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The Strategic Relationship Between Space and Customers' Brand Experience at Exclusive Books

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Research Report Project 5: Research Methodology (RESM8419p)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts Degree of Honours in Strategic Brand Communications at Vega School of Brand Leadership, a brand of the Independent Institute of Education (IIE)

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16 September 2019



DECLARATION

I, **Brendon Shane Simmonds** (student number: **15020692**), hereby declare that this research report submitted for the Bachelor of Arts Degree of Honours in Strategic Brand Communications to the Independent Institute of Education is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another university or higher education institution for degree purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BS Simmonds', written over a horizontal line.

Brendon Shane Simmonds

16 September 2019

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My Mom, this one is for you. Love you more than a span.

A special thank you to my soulmate and best friend, Darryl, the person gifted to me by the universe to spend my entire life with. Without your support, encouragement and patience, this project would not have been possible. “Experiences, not things.” More than more to the stars and back.

To our three boys, Vincent, Pablo and Tin-Tin man: Dads love you unconditionally, always and always.

ABSTRACT

The underlying theme of this small-scale research study is the way in which atmospherics emotionally influence the brand experience construct within the consumption space. Customers' in-store retail experience has become a fundamental differentiator for brands and their product offerings. This exploratory study used a qualitative research approach to assess how the layout and design considerations of two alternative spaces under the Exclusive Books brand contribute to customer experience. Exclusive Books was selected as a case study because the brand has recently undergone a shift in its retail strategy; the new strategy is reflected in certain of its stores but not others, which provides a unique opportunity for comparison. Observational research was conducted at the brand's Hyde Park and Gateway stores, and information was also collected through personal interviews and a group interview. The meaningful findings emerging from this study can help to advance the exciting body of knowledge relating to atmospherics in general, and they may also be insightful for Exclusive Books in particular. It was concluded that, in contrast with the flagship store in Hyde Park, the brand's Gateway store falls short of providing the intended customer experience. There appears to be a disconnect between how the Exclusive Books retail experience is envisaged internally (by the brand) and how it is perceived externally (by the customer) at the Gateway store.

Keywords: Space planning; atmospherics; brand experience; retail strategy; environmental psychology.

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 2.1: Atmospheric Channels and Variables (Kotler, 1973)	10
TABLE 2.2: Atmospheric Variables, Adapted from Turley and Milliman (2000)	13
TABLE 3.1: Atmospherics Under Observation	25
TABLE 3.2: Contrasting Atmospheric Variables Under Observation	27
TABLE 3.3: Research Design Approach	28
TABLE 4.1: Response to Task-and-Report Exercise for Gateway Store	39
TABLE 4.2: Response to Task-and-Report Exercise for Hyde Park Store	43

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1.1: Exclusive Books' Logo Evolution (2019)	2
FIGURE 2.1: The Mehrabian and Russell Model (1974)	8
FIGURE 2.2: Progression of Economic Value (Pine & Gilmore, 1998)	9
FIGURE 2.3: Pine and Gilmore's "Four Reals of an Experience" Mode (1998)	11
FIGURE 4.1: Exclusive Books' Brand Identity	36
FIGURE 4.2: Store Entrance at Gateway	38
FIGURE 4.3: Store Interior at Gateway	38
FIGURE 4.4: Customers' Brand Experience at Exclusive Books in Gateway	40
FIGURE 4.5: Store Entrance at Hyde Park	42
FIGURE 4.6: Store Interior at Hyde Park	42
FIGURE 4.7: Customers' Brand Experience at Exclusive Books in Hyde Park	44

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COVER PAGE.....	II
DECLARATION	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
ABSTRACT	V
LIST OF TABLES	VI
LIST OF FIGURES.....	VI
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1.1 Field of Study.....	1
1.1.2 Proposed Journal	2
1.2 BACKGROUND	2
1.3 RATIONALE.....	3
1.3.1 Personal Rationale	3
1.3.2 Academic Rationale.....	3
1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	4
1.4.1 Research Purpose.....	4
1.4.2 Research Question.....	4
1.3.3 Research Objectives	4
1.5 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS.....	5
1.5.1 Limitations	5
1.5.2 Delimitations	5
1.6 CHAPTER OUTLINES	5
1.7 SUMMARY	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 INTRODUCTION	7
2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	7
2.3 LITERATURE PERTINENT TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	9
2.3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1	9
2.3.1.1 Atmospherics.....	9
2.3.1.2 Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R).....	10
2.3.1.3 The Four Realms of an Experience.....	11
2.3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2	12
2.3.2.1 Atmospheric Variables.....	12
2.3.2.2 Retail Marketing with Atmospherics	12
2.3.2.3 Atmospheric Variables Within the Context of Academic Research	14

2.3.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3	15
2.3.3.1 The Brand Experience	15
2.3.3.2 Branding with Proxemics	15
2.3.3.3 Communicating with Space	16
2.3.4 Research Conceptualisation	17
2.4 SUMMARY	18
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	19
3.1 INTRODUCTION	19
3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM	19
3.2.1 Methodology	19
3.2.2 Epistemology	19
3.2.3 Ontology	19
3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN.....	20
3.3.1 Quantitative Research	20
3.3.2 Qualitative Research	20
3.3.3 Mixed Methodologies.....	21
3.3.4 Conceptualisation	21
3.3.4.1 Phenomenology.....	21
3.3.4.2 Ethnography	22
3.3.4.3 Case Study	22
3.3.5 Research Approach	23
3.4 POPULATION	23
3.4.1 Target Population	23
3.4.2 Sampling.....	23
3.5 DATA-COLLECTION METHODS	24
3.5.1 Group Interview	25
3.5.2 Observational Research	26
3.5.3 Participant Research	27
3.5.3.1 Task and Report.....	27
3.5.3.2 Face-to-Face Interviews	28
3.6 DATA-ANALYSIS METHODS	28
3.6.1 Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness	29
3.6.1.1 Validity and Reliability.....	29
3.6.1.2 Trustworthiness	29
3.6.2 Crystallisation	30
3.6.3 Anticipated Contribution	30
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	31

