I love going to actually sorts their colours, their clothes in different colours."

Participant 8

"Sometimes it's also interesting to see other people what they wear, and how they wear it."

Participant 3

4.2.5.2 Category 4(B): Assistance

Category 4(B) considers the assistance received as an attractive feature for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

This study reveals that most participants consider customer service a pivotal factor in their decision to frequent physical fashion retail stores, emphasising the impact of personalised and attentive interactions from store personnel. Participants valued assistance in navigating the store, fashion advice, and prompt query resolution. Notably, positive customer service experiences correlated with increased loyalty and repeat visits, highlighting the critical role of human interaction in fostering customer engagement.

Figure 4-20: Category 4(B) research results – Theme 4

Attractive factors of physical fashion retail stores: Products

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"I also think definitely the people that work there, I mean, they don't have to be standing by the door but if you can just see and then they look very like positive and happy and they have a good vibe – you know, they don't like miserable or anything like that, they look inviting into the stoor and like they are like willing to help, and that's definitely also another factor that draws me."

Participant 1

"And friendly staff or- attract me, you know, that they look that they want you in the shop and they would like to sell something to you."

Participant 8

4.2.5.3 Category 4(C): Music

Category 4(C) considers the music that is playing at the fashion retail store at the time as an attractive feature for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

The findings of this study illuminate the role of music as a compelling element influencing the shopping experience in physical fashion retail stores, as identified by two participants. The incorporation of background music was noted as an attractive factor, contributing significantly to the ambiance and overall appeal of the retail environment. Participants expressed that the choice of music played a crucial role in shaping their mood and enhancing the overall shopping atmosphere. The study suggests that retailers should consider the careful selection of music genres and playlists to align with the brand image and target demographic, thereby creating a more immersive and enjoyable shopping experience. Furthermore, the positive impact of music on participants' perceptions highlights its potential as a strategic tool for enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction within the competitive landscape of the fashion retail industry.

Figure 4-21: Category 4(A) research results – Theme 4

Attractive factors of physical fashion retail stores: Music

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"if there is music playing, that will definitely draw me to the store because I think especially like in a mall where there is lots of stores next to each other and you're definitely more likely to go to the one where there is like music playing."

Participant 1

"You just mentioned music just now – that would definitely give a nice atmosphere."

Participant 8

4.2.5.4 Category 4(D): Touching

Category 4(D) considers touching the products by means of feeling the material as an attractive feature for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

This study underscores the significance of the tangible, hands-on experience in physical fashion retail stores, with two participants highlighting the allure of being able to touch and feel actual clothing items. The physical interaction with products emerged as a key factor influencing their shopping preferences, as it allowed for a sensory exploration of textures, fabrics, and quality. Participants expressed that this tactile engagement provided a more immersive and reliable assessment of the merchandise compared to online shopping. This finding emphasises the irreplaceable role of the physical store in offering customers a sensory-rich environment, enhancing their ability to make informed and satisfying purchase decisions. It suggests that retailers should not only focus on visual aesthetics but also prioritise the tactility of the shopping experience to create a more compelling and rewarding interaction with their products. This aspect becomes pivotal in differentiating physical stores from their online counterparts, adding value to the overall appeal of brick-and-mortar fashion retail establishments.

Figure 4-22: Category 4(A) research results – Theme 4

Attractive factors of physical fashion retail stores: Touching

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"You see colours and patterns and I love nice material so you know you can touch it, so I think it's a sensory experience."

Participant 3

"But I think being able to touch, to smell; clothing does smell different. To touch to see if this is really [inaudible] that they advertising it as or- and is this handbag really leather or [inaudible] fake leather, and I think that's all about smell and touch and looking; seeing."

Participant 7

4.2.6 Theme 5: Unattractive factors of physical fashion retail stores

This section provides a detailed discussion pertaining to the unattractive factors of physical fashion retail stores.

4.2.6.1 Category 5(A): Layout

Category 5(A) considers the layout of a physical fashion retail store an unattractive feature for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

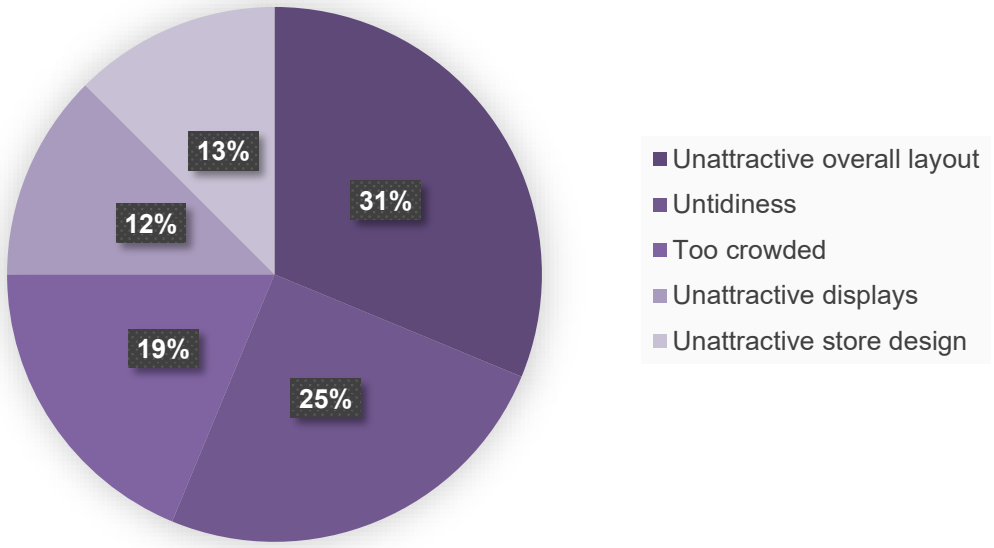
The study findings reveal a prevailing sentiment among the majority of participants who considered the store layout as unattractive when visiting physical fashion retail stores. Several participants pointed out the issue of store neatness, citing concerns about clutter and messiness, as contributing to the unattractive aspects of their shopping experience. Additionally, a subset of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the crowdedness of the store during their visits, marking it as another detracting factor. Notably, two participants specifically identified the presentation of products during their shopping as unattractive, while another two participants highlighted displeasure with the overall store design of a specific retail outlet. These diverse insights underscore the multifaceted nature of factors influencing the perceived attractiveness of physical fashion retail stores, providing valuable insights for retailers seeking to enhance their customers' shopping experience.

Figure 4-23: Category 5(A) research results – Theme 5

Unattractive factors of physical fashion retail stores: Layout

Explanation of category:

The study indicates that the majority of participants found the layout of physical fashion retail stores unattractive. Concerns included issues of neatness (clutter and messiness), crowdedness, displeasure with product presentation, and specific criticisms of store design. These diverse perspectives highlight various factors influencing the perceived attractiveness of physical stores, offering valuable insights for retailers aiming to improve the overall shopping experience.



Supporting verbatim quotes:

"It's not as well set out, it is not well planned out…if I see clutter in a store like it will literally give me headache, so I probably won't go in there."

Participant 2

"…can be very like full and it creates a feeling of stuffiness…can be almost a bit old-fashioned in their layout."

Participant 7

"The lighting is not good. So, that is a bigger factor than the temperature, maybe. But yeah, we all like this nice lighting and when it's nice and bright and fresh feel. So, I think a store needs to speak to all your senses."

Participant 1

4.2.6.2 Category 5(B): Variety

Category 5(B) considers the variety of a physical fashion retail store an unattractive feature for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

This study reveals a noteworthy sentiment expressed by two participants, emphasizing their dissatisfaction with the assortment and variety of product types and sizes available at physical fashion retail stores. The participants highlighted a general dislike for the options presented, suggesting that the store's inventory did not adequately cater to their preferences and needs. This finding sheds light on the crucial role that product diversity plays in shaping the overall appeal of physical fashion retail establishments. The participants' perspectives underscore the importance for retailers to carefully curate and expand their product offerings, considering different styles, sizes, and trends to accommodate a diverse customer base. This aspect becomes particularly pertinent in enhancing customer satisfaction, fostering a positive shopping experience, and ultimately influencing the attractiveness of the physical store in the competitive landscape of the fashion retail industry.

Figure 4-24: Category 5 (B) research results – Theme 4

Unattractive factors of physical fashion retail stores: Variety

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"If they don't have a wide variety of like sizes."

Participant 1

"They don't have my size. So, that I don't find attractive – walking past and seeing these amazing flair jeans and they don't have your size is very depressing."

