The influence of store environment on brand trust, brand satisfaction and brand loyalty among the black middle class

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid evolution of marketing from product to service to experience, marketers are challenged to incorporate experiential marketing into their strategies (Maklan & Klaus, 2011). This is especially relevant for retailers creating an experience-based store environment to increase sales and profit margins. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the store environment's influence on brand loyalty, with brand trust and brand satisfaction as mediators. Although a number of similar studies have been conducted, there is still a lack of research on this topic in fashion retail, especially among black middle class women in Johannesburg. This study undertakes a quantitative approach in that 501 online surveys were distributed among black middle class women to explore the influence of store environment on brand loyalty in relation to fashion brands. The findings support all five hypotheses. In other words, store environment has a positive influence on brand trust, brand satisfaction, and brand loyalty. This study is of significant importance to retailers who wish to influence consumers' buying behaviour through the manipulation of in-store environmental cues. By achieving this, practitioners are able to increase consumers' trust in a brand, their satisfaction with the brand, and ultimately increase brand loyalty. The present study contributes to the growing body of knowledge in experiential marketing, retail management, and branding. Furthermore, it contributes to literature in South Africa, which, as an emerging market, is often overlooked.

Keywords: Experiential marketing, fashion, store environment, sensory branding, brand loyalty, purchase intention, black middle class

It is a common belief nowadays that consumers not only purchase products or services based on their functional aspects, but that they also consider the experience they receive when buying a product or service. As a result, marketing practice has shifted from a focus on product and brand management to creating a compelling customer experience through experiential marketing strategies (Maghnati, Ling & Nasermoadeli, 2012). Therefore, marketers and retailers are under significant pressure to embed the concept of experiential marketing in their advertising campaigns to gain market share. This is especially relevant for fashion retailers, since the in-store fashion-brand experience is a multifaceted experience that positively influences consumers' buying behaviour (Kim, 2012; Michon, Yu, Smith & Chebat, 2007). The fashion industry is largely driven by exports to emerging countries, and as a result, has experienced substantial economic growth (Iannone, Ingenito, Martino, Miranda, Pepe & Riemma, 2013).

In fashion retail, women are considered to be the primary customer base (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003), and spend more than 70% of their income on clothing (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Babin, Hardesty & Suter, 2003). Therefore, due to increasing female spending power, this market segment has become of major importance to marketers (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Babin et al., 2003). The importance of this market segment has received an abundance of interest from practitioners, since the segment has doubled in size over the past eight years. Furthermore, the black middle class is currently estimated to comprise about 4.2 million people in South Africa (Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing, 2013).

Given the importance of the fashion retail sector to women generally, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of employing experiential marketing campaigns, in influencing the buying behaviour of black middle class women. By gaining insight into this topic, retailers are given insight into creating a differentiated in-store experience by which to attract consumers (Clarke, Perry & Denson, 2012).

Previous studies on experiential marketing in the retail industry have been conducted, however they have differed in several aspects. For example, some studies focused on individual sensory cues in isolation, such as sight, sound, or touch (Clarke et al., 2012; Park, Jeon & Sullivan, 2014; Valenti & Riviere, 2008), and its impact on consumers' buying behaviour, rather than store environment as a holistic construct. Furthermore, this topic has been researched in a global context by several researchers (Park et al., 2014; Sullivan, Kang & Heitmeyer, 2012; Clarke et al., 2012; Kim, 2012), especially with reference to developed countries. Despite the wealth of studies on experiential marketing, a lack of research remains on this topic with regards to fashion consumption among South African consumers.

Therefore, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature by providing insight into the impact of store environment on brand loyalty of fashion products among women belonging to the black middle class in Johannesburg. By means of a conceptual model, this study proposes that the store environment (predictor variable) influences brand loyalty (outcome variable), with brand trust and brand satisfaction as mediators. In other words, it is anticipated that when retailers create a favourable in-store environment, it is expected to have a positive effect on consumers' trust in the brand, their brand satisfaction, and brand loyalty.