3.8 LIMITATIONS.....	31
3.8.1 Resources	31
3.8.2 Sample size	32
3.8.3 Timing.....	32
3.9 SUMMARY	32
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	33
4.1 INTRODUCTION	33
4.2 DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS	33
4.2.1 Group Interview	33
4.2.2 Observational Research	33
4.2.3 Face-to-Face Interviews	34
4.3 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	34
4.3.1 Presentation of Findings from Group Interview with Exclusive Books.....	34
4.3.1.1 Background and Business Model	34
4.3.1.2 Brand Identity	35
4.3.1.3 Space, Layout and Design Considerations	35
4.3.1.4 Brand Experience	36
4.3.2 Presentation of Findings from Primary Research Conducted at Gateway	37
4.3.2.1 Observational Research Findings at Gateway	37
4.3.2.2 Debriefing and Semi-Structured Interview Findings at Gateway	39
4.3.2.3 Discussion of Primary Research Findings at Gateway.....	40
4.3.3 Presentation of Findings from Primary Research Conducted at Hyde Park.....	41
4.3.3.1 Observational Research Findings at Hyde Park.....	41
4.3.3.2 Debriefing and Semi-Structured Interview Findings at Hyde Park	43
4.3.3.3 Discussion of Primary Research Conducted at the Hyde Park	44
4.4 SUMMARY	45
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	46
5.1 INTRODUCTION	46
5.2 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	46
5.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1	46
5.3.1 Findings from the Literature.....	46
5.3.2 Findings from the Research	46
5.3.3 Conclusion.....	47
5.3.4 Recommendations.....	47
5.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2	47
5.4.1 Findings from the Literature.....	47
5.4.2 Findings from the Research	48

5.4.3 Conclusion.....	48
5.4.4 Recommendations.....	48
5.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3.....	48
5.5.1 Findings from the Literature.....	49
5.5.2 Findings from the Research	49
5.5.3 Conclusion.....	49
5.5.4 Recommendations.....	49
5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	49
5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS	50
REFERENCE LIST.....	51
6. APPENDIX	58
Appendix A: Primary Research Guides, Templates and Questionnaires	58
A.1 Group Interview Guide	58
A.1.1 Group Interview Questionnaire	59
A.2 Observational Research Guide	60
A.2.1 Template for Field Work.....	60
A.3 Participant Research Guide	61
A.3.1 Face-to-Face Questionnaire	63
Appendix B: Copies of the Gatekeeper’s Letter, the Informed Consent Letter and the Ethical Clearance Letter.....	64
B.1 Gatekeeper’s Letter.....	64
B.2 Informed Consent Letter	65
B.3 Ethical Clearance Letter.....	67
Appendix C: Observational Field Notes, Images, Thematic Analysis of Responses and Interview Transcripts	68
C.1 Primary Research Data for Exclusive Books, Gateway	68
C.1.1 Observational Field Notes.....	68
C.1.2 Images of Exclusive Books in Gateway	71
C 1.3 Thematic Analysis of Responses to Questionnaire from Gateway Experience	72
C.2 Primary Research Data for Exclusive Books, Hyde Park.....	75
C.2.1 Observational Field Notes.....	75
C.2.2 Images of Exclusive Books in Hyde Park	78
C 2.3 Thematic Analysis of Responses to Questionnaire from Hyde Park Experience	79
C.3 Transcript of Group Interview with Exclusive Books.....	82
Appendix E: Concept Document Table	97
E.1 Originality Report.....	97

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The in-store experience is considered to be a holistic exchange of atmospheric stimuli (Venter de Villiers, Chinomona & Chuchu, 2018), influenced by a wide range of psychological factors that affect customers' decision-making processes (Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Raghubir & Stewart, 2009). The development of sensory marketing techniques (involving the manipulation of atmospheric stimuli) has led to products and retail spaces being specifically designed to appeal to both emotional and rational customer expectations (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

This evolution in retail, which is a reaction to both changing customer expectations and intensified competition among brands, looks beyond the scope of products (Kotler, 1973) and places increased importance on experience as part of the marketed product (Puccinelli, et al., 2009). Today, retailers are creatively crafting new value-added experience spaces, over and above the expected features and benefits of the manufactured products on offer (Venter de Villiers, et al., 2018). The specific design considerations of multi-sensory atmospheric variables in their retail spaces have enabled many brands – including Starbucks, Disney, Apple and Nike – to achieve a substantial competitive advantage (Same & Larimo, 2012; Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal, Dhruv & Roggeveen, 2014).

1.1.1 Field of Study

This dissertation explores emotional responses to experienced retail environments. It investigates the shift in retail design strategy at Exclusive Books in relation to how the brand's retail environment is experienced by the consumer. It uses atmospherics to review brand experiences, employing a theoretical framework whose qualitative approach to methodology is exploratory. An approach well suited to studies in the field of social sciences and humanities (Maree, 2016).

1.1.2 Proposed Journal

This study looks at a broad spectrum of interrelated topics and would be equally suitable for inclusion in marketing-, retail- or design-focused publications.

1.2 BACKGROUND

From its humble beginnings as a second-hand book store in the back-streets of Johannesburg to its emergence as the leading South African book retailer, with 39 stores across the country, Exclusive Books has a rich and eclectic brand personality (Campbell, 2016). Today, the brand is shifting its retail strategy up a gear in order to generate a more experienced-based environment for its customers (Exclusive Books, 2019). Yet this current ideology of crafting tangible experiences for customers within the brand's retail spaces in fact extends back to the 1990s, when Exclusive Books first introduced coffee culture into its flagship store in Hyde Park (Exclusive Books, 2019; The Pundits, 2017; Leader, 2018). Even as early as the 1970s, this lifestyle brand was making use of a differentiated marketing strategy at the retail level by encouraging in-store experiences, safe spaces and late-night shopping in a relaxed and elegant environment (Grubb, 2014).