Participant 7

4.2.6.3 Category 5(C): Staff

Category 5(C) considers the staff in terms of the service offered of a physical fashion retail store an unattractive feature for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

The study brings to light a significant finding regarding participants' dissatisfaction with customer service at physical fashion retail stores. A substantial majority of participants expressed a general aversion towards the customer service they encountered during their shopping experiences. This sentiment stemmed from various factors, including perceived rudeness, a lack of attentiveness,

and inadequate product knowledge demonstrated by the staff. The negative impact of these customer service shortcomings extended beyond individual interactions, influencing participants' overall perceptions of the store and, in some instances, dissuading them from revisiting.

Figure 4-25: Category 5 (C) research results – Theme 4

Unattractive factors of physical fashion retail stores: Staff

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"I've been at places and I've called them, and they say they have stock, but then when I come there, there isn't. So the people that work there just don't go look or something."

Participant 4

"And then you have to walk around to find someone to come and help you, for example, with the shoes, that kind of thing. That is quite important, I think, that you do have someone there who can assist someone immediately."

Participant 5

"If people are rude in there, I wouldn't go back."

Participant 8

"Definitely the staff – I come from a background where when a client walk into the store, you immediately had to go to the client and ask if you can help them at any way possible; that definitely doesn't happen anymore. People are not friendly. Overall, unless you go to a private boutique hotel, but the overall retail store – you can name any of them – they don't really offer any assistance. So, obviously, when you do have friendly staff, it just put a positive spin onto the whole shopping experience."

Participant 9

"Definitely the staff training is something that's very important and sometimes staff is not trained well or doesn't have a good working relationship with customers, and that is off-putting. So, that would be something that they need to look at."

Participant 10

"…members of staff need to know that they are in the service industry, and they are there to provide a service to clients and clients are important and clients should be valued…teach them a couple interpersonal skills because you also don't want someone that is too pushy…"

Participant 3

4.2.6.4 Category 5(D): Cleanliness

Category 5(D) considers the cleanliness of a physical fashion retail store an unattractive feature for customers to frequent physical fashion retail stores.

The findings of this study bring attention to a notable aspect of participants' experiences within physical fashion retail stores, as a subset expressed dissatisfaction with the overall cleanliness and hygiene standards. Specifically, a few participants conveyed a general dislike for the prevailing lack of cleanliness in these establishments. This sentiment reflects a broader concern about the perceived inadequacy in maintaining a hygienic and orderly shopping environment.

Figure 4-26: Category 5 (D) research results – Theme 4

Unattractive factors of physical fashion retail stores: Cleanliness

Supporting verbatim quotes:

"the cleanliness of the store – like I don't want to like try on things or whatever if it's like a very dirty room or- ja, so I think that is a big thing as well."

Participant 1

"And I have got a thing about not being- something not being clean…if I get the feeling that something is not clean, that puts me off totally."

Participant 7

"If it's dirty."

Participant 8

4.3 Summary of the empirical research results

Table 4-3 summarises the categories and themes identified in the empirical research results. It also notes the main findings pertaining to each identified theme.

Table 4-3: Summary of empirical research results

Theme 1: Motivation for customers to frequent physical retail spaces			
Categories	1(A) Browsing	1(B) Fitting	1(C) Timeless
	1(D) Therapeutic	1(E) Socialising	1(F) Expectation
Main finding 4.1	The in-depth interviews reveal a notable trend among participants, indicating a substantial appreciation for the tactile and sensory aspects of shopping in physical fashion retail stores compared to online alternatives. Participants derive value from the hands-on experience, expressing satisfaction in inspecting and feeling products, trying on clothing before making purchases, and engaging socially with friends, employees, or fellow shoppers during the process. This tangible approach allows participants to ensure that their specific buying expectations are not only met but often exceeded. Moreover, for some participants, shopping at a physical fashion retail store serves as a form of escape, described as a therapeutic activity. Despite the convenience of online shopping and access to trends and fashion information through eCommerce platforms, the majority of participants express a clear preference for the in-person experience provided by physical fashion retail stores. The immediacy of using purchased items and the ease of in-person exchanges or returns further contribute to their preference for brick-and-mortar shopping over online transactions.		
Theme 2: Experience when frequenting physical fashion retail stores			
Categories	2(A) Atmospherics	2(B) Fitting rooms	2(C) Store design
	2(D) Displays	2(E) Customer Service	2(F) Hygiene
Main finding 4.2	The responses highlight the profound impact of atmospheric elements on participants' experiences within physical fashion retail stores. Factors such as music, lighting, temperature, scent, store layout, fitting room conditions, customer service, and cleanliness collectively contribute significantly to how shoppers perceive and engage with these environments. Well-managed in-store lighting, organised layouts, and exemplary customer service enhance participants' overall experiences. Conversely, issues such as fitting room challenges, overcrowding, and insufficient hygiene lead to dissatisfaction and unhappiness among participants during their shopping journeys. These findings underscore the intricate interplay of these variables in shaping the overall impressions and enjoyment of the shopping experience.		

Table 4-3: Summary of empirical research results (continued)

Theme 3: Value received when frequenting physical fashion retail stores			
Categories	3(A) Utilitarian	3(B) Financial	3(C) Time
	3(D) Experiential	3(E) Social	3(F) Service
Main finding 4.3	The in-depth interviews revealed that participants derive value from various aspects of shopping at physical fashion retail establishments. A majority of participants find pleasure in the hands-on experience of trying on clothing and accessories to ensure a proper fit and quality. Their perceived value is also influenced by the diverse range of apparel, trend-spotting opportunities, promotions, sales, and loyalty awards. Some participants appreciate the cost-saving aspect, which eliminates delivery fees similar to online shopping, along with the convenience of quick access to desired products. Moreover, many participants assign a high value to the entire shopping experience, considering it a pleasurable excursion that provides sensory stimulation and an escape from their regular lives. The results also indicate that social engagement with employees and fellow consumers is highly valued, highlighting a need for human connection when shopping at a physical fashion retail store. Customer service and assistance from staff further enhance the perceived value for most participants. The participants' enthusiasm for the tactile and sensory aspects of shopping, along with the social and experiential dimensions of in-store interactions, collectively contribute to the significance they place on making purchases at physical fashion retail outlets.		
Theme 4: Attractive factors of physical fashion retail stores			
Categories	4(A) Products	4(B) Assistance	4(C) Music
	4(D) Touching		
Main finding 4.4	The key inference drawn from these findings is that participants are enticed by various appealing qualities when shopping at physical fashion retail establishments. A majority values the diverse array of items available, suggesting a preference for a broad merchandise selection. Additionally, participants find the visual displays in stores to be enticing, indicating that a well-presented and aesthetically pleasing shopping environment enhances their overall experience. Some participants are attracted to the opportunity to spot trends, reflecting a desire to stay abreast of the latest fashion advancements. A subgroup emphasises the appeal of customer service, underscoring the significance of attentive and helpful staff in their purchasing process. Background music is noted by some participants as an attractive factor, highlighting the role of the auditory atmosphere in creating an appealing physical fashion retail environment. Another subset mentions the opportunity to touch and feel products as an attractive aspect, underscoring the importance of sensory engagement in the purchasing experience.		

Table 4-3: Summary of empirical research results (continued)

Theme 5: Unattractive factors of physical fashion retail stores			
Categories	5(A) Layout	5(B) Variety	5(C) Staff
	5(D) Cleanliness		
Main finding 4.5	Participants highlighted several factors they considered unattractive or undesirable when shopping at a physical fashion retail store. The majority expressed dissatisfaction with the store layout, indicating that the arrangement of products and space did not appeal to them. Some participants identified lack of neatness as another unattractive characteristic, suggesting that disorder negatively impacts their shopping experience. Crowding within the store was perceived as unattractive by some, possibly indicating that an excessive number of consumers detracts from their enjoyment. Additionally, certain aspects of the store, such as design and product display, were deemed unattractive by some participants, potentially influencing their overall experience. A subset of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the variety and diversity of items on display, implying that the selection does not meet their needs. Similarly, some participants disliked the overall cleanliness, hygiene standards, and customer service at physical fashion retail locations, indicating that these variables have a negative influence on their shopping experiences.		

4.4 CONCLUSION

The empirical data collected for this investigation is presented in this chapter. The main questions raised in the in-depth interviews are briefly summarised at the beginning of the chapter. This chapter describes the nature and intent of these questions, how they fit with the objectives of secondary research, how they relate to the pertinent literature, and what thematic and category aspects they cover. The next chapter introduces the categories and thematic framework, which provides the basis for categorising and reporting the empirical findings.

Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings related to each selected topic. The literature analysis provided in Chapter 2 and the empirical findings discussed here are integrated in Chapter 5 to clarify how each of these components works together to achieve the goals of the study. The discussion is then directed toward addressing the major research aim by means of concluding remarks and recommendations for each of the secondary research goals.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the study's research objectives as identified in Chapter 1. It commences with a concise overview of the study's scope, followed by conclusions and recommendations for each of the study's objectives. The chapter concludes by considering the study's limitations and proposing suggestions for future research.

5.2 OVERVIEW

This section provides a concise overview of this study's objectives, the themes addressed in the literature study (Chapters 2) and the research methods (Chapter 3) to provide context for the results and suggestions of each objective presented in section 1.5.2.

The primary research objective of this study was to explore and interpret, through a phenomenological approach, how in-store experience contributes to store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry. To address the primary objective, a number of secondary objectives were formulated.

Many studies have focused on individual factors such as pricing, variety, and convenience, creating a focus area in understanding the whole customer experience. This study fills that need in understanding the entire customer experience by studying customer responses to a variety of experiential factors. Amid the retail apocalypse, brick-and-mortar retailers – particularly fashion retailers – are confronted with fierce competition from online shopping platforms. It is therefore critical to provide an exceptional in-store experience to remain competitive. The in-store experience is enhanced by sensory effects such as physical qualities and design. Prior studies increase comprehension, but further empirical research is required to understand how these factors interact. Pine and Gilmore's (2011) 4E model suggests educational, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetic experiences that brick-and-mortar retailers might provide to enhance their appeal for in store-experiences to their customers.

To this end, the highlighted problem areas, as well as their practical and theoretical infancy, provided the incentive for further investigation to address the need for more extensive empirical research on customers' subjective in-store experiences. The study's findings aim to provide important insight into customers' motivations for preferring physical fashion retail outlets over e-commerce platforms. Furthermore, the study aims to provide insight into the entire customer

journey within a physical retail setting, investigate the value derived from in-person shopping experiences, and discover the components that improve in-store attractiveness.

A literature review was conducted on the significant ideas of customers' in-store experience from a subjective aspect, which provided the theoretical foundation of this study. The literature review chapter (Chapter 2) set out to provide the required background to assist in gaining a holistic understanding of in-store experience and store attractiveness in a South African fashion retail setting. This background, with references to Chapter 2, provides valuable contributions to understanding the theoretical and empirical consequences of this study.

The literature review provided a thorough explanation of the critical significance of the retail experience in enhancing our understanding of the overarching construct of consumer behaviour, specifically in the context of the South African retail environment. As stated in the literature, the aspects of the retail experience, including the physical store environment, customer service, product assortment, and online presence, combined comprise a multidimensional framework. Notably, the physical store atmosphere has a significant impact on the entire retail experience. Scholarly investigations into the contributing factors to customer experiences, the complex mechanisms regulating customer decision-making, and underlying motivating factors have highlighted the subjective aspect of customer behaviour in the South African fashion retail environment.

Furthermore, this chapter stressed the all-encompassing aspect of customer experience, covering interactions that occur before, during, and after a customer's involvement with a physical fashion retail store. This literature review has provided essential insights into the importance of retail customer experience in the fashion retail business. The extensive literature analysis revealed a shift away from the traditional understanding of customer experience as a means of increasing profits. Contemporary academic research and practical examples from the business world have challenged this view, revealing that cultivating a strong customer experience provides firms with several benefits, and thus with a powerful competitive advantage. The investigation of the drivers of customer experience, the complex dynamics behind customer decision-making, and the motivational underpinning to the matter emphasise the subjective nature of customer behaviour in a physical fashion retail store. This emphasised the importance for businesses to thoroughly understand their customer base and personalise experience products to their specific needs. The key aspects pertaining to each literature chapter are presented in Table 5-1.

Table 5-1: Key aspects of the literature chapter

Key aspects	Reference(s)
A comprehensive review was undertaken into retailing practices and concepts that are related to the fundamental disciplines of retailing specifically related to the physical retail stores in the South African fashion industry.	Section 2.2 Figure 2-2, Figure 2-3, Figure 2-4, Figure 2-5, Figure 2-6
Customers' motives for shopping were discussed in terms of personal and social motives, followed by different types of customers to devise an unambiguous motive for shopping in this study.	Section 2.3 Table 2-1, Table 2-2
The factors influencing in-store customer behaviour were reviewed, encompassing the customer decision-making process	Section 2.4 Figure 2-7
The particularities of customer experience were discussed.	Section 2.5
A comprehensive review was undertaken into Pine and Gilmore's (1998) Experience Economy, including educational, aesthetic, escapist and entertainment experiences.	Section 2.6 Figure 2-8
Perceived experiential value was reviewed, specifically relating to the experiential value in a retail setting.	Section 2.7
Customer satisfaction was discussed.	Section 2.8

The literature review laid the groundwork for the process described in Chapter 3, in which the structured methodological approach provided a detailed explanation of the way in which the researcher carried out this study to determine or investigate how store experience contributes to South African clothing retail stores' attractiveness. This study embraced interpretivism as its research philosophy due to the qualitative nature of this study. Furthermore, the technique of theory development used in this work was inductive. Due to the nature of this study, an exploratory research design was used. Secondary data was used to construct a comprehensive theoretical exploration of how in-store experience contributes to store attractiveness. Primary data was used in addition to secondary data when presenting and discussing empirical findings.

Based on the nature of retailing in the South African fashion industry, primary data was collected using a qualitative research approach by means of in-depth interviews. Participants were encouraged to speak on their experience in physical fashion retail stores in South Africa to maximise the investigation's effectiveness. As detailed in section 3.4.5.3.2, a non-probability purposive sampling method was used to select participants for the in-depth interviews. The Morse and Field technique was used to analyse the data. The ATLAS.ti 23 qualitative data analysis software package was used to aid analysis, and the results are discussed in Chapter 4. The

categories and themes derived from participant responses provided valuable insights into the considerations required for achieving the complementarity dimension on how in-store experience contributes to store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry.

In pursuit of addressing the predetermined objectives for this study, the present chapter presents explanations of known results based on the numerous concepts offered in the prior chapters. The following section contains conclusions and suggestions for each objective of the study.

5.3 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This section answers the research objectives developed for the purpose of this study. The secondary objectives are addressed first to answer the study's primary objective. Table 5-2 indicates how the study's research objectives correlate with the literature review and empirical investigation. Each objective is revisited and summarised below.

Table 5-2: Summary of the linkages between the research objectives, literature review, and empirical study

Research Objectives	Literature Review	Empirical study
Primary research objective		
This research was conducted to explore and interpret through phenomenology how in-store experience contributes to store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry.	Chapters 1 & 2	In-depth interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4
Secondary objectives		
1. Provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely shopping motivation, perceived value, customer experience, customer satisfaction and store attractiveness.	Chapters 1 & 2	In-depth interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4
2. Investigate the factors that motivate participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store.	Chapter 2	In-depth interview question 1
3. Explore and describe the experience of participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.	Chapters 1 & 2	In-depth interview question 2
4. Explore and describe the value derived by participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.	Chapter 2	In-depth interview question 3
5. Explore and describe the factors that contribute to the attractiveness of a physical fashion retail store.	Chapter 2	In-depth interview question 4

The empirical study findings reported in Chapter 4, and the literature evaluation presented in Chapter 2 were used to derive conclusions and suggestions for each secondary purpose. The following section includes conclusions and suggestions for each of the study's research objectives.

5.3.1 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.3.1.1 Secondary objective 1

Secondary objective 1 aimed to provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely shopping motivation, perceived value, customer experience, customer satisfaction and store attractiveness.