This study argues that by creating an overall sensory experience, fashion retailers are able to create a distinct competitive advantage, which is crucial in the increasingly competitive landscape that has resulted from the infiltration of global fashion brands into the South African market. This paper is structured by providing a theoretical overview, followed by the research design and methodology, and thereafter the results are presented, followed by the discussions and lastly, the implications, limitations, and future research are discussed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Stimulus-organism-response Theory

The stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982) theory suggests that an organism responds differently to stimuli, based on their internal state during the time when the stimulus is introduced. In a retail context, this infers that different facets of the store atmosphere affect consumers in different ways (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). For example, when consumers engage with a brand, stimuli such as the visual atmospherics, store layout and design, and social presence, influences consumers' internal states. This will result in affective and cognitive arousal that stimulates a consumer's shopping behaviour, such as approach, or avoidance. Similarly, the proposed conceptual model also pays close attention to stimuli, such as layout and design, atmospheric cues, and social presence, and its impact on consumers' internal states (affect and cognition), and the impact of these on shopping behaviour outcomes (approach or avoidance).

The Experiential Marketing Concept

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) define experiential marketing as the consumption of fantasies, feelings, and fun. Having received widespread interest in marketing literature, experiential marketing is prevalent in contexts such as branding, consumption, shopping, and service experience (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). The concept of experiential marketing was introduced into the field of economics by Pine and Gilmore (1999), who explain the difference between buying a 'service' and buying an 'experience' in the following way: if a consumer buys a service, he or she purchases a set of intangible activities that are carried out on their behalf, however, when buying an experience the consumer pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events and actively participates in the buying experience. A common belief nowadays, is that consumers consider the experience that accompanies the product as an important determinant in making a purchasing decision. As a result, the concept of experiential marketing continues to draw interest amongst both marketing scholars and practitioners (Schmitt & Rogers, 2008).

The Fashion Industry

The fashion industry has established its relevance in different aspects of society (Steele, 2000) and is one of the pillars of the modern economy. In 2014, this industry was valued at US$1.7 trillion and employed over 75 million people (Fashion United, 2014). Moreover, the industry sold US$530 billion in merchandise in 2011 (Fashion United, 2014). Considering these facts, it is important that the fashion industry remains lucrative in order to continue fueling the economy, as well as to support a large portion of the global labour force. Throughout history, fashion has established itself as a defining element in constructing cultural, national, gender, and generational identities (Steele, 2000). The industry provides the means for people to express themselves through the clothes they wear. The global appetite for new

fashion trends has grown extensively since the advent of the industry, with an ever-present demand for innovation (Steele, 2000). As a result, this industry is under constant pressure to provide for the needs of the public, and there is intense competition among industry players to fulfill these needs (Steele, 2000). At the same time, fashion has become a medium through which people across different cultures interact and seek to understand one another. Various fashion trends that start in one country find their way to other countries, and sometimes even to other continents. Such cultural transfers are made possible by the supply chain networks that have been established in the fashion industry.

Store Environment

Creating a unique store environment often emerges as a powerful instrument for market differentiation (Wu, Ju, Kim, Damminga, Kim & Johnson, 2013). It consists of the physical environment of a store, and refers to its many components or constituent parts, such as music, lighting, store layout, store design, store materials, and workforce. The store environment description is the general experience that retailers provide to customers (Tong & Hawley, 2009). In this context, the product or brand is no longer the most significant aspect of store environment, it is the experience that is created.

Brand Trust

Brand trust is the assurance or reinforcement of the reliability and capability of customers to trust the brand (Soars, 2009; Tong & Hawley, 2009). Brand trust is often categorised into affective and cognitive trust (Soars, 2009). Cognitive trust refers to brands or retailers that are confident in their competency and reliability in keeping promises, while affective trust is the belief that while the customers seek to buy genuine, stylish, and modern products, they also have specific requirements (Clarke et al., 2012). The importance of brand trust in literature has been exhausted in a number of studies, and the results conclude that brand trust results in consumer loyalty and long-term commitment

(Nairn, 2008; DeWulf, Odekerken-Schroder & Iacobucci, 2001; Roberts, Varki & Brodie, 2003; Papista & Dimitriadis; 2012). Furthermore, several researchers have noted satisfaction as having both a direct and indirect relationship with brand trust and customer experience (Urban, Sultan & Qualls 2000).