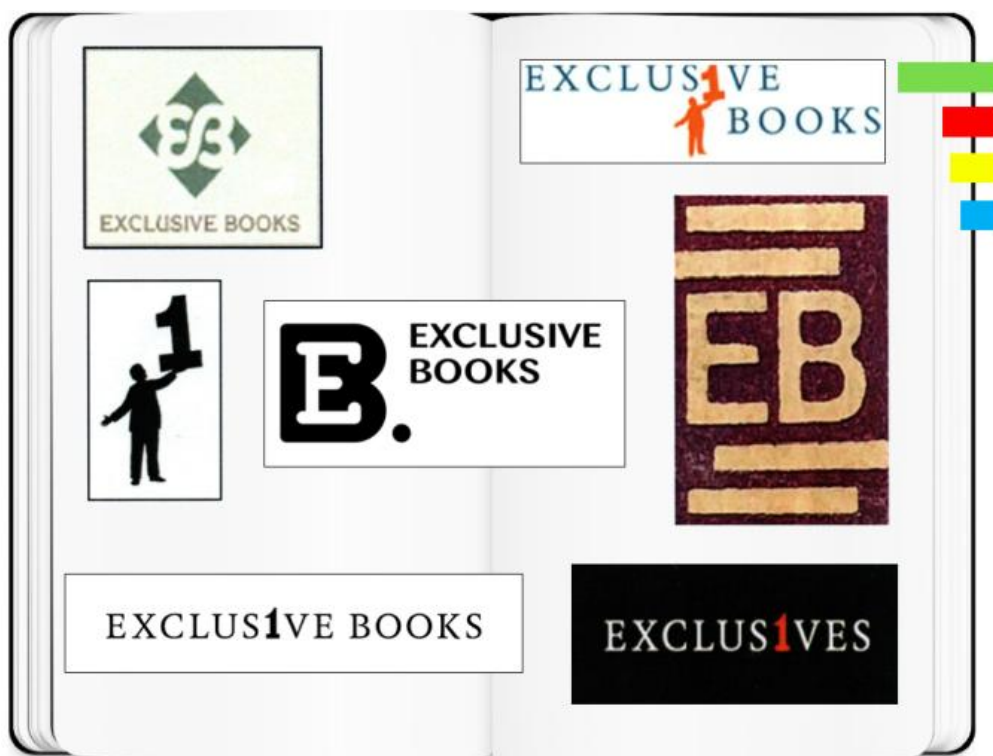


FIGURE 1.1: Exclusive Books' Logo Evolution (2019)

1.3 RATIONALE

1.3.1 Personal Rationale

Learning should be a lifelong process, and people only grow when they are challenged to think differently. After twenty years of interior design experience, I embarked on a journey to learn something completely new and outside of my creative comfort zone. This dissertation uses design thinking to connect my life's passion of exploring how people experience and respond to space with the broader theoretical framework of strategic brand communication.

1.3.2 Academic Rationale

As concepts of branding evolve (Roper & Parker, 2006), and more people look to brands for meaningful interactions (Light, 2017), so the gap between retail space and brand experience needs further consideration. Retail stores are struggling to stay open (Broll Property Group, 2017). Physical stores are shifting from being places of purchase to places of experience (Light, 2017), with the act of purchasing relegated to the comforts of the home (Apostolou, 2011). Faced with increased competition from online retail (Srinivasan & Srivastava, 2010) and with customers' need for a more experience-based brand relationship, certain retail brands are struggling to remain relevant (Petermans & Van Cleempoel, 2009). In order for brand connections to be nurtured and maintained, more emphasis needs to be placed on understanding the role of human feelings within a purposefully designed space (Yoo, Park, MacInnis & Deborah, 1998; Pop, 2013; Mahmoud, 2017).

Against this backdrop, this study pays attention to atmospheric variables and how they influence brand-contact experiences within the retail environment at selected Exclusive Books stores. The research examines how contrasting layout, design and space-planning considerations at Exclusive Books retail stores impact on relevant stakeholders. This research is exploratory in its nature and intends to be of value to Exclusive Books, the interior design community and strategic brand communicators.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

It can be argued that poor retail layout and design decisions adversely impact the consumer's in-store brand experience and, conversely, that informed decisions in this area have a positive impact on brand experience (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss, 2002).

The present study employed a case study-based approach to exploring how effectively two contrasting retail spaces under the Exclusive Books brand deliver the brand's desired consumer experience.

1.4.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to explore the recent shift in retail design strategy at Exclusive Books, with a particular focus on how the introduction of certain atmospheric variables has holistically accommodated customers' evolving need for an in-store, experience-based brand relationship.

1.4.2 Research Question

How do emotional responses to space-planning considerations influence customer experience and contribute to the customer-brand relationship?

1.3.3 Research Objectives

Exclusive Books has embarked on a revised retail design strategy for some of its existing and new stores across South Africa. The purpose of this research is to explore this shift in retail design strategy at Exclusive Books, with a particular focus on layout, zoning and design atmospheric variables and how they are used to meet customers' growing need for an experience-based brand space. The research objectives of this study are:

1. Reviewing the conceptual models and theoretical frameworks related to retail customers' response to in-store atmospheric variables.
2. Establishing the role of environmental stimuli in influencing customers' brand experience.
3. Evaluating the retail experience of Exclusive Books.

1.5 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

1.5.1 Limitations

The limitations that have been identified in this study include the timeframe of the research and the financial resources that were available to the researcher. The study was self-funded and was conducted by a novice researcher, which directly impacted the scope and the quality of the information collected. Moreover, the study was completed within a six-month timeframe, which limited the amount of data that could be collected.

1.5.2 Delimitations

Exclusive Books is a prominent national brand with a footprint in most major retail outlets across South Africa. However, time and financial constraints only allowed for two of the brand's 39 retail spaces to be studied.