Table 5-3: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 1

Literature findings: Secondary objective 1
In pursuit of this objective, Chapter 2 of the dissertation thoroughly analysed the relevant literature, concentrating on the core principles of retail correlated to in-store experience and store attractiveness in the South African fashion industry. This chapter provided the theoretical foundation for the later investigational research described in Chapter 3.
The literature reviewed in this study emphasises retailing as a vital component in the business environment, focusing on its core function as the process of selling products and services to customers for personal or family use (Berman and Evans, 2018:5; Duignan, 2022). The need for understanding and effectively satisfying customer wants and needs, hence encouraging customer satisfaction and loyalty, is central to the proposed retailing concept (Haitham *et al*., 2022:452). Retailing as a concept emphasises the aspect of modern retailing via the overarching conceptualisation such as customer focus, coordinated effort, value-driven practices, and goal orientation (Berman *et al*., 2018:34). The physical retail store setting, customer service provided, product selection, and online presence are all aspects of the retail experience that contribute to the entire shopping experience (Berman *et al*., 2018:35). In South Africa, where retail is a significant component of the economy, the retail industry effectively faces a variety of challenges and possibilities. The development of online shopping and continuing shifting customer behaviours, aided by the COVID-19 pandemic, have changed the retail sector in South Africa (PWC, 2023; Sheth, 2020). Price sensitivity and an interest in overseas fashion labels that offer quality and value challenge South Africa's retail environment (De Klerk *et al*., 2019:12; Struwig, 2018:164). The development of e-commerce and retail market saturation have furthermore led to the phenomenon known as the "retail apocalypse," which has resulted in worldwide store closures and abandonment of shopping centres (Chatterjee *et al*., 2021:618; Helm *et al*., 2020:20). Traditional retail stores need to adjust to shifts in customer behaviour as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Nanda *et al*., 2021:112; Yasaman & Sina, 2022:1).

Table 5-3: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 1 (continued)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 1
The development of e-commerce and retail market saturation have furthermore led to the phenomenon known as the "retail apocalypse," which has resulted in worldwide store closures and abandonment of shopping centres (Chatterjee *et al*., 2021:618; Helm *et al*., 2020:20). Traditional retail stores need to adjust to shifts in customer behaviour as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Nanda *et al*., 2021:112; Yasaman & Sina, 2022:1). The retail apocalypse is seen to have far-reaching implications, affecting not only the retail industry but also the entire economy (Hänninen *et al*., 2021:1). Retailers are faced with the problem of navigating changing customer behaviours, technological disruption, and greater competition from e-commerce enterprises (Salem & Nor, 2020:15). Profitability and competitiveness are elusive aims for many retail stores in this volatile and demanding economic climate (Hopkins, 2023; Krämer & Kalka, 2017:1). The deterioration of South African metropolitan regions highlights the additional complicated issues confronting the retail industry (News24, 2020). As e-commerce continues to transform the retail environment, merchants will need to be adaptable and innovative to flourish in an ever-changing market (Masebe *et al*., 2020:3).
Shopping motivations, encompassing both internal and external factors (Horváth & Adıgüzel, 2018:301), drive customers toward utilitarian needs and hedonic wants (Lee & Wu, 2017:2454). Schiffman and Wisenblit (2019:78) define motivation as the innate need to prompt specific actions to meet particular requirements. Determinants like perception, learning, attitude, lifestyle, and personality influence customer purchase motivation (Roberts-Lombard & Parumasur, 2017:6). Six key shopping motives include seeking adventure, socialising, seeking gratification, searching for ideas, buying for others, and searching for value (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015:71). Shopping is integral to contemporary societies, driven by individual needs and societal variables (Solomon, 2018:326). Recognising customer types assists retailers in tailored marketing, enhancing their ability to meet diverse customer needs in a dynamic marketplace (Davis, 2023).
Retailers can increase profitability by focusing on specialised markets with individualised marketing tactics based on a grasp of the customer decision-making process (Roberts-Lombard & Parumasur, 2017:242). The customer decision-making process is divided into phases and categories. Problem identification, information collecting, option evaluation, product selection, and post-purchase activities are integral parts of customer decision-making (Islam & Chowdhury, 2018:131). Input and output components are separated into these phases (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:376), with inputs including marketing mix, socio-cultural factors, and communication. The first phase, need recognition, is critical to customer satisfaction, which is driven by problem recognition (Camilleri, 2018:3). Customers then acquire data for decision-making (Rudansky-Kloppers & Strydom, 2016:137), taking into account factors linked to their demands (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017:154; Oke *et al*., 2016:46). Customers make the final purchasing decision after weighing various alternatives (Amankwah, 2016:20). Customers continue to evaluate their options after purchase, guiding their future selections (Rudansky-Kloppers & Strydom, 2016:137). Retailers may modify their marketing tactics to effectively meet each stage, fitting a wide range of customer wants and preferences.

Table 5-3: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 1 (continued)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 1
Customer experience is a complex notion that includes all customer encounters with a brand, product, or service throughout the course of the customer journey (Li *et al*., 2022:2). Businesses like Disney, Starbucks, and Apple are increasingly prioritising the production of memorable customer experiences, recognising the significant link between customer memories, attitudes, and buying behaviour (McColl *et al*., 2021:397). These retailers understand that providing excellent customer experience is critical to sustaining customer loyalty and long-term marketing success. As a result, controlling and improving customer experience has evolved from a best practice to a strategic requirement for modern enterprises.
In today's retail context, the literature emphasises the necessity of generating engaging and memorable customer experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1999) describe experiences as "personal engagement events," which form the basis of the experience economy model including education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escapism. According to Pine and Gilmore (1999), retailers use services as staging and items as props to engage specific customers. The notion of a "multisensory atmosphere" (Spence, 2022:4), which stems from the "service scape" concept, might affect buying decisions by eliciting pleasant cognitive and emotional reactions. Providing one-of-a-kind and unforgettable experiences can help retailers gain a competitive advantage and attract new customers (Chevtchouk *et al*., 2021:1308). This proves true for traditional fashion retailers where customers look for fashion trends, inspiration, and educational possibilities (Amrut & Ann Marie, 2018:442). Even intangible events make a lasting impression in the minds of customers (Pelletier & Collier, 2018:457). Physical store aesthetics and atmosphere are furthermore essential elements in producing long-lasting memories and moulding total customer experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2011:46). External stimuli can pique customer interests, but compelling and coherent environmental aspects can also impact customer demand (Siyanbola & Ogunseye, 2021:167). The favourable influence of escapist experiences on emotional satisfaction and arousal is supported by empirical research (Fiore *et al*., 2000). Businesses, especially brick-and-mortar retailers and shopping centres, should include the four realms of education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escapism in their marketing strategies to provide more memorable experiences and higher value to customers (Sadachar & Fiore, 2015). Meaningful customer experiences are not simply a desired strategy in today's competitive market; it is an essential aspect of attaining corporate success.
By incorporating the influence of customers' perceived advantages, the idea of perceived customer value plays a critical role in understanding customer behaviour (Yoo & Park, 2016:2). Product qualities, market positioning, price, and customer preferences all have an impact on this view (Goworek & McGoldrick, 2015:151). Retailers can utilise perceived customer value to differentiate their goods from rivals, acquire new customers, and retain existing ones (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019:10). Notably, customer value perception in a retail context is relative and prone to change because of the rapid progression of customer requirements caused by evolving technical advancements (Ibarra *et al*., 2018:5).

Table 5-3: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 1 (continued)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 1
The literature emphasises the profound importance of customer experience on customer satisfaction. According to Cachero-Martnez and Vázquez-Casielles (2017:548), the shopping experience includes both pragmatic and emotional components. Recognising the interaction of these factors is critical for businesses seeking to improve customer satisfaction and retain loyalty in the fast-paced retail environment. Retailers can establish lasting impressions and develop deep relationships with their customers by properly controlling and nurturing both pragmatic and emotional components of the retail experience, eventually driving corporate success.

5.3.1.2 Secondary objective 2

Secondary objective 2 set out to investigate the factors that motivate participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store.

Table 5-4: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 2

Literature findings: Secondary objective 2
Understanding the factors that motivate customers to purchase is a multidimensional process that is impacted by a variety of psychological and social factors. Perceptions are important, because they have a bearing on how customers view goods and services, thereby influencing their purchase decisions (Solomon, 2018:74). Customers are more inclined to make a purchase when they have favourable feelings about things that correspond with their beliefs. Another critical component in inspiring customers to buy is the element of learning (Solomon, 2018:109). Marketers may use a variety of learning tactics to help customers make educated decisions about their products. Customer motivation is greatly influenced by education and information diffusion. Customer mentality, which includes views regarding products and market conditions, also substantially impacts purchasing motivation (Roberts-Lombard & Parumasur, 2017:6). A positive attitude can increase customer interest in goods and services, pushing them to engage in buying activities. Customer buying behaviour is furthermore influenced by lifestyle and personality (Solomon, 2018:228). The way customers live and their psychological features shape and reflect their encounters with marketing stimuli. These elements all play a part in deciding what motivates a person to shop. Recreational shopping emphasises the social components of buying as a source of leisure and enjoyment (Evangelista *et al*., 2020:151).