Brand Satisfaction

Brand satisfaction is an important construct in marketing literature, and there is considerable evidence that identifies satisfaction as having a major influence on brand loyalty (Bolton, 1998; Jones & Suh, 2000; Chandrashekaran, Rotte, Tax & Grewal, 2007; Yang & Peterson, 2004; Bodet, 2008; Bloemer & Lemmink, 1992; DeWulf et al., 2001; Roberts et al., 2003). Brand satisfaction is defined as the extent to which customers' expectations about a brand's product or service are met (Rowley, 2009). Obtaining high levels of brand satisfaction leads to a long-term commitment to purchasing certain products and brands (Clarke et al., 2012). As a result, retailers conduct regular market research to evaluate the exact level of customer and brand satisfaction, both of which are vital to a company's growth.
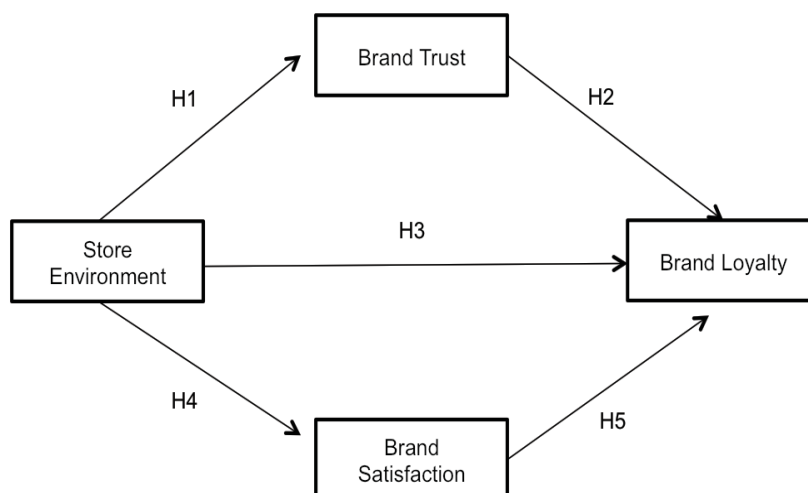
Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is considered as the most important metric for developing marketing strategies, and refers to a consumer's continued behaviour of patronage or support for a specific brand (Farris, Bendle, Pfeifer & Reibstein, 2010). Consumers with high brand loyalty tend to repurchase the same brand of product, or continue to use the same brand of service over an extended period of time (Farris et al., 2010). They do so even when this brand experiences changes, such as when the price increases, packaging changes, and so on. On the other hand, consumers with low brand loyalty tend to try different brands (Farris et al., 2010). Therefore, retailers try to ensure different marketing efforts to influence and control switching behaviour (Soars, 2009). As such, there is considerable impetus for companies to conduct detailed assessment of factors the affect the development of strong brand loyalty (Farris et al., 2010).

CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The conceptual model proposes that store environment is the predictor variable, with brand loyalty as the outcome variable. Brand trust and brand satisfaction act as mediators in determining the indirect relationship between store environment and brand loyalty. In practice, this means that when retailers create a favourable in-store environment, it will have a positive effect on

FIGURE 1:
CONCEPTUAL MODEL

consumers' brand trust, brand satisfaction, and brand loyalty. Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual model for this study, followed by the hypotheses development.

Hypotheses Development

Store environment and brand trust (H1)

Lunardo and Mbengue (2013) found that consumers' trust in a brand can be affected by store environment characteristics; when consumers believe that the store environment promotes transparency to consumers, they are more likely to place trust in the brand. This is best illustrated in the context of the food industry, where Lindborg (2015) found that consumers perceived restaurants that followed an open kitchen policy, where the kitchen is visible for patrons to see, generated greater trust among their diners. Patrons felt safer being able to see how their orders were prepared, and this contributed to their trust in the brand. Guenzi, Johnson, and Castaldo's (2009) study compared consumer trust in two retail stores by surveying 393 consumers. Guenzi et al. (2009) established that trust in sales personnel greatly influences overall trust in the brand. When salespersons appear trustworthy to consumers, they are more likely to trust the store brand in general.

H_1: There is a positive relationship between store environment and brand trust.