1.6 CHAPTER OUTLINES

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

Chapter 1 has introduced the field of research along with the rationale, the research question and the research objectives that guide this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 outlines the study's theoretical framework and reviews the existing literature within the context of each research objective.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 3 describes the research approach, the data-collection process, the targeted population and the desired sample size. It concludes with a discussion on validity and reliability.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Interpretations

Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion of the research findings that emerged from the data-collection process.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Chapter 5 offers an analysis of the research findings within the context of each research objective and concludes with suggestions for further research.

1.7 SUMMARY

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research problem and outlined the study's main objectives. The physical retail spaces of certain brands need to evolve from places of purchase to places of experience if they are to remain relevant and in line with customers' changing expectations. The recent shift in retail strategy at Exclusive Books stores presents an opportunity for exploring how in-store atmospherics, within the context of strategic brand communication, contribute to customer experience and influence the customer–brand relationship.

A comprehensive review of the literature used to inform each research objective is presented in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Mehrabian and Russell's Stimuli–Organism–Response (SOR) model was used in this study to capture cognitive responses to in-store “atmospherics” – a marketing concept first coined by Kotler – while Pine and Gilmore's “Four Realms of an Experience” model was used to examine environmental variables within the consumption space. In the chapter that follows, this core theoretical framework is carefully outlined, along with the relevant literature surrounding each of the study's research objectives.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Emotional reactions to in-store environments have been a topic of academic research since the 1950s (Bitner, 1992). It is Kotler (1973), however, who is credited for theorising the principle of conscious environmental planning and its role in affecting consumer responses (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Kotler reframes McCarthy's (1964) original “Four Ps” definition of the marketing mix (product, price, place and promotion) by including the retail environment (atmospherics) as part of the “true product” experienced by consumers (De Farias, Aguiar & Melo, 2014).

As part of the effort to measure atmospherics – a field also known as “environmental psychology” (Ayadi & Cao, 2016) – Mehrabian and Russell (1974) conceptualised the widely used S–O–R model, which captures consumers' cognitive responses to manipulated variables: sight, sound, smell and touch (see Figure 2.1). The atmospheric stimuli (S) are processed via the organism (O), resulting in a human behavioural response (R). The results are either positive or negative in relation to the experienced stimuli and are measured in terms of pleasure (P), arousal (A) or dominance (D). The pleasure scale refers to how pleasant or unpleasant one finds something; the arousal scale refers to how energised or lethargic one feels in relation to something; and the dominance scales refers to how in control or submissive one feels in relation to something (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

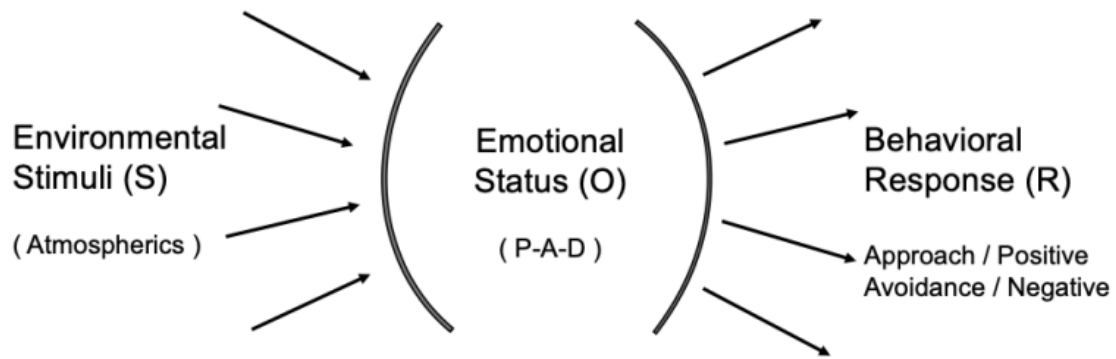


FIGURE 2.1: The Mehrabian and Russell Model (1974)

By the 1980s, distinct consumer profiles had emerged, and a new avenue of research began to explore the in-store behaviour of different types of shopper personalities (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Research into the processing of environmental stimuli revealed that responses were both rational and irrational, depending on the shopper archetype in question: specifically, “hedonic” or “utilitarian” (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982).

It was not until the turn of the millennium, however, that Pine and Gilmore (1998) brought to the attention of the research community what we now know as the “experience economy” (see Figure 2.2). In Pine and Gilmore’s (1998) popular model (Bille, 2012), the mere selling of features and benefits shifts to the delivery of services and, ultimately, to the provision of staged experiences for the customer. The consumption space becomes the space of staged experience and forms part of the final phase of economic progression (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Similarly, the environment in which the brand is experienced becomes part of the marketing mix (Bitner, 1992). It follows that brands should actively control and coordinate every contact-point within the consumption space, in an effort to strategically reinforce brand experience, both leading up to the point of purchase and beyond it (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). Indeed, a brand’s differentiated position in the marketplace is established when the experiential needs of its customers become part of its product offering (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

