

In-store experience, satisfaction, loyalty, and the moderating role of price image in the South African grocery sector

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ABSTRACT

The South African grocery sector has not shown significant increases in sales in recent years, suggesting that South African consumers remain consistent in their grocery purchases and may have become price sensitive. Against the background of trying economic times, this paper explores whether a grocery store's price image moderates the relationship between customers' satisfaction and loyalty towards grocery retailers. The effect of in-store experience on customer satisfaction is also reported, with the results suggesting that in-store experience remains key in securing satisfaction and that a focus on the price image conveyed should not necessarily be a key driver in the grocery sector.

Keywords: In-store experience, Customer satisfaction, Customer loyalty, Price image.

1. INTRODUCTION

High levels of competition and economic pressure on consumers in the South African retail sector have led retailers to look again at the way they operate their businesses and aim to become more customer-centred. The South African trade sector, under which retail is classified, represents one of the largest contributors to the country's gross domestic product (GDP), and employs just over 20% of the total labour force (Statistics South Africa, 2019). This emerging economy is therefore dependent on the sector to grow and be sustainable. To put this into perspective, in 2018 retail industry sales amounted to R1.045430 billion (about USD 68.757931 million), with a year-on-year growth of 4.2% – down from 7.2% in 2017 (Statistics South Africa, 2019). The economy faced several unfavourable conditions, including a technical recession, exchange rate pressure, limited credit availability, and high unemployment figures (Euromonitor, 2017).

Even though the retail sector as a whole is still reporting growth in sales, according to Statistics South Africa (2019) the grocery sector has not shown significant increases in sales. Combining this with poor economic growth prospects, grocery retailers are looking again at their business strategies. During such times, driving customer satisfaction and

loyalty comes to the forefront of retailers' tactics. Authors have argued for the importance of in-store experience as a key factor that influences these retail experiences and contributes to customer satisfaction (Drotskie & Herbst, 2010; Joshi, Waghela & Patel, 2015; Venter, Chinomona & Chuchu, 2016). This study is therefore grounded in disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980), and draws on the work of Bustamante and Rubio (2017), which suggests that retailers need to provide memorable in-store experiences to attract and retain customers, while Sotiriadis (2017) argues that satisfactory experiences lead to customers who are generally willing to repurchase or revisit the business. This study focuses on customer in-store experience, specifically in the grocery retail industry, to understand what effects in-store experience has on customer satisfaction leading to loyalty. In-store experiences are often neglected by grocery retailers as they focus on attracting customers with promotional items such as free toys for children, collection of stickers for free products or collection of loyalty points that may be used towards future purchases. Also, the challenging economic times often see retailers trying to encourage purchases by applying price discounts, thus aiming to create a more favourable price image for their stores. The moderating effect of store price image between satisfaction and loyalty is therefore further explored. Owing to emerging economies having large segments of price-sensitive consumers and groceries being such a homogeneous category the role of price image needs to be considered as a factor influencing customer loyalty.

The authors follow the guidelines presented by Fine and Kurdek (1994), and recognise that the data set used in this paper is an existing one that was initially collected by Sedibe, Matthysen, Biko, Gomez, Stiehler-Mulder and Frazer in 2018 and published the following year (Sedibe, Matthysen, Biko, Gomez, Stiehler-Mulder & Frazer, 2019). This paper, however, has a distinct focus, with the main objective of the study being the following:

To explore and describe the effect of in-store experience, satisfaction, and the moderating role of store price image on customer loyalty in the grocery sector of South Africa.

The contribution of this study is twofold. First, this paper represents an empirical investigation in a South African context where the impact of retail experience, satisfaction, and customer loyalty – with the moderating role of store price image plays between satisfaction and loyalty – is explored. Second, the study adds uniquely to the theoretical and managerial understanding of in-store experience and store price image on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the grocery sector.