Store environment and brand loyalty (H2)

Furthermore, the influence of store environment on customer loyalty has been explored in a number of studies (Ailawadi, Pauwels & Steenkamp, 2008; Corstjens & Lal, 2000; Hansen & Singh, 2008). From the findings, the majority of these studies indicate a positive relationship between the two constructs. For example, Ailawadi et al. (2008) established a positive relationship between these two variables, as did Hansen and Singh (2008). As previously discussed, Fox, Montgomery, and Lodish (2004) have highlighted the importance of not neglecting tangible cues, such as price, quality, and product assortment, and simply adding value by offering customers a unique in-store experience. Fox et al.'s (2004) research provies evidence that over and above the store environment and associated intangible aspects, factors such as price promotions, product assortment, and product quality contribute significantly to store loyalty. It was also found that promotional programmes increase store traffic, which leads to increased store loyalty (Gijsbrecht, Campo & Goossens, 2003). This is particularly true when consumers shop to fulfill a specific need (Gijsbrecht et al., 2003). However, when recognising the experiential aspects of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) for hedonic retail store environment's, consumers shop for enjoyment.

H_2: There is a positive relationship between store environment and brand loyalty.

Store environment and brand satisfaction (H3)

As discussed by Koo (2003), environmental factors in retail stores may be considered to have important impacts on how consumers perceive the branding of the store. Consumers may associate certain characteristics of the store, such as how orderly its design is or how neat its surroundings are, with the quality of the items that a store sells (Koo, 2003). As such, it is important to consider how different aspects of the store environment impact brand satisfaction. Doing so can provide important insights into particular contexts with regard to improving brand satisfaction of the target market. As such, the relationship between brand satisfaction and other important variables in this study, such as store environment, must also be considered. Specifically, the relationship between brand satisfaction and store environment has been discussed in Dholakia and Zhao (2010) and Kremer and Viot's (2012) studies. In consensus, these studies stress the importance of store environment aspects in shaping consumers' brand experience, which in turn affect consumers' satisfaction. Consumers need to feel comfortable and stimulated within the store environment in order for them to perceive the brand positively and become satisfied with it.

H_3: There is a positive relationship between store environment and brand satisfaction.

Brand trust and brand loyalty (H4)

Brand loyalty and brand trust are two common research variables in marketing literature. For instance, Bianchi, Drennan, and Proud (2014) conducted a study on the antecedents of brand loyalty and their findings indicate that brand trust and brand satisfaction are mediators of brand loyalty. Although Bianchi et al.'s (2014) study was conducted in the wine industry, the results provide evidence of the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. Consistent with the findings of Bianchi et al. (2014), a study was conducted on website environmental design and how it impacts on trust and loyalty. According to the results, it was determined that website environment design generates higher brand loyalty through an increase in brand effect and brand trust (Lee & Miao-Que, 2012). Several previous studies have investigated the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. For instance, Horppu, Kulvalainen, Tarkiainen, and Ellonen (2008) conducted a study on the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty in the magazine industry. From their findings it was evident that brand trust contributes to brand loyalty. Sahin, Zehir, and Kitapci's (2011) study findings revealed a strong relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty. Although this study was conducted in the car industry in Istanbul, these authors suggest future research on these constructs in other contexts. Therefore, this research study proposes that there is a positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty.

H_4: There is a positive relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty.

Brand satisfaction and brand loyalty (H5)

Brand satisfaction has been a primary focus of marketing research over the past few decades (Erciş Unal, Canadan, & Yildirim, 2012; Brakus et al., 2009; Tong & Hawley, 2009). Consequently, several studies have explored brand satisfaction and its impact on brand loyalty (Horppu et al., 2008; Iglesiais, Singh, & Batista-Foguet, 2011; Sahin et al., 2011). The majority of studies emphasise that brand satisfaction is essential for building customer-brand relationships and ultimately creating brand loyalty. As explained by Oliver (1997), while the ultimate goal of marketing is to get the consumer to make the purchase, establishing strong consumer satisfaction can be considered as being almost identical to this goal, since satisfied consumers are most likely going to make the decision to purchase the product (Oliver, 1997). As such, satisfaction has been considered a primary concern in any marketing metric, such as those developed in Brakus et al. (2009) or Tong and Hawley (2009). Thus, in relation to brand loyalty, it is simple to make the connection that consumers need to be satisfied with a brand before they can become loyal to it. The converse of this relationship is not as strong, because a consumer may be satisfied with a wide range of brands, but may only opt to be loyal to one of those brands. Nonetheless, it is not unlikely that the consumer will decide to be loyal to the brand that he or she is most satisfied with. Thus, it is important to examine the relationship between these two variables in different marketing contexts.