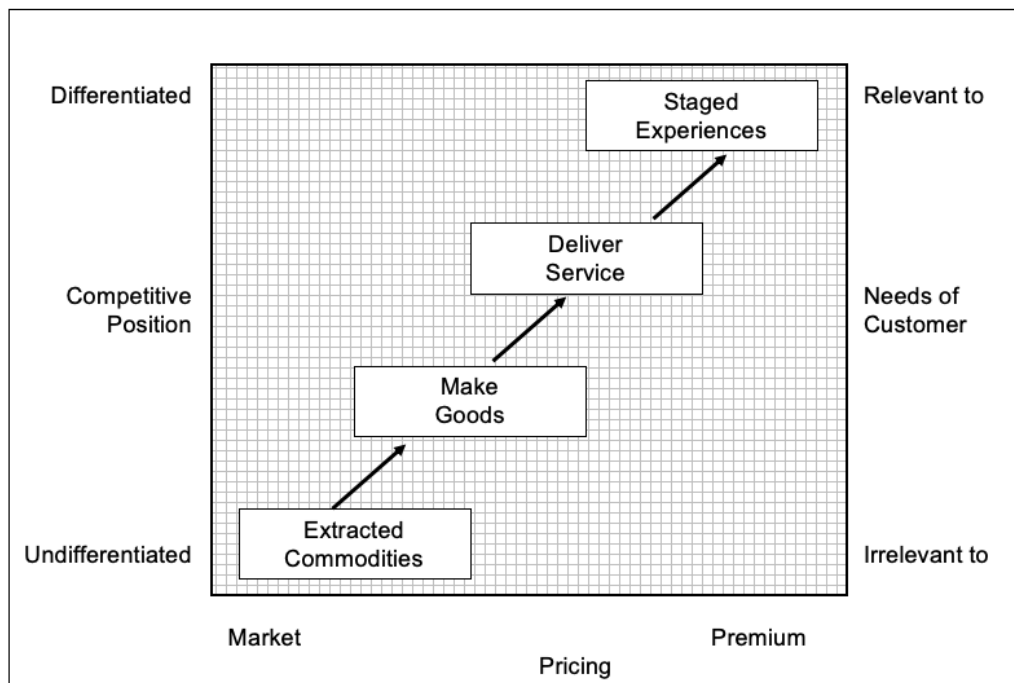


FIGURE 2.2: Progression of Economic Value (Pine & Gilmore, 1998)

2.3 LITERATURE PERTINENT TO RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

For the purpose of clarity, the below literature review is structured within the context of each research objective.

2.3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1

Research Objective 1 of this study is “Reviewing the conceptual models and theoretical frameworks related to retail customers’ response to in-store atmospheric variables”.

2.3.1.1 Atmospherics

It was Kotler’s (1973) seminal article “Atmospherics as a Marketing Tool” that first began to holistically formulate the argument for environmental variables within the consumption space. The retail environment, Kotler asserted, should be designed to apprehend emotions according to sensory channels (visual, aural, olfactory and tactile) and, in so doing, to elicit a perceived response from people via interior, exterior, layout, display and human variables (Kotler, 1973) (see Table 2.1). Ambience,

functionality, design and social variables within a space, as Baker, Grewal and Parasuraman (1994) later argued, are second only to brand name in customers' evaluation of product quality. Triantafillidou, Siomkos and Papafilippaki (2017) have defined these stimuli as part of an integrated series of responses to objects, spaces, processes and people within the retail environment.

The “physical evidence” category in Boom and Bitner’s (1981) “Seven Ps” version of the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion, packaging, positioning and people) – a modification of McCarthy’s (1964) original “Four Ps” model – drew specific attention to atmospherics: namely, furnishings, colour, layout, noise level, facilitating goods and tangible clues. Nonetheless, as Rafiq and Ahmed (1995) observed, these environmental cues long remained under-conceptualised within marketing.

TABLE 2.1: Atmospheric Channels and Variables (Kotler, 1973)

SENSORY CHANNEL	Visual	Aural	Olfactory	Tactile
	Colour Brightness Size Shape	Volume Pitch	Scent Freshness	Softness Smoothness Temperature

VARIABLE	Architecture	Interior Design	Window Dressing
	Exterior structure of the building	Interior space of the building	The store’s windows

2.3.1.2 Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R)

Although research into emotional responses to environment was instigated by Kotler, it was the work of Donovan and Rossiter (1982) that brought this research topic to the fore. The authors adapted Mehrabian and Russell’s (1974) S–O–R framework to create a model that measured different atmospheric stimuli across a range of social and physical settings, producing a response taxonomy of “approach” or “avoidance” along the pleasure (P), arousal (A) and dominance (D) (P–A–D) scales (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982).

A large number of authors used this updated framework to explore how retail environments influence emotional and purchase responses (Ballantine et al., 2010; Hatzithomas, Gkorezis, Zotou & Tsourvakas, 2018). The resulting body of work was

consolidated in an extensive literature review by Turley and Milliman (2000), who made a strong case for atmospherics' inclusion within the marketing mix. Subsequent research has investigated how separate, manipulated or observed atmospheric variables affect consumers' in-store emotional behaviour in terms of approach or avoidance (Puccinelli et al., 2009; Ballantine et al., 2010; Chen & Hsieh, 2011; Gilboa & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2013; Hatzithomas et al., 2018; Jang, Baek, Yoon, Choo & Jung, 2018).

Ongoing testing of Mehrabain and Russell's (1974) response framework model has revealed little supporting evidence for the inclusion of the dominance factor (Gilboa & Rafaeli, 2003; Ballantine et al., 2010), with most responses tending towards either pleasure or arousal emotional variations (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Spence et al., 2014).

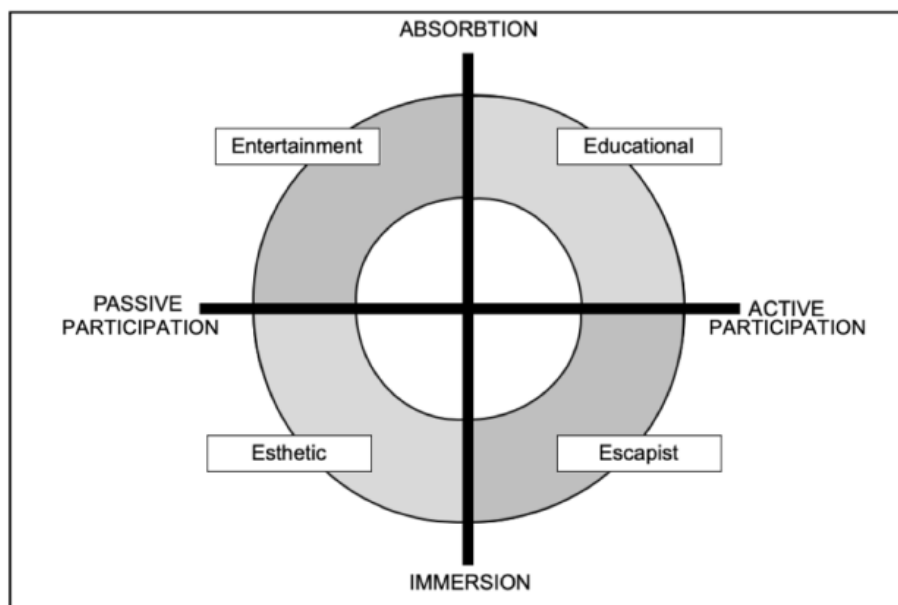


FIGURE 2.3: Pine and Gilmore's "Four Realms of an Experience" Model (1998)