The organisation of the paper is as follows: a literature review, consisting of a brief discussion of in-store experience and of that experience leading to satisfaction and loyalty, is followed by the theory of price image, and concluding with a discussion of the proposed research model to guide the hypotheses of this paper. In the methodology section, the methodological choices of the study are described. The results and discussion are then presented, followed by the conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. THEORY OF EXPECTANCY DISCONFIRMATION

Expectation disconfirmation theory (EDT) has been used extensively in marketing literature to study customer satisfaction (Banerjee and Chai, 2019). Customers approach a shopping situation with certain pre-purchase expectations against which they measure their experience. Oliver (1980), developed a five-phase model to explain EDT to gain insight into this phenomenon. Starting with the pre-purchase phase where expectation around the product and purchase experience develops, moving to the purchase phase when the product and service quality may be evaluated. During the third phase, the customer compares the pre-purchase expectations with the experience and if they were met. If the pre- expectations were not met the expectations were negatively disconfirmed and if they were met or exceeded the pre-expectations were positively disconfirmed. The fourth phase would then lead to the customer experiencing satisfaction or dissatisfaction based on the type of disconfirmation experienced. The fifth and final phase consists of post-purchase behaviour of either re-patronising, and spreading positive word-of-mouth or avoiding re-patronising and spreading negative word-of-mouth (Choi, Moon, and Kim, 2019).

According to the EDT model, a satisfied customer implies that a customer had a positive emotional reaction to the in-store experience and that their expectations were fulfilled (Nuradiana and Sobari, 2019). According to Gillison & Reynolds (2018), customer expectations may be based on previous experience or the experience of others. Positive experiences influence customer's emotional state and can in turn positively impact customer's feelings of satisfaction (Wirtz and Bateson, 1999 & Moore, Collier, Williams, and Moore, 2020).

2.2. IN-STORE EXPERIENCE LEADING TO SATISFACTION

Most of the academic work on in-store experience is grounded in the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory of Mehrabian and Russell (1974), which proposes that the external environment can influence an individual's internal state and subsequent behaviour. The retailer provides the stimulus in the form of the sensory, intellectual, social, and pragmatic in-store experience to the customer (the organism), who responds in value perception and satisfaction, which may, in turn, lead to loyalty (Cachero-Martínez & Vázquez-Casielles, 2017).

The in-store experience is therefore no longer a product acquisition exercise; it is a multi-sensory and interactive social experience that emotionally affects and challenges consumers (Terblanche, 2018). Humans are hedonic, and so tend to avoid pain and seek satisfactory experiences. In-store shopping experiences are not excluded from this principle (Paul, Sankaranarayanan & Mekoth, 2016). Retail experience is a combination of pragmatic and emotional experiences; the pragmatic aspects relate to the dimensions of product, price, and promotions (utilitarian value); and the emotional experience relates to the intellectual and social experience with employees (hedonic value) (Cachero-Martínez & Vázquez-Casielles, 2017).

Consequently, customer experience is commonly defined from a multidimensional view and includes five types of experience: affective (feel), physical (act), sensory (sense), social-identity (relate), and cognitive (think) experiences (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016:70). The variables 'sense', 'think', and 'feel' are individual-level experiences, as they influence a customer's physical senses, emotions, and intellect; the other variables – 'act' and 'relate' – may be classified as shared experiences that are focused on a customer's lifestyle and culture (Yoon, 2013:696). It has also been found that activating the sensory experience complements the other experience dimensions, which in turn contribute to satisfaction (Cachero-Martínez & Vázquez-Casielles, 2017).

Experience marketing considers that customers use not only a product's attributes when making purchase decisions, but also take into account the experience when buying the product (Maghnati, Ling & Nasermoadeli, 2012). Literature support that customer experience has a substantial impact on customer satisfaction (Grzeskowiak, Sirgy, Foscht and Swoboda, 2016 & Stein and Ramaseshan, 2019). The theory of service-dominant logic supports customer experience as a determinant of customer satisfaction and views the customer as co-creator of value and customer experience which are defiantly applicable to a retail setting (Mohd-Ramly and Omar, 2017).