H_5: There is a positive relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study adopted a positivist paradigm, a philosophy that is of the view that knowledge stems from human experience (Collins, 2010). A quantitative research approach was adopted and 501 respondents were selected by means of systematic sampling. The data was analysed through the use of statistical methods in SPSS 23 and AMOS 23. Furthermore, structural equation modelling, a technique of multivariate statistical analysis that measures latent constructs through factor analysis and examining hypothesised relationships between the constructs, was used for the data analysis (Nusair & Hua, 2010).

Sample and Data Collection

The population of interest was black middle class women between the ages of 25 and 45 that reside in Johannesburg. This market segment is identified as having a monthly household income of between R15 000 and R50 000, personal transportation, a tertiary education, employment in a white-collar job, and owning or renting a home costing more than R4 000 per month in a suburban area (Unilever Institute of Strategic Marketing, 2013). A prescreen sample of 2000 respondents was used and every fourth individual was selected. As a result, 501 usable surveys were obtained. This sample size was calculated in the following manner: from an estimated population of 3.4 million black middle class women in Johannesburg, an allowance of a 95% confidence level was allowed, using a 5% confidence interval. By means of a sample size calculator, the researcher has estimated a sample size of at least 384. To decrease possible sampling errors, a sample of 501 participants was surveyed.

Measurement Instrument and Questionnaire Design

Research scales were operationalised based on prior studies, and adequate modifications were made in order to fit the current research context and purpose. All scales were measured by means of a 7-point Likert scale. For the first variable, STE, a modified version of Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman's (1994) scale was used. BS was measured using scales adapted from Sahin et al. (2011), while brand trust was measured with a scale modified from He, Li and Harris (2012). Lastly, brand loyalty was measured with Yoon and Kim's (2000) loyalty scale.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section provides an overview of the respondent profile, the scale accuracy analysis, the model fit, and hypotheses results.

Respondent Profile

The profile of the participants is presented in Table 1 and is followed by a discussion.

TABLE 1:
CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Education	n	%	Age	n	%
Diploma	193	40%	17-24 years	130	26%
Graduate Degree	129	26%	25-34 years	261	52%
Post-graduate	50	10%	35-44 years	95	19%
Professional Certificate	131	24%	45-54 years	10	2%
Total	501	100,0	55-65 years	5	1%

Income	n	%	Occupation	n	%
R1 - R4000	56	11%	Trainee, Apprentice, Student	68	14%
R4001-R8000	40	8%	Working full-time (for a company)	296	59%
R8001-R16 000	105	21%	Working full-time (self-employed)	22	4%
R16 001-R25 000	81	16%	Working part-time (for a company)	39	8%
R25 001-R40 000	79	16%	Working part-time (self-employed)	12	3%
R40 001-R60 000	45	9%	Homemaker	6	1%
R60 001-R100 000	17	3%	Unemployed – seeking work	52	10%
>R100 001	11	2%	Retired, Pensioner	6	1%
Prefer not to answer	67	14%			
Total	501	100,0	Total	501	100,0

The findings in Table 1 indicate that the majority of the respondents (40%) are educated to tertiary diploma level, while 26% and 24% respectively either have a graduate degree or professional certificate. The remainder, which accounts for 10%, have a post-graduate degree. Fifty-two percent of the respondents are between the ages of 25 and 34, with 26% aged between 17 and 24, and 22% being older than 34 years of age. The analysis further indicates that 53%