Table 5-4: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 2 (continued)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 2
Shopping is an opportunity for many individuals to spend time with friends and family, stressing the social relationships formed and maintained during shopping trips. Sensory purchasing, in which buyers seek tactile and sensory interaction with objects, is especially prevalent in physical stores (Farah *et al*., 2019:16). The need to physically touch, feel, and experience products may be a powerful incentive. Social conventions and identities can have a role. Customers frequently purchase to meet the expectations of their social groupings (Kim & Seock, 2019:85). Those who strongly identify with a brand are more inclined to acquire products associated with that brand (An *et al*., 2019:168). Additionally, shopping allows for social contact, whether through interactions with friendly salespeople or connecting with fellow customers (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017:891). Finally, the art of negotiating may be a motivator. Customers who prefer bargaining for lower prices or discounts may be more likely to purchase, even in non-bargaining situations (Gillison *et al*., 2014:151). Customer motivation to shop is a complex interplay of perceptions, learning, attitudes, lifestyle, personality, recreation, social influences, and individual preferences, all of which contribute to the ever-changing world of customer behaviour.
Secondary objective 2 was addressed in main finding 4.2.1. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to the factors that motivate participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store are provided subsequently.
Conclusions: Secondary objective 2
Conclusion 2.1: The findings show that participants have a substantial preference for sensory components of buying at physical fashion retail outlets in South Africa, such as looking at, touching, and experiencing goods or services. This indicates customers prioritise tactile and sensory-rich shopping spaces.
Conclusion 2.2: A sizable proportion of participants conveyed a desire to take instant possession of their purchased items, showing a preference for instant gratification without having to wait for later delivery of products purchased.
Conclusion 2.3: The ease of returning or exchanging items was noted by participants as a motivation for buying in physical stores, thereby indicating customers' desire for liberal return and exchange policies as part of their shopping experience.
Conclusion 2.4: According to the study's findings, physical fashion retail stores provide more than merely a traditional transaction between customer and store; they also provide an experience and a sense of escape for many participants, thereby conveying customers desire for a distinctive and entertaining retail environment that provides them with more than just transactions but also a memorable experience.

Table 5-4: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 2 (continued)

Conclusions: Secondary objective 2
Conclusion 2.5: The study emphasises the social component of shopping at traditional fashion retail establishments. Participants liked the social side of shopping, enjoying interactions with friends, fellow customers, and sales personnel.
Recommendations: Secondary objective 2
Recommendation 2.1: Retailers should invest in establishing a sensory-rich setting within their physical fashion retail outlets. This might include allowing customers to touch and feel their goods, providing scent samples, and ensuring well-lit, aesthetically appealing displays at all times. By emphasising the sensory components of purchasing, companies may adapt to the preferences of most participants, resulting in a more engaging and memorable in-store experience.
Recommendation 2.2: Recognising that the majority of participants desire to possess things instantly, retailers can consider employing methods that drive fast purchases. Special in-store promotions, limited-time deals, or exclusive in-store discounts might be used to entice customers to make on-the-spot purchasing decisions. Emphasising the benefits and ease of instant satisfaction might encourage more in-store purchases.
Recommendation 2.3: In relation to the fittings room and return procedure, retailers should make customer convenience their number one priority. They must make sure that the fitting rooms are well maintained, offer privacy and simplify return procedures with a view to making them free of any hassle. Make sure that retailers address any problem which prevents customers from trying on clothing or returning items.
Recommendation 2.4: Retailers need to organise events, promotions, and interactive displays where customers can be encouraged to interact with each other and their staff in order to tap into the desire for an experiential and social shopping experience to make customers feel part of the community, create an inviting and pleasant atmosphere.
Recommendation 2.5: Retailers may use technology such as Augmented Reality or Virtual Try-on Tools to enhance the in-store experience. This technology, in combination with the benefits of online and offline shopping, allow customers to see what clothes look like without physically trying them on.
Recommendation 2.6: Retailers should recognise that there is a need to identify the latest trends in fashion and incorporate trend detection into their store environment. Specific sections and displays that feature the latest arrivals, as well as elements such as QR codes which offer customers a glance at trends or tips on how to look good when they are scanned can also be included.

5.3.1.3 Secondary objective 3

Secondary objective 3 aimed to explore and describe the experience of participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.

Table 5-5: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 3

Literature findings: Secondary objective 3
A variety of factors impact customers' attitudes, feelings, and pleasure when they frequent physical fashion retail establishments in South Africa. Customers' overall assessment of the experience of a physical fashion retail store is influenced by the memories they build throughout their shopping trips (Manthiou *et al*., 2020:2). Product selection and accessibility are important aspects of this experience that impact customer satisfaction (Terblanche, 2018:55). The increase of online shopping and the implementation of technology have also contributed to overall customer satisfaction, with a positive association between online shopping satisfaction and total store satisfaction (Nisar & Prabhakar, 2017:143). Another important component in increasing customer satisfaction in physical retail businesses is personalisation (Hult *et al*., 2019:24). Personal shopping and styling, for example, may have a considerable influence on customer experience by generating a sense of customised attention and care (Lee *et al*., 2019:280). However, South Africa's surplus of shopping centres presents additional issues. A plethora of alternatives and severe competition can result in decision paralysis and a decrease in the perceived value of shopping experiences (Singla & Rai, 2016:109). To create a great customer experience, retailers must find a balance between diversity and overwhelming choices. South African shoppers thereby buy for both utilitarian necessities and hedonic wants, seeking both need and pleasure in their purchasing experiences (Lee & Wu, 2017:2463). Their judgments are impacted by recollections of previous experiences, which play an important role in moulding their perceptions and influencing future purchases (McColl *et al*., 2021:397).
Secondary objective 3 was addressed in main finding 4.2.2. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to the experience of participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store are provided subsequently.
Conclusions: Secondary objective 3
Conclusion 3.1: According to the findings of this study, environmental variables such as music, lighting, and smell have a substantial impact on participants' experiences at physical fashion retail outlets. While some participants found the music that they play in a physical fashion retail store relaxing, others found it annoying. Lighting tastes ranged from aversion of harsh lighting to praise for appealing lighting. The store's aroma had an uneven influence, with some individuals hating it. This emphasises the significance of adequately selecting these aspects to create a favourable purchasing environment.

Table 5-5: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 3 (continued)

Conclusions: Secondary objective 3
Conclusion 3.2: Participants' fitting room experiences varied, with some emphasising the significance of fitting room design, cleanliness, and temperature. However, complaints about unattractive mirrors, skewed images, and congested situations were also made. To improve the entire shopping experience and address frequent complaints, retailers should pay attention to fitting room design and hygiene.
Conclusion 3.3: Most participants enjoyed a well-organised store layout and appealing displays, whereas a few found overpowering product displays and disordered layouts repulsive thereby indicating a preference to an appealing and easy-to-navigate store layout.
Conclusion 3.4: The appearance of sales and promotion signs generated a mixed reaction, with some participants loving them and others feeling overwhelmed by them conveying a desire for balance between utilising promotional signs to attract attention and producing a cluttered or disorderly retail environment.
Conclusion 3.5: A great shopping experience was frequently rated as being enhanced by excellent customer service. However, a few individuals expressed a desire for improved customer service, emphasizing the need of employee training. Furthermore, the majority of participants rated the level of hygiene in physical fashion retail outlets as inadequate, underlining the need of merchants prioritising cleanliness and sanitation to improve the entire shopping experience.
Recommendations: Secondary objective 3
Recommendation 3.1: Customers' preferences for ambient aspects like music, lighting, and aroma should be recognised by retailers. Retailers can consider segmenting their store or parts within your store depending on these preferences to improve the purchasing experience. For example, designate places with peaceful music and gentle lighting for customers seeking a relaxing environment, while giving well-lit rooms with stimulating music for those seeking a livelier vibe. Businesses should regular customer surveys to measure preferences and adjust the use of ambient elements as needed.
Recommendation 3.2: Given how important fitting room experiences were to participants, retailers should invest in pleasant, clean, and well-designed fitting rooms. Maintain a pleasant temperature and ensure that mirrors give correct reflections and appropriate space. To maintain a sanitary and pleasant atmosphere, examine and clean fitting rooms on a regular basis. Additionally, retailers can help customers in fitting rooms to improve their overall experience and swiftly answer any complaints.