2.3.1.3 The Four Realms of an Experience

Differentiation in retail strategy happens not in the realm of services or product offerings, as previously assumed, but in the realm of experiences (Anteblian, Filser & Roederer, 2013). Brands need to create platforms for people to play, escape and fantasise, transporting them to an alternative space, time or place. In their research, Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggested that emotional responses to space were

fundamentally holistic in nature. Response levels sit between two dimensions on a shifting spectrum: active versus passive customer participation, and absorption versus immersion in environmental activity (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) (see Figure 2.3). People viewing an orchestra, for example, will passively observe and listen to the performance. When they applaud, their level of participation shifts towards the active end of the spectrum, as they become part of the overall experience in this moment. Likewise, one can be *absorbed* in the orchestra when listening to and observing it from the back seat of the auditorium, which differs from being *immersed* in the experience from the front row.

2.3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2

Research Objective 2 of this study is “Establishing the role of environmental stimuli in influencing customers’ brand experience”.

2.3.2.1 Atmospheric Variables

Kotler (1973) ascribes a spatial language of communication to atmospherics, on account of their ability to influence a calculated reaction (Raja, Anand & Allan, 2019). Environmental stimuli trigger a cognitive process in individuals that results in a specific behavioural response (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Baker, Grewal and Parasuraman (1994) link these variables to “perceived store quality”, while Pine and Gilmore (1999) refer to them as the holistic experience of a space as a result of planned outcomes. The most important spatial cues were categorised by Yanow (2006) as vocabulary, gestures, proxemics and decoration. Turley and Milliman (2000) consolidated the various stimuli identified by Kotler (1973) as exterior; interior; layout and design; point-of-purchase and decoration; and human variables (see Table 2.2).

2.3.2.2 Retail Marketing with Atmospherics

The conscious planning and design of an environment in order to elicit a desired emotional response is what Kotler (1973) refers to as atmospherics in the context of marketing (Hatzithomas et al., 2018). A store’s atmosphere (S) has the ability to enhance (R) the customer’s perceived brand quality (O) (Turley & Milliman, 2000). This perceived value in the mind of the consumer can be described as the successful

outcome of manipulated marketing techniques (Babin et al., 1994), which establishes the groundwork for building a customer-based brand relationship (De Farias et al., 2014).

As with brand image (Oh, Fiorito, Cho & Hofacker, 2007; Haug & Munster, 2015), there is a clear distinction within atmospherics between the desired outcome and the perceived experience of designed variables (Kotler, 1973). Stimuli in an artificial environment manipulated to provoke a certain response cannot be fully controlled, due to the emotional status of individuals within the S–O–R framework (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). As Turley and Milliman (2000) asserted, perceptions of space, and responses to these perceptions, differ across individuals. How one person reacts to colour, noise, temperature or dimension is partially the result of past experiences that cannot be unlearned (Brax, Bask, Hsuan & Voss, 2017).

TABLE 2.2: Atmospheric Variables, Adapted from Turley and Milliman (2000)

EXTERIOR	INTERIOR	LAYOUT AND DESING	PURCHASE AND DECORATION	HUMAN
Entrance Signage Windows Building Height and size Colour Architectural style Wall treatment Location Surrounding area Parking availability Traffic congestion	Composition Walls Ceilings Merchandise Temperature Cleanliness Flooring Colour scheme Lighting Music PA usage Scents Aisle width	Space planning Product Placement Grouping Zoning Workstation Equipment POS Waiting area Waiting rooms Departments Traffic flow Racks and cases Waiting queues Furniture Dead areas	Display Signage cards Wall decoration Qualifications Pictures Artwork Product instructions Price	Employees Characteristics Uniforms Crowding Customers Characteristics Privacy

2.3.2.3 Atmospheric Variables Within the Context of Academic Research

Empirical studies on the environmental psychology of atmospherics focus mainly on retail or mall environments and tend to use laboratory or field-study surveys. The majority of the studies within this field, moreover, use quantitative experimental design approaches (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Ballantine et al., 2010). Research into atmospherics' potential to persuade customers' decision-making has, to a large extent, focused on the manipulation of independent variables (Chebat & Dube, 2000; Baker, Grewal & Parasuraman, 1994; Turley & Milliman, 2000). The most commonly manipulated variables tested on consumers include light, sound, colour and scent alternatives (Puccinelli et al., 2009), with positive approach or negative avoidance results recorded in each case (Baker et al., 1994; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Triantafillidou et al., 2017; Turley & Milliman, 2000; Olivier & Fletcher, 2000; Ballantine et al., 2010). Colour has been found to have the potential to affect purchase considerations (Bellizzi & Robert, 1992), while the genre of in-store music can positively or negatively contribute to the time spent shopping (Grewal, Baker, Levy & Voss, 2003). Lighting, meanwhile, can influence store image (Baker, Grewal & Parasuraman, 1994) but not product sales (Areni & Kim, 1994).