Satisfaction relates to two conceptualisations, the first would be meeting the needs of the customer and the second "appraisal satisfaction" refers to the overall judgement of the experience measured against anticipations (Biscaia, Rosa, Moura e Sá & Sarrico, 2017). Therefore; 'satisfaction' may be defined as a condition in which the perceived experience of the customer meets or exceeds the pre-purchase expectations, and includes the conscious evaluation of the interactions, the product, or the service performance (Oliver, 1997; Yi, 1990). In a retail context, satisfaction refers to the "post-consumption evaluation of how well a store or a product meets or exceeds customer expectations" (Levy and Weitz, 2009, p. 111 cited in Grewal, D., Ailawadi, Gauri, Hall, Kopalle, and Robertson, 2011)

Retailers have been striving to keep customers satisfied due to increased competition and the financial loss represented by a customer switching to a competitor (Bansal & Taylor, 2015). In-store experiences are key to building trust among customers (Venter, Cinamona & Chuchu, 2016), in-store experience (emotional and pragmatic) has a significant impact on satisfaction (Cachero-Martínez & Vázquez-Casielles, 2017), and a South African study found that customer satisfaction in retail stores is also a strong predictor of customer loyalty (Mafini & Dhurup, 2015). This suggests that a satisfactory in-store experience is likely to lead to a customer being satisfied and that a satisfied customer is likely to be loyal to a retailer. The study by Stein and Ramaseshan (2019), supported the positive link between customer experience and customer loyalty.

2.3. CONNOTATION OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH CUSTOMER LOYALTY

The marketing literature is clear in that customer satisfaction leads to loyalty, and loyal customers represent greater profitability (Tweneboah-Koduah & Farley, 2016; Awara & Anyadighibe, 2014; Bagram & Khan, 2012; Yuen & Chan, 2010). However; it must be noted, that repetitive purchase behaviour does not indicate customer satisfaction or customer loyalty, as repeat buying may result from constraints such as availability, convenience or high switching costs (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011; Reichheld, 2003 & Reinartz and Kumar, 2002). Further; authors agree that without satisfaction a customer will not be able to move to a state of loyalty (Oliver, 1999, Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011 & Kotler and Armstrong, 2006).

True customer loyalty may be defined as a situation where a customer becomes an advocate for an organisation without encouragement and are deeply committed to re-patronise said organisation (Oliver, 1997 & Singh, 2006). In turn, loyal customers are less likely to be influenced by short term incidental efforts of competitors, such as price discounts or promotional offerings. Therefore; customer loyalty relates to both customer attitudes and behaviours (Cuesta-Valiño, Rodríguez, and Núñez-Barriopedro, 2019).

The relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty has been found to be positive by authors Johnston, Clark, and Shulver, (2012) one can read: "Satisfied customers who perceive value from the service are more likely to return and also more likely to provide positive word-of-mouth and recommend the organisation and its services to others". A 2017 case study in the retail sector by Biscaia, Rosa, Moura e Sá & Sarrico found a 2:1 relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty in that in cases where customer satisfaction increase by two units, loyalty increase of one unit was predicted. The study supported the positive effects of satisfaction on customer loyalty and in turn better long term results. However; considering the recent economic challenges experienced in South Africa, retailers have been trying to encourage purchases by applying price discounts, thereby creating a more favourable price image for their stores. This suggests that price image also needs to be taken into consideration in the current context.

2.4. STORE PRICE IMAGE

The grocery consumer market in emerging economies is commonly characterised by large pockets of price-sensitive consumers, due to increased urbanisation that is often accompanied by population growth and poverty (Peyton, Moseley & Battersby, 2015). This results in grocery consumers being motivated by value pricing and discounts, as these represent perceived savings and even self-expression value (Iranmanesh, Jayaraman, Zailani & Ghadiri, 2017). It may be said that this market is more utilitarian motivated as price and convenience play a key role in the amount a customer will spend during a shopping trip (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2019). Therefore, pricing represents a complex decision for retailers, as it influences consumers on many levels.