TABLE 2:
ACCURACY ANALYSIS STATISTICS

Research Construct		Descriptive Statistics				Cronbach's Test		C.R. Value	AVE Value	Highest Shared Variance	Factor Loading
		Mean Value		Standard Deviation		Item-total	α value				
STE	STE1	5,491		1,282		0,587					0,718
	STE2	5,253		1,386		0,545					0,671
	STE4	4,675		1,585		0,591					0,653
	STE6	4,868	4,780	1,506	1,521	0,606	0,801	0,808	0,384	0,215	0,700
	STE7	4,533		1,528		0,600					0,632
	STE8	4,198		1,685		0,352					0,366
	STE10	4,441		1,673		0,500					0,525
BT	BT1	6,068		1,086		0,786					0,875
	BT2	5,431		1,482		0,622					0,676
	BT3	5,902	5,863	1,158	1,211	0,799	0,869	0,886	0,663	0,493	0,871
	BT4	6,052		1,120		0,740					0,819
BS	BS1	5,966		1,151		0,763					0,797
	BS2	6,032		1,095		0,849					0,886
	BS3	6,074		1,098		0,849					0,892
	BS4	5,964		1,129		0,825					0,853
	BS5	6,142	5,929	1,070	1,179	0,806	0,931	0,945	0,686	0,546	0,841
	BS6	5,992		1,092		0,830					0,861
	BS7	6,086		1,109		0,827					0,869
	BS8	5,180		1,689		0,539					0,583
BL	BL1	5,629		1,405		0,757					0,777
	BL2	5,671		1,444		0,744					0,760
	BL3	6,134	5,709	1,047	1,368	0,755	0,864	0,933	0,593	0,546	0,876
	BL4	4,942		1,833		0,606					0,590
	BL5	6,168		1,113		0,692					0,817

STE: Store environment; BT: Brand trust; BS: Brand satisfaction; BL: Brand loyalty; CR: Composite reliability; AVE: Average variance extracted;

of respondents have a monthly household income of between R8 001 and R40 000, with 19% earning less than R8 000 per month, and 14% earning above R40 000. More specifically, from the portion of respondents earning between R8 001 and R40 000, three relatively equal clusters are evident, with incomes ranging between R8 001 and R16 000 (21%), followed by those between R16 001 and R25 000 (16%), with 16% earning between R25 001 and R40 000. In terms of occupation, almost 60% are employed full-time and work for a company. Fourteen percent of the respondents are students or trainees, while 10% are seeking employment. The remainder, which accounts for a relatively small portion, either work part-time or are self-employed.

Scale Accuracy Analysis

The scale accuracy analysis is presented in Table 2, and followed by a discussion of the measurement scale reliability and validity.

Testing for scale reliability

From the results in Table 2, it is evident that all the variables indicate satisfactory levels of reliability. In fact, Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0,801 to 0.931, therefore exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The composite reliability values ranged from 0,808 to 0,933 which is acceptable as this exceed 0.7 (Hair, Bush & Ortinau, 2009). The average variance extracted (AVE) of store environment (STE) is 0,384 which is greater than the square of the shared variance of STE and brand satisfaction (BS), which [(0.464) 2] = 0,215. Therefore, this proves the existence of discriminate validity (Nusair & Hua, 2010). Table 3 below illustrates the correlation of research variables.

TABLE 3:
CORRELATIONS MATRIX

	STE	BL	BS	BT
STE	1	.409**	.464**	.451**
BL	.409**	1	.739**	.597**
BS	.464**	.739**	1	.702**
BT	.451**	.597**	.702**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 3 above, most of the inter-correlation values for paired latent variables were below 0.7, therefore positing the presence of discriminant validity, according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Table 4 presents the study's model fit.

TABLE 4:
MODEL FIT SUMMARY

	Acceptable Threshold	Study Threshold	Acceptable/ Unacceptable
CMIN	< 3	2,491	Acceptable
GFI	>0.9	0.900	Acceptable
NFI	>0.9	0,927	Acceptable
RFI	>0.9	0,917	Acceptable
IFI	>0.9	0,955	Acceptable
TLI	>0.9	0,949	Acceptable
CFI	>0.9	0,955	Acceptable
RMSEA	<0.06	0,05	Acceptable

From Table 4 it is evident that all the indices indicate an acceptable model fit. First, the Chi-square index is accepted at 2.491, falling below the recommended threshold of 5 (Barrett, 2007). Furthermore, goodness-of-fit index (GFI) (0.900), normed fit index (NFI) (0.927), relative fit index (RFI) (0.917), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) (0.949) and comparative fit index (CFI) (0.955) all meet the threshold of 9 recommended by Hooper, Coughlan and Mullen (2008). The Root Mean Sqaure Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is indicated by a value of 0.05 which is lower than the recommended threshold of 0.06 (Hooper, Coughlan & Mullen, 2008). The Incremental Fit Index (IFI) (0.955) exceeds the recommended threshold of 9, as recommended by McDonald and Ho (2002).