Vrechopoulous, O'Keeke, Doukidis and Siomkos (2004) observed that a store's layout strongly influenced perceptions of "enjoyment" and "ease of use". These atmospheric variables have the ability to influence how much time people spend in-store (Cho & Kim, 2017). Yet the research falls short when it comes to variables that are not as easily manipulated once the store design has been constructed (Spence et al., 2014). Layout and design variables that focus on the allocation of space; space planning, zoning and departmentalisation; and crowding within the parameters of the built environment are the least researched atmospheric variables (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal and Voss (2002) cite these variables as key influencers of consumers' experience.

This identified gap in the body of research requires further investigation if we are to fully understand the extent to which design and layout atmospheric variables influence customers' retail experience.

2.3.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3

Research Objective 3 of this study is “Evaluating the retail experience of Exclusive Books”.

2.3.3.1 The Brand Experience

Brand constructs such as personality, identity, community, attachment and trust have been explored and theorised far more extensively than experience constructs have been (Aaker, 1997). Whereas brand identity or consumer personality can easily be associated with a single academic discipline – namely, psychology – from which a body of knowledge can be drawn, brand experience is multi-dimensional and not as easily accommodated. In fact, research has neglected to investigate the complex structure of brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009; Hepola, Karjaluoto & Hintikka, 2017).

As Keller (1993) suggested, brand experiences stand in direct contrast to other brand constructs like identity, personality and attachment, which are associative in nature and which are typically evaluated as such. The consumer confers human personality traits on a brand as a result of exposure to that brand (Aaker, 1997). Exposure over time to the brand’s communication and usage is then retained within the mind of the receiver. Brand judgement is made on the basis of prior involvement, culture, exposure or belief (Murphy & Zajonc, 1993).

Brand experiences, by contrast, are real emotional responses (feeling and sensations) triggered during the actual time of exposure to the brand’s design, packaging, environment or identity stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009). Schmitt (1999) proposed that these experiences existed within five interrelated dimensions: sensing, feeling, thinking, relating and acting. These dimensions, to some extent, overlap with Pine and Gilmore’s (1998) categories of staged experiences for retail: aesthetic, entertainment, educational and escapist (Brakus et al., 2009).

2.3.3.2 Branding with Proxemics

Proxemics is what Marrewijk and Broos (2012) referred to as the process by which culturally specific meaning is attributed to social and personal space, for the purpose

of guiding human behaviour. According to Yanow (2006), it is the meaning attributed to the distance between personal and social space. Others have defined proxemics as the space between people and their experienced environment (Prabhu, 2010), where space acts as a vehicle of silent communication (McCall & Singer, 2015), or as the degree to which one approaches or avoids an environment and evaluates it positively or negatively (Marrewijk & Broos, 2012). Edward T. Hall (1990, p. 01), the renowned anthropologist, referred to it as the “interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialised elaboration of culture”. According to Hall (1990), sensitivity to culture shapes our environment and our perception of space.

The spatial cues surrounding personal space are different to those surrounding public space (Williams & Bargh, 2008; Eytan, 2019). Moreover, how a space is used impacts how people interpret its purpose and function (Marrewijk & Broos, 2012). A living room (its furniture, colour, layout and accessories) is constructed very differently to a boardroom, for example. The perception of what a living room should look and feel like dictates how it is supposed to function. In the case of retail design, customers interpret what the space should be like, either in accordance or in contrast with their cultural expectations (Hall, 1990). Apple’s use of space is illustrative: unlike conventional technology shops, which display products on standard-height racks, arranged in a grid-like format, Apple stores strip back the complexity of the typical space-plane. The liberal use of open space, the non-existence of points-of-sale, the dropped height of the racks and the smaller number of products on display allow the customer to scan across the interior with ease. The resulting perception of the experienced environment (as being clean, easy and sophisticated) dovetails with other Apple brand-identity constructs (Johnston, 2010).

2.3.3.3 Communicating with Space

Differentiation from competitors, in an effort to remain relevant, is the dominant focus of brand strategy (Marrewijk & Broos, 2012; Raffaelli, 2019). In recent years, there has been increased scholarly interest in space planning’s ability to communicate and influence brand experience and perceptions (Anteblian et al., 2013). Penaloza’s (1998) ethnographic study of Niketown, for example, revealed how carefully designed architectural elements (passageways, atriums and concept spaces) “siphon[ed]”

people through the multi-sensory space in order to elicit imaginative and inviting emotional brand attributes. Design and layout stimuli influence behaviour and, in return, how meaning and symbolism are experienced (Spence et al., 2014; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Kotler, 1973).

In a departure from Donovan and Rossiter's (1982) emotional response taxonomy and Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) earlier S–O–R model, then, it can be argued that space planning communicates brand experience through the holistic interplay of action, interaction and perception in relation to layout and design variables. A store's atmosphere, according to Spence, Puccinelli, Grewal and Roggeveen (2014), is experienced as an interconnected emotional response, both conscious and unconscious, and is not perceived on a variable-by-variable basis. This view is a confirmation of Brakus, Schmitt and Antonello's (2009) description of how multiple brand stimuli influence consumer response and also of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) theory that the "whole process" of an environment informs consumer experience.

2.3.4 Research Conceptualisation

There is very limited (if any) research that studies defined contrasting atmospheric variables (for example, indoor versus outdoor entrances or low versus high ceilings) across two different store designs within the same brand. As such, there is no data available on customer responses to alternative design and layout strategies that result from a brand's revised in-store experience.

Space frames the perception of how people are supposed to experience a brand (Ballantine et al., 2010). Space variables act as signals of intention, inviting customers to participate (Grewal et al., 2014). Yet design and layout variables, unlike audio or olfactory ones, are difficult to measure before execution and even harder to compare *in situ*.

Perhaps as a result, research into atmospherics is exploratory by nature. There is no single perfect model for measuring the influence that either one or multiple atmospheric variables might have on brand experience (Baker et al., 1994, 2002; Babin et al., 1994; Turley & Milliman, 2000; De Farias et al., 2014). What is evident, though, is that most of the research conducted to date has been from a quantitative

perspective, with very little research being qualitative in approach (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Anteblian et al., 2013; De Farias et al., 2014). As highlighted earlier, atmospherics are experienced holistically, and a well-rounded research framework is therefore required to capture consumers' interpreted experiences within a branded atmospheric space.