Price represents revenue for the retailer; on the other hand, consumers see price as perceived value and quality compared with the 'sacrifice' they make to obtain the product. Price is used as a cue for quality perceptions, and a consumer will associate high prices with high-quality products and experiences (Jeong, Crompton & Hyun, 2019). However, offering low prices does not necessarily mean that consumers have a negative store quality experience evaluation (Diallo, Coutelle-Brillet, Riviere & Zielke, 2015). Customer satisfaction is influenced by the perceived value, and the monetary price is a promising predictor of customer satisfaction (Raji & Zainal, 2016). In Makhitha and Khumalo's (2019) study, it was found that the three top selection attributes for grocery stores in a South African context were convenience, service, and price perception.

Against this background, the following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

- H₁ In-store experience positively and significantly influences customer satisfaction in the grocery retail sector in South Africa.**
- H₂ Customer satisfaction positively and significantly influences customer loyalty in the grocery retail sector in South Africa.**
- H₃ Price image moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the grocery retail sector in South Africa.**

2.5. THE PROPOSED THEORETICAL MODEL

The proposed theoretical model is grounded in previous research on the antecedents of customer satisfaction and loyalty (Cachero-Martínez & Vázquez-Casielles, 2017; Mafini & Dhurup, 2015). 'Satisfaction' is theorised, for the purpose of this paper, as the positive fulfilment of customer needs, founded on whether or not there is a gap between expectations and experience (Mafini & Dhurup, 2015). 'Customer loyalty' is defined by Jones, Reynolds and Arnold (2006) as the customer holding a strong and deep commitment to repurchase a product or service in future. The research model, for this paper, therefore hypothesises that in-store experience (on an individual level as 'sense', 'feel', and 'think') leads to satisfaction, and that satisfaction leads to loyalty, while price image moderates the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty.