Hypotheses Testing & Path Coefficients

Table 5 presents the results of the hypotheses and path coefficients and a discussion thereof follows.

Upon examining the hypotheses results in Table 5, it was observed that most of the hypotheses are significant and supported, with

TABLE 5:
HYPOTHESES RESULTS AND PATH COEFFICIENTS

Path Coefficient	Hypothesis	Estimate	P-Value	Result
Store Environment → Brand Trust	H1	0.64 [a]	***	Supported and significant
Store Environment → Brand Loyalty	H2	0.05	0,416	Supported but insignificant
Store Environment → Brand Satisfaction	H3	0.67[a]	***	Supported and significant
Brand Trust → Brand Loyalty	H4	0.14 [b]	0,002	Supported and significant
Brand Satisfaction → Brand Loyalty	H5	0.64[a]	***	Supported and significant

(a): *** = significance level $p < 0.01$; (b): significance level $p < 0.05$

the exception of hypothesis 2 (STE and BL), which is insignificant. Notably, the strongest relationship was found to be hypothesis 3, which tested the relationship between STE and BS, positing that STE has the strongest influence on BS with an estimate of 0.67. Furthermore, hypotheses 1 and 5 also indicated strong relationships between STE and brand trust (0.64) and brand loyalty (0.64) respectively. Therefore, hypothesis 1, 3, and 5 are supported and significant. The weakest relationships were found to be hypotheses 2 (STE and BL) and hypothesis 4 (BT and BL), which were indicated by an estimate of 0.05 and 0.14 respectively. Both of these relationships were supported, however the former was insignificant and the latter was significant.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on this study's findings, marketers can benefit from the research results in numerous ways. Firstly, it is suggested that fashion marketers focus most of their efforts on enhancing the environment of their stores, as this positively affects consumers' level of brand satisfaction. This implies that the in-store experience plays a key role in the creation of positive attitudes towards the brand. Secondly, it is observed that the atmosphere in a particular store influences consumers' brand trust, therefore positing that the more pleasant the surroundings of a store are perceived, the more likely consumers are to develop trust in the brand. For example, fashion retailers should focus on sensory stimuli such as music, visual aesthetics of the merchandise, store design and layout, and adequate representation of the

staff. More specifically, retailers should employ specific visual merchandising techniques to display products in an appealing manner; the store must not seem cluttered and should have clear signage as to where the ladies section, men's section and fittings rooms are located; music that represents the brand image should be played at a reasonable volume without annoying the customers; and the store staff must be easy to identify, well dressed, and behave professionally. Thirdly, by creating brand satisfaction through a pleasant in-store environment, customers are likely to portray loyalty towards the brand. In conclusion, the present study implies that marketing managers and retailers are required to implement strategies that ultimately increase brand trust and satisfaction, as this is seen to increase consumers' brand loyalty.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The present research attempted to gain a better comprehension of the concept of store environment and its impact on consumers' buying behaviour. As much as this study examines the relationships that exist between store environment and brand loyalty, trust and satisfaction, there is the possibility of observing other key themes that may arise out of assessing these relationships. Possible further research could be conducted with more than one demographic group, as this research only sampled black female South Africans. This could possibly provide more diverse insights on consumer behaviour and contribute significantly to research in the field of the present study. Financial and time constraints could have

possibly limited the depth of the study, therefore future research would benefit from a sizable amount of financial and human resources, as well as more time in conducting the research. The present research leaves room for the application of the same variables in different relationships or additional variables to the same research area in order to observe whether or not interesting findings can arise out of such research.

CONCLUSION

By gaining insight into the impact of store environment on brand loyalty, the findings of this research study provides marketing practitioners with a better understanding of how to positively influence brand loyalty among fashion consumers. Furthermore, it is evident that brand trust and brand satisfaction mediate the relationships between store environment and brand loyalty respectively. Therefore, marketers should invest in experiential strategies that incorporate a multitude of in-store sensory stimuli to influence brand trust and brand satisfaction, which will ultimately lead to brand loyalty. By gaining a better understanding of the use of sensory marketing in fashion retail, marketers can target consumers' subconscious minds through the implementation of innovative retail strategies. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of using experiential marketing to create a competitive advantage in the fashion retail industry.

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