Table 5-5: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 3 (continued)

Recommendations: Secondary objective 3
Recommendation 3.3: Retailers should concentrate efforts on putting in place a well organised and easy to use store layout. Avoid overcrowding displays and maintain a neat and organised shopping environment. The positive impact of in store displays as well as window displays may also be beneficial for the general shopping experience.
Recommendation 3.4: Emphasis should be placed on providing excellent customer service training for retail workers. Investments in employee training and responsiveness may boost customer satisfaction since most participants have high esteem for the quality of the services they offer.
Recommendation 3.5: Retailers should make maintaining elevated levels of sanitation and cleanliness a top concern. They should also consider the hygiene of the business as a whole and the cleanliness of the changing facilities. If these issues are resolved in the context of a customer experience, it can raise its intrinsic worth.
Recommendation 3.6: Retailers should consider appealing to different senses beyond visual and audio stimuli, in order to further enhance the shopping experience. A more attractive atmosphere can be created when aroma or fragrance is introduced in the store. The overall customer's perception of the store and their experience with shopping may be enhanced by such a multisensory approach.
Recommendation 3.7: Retailers can consider maintaining a comfortable in-store temperature in order to greatly improve their customers shopping experience.

5.3.1.4 Secondary objective 4

Secondary objective 4 aimed to explore and describe the value derived by participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.

Table 5-6: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 4

Literature findings: Secondary objective 4
Physical fashion retail outlets in South Africa play an important role in the supply chain by providing customers with a varied choice of products, services, and experiences (Elghannam *et al*., 2019:2). Whether they operate in the premium or bargain segments, retailers try to provide outstanding value to their customers. This dedication to value is critical for retailers because it has a direct influence on customer satisfaction with both the product or service and the store. The pricing strategy used by merchants is an important component of value.

Table 5-6: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 4 (continued)

Literature findings: Secondary objective 4
Customers in South Africa, like customers everywhere else, demand a fair and acceptable price for the quality of the things and services given (Berman *et al*., 2018:34). Furthermore, South African shoppers are interested in overseas fashion brands that provide high quality and value for money (De Klerk *et al*., 2019:12). This emphasises the significance of catering not only to local preferences, but also understanding the attractiveness of multinational brands that offer a perceived value proposition. The value that South African shoppers experience while buying at physical fashion retail establishments is complex. It includes the complete shopping experience, cost, and the attraction of both domestic and foreign brands.
Secondary objective 4 was addressed in main finding 4.2.3. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to the value derived by participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store are provided subsequently.
Conclusions: Secondary objective 4
Conclusion 4.1: According to the findings in the study, participants enjoy the ability to try on clothing and examine a wide range of fashion goods accessible in physical fashion retail locations. This part of the shopping experience has a big impact on their overall pleasure and impression of value.
Conclusion 4.2: When shopping at physical fashion retail outlets, some participants appreciate the opportunity to recognise and keep up with the current fashion trends. To appeal to trend-conscious clients, shops should prioritise exhibiting new arrivals and trend-focused collections.
Conclusion 4.3: While a few individuals noted cost-related benefits, such as avoiding delivery fees and taking advantage of promotions and deals, this illustrates that physical businesses may give value in the form of cost savings and unique offers that online shopping may not always provide.
Conclusion 4.4: Participants value the time-saving benefits of shopping at physical fashion retail establishments, such as fast product availability and the option to return or exchange things in-store. Retailers could highlight these benefits to attract customers who value efficiency.
Conclusion 4.5: The in-store experience is highly valued by most participants, who see it as a pleasurable visit and a sensory escape from their everyday routines. Furthermore, mingling with employees and fellow customers is highly valued, highlighting the significance of delivering outstanding customer service and creating a friendly environment. To increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, retailers should focus providing unique in-store experiences and fostering human engagement.

Table 5-6: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 4 (continued)

Recommendations: Secondary objective 4
Recommendation 4.1: Fashion retail establishments should focus on establishing an engaging and pleasurable ambiance to cater to clients that appreciate the in-store experience. Retailers can consider including factors such as comfy lounging spaces, appealing retail designs, and eye-catching displays of the newest trends in order to engage the senses with pleasing smells, enticing lighting, and well selected music playlists. Retailers can furthermore offer interactive elements like as style consultations or trend presentations to encourage customers to spend more time in-store.
Recommendation 4.2: Recognising the value of human connection and providing excellent customer service, merchants should consider investing in employee training to ensure that personnel are informed, personable, and responsive to the demands of their customers. One should ncourage employees to participate in polite interactions with customers, giving aid and direction as needed. Retailers can create opportunities for social engagement within the store, such as events, workshops, or style consultations, to develop a feeling of community and enhance the shopping experience.
Recommendation 4.3: Retailers should keep expanding the variety of apparel and fashion items they carry to provide shoppers more options. This would cate to a wide range of tastes and preferences, drawing in more customers.
Recommendation 4.4: Retailers can consider proactively promoting and displaying the newest fashion trends inside the store. Fashion-conscious clients looking for the newest trends and ideas might be drawn in by offering trend-focused displays or specialised areas.
Recommendation 4.5: Retailers can develop or enhance consumer loyalty programs that give rewards for in-store purchases. Customers' loyalty may be increased by offering them prizes, discounts, or loyalty points.
Recommendation 4.6: Retailers can effectively make it easier and more convenient for customers to exchange items and return items at physical businesses. Effective returns help to increase overall customer satisfaction.

5.3.1.5 Secondary objective 5

Secondary objective 5 aimed to explore and describe the factors that contribute to the attractiveness of a physical fashion retail store.

Table 5-7: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 5

Literature findings: Secondary objective 5
The allure of a physical fashion retail store in South Africa includes a plethora of components that add to the entire retail experience. An enticing retail environment combines a variety of aspects such as adequate lighting, music, appealing decorations, layouts, architectural design, aroma, air conditioning, and trendy colour schemes (Hanaysha, 2018:8). These aspects work together to create an attractive ambiance for customers, increasing their likelihood of engaging favourably with the shop and its offers. Furthermore, as Cachero-Martnez and Vázquez-Casielles (2017:548) point out, the shopping experience involves a complex interaction of pragmatic and emotional experiences. These environmental elements have been divided into three categories by researchers: social aspects, design considerations, and ambient components. Colour, layout, comfort, scent, music, atmosphere, air quality, and the presence of other customers and shop employees are all important components in defining the customer's view and attractiveness of the store environment. According to Paul *et al*. (2016:639), particular retail environment components are key drivers of customer satisfaction. While the study identified six of the fourteen components as predictors of customer satisfaction, it also emphasises the significance of curating the retail environment carefully in order to maximise the entire shopping experience.
Secondary objective 5 was addressed in sections 4.2.5 to 4.2.6. Conclusions as well as recommendations pertaining to the attractiveness of a physical fashion retail store are provided subsequently.
Conclusions: Secondary objective 5
Conclusion 5.1: Most participants are drawn to physical fashion retail outlets because of the diversity of goods, which includes a broad range of colours and sizes, as well as visually appealing displays. This emphasises the significance of providing a diverse assortment while maintaining appealing visual merchandising and displays.
Conclusion 5.2: Participants value the ability to identify and visualise the current fashion trends in physical fashion retail outlets, implying that keeping up with fashion trends may be a significant attractive element for customers.
Conclusion 5.3: While they are in the minority, some individuals found the customer service given at physical establishments to be appealing. This emphasises the need for providing good customer service to improve the entire buying experience.