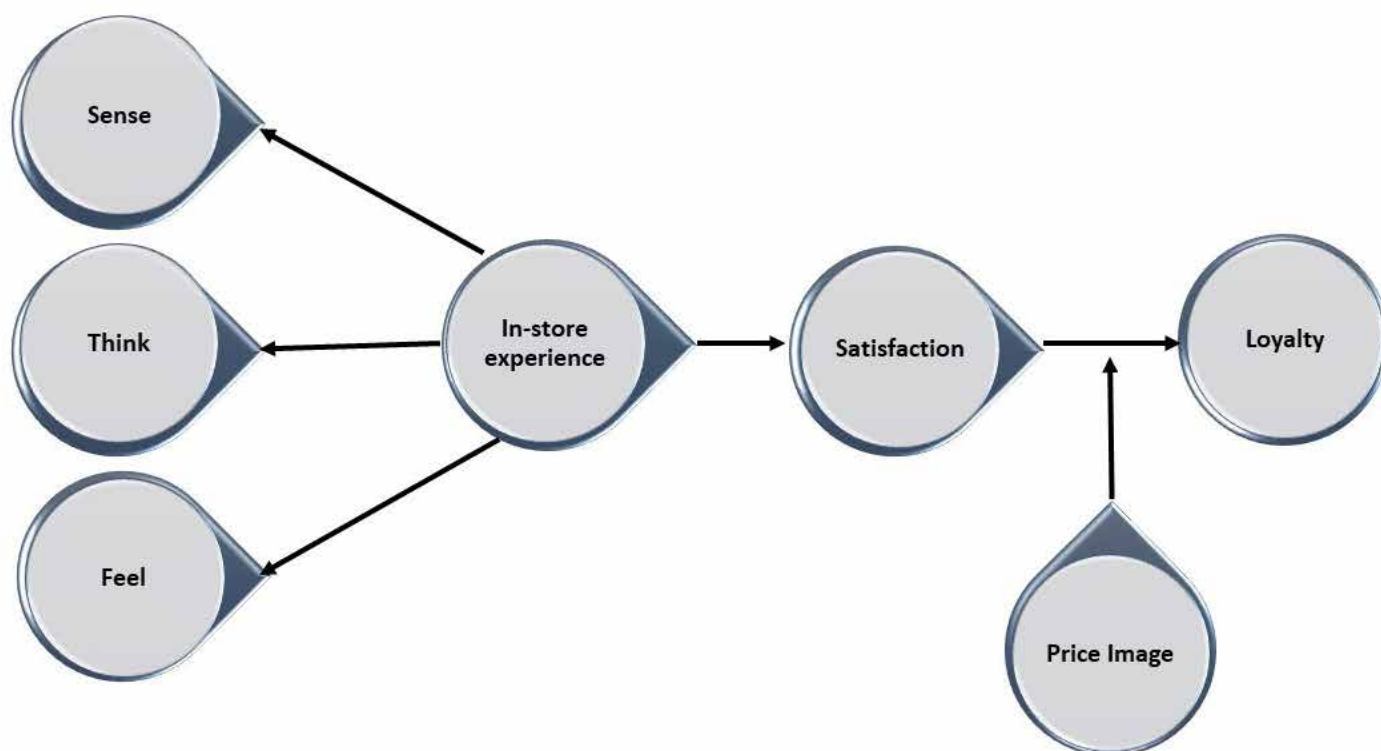


FIGURE 1: THEORETICAL MODEL

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

A non-probability convenience sampling approach was used to identify respondents for the study. Convenience sampling allows the researchers to reach a large number of respondents who are ready and conveniently available to participate in a study (Bradley, 2013). Data was collected using a survey approach, a questionnaire containing items adapted from existing scales where used with a 7-point Likert scale for the respondents to indicate their level of agreement. The questionnaire was pre-tested amongst the target population before the final data collection. The data was collected by field workers approaching the target population of both male and female grocery shoppers in South Africa to complete a questionnaire. Respondents were asked to state their most recent grocery shopping trip to a South African retailer, as well as their reason for their shopping trip (e.g., weekly or monthly grocery shopping). The next part consisted of 21 items measuring the variables 'sense' (four items), 'feel' (four items), 'think' (four items), 'satisfaction' (three items), 'loyalty' (three items), and 'price image' (three items). The items mentioned as variables were adapted from Yoon (2013), Srivastava and Kaul (2016), and Wang and Chang (2014). The questionnaire concluded with demographic questions pertaining to age and gender, as well as the amount spent on groceries per month. A total of 397 responses were collected, of which 395 were included in the final analysis (99.5% response rate).

Once the data were collected the data were analysed using of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25 to run statistical tests on the quantitative data and analyse the constructs and items of the questionnaire. Details of the statistical test done to analyse the data will be covered in the results section that follows.

4. RESULTS

4.1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Table 1 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics of the sample. The largest number of respondents were female (63.8%), and the two largest groups of all respondents were aged from 23 to 30 (34.4%) and from 31 to 35 (23%).

TABLE 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

	Demographics	Percentage
Gender	Male	36.2
	Female	63.8
Age	18-22	16.5
	23-30	34.4
	31-35	23.0
	36-40	10.1
	41-45	9.2
	46 or more	6.8

Table 2 indicates the respondents' purpose of the last shopping trip they undertook before they completed the questionnaire. Most indicated that the trip was focused on monthly grocery shopping (46.3%), followed by a quick pop-in for a few items (30.9%).

TABLE 2: PURPOSE OF SHOPPING TRIP

Purpose of shopping trip	Frequency	Percent
Monthly grocery shopping	183	46.3
Weekly grocery shopping	69	17.5
Just popped in quickly to get a few things	122	30.9
I bought groceries for a specific occasion	19	4.8
Other reason	1	0.3
Total	394	99.7

The average amount spent on groceries was also requested; this was estimated at R2591.24 (about USD170).

4.3. RELIABILITY, MEAN SCORES, AND VALIDITY

The reliability of the scale items used in the analysis of the hypotheses was determined by calculating the internal consistency reliability scores, or Cronbach's alphas. Table 3 below shows the scores obtained and the mean and standard deviation for each of the items.

TABLE 3: COEFFICIENT ALPHA, MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Construct	Items	Coefficient alpha	Mean	Standard deviation
Sense	The smell of the store was very good	0.822	4.93	1.456
	The shopping experience made me relaxed and comfortable		4.62	1.587
	The ambience of the store was very pleasant		4.80	1.495
Feel	The shopping experience was uplifting	0.774	4.48	1.555
	The temperature inside the store was comfortable		5.10	1.498
	The store was well lit to help me select my groceries		5.57	1.457
	The atmosphere in the store was welcoming		5.13	1.490
Think	I felt secure in dealing with the service staff in the store	0.866	5.13	1.535
	I felt satisfied with the treatment I received from the service staff of the store		5.17	1.552
	The service staff showed commitment to satisfy my shopping needs		4.82	1.521
Loyalty	I am willing to revisit this retailer	0.749	5.63	1.342
	I am willing to dedicate all my future purchases at this retailer		4.40	1.769
	Even in the case of a price mark-up, I will buy from this retailer in future		4.23	1.784
Customer satisfaction	My choice to purchase from this grocery retailer was a wise one	0.854	5.00	1.485
	I am satisfied with the service I received from this grocery retailer		5.13	1.434
	I am happy with the service I received from this grocery retailer		5.18	1.423
Price image	The prices of the groceries sold by this retail store are attractive	0.830	4.41	1.561
	The prices of the groceries sold by this retail store are reasonable		4.45	1.550
	The prices of the groceries sold by this retail store are much lower than other stores		3.73	1.754

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all the constructs are above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:223), suggesting internal consistency and reliability. The variable 'I paid attention to the music played at the retail store' under 'Sense' was deleted, which improved the score from 0.704 to 0.822. The variable was deleted to move the Cronbach's alpha value from acceptable to strong (Zikmund & Babin, 2007).

4.4. CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS (CFA) AND STRUCTURAL MODEL

Convergent validity was assessed by evaluating the average variance extracted (AVE) scores, which were all above 0.5 (Fornell-Larcker, 1981); convergent validity was thus achieved. The composite reliability scores were also reviewed. All values were above 0.700 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The correlation between 'sense', 'feel', and 'think' was 0.758. As this is lower than the lowest square of AVEs for all the constructs (with the lowest value being 0.775), this indicates that discriminant validity was achieved.

This study originally set out to measure in-store experience through the three variables 'sense', 'feel', and 'think'. A CFA analysis was conducted to assess the measurement model. An analysis of the factors for the CFA showed a correlation of 0.987 between the variables 'sense' and 'feel', suggesting issues with multicollinearity. These two

experience variables were therefore combined to form a new variable that the researchers termed 'environment'. As consumers sense and feel are mainly stimulated by external stimuli and therefore the shopping environment the label "environment" seemed appropriate in the context of the study. The researchers then proceeded with the analysis using only the two variables 'environment' and 'think' as representative of the overall variable 'experience'.

The model fit and structural model was analysed, using Bentler, (2005), structural equations program (EQS). The normalised estimate was high (57.498), and thus the robust statistics were interpreted. The model fit for the measurement model was assessed using chi-square (χ^2), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square (RMSEA). The measurement model proceeding with the two factors demonstrated a fair fit (χ^2 = significant, but accepted due to χ^2 sensitivity to large samples; NFI = 0.932; CFI = 0.929; RMSEA = 0.083). The low number of items for the variables 'satisfaction' (three items) and 'loyalty' (three items) meant that fit statistics could not be calculated.

The structural model also demonstrated a fair fit (χ^2 = significant – 258.898 / 73df = 3.546), but is accepted due to χ^2 sensitivity to large samples; NFI = 0.900; CFI = 0.925; RMSEA = 0.081 (0.070 – 0.91). The experience variable 'think' showed a significant positive relationship with satisfaction ($t = 7.126$, $p < 0.05$), while the variable 'environment' did not ($t = 1.800$, $p > 0.05$). Hypothesis 1 was therefore accepted, with only 'think' having a significant effect on customer satisfaction, and not both variables 'think' and 'environment' as one construct representing customer experience. Satisfaction to loyalty ($t = 10.314$; $p < 0.05$) was significant, and so hypothesis 2 could be accepted.

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the moderation effect of price image on the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The interaction term between satisfaction and price image was not significant ($t = -0.116$, $p = 0.907$). Price image on its own as an independent factor does not significantly influence loyalty ($T = 1.004$; $p = 0.316$). There was, therefore, no moderation so therefore hypothesis 3 was rejected.