Table 5-7: Conclusions and recommendations: Secondary objective 5 (continued)

Conclusions: Secondary objective 5
Conclusion 5.4: Sensory features, such as background music and the opportunity to touch and feel things, drive a handful of participants to actual establishments. Providing a multimodal shopping experience can be an effective way to engage shoppers.
Conclusion 5.5: Some participants, on the other hand, voiced reservations about the layout, cleanliness, and clutter in physical fashion retail establishments. Retailers should focus on store design and cleanliness to provide a great shopping experience and solve customer complaints.
Recommendations: Secondary objective 5
Recommendation 5.1: Retailers can focus on presenting a diverse range of items, including different colours and sizes, to attract more clients. They can also consider updating visual displays on a regular basis to ensure they are aesthetically appealing and in line with current fashion trends. Engaging displays may draw customers' attention and encourage them to explore the business.
Recommendation 5.2: Retailers can install more colourful and interesting displays to draw in their customers, and making sure that the displays are frequently updated and changes in order to maintain visual interest and facilitate curiosity among their customers
Recommendation 5.3: To ensure dependable and superior service, retailers should engage in thorough staff training in customer service. The appeal of the shop and client satisfaction may be considerably increased by knowledgeable and accommodating staff as an attractive factor.
Recommendation 5.4: Retailers can select the background music with care in order to give the business a welcoming and interesting ambiance. The choice of music should appeal to the target demographic and improve the entire shopping experience.
Recommendation 5.5: To lessen clutter and enhance overall shop management, retailers might reexamine and even remodel store layouts. The shopping experience and consumer impressions can be positively impacted by an efficient store layout.
Recommendation 5.6: Retailers can keep the physical fashion retail establishments clean and hygienic to high standards. A cleaner, more orderly workplace can attract more customers and add to a business's good reputation.
Recommendation 5.7: Retailers may improve the layout of their stores to improve the overall shopping experience of their customers. To reduce crowding and improve navigation, pay attention to product placement, aisle widths, and traffic flow. A better store layout can result in a more appealing and delightful shopping experience, easing customer annoyances brought on by cluttered or crowded areas.

5.4 LINKING ALL ASPECTS OF THE STUDY: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, QUESTIONS, MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 5-8 below presents the links between the secondary objective and the interview guide questions, highlighting the main findings, along with the derived conclusions and recommendations.

Table 5-8: Links between objectives, questions, main findings, conclusions, and recommendations

Questions	Main Finding	Conclusions	Recommendations
Secondary objective 1: Provide an overview of the literature related to this study, namely shopping motivation, perceived value, customer experience, customer satisfaction and store attractiveness.			
Chapters 1 & 2	N/A (the conclusions and recommendations formulated for secondary objectives 2 to 5 were derived from the literature review conducted in Chapters 1 and 2).		
Secondary objective 2: Investigate the factors that motivate participants to shop at a physical fashion retail store.			
Question 1	5.3.1.2	2.1 – 2.5	2.1 – 2.6
Secondary objective 3: Explore and describe the experience of participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.			
Question 2	5.3.1.3	3.1 – 3.5	3.1 – 3.7
Secondary objective 4: Explore and describe the value derived by participants when shopping at a physical fashion retail store.			
Question 3	5.3.1.4	4.1 – 4.5	4.1 – 4.6
Secondary objective 5: Explore and describe the factors that contribute to the attractiveness of a physical fashion retail store.			
Question 4	5.3.1.5	5.1 – 5.5	5.5 – 5.7

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Even though the study was completed satisfactorily, several limitations were discovered. The following limitations of the literature review were discovered:

- The literature focuses mostly on broad characteristics of retailing, such as customer satisfaction, customer behaviour, and the shopping experience. It does not go into detail on individual retail categories like fashion, technology advancements, or grocery sectors.

Different types of retail venues may provide distinct issues and dynamics that the literature does not completely address at present.

- The examination of literature does not go into detail about cultural and geographical differences in retailing. Retail procedures, customer habits, and tastes can differ greatly between cultures and locales. As a result, the findings may not be generally relevant and may fail to account for these variances.

- While the literature briefly addresses technological innovation, it does not fully explore the influence of developing technologies on the retail business, such as e-commerce platforms, mobile applications, or artificial intelligence. The influence of technology in altering the retail scene is an evolving topic that deserves further attention.

- The evaluation does not address expanding customer data privacy and ethical concerns in retail, particularly in the context of data collecting, customization, and targeted marketing which is a prevailing issue in the retail industry.

- While the analysis examines the elements that influence purchasing decisions, it does not go into detail into post-purchase behaviours such as product reviews, returns, or loyalty programs.

The following limitations regarding the empirical study were identified:

- The research focuses mostly on specific components of the retail experience, such as customer preferences, in-store features, and customer behaviour. These findings may not fully represent the complexity of the retail environment, which varies widely according on geography, culture, and other contextual variables.

- The study mainly depends on participants' subjective replies and judgments. While these insights are significant to this qualitative study, they may be impacted by personal biases and individual experiences, limiting the findings' generalizability.

- Participants of this study reside in the Gauteng province of South Africa. This may restrict the findings' generalizability to a larger population. However, as stated in Chapter 3, the sample was still typical of the population targeted by this study.

- The study focuses exclusively on physical fashion retail outlets and did not address differences in other types of retail locations such as electronics stores, supermarket stores, or

department stores. Various elements may influence customer experiences in different types of shops.

- This study did not go into detail about cultural differences in customer behaviour and preferences. Retail experiences differ greatly between cultures, and a more diversified sample might shed insight on these differences.

- Given the changing significance of technology in retail, several studies fail to investigate how digital advances, such as mobile applications or e-commerce, affect customer experiences.

- This study is set in the context of fashion marketing in South Africa, with an emphasis on a relationship strategy. As a result, the study's conclusions are tightly tied with the examined environment, thereby limiting their generalisability to other situations.

Nonetheless, none of these limitations diminish the importance of the current study. Indeed, they provide an opportunity to further research in this area in a focused manner. Various recommendations for further research are offered in the next section, considering the study's shortcomings.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While there were limits to this study, these were extensively explored, explained, and justified throughout the dissertation. As a result, they had no detrimental influence on the study's value. Furthermore, the study's weaknesses might serve as areas for further research. For the future, the following suggestions are made:

- In-depth research can be conducted to investigate the influence of cultural and regional differences on customer behaviour and retail practices. Investigate how cultural norms, beliefs, and preferences impact purchasing behaviours and retail strategy in various locations.

- Because the retail business is dynamic, future research can investigate this context using longitudinal studies that follow changes in customer behaviour and retail practices over time. This can assist in capturing changing patterns and adapting to new problems and opportunities.

- Quantitative analysis, surveys, and experiments could be used to supplement qualitative research. Collect and evaluate quantitative data to confirm and quantify customer behaviour, satisfaction, and loyalty results.

- The impact of developing technologies on the retail business, such as the growing industry of AI and blockchain can be explored. Examine how these technologies are changing customer interactions, supplier networks, and marketing techniques.

- The dynamics of omnichannel retailing, particularly the integration of online and physical channels can be investigated. Examine the rise of direct-to-consumer (DTC) brands and its implications for traditional retail methods.

- Retailer adoption of sustainable practices and their influence on customer behaviour can be explored by how environmentally friendly measures affect purchase decisions and brand loyalty.

- The range of issues that the retail business faces, such as e-commerce rivalry, supply chain disruptions, and economic downturns can be investigated by use of the techniques used by merchants to deal with these difficulties.

- Researchers could include post-purchase activities, such as product reviews, returns, and customer loyalty programmes can be extended in the research by investigating the elements that influence customer involvement and loyalty beyond the time of sale.

- New retail formats including cashier less stores, pop-up shops, and personalised shopping experiences can be investigated to examine how these advances affect customer choices and satisfaction.

- The resilience of retail supply networks in the face of interruptions such as pandemics and natural catastrophes can be assessed by analysing supply chain agility and responsiveness techniques.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a thorough description of the study, including a literature review and empirical analysis, followed by conclusions and suggestions on the secondary objectives identified in this research. The chapter finishes by recognizing the study's shortcomings and making suggestions for further research.

Based on the synthesis of the literature review and empirical findings in the context of in-store experiences and store attractiveness in South Africa, it is possible to conclude that the physical retail environment is critical in fostering effective relationships between retailers and customers. According to the research, providing an appealing in-store atmosphere that is personalised to

customers' interests and requirements may considerably improve the entire shopping experience and develop customer-retailer connections. While the findings may not be universally applicable, they do highlight the possibility for enhancing marketing success by investing in the development of in-store experiences that appeal with customers. This undertaking must be approached with attention to customer expectations, resulting in more successful and sustainable retail settings. Furthermore, shop design and management techniques should prioritise features that lead to a pleasant and joyful in-store experience.