5. DISCUSSION

Most of the respondents were female, and the purpose of their shopping trips was a monthly shop, which tended to be larger in size. The findings around demographics and shopping trips were in line with similar studies in the field (Selema and Makgosa, 2018 & Mortimer, 2013). The results indicated that the variables 'feel' and 'sense' were similar in loadings, and they were therefore combined to form a new variable that the researchers termed 'environment'. Of the two experience components – environment and think – only the variable 'think' positively influenced customer satisfaction. When referring to the variable's items, 'think' was strongly focused on the human and service staff component of the experience. This suggests that the in-store experience – specifically, the customer service component – plays an important role in contributing to customer satisfaction, and that the manner in which customers perceive their treatment by store employees significantly impacts their satisfaction levels. These results were also reported in the first publication where this data set was analysed: that of Sedibe *et al.* (2019) (see introduction).

In extending the results further, the additional objectives and hypotheses developed included the impact of satisfaction on loyalty, and the moderating role of price image. These results indicated that customer satisfaction positively and significantly influences customer loyalty, which is in line with previous findings (Mafini & Dhurup, 2015). The results on customer satisfaction and loyalty support the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) theory of Mehrabian and Russell (1974). However, even though the literature suggests that price plays a significant role in shopping situations and decisions (Makhitha & Khumalo, 2019; Raji & Zainal, 2016), the results of this study found that price image did not have any specific impact on the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. As proposed in the literature, pricing may play a role as an antecedent of satisfaction (Makhitha & Khumalo, 2019; Raji & Zainal, 2016), but this does not have a core impact on a consumer's transition from satisfaction to becoming loyal. The finding also supports the literature on customer loyalty in that truly loyal customers will not be influenced by short term price discount tactics of competitors (Cuesta-Valiño, Rodríguez, and Núñez-Barriopedro, 2019).

6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite challenging economic times, grocery retailers in the emerging market of South Africa cannot rely on price image to build a loyal customer base. Pricing can be copied by competitors, and highly price-sensitive customers – such as cherry pickers' purchase behaviour – will follow price discounts across competitors in the market. It is clear that loyalty and satisfaction are multidirectional concepts, and cannot be built on pricing strategies alone. Managers need to recognise the impact of in-store experience on consumers' levels of satisfaction, and ensure that the overall environment, but especially customers' experience levels with staff, is positive.

Managers should also strive to achieve satisfaction, as it contributes significantly to achieving loyalty. Even though price played no role in the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, it is still identified as a contributor to satisfaction in previous studies, and managers should therefore always consider the impact and role of their pricing strategies. However, a strong pricing focus is not recommended when the focus is on building customer loyalty. Rather, positive experiences, in particular with service staff, lead to satisfaction, which in turn creates loyal customers. Retailers should focus on the "think" aspect of their customer journey, and train staff to interact positively with their customers at certain key interaction points within the grocery shopping experience. Retailers ought to strive to create memorable experiences and offer great service to customers if they want to create loyalty among their shoppers. Frontline staff should be rewarded for their commitment to service, and empowered to create excellent in-store experiences for customers. Retail frontline staff should receive ongoing customer service training and be given the autonomy to make decisions to serve customers. The organisation's mission and values should embody a commitment to creating an excellent customer in-store experience and should be driven from the top management level. Customer satisfaction is not an operational issue for store employees alone to implement. The findings support the theory of service-dominant logic as the in-store experience impacts customer satisfaction (Mohd-Ramly and Omar, 2017).

Future research could look into different product categories that are less homogenous such as luxury apparel or home appliances. The study also focused on a specific geographic area and could be expanded to other areas to see if similar results could be obtained. A longitudinal study within a particular focusing on how the variables change over time could also be beneficial to gain insights on the effectiveness of said retailer's tactics and strategies.

We conclude on the note that price perception does not create true loyal customers in the grocery sector of South Africa. Staff interactions continue to play a key role in satisfying in-store experiences even in low involvement situations such as grocery shopping. Therefore; driving customer experience should remain a focus even during slow economic times while providing value for money offerings to the consumers.

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