It is critical to note that improving the appeal of physical stores is not a stand-alone solution, but rather a catalyst that may promote behavioural changes and contribute to the development of marketing skills. Retailers may create stronger and more enduring ties with customers by providing the correct psychological and behavioural antecedents through engaging in-store experiences. In the South African retail sector, this study emphasises the importance of prioritising in-store experiences and shop appeal. By doing so, businesses may effectively achieve the primary goal of this research by creating, improving, and sustaining customer involvement.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview #:_____ Time:_____Date:_____

Introduction to Interview and Elaboration of Study

My name is Clara Wessels and I am a Master's student in marketing management at the North-West University in Potchefstroom. I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this study, and I look forward to talking with you about the topic at hand. The primary aim of this study is to gain an understanding of customers' in-store experience when shopping at a physical fashion retail store in Gauteng and to determine if these experiences play a role in store attractiveness. In order for me to obtain this objective, I would like to ask you a few questions regarding your motivation for shopping at a physical retail store as opposed to an online retail store, your experience when shopping at a physical retail fashion store, and also gain a more profound understanding of the value, if any, you derive from shopping at a physical retail store. I will then also ask a few questions pertaining to factors that you consider attracts you to a physical fashion retail store. Due to an array of different reasons, for example the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, physical retail spaces like stores and shopping centres, are finding it increasingly challenging to attract customers. The results of this study will provide some guidance to physical fashion retail stores as to how they can improve customer experience in their stores, and to make their stores more attractive to customers. Do you have any questions so far?

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio recorded. There are no right or wrong answers, so please feel free to answer my questions as comprehensively as possible. You can take as much or as little time as you require. If you are unsure about a question, please feel free to ask me for clarification. If, at any time you feel uncomfortable to wish to end the interview, please let me know.

Before we commence with the interview, I would just like to confirm the following for record-keeping purposes:

- Have you read and signed the interview consent form?
- Are you older than 18 years of age?
- Have you purchased an item from a physical fashion retail store in the past six months?
- Do you reside in the Gauteng province?

Thank you. Let us now commence with the interview.

[Ask questions below and probe accordingly]

Motivation to Frequent Physical Retail Spaces

Since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, and even before then, people are choosing to rather shop online as opposed to venturing out to a physical shopping centre or store to do their shopping. Thinking about the last time you chose to rather go to a physical shopping centre or store to buy something and not to buy it from an e-commerce platform like Amazon or Takealot, please explain to me why you made this decision.

In-store Experience

Please tell me about your experience from the moment you walked in the door the last time you bought something from a physical fashion retail store.

Customer Value

Sometime people choose to buy their items from a physical fashion retail store because they derive value from this experience. What personal benefit, if any, do you think you derive by shopping at a physical fashion retail store instead of buying your items online?

Store Attractiveness

Please explain to me what you find attractive of shopping at a physical fashion retail store. What are some of the factors that draw you towards a physical store?

Thank you, that concludes our interview. Is there perhaps anything you wish to add before we end the session?

I would once again like to express my sincere gratitude to you for partaking in this study. I am looking forward to sharing the results of the study with you once the study is completed. Please feel ensured that your personal information will remain strictly confidential throughout the research process, during analysis and upon reporting the results.

You are welcome to contact me or my supervisor at any time should you have any questions or queries regarding the study, and we shall gladly assist you.

Thank you.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Please refer to the CD-ROM included at the back of this dissertation.

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INVITATION

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

Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

Dear (NAME OF PARTICIPANT)

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH BASED IN-STORE EXPERIENCE AND STORE ATTRACTIVENESS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN FASHION RETAIL INDUSTRY

I am currently conducting research in Marketing Management at the North-West University, with a specific focus on *the in-store experience and store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry*. This is a friendly request to you for participation in my study by attending an interview session online that will take approximately 60 minutes of your time.

Research objective:

The primary research objective of this study is to explore in-store experience and store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry.

Sample and methodology:

The researcher aims to conduct interviews online with selected participants. It is required for participants to be aged 18 years or older; have purchased a fashion item from a physical (not online) fashion store in the past six months; and reside in the Gauteng province. The interview will be audio recorded. Depending on the participant's preference, interviews can be conducted via Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

Confidentiality and anonymity:

Participants will be asked to sign a consent form prior to the commencement of the interview. All research participants are welcome to request results upon completion of this study.

Participation:

Kindly confirm whether you are willing to partake in the study no later than five working days from receipt of this invitation. Failing to confirm or decline participation in writing within this timeframe will automatically exclude you from the study.

Upon agreeing to partake in the study, kindly provide date(s) and time(s) that you would be available to be interviewed. The researcher will then confirm the date and time with you, upon which a link to the interview session will be shared (i.e., Microsoft Teams or Zoom link).

Prior to the interview, the consent form will be shared with you that must be signed and returned to the researcher please. The interview cannot commence without receiving the signed consent form. In addition, the interview guide comprising some of the questions that will be asked during the interview will be shared with you.

I thank you in advance for time and effort awarded me in completing this study. Your input will be greatly appreciated.

Please feel free to contact me directly with any queries.

Yours faithfully,

……

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……

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APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

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Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Web: http://www.nwu.ac.za

CONSENT TO PARTAKE IN STUDY

EXPLORING IN-STORE EXPERIENCE AND STORE ATTRACTIVENESS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN FASHION RETAIL INDUSTRY.

		Please tick each box
1	**I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions, and have had these answered satisfactorily.**	☐
2	**I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or penalty.**	☐
3	**I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, EMS-REC (Ethics Committee).**	☐
4	**I understand who will have access to the data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.**	☐
5	**I understand how this research will be reported and published.**	☐
6	**I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.**	☐
7	**I consent to being audio recorded.**	☐
9	**I give permission to be quoted directly in research outputs but only completely anonymously.**	☐

10	**I agree to take part in the study.**	☐

Consent to process personal information

With this, I consent to the use of my personal information contained herein (as well as demographic information provided during the interview) and confirms that:		***Please tick each box***
1	**the information is supplied voluntarily, without undue influence from any party and not under any duress.**	☐
I acknowledge that I am aware that I have the following rights regarding personal information, which is collected. I have the right to:		
2	**access the information at any reasonable time to rectify the information.**	☐
3	**object to the processing of the information in which case this agreement will terminate.**	☐
4	**access the information at any reasonable time to rectify the information.**	☐

_____ dd / mm / yyyy
Participant signature Date

_____ dd / mm / yyyy _____
Name of person taking consent Date Signature

APPENDIX E: DATA ANALYSIS AND CODEBOOK

Please refer to the CD-ROM included at the back of this dissertation.

APPENDIX F: PEER CHECKING APPROVAL LETTER

Mr. Johan Gouws
Lecturer
North-West University
Potchefstroom
South Africa

Ms. Clara Wessels
Master's student in Marketing Management
North-West University Potchefstroom
South Africa

12 October 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

PEER REVIEW OF CLARA WESSELS' QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

This letter verifies that I, Johan Gouws (Lecturer in Entrepreneurship and Business Management at the North- West University; Staff No. 24970190), meticulously reviewed the qualitative analysis of the transcribed data of Ms. Wessels' dissertation entitled "*Exploring in-store experience and store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry*". Moreover, I reviewed Ms. Wessels' use of the Morse and Field approach towards analysing qualitative data. Conclusively, this letter confirms that Ms. Wessels rigorously analysed the data and verified that the themes identified reflect both confirmability and dependability.

Yours faithfully

082 842 6176 SJH.GOUWS@GMAIL.COM 018 285 2315

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24 October 2023

QUALITATIVE THEMATIC VALIDATION: MS CLARA WESSELS

This letter hereby serves to verify that I, Prof Alfred Henrico, has worked through the analysed data applicable to the above-mentioned student's dissertation, as it is presented in Atlas.ti 23. I have scrutinised the project file, codebook, as well as the thematic and categorical framework of the results.

To this end, I agree with the accuracy of the identified themes.

I wish Ms Wessels all the best.

Regards

Prof A. Henrico
Professor in Business Management

APPENDIX G: LETTER FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

Declaration

This is to declare that I, Dr. L Combrink

Language editor and translator

have language edited the dissertation

with the title

Exploring in-store experience and store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry

by

C Wessels

November 2023

APPENDIX H: LETTER FROM TECHNICAL EDITOR

LEON DU PREEZ

TECHNICAL EDITING

Leon du Preez

Lecturer

North-West University

Potchefstroom

2531

13 November 2023

To whom it may concern:

DECLARATION OF TECHNICAL EDITING

This letter verifies that I, Leon du Preez, did the technical editing of Ms C Wessels' dissertation entitled: *"Exploring in-store experience and store attractiveness in the South African fashion retail industry"* for the degree Master of Commerce in Marketing Management at the North-West University. The document has been edited (formatted) in accordance with the technical requirements of the North-West University as set out in the Manual for Higher Degrees Studies and Referencing Guide (NWU Harvard 2020). Notwithstanding, the editor's revisions are recommendations, and as such the implementation thereof remains the responsibility of the author. In addition, the editor will not be responsible for any changes made after the date of issue.

Sincerely,

Mr Leon du Preez