2.4 SUMMARY

This literature review has highlighted the importance of atmospherics within the context of brand strategy, space and experience. Atmospherics is a very broad field of research, with many studies approaching the concept from different perspectives within the S–O–R paradigm. The conceptualisation of atmospheric variables has evolved over the research period discussed in this chapter, yet it has largely remained within Kotler's original categorisation: namely, visual, aural, olfactory and tactile variables.

The retail space is a multi-dimensional expression of a brand, designed to elicit a planned contact experience through the manipulation of atmospheric variables. While research supports measuring variables on a cause-and-effect basis, this framework does not give a full account of how each variable contributes to the overall in-store experience. The identified gap in the existing body of research suggests that further investigation is needed in order to understand how exactly design and layout atmospheric variables influence customers' retail experience. Such investigation should be conducted from a holistic perspective.

The research methodology of this study follows in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

An in-depth discussion of this study's research methodology and data-collection processes is presented in this chapter. The specific approach to the research is outlined within the context of the information required for analysis. A brief evaluation of validity and reliability in relation to qualitative research methods concludes this chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm is the interpretive framework of feelings and beliefs used by the researcher to guide the enquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Three categories of belief exist within this framework: methodology, epistemology and ontology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). They are briefly outlined below.

3.2.1 Methodology

The methodological approach to research begins from a point of accepted procedures and best practices (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The existing methods and rules within a particular discipline are used to guide the research approach.

3.2.2 Epistemology

The epistemological approach to research starts from the position of understanding and interpreting what we already know (Maree, 2016). The specific theory of knowledge that one adopts is based on the stance that one takes: positivist (objective) or interpretivist (subjective).

3.2.3 Ontology

The ontological approach to research begins with the assumption of an existing relationship between nature and beings (Maree, 2016), for the purpose of establishing whether this relationship is real or not (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The interpretation of

this relationship is positioned externally, as either objective reality or as normality within the individual's mind (Maree, 2016).

The ontological/interpretivist paradigm is suitable for phenomenological qualitative research methodologies (Maree, 2016). Primary qualitative ethnographic research involves an objective interpretation of subjective human perceptions and opinions about reality, by means of the implementation and epistemological analysis of personal interviews and ethnographic observation regarding experiences within an environment.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The strategy that guides the conceptual approach to data-collection methods is known as the research design. Factors influencing the research design include the researcher's own skills and limitations in relation to the aims of the enquiry (Maree, 2016).

3.3.1 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research is concerned with the systematic analysis and objective interpretation of factual or numerical data for the purpose of generalisation against a predetermined population or sub-group. Typical quantitative data-collation methods from a sample of respondents include questionnaires, in the form of group, postal, email, telephone or face-to-face surveys. While quantitative research generates precise numerical data that is not subject to a researcher's biases, it lacks the advantage of generating the rich, in-depth data afforded by qualitative research techniques (Maree, 2016).

3.3.2 Qualitative Research

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research works with a much smaller sample of the population, for the purpose of generating rich descriptive and in-depth data from participants about their feelings and thoughts towards the particular research topic. In relying on the researcher to objectively capture findings, reactions and emotions, the qualitative data-collection process is geared towards gathering information about participants' subjective interpretations of phenomena. Even though qualitative

research allows for some flexibility within the conceptual approach to data collection, data collection can still be time-consuming. The five broad categorisations of suitable qualitative research approaches for social science and humanities research, according to Creswell (2007), are narrative studies, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study research (Maree, 2016).

3.3.3 Mixed Methodologies

The combination of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches within a single study is referred to as mixed methodologies. It involves the collection of a combination of numeric units and textual data to form a well-rounded contextual understanding of the research problem. The key advantage of this approach is its ability to explain the interrelationship between research objectives and relationship variables and to allow for the development of new measurement instruments (Maree, 2016).

3.3.4 Conceptualisation

Exploring emotional responses to experienced spaces requires a level of intimacy between research participants and the researcher that is generally not afforded by quantitative methods of engagement (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). A qualitative approach to the research design was therefore chosen over quantitative and mixed methodologies for this study. Qualitative approaches are well suited to studies in the field of social sciences and humanities (Maree, 2016).

3.3.4.1 Phenomenology

Understanding how people interact with their environment and experience everyday situations is the primary focus of research that employs a phenomenological perspective (Maree, 2016). The comprehensive descriptions that emerge from lived experiences of a phenomenon are used to attribute general or universal meanings to that phenomenon. The key purpose of a phenomenological approach to research is to distil the true essence of an experience from several accounts and perspectives, so that all individuals can understand it (Van Manen, 2007).

3.3.4.2 Ethnography

An ethnographic approach to research is typically carried out over an extended period of time (Maree, 2016). The researcher is central to data collection from an anthropological standpoint, in that details, descriptions and interpretations of shared cultural values, beliefs, behaviours and languages are recorded for the purpose of understanding cultural systems and heritage. The success of ethnographic research relies on the researcher's ability to distinguish specific gestures, symbols or meanings that have been culturally attributed to an object or experience, in order to expose and describe the hidden inference in each case (Creswell, 2007).

3.3.4.3 Case Study

A case-study approach to research is most suitable when the boundaries between the context of the investigation and the phenomenon being investigated are not particularly evident. A case-study approach helps guide the research process by allowing the researcher to craft appropriate and clearly defined parameters between the entity being studied and the context of the investigation (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995).

The key advantage of case study-based research is its approach to data collection. Research involves participant observation within a setting (whose boundaries are determined by the researcher), for the purpose of compiling a holistic account of the phenomenon (Cousin, 2005).

While the mode of enquiry for the case-study approach may be exploratory, descriptive or interpretive, it still sits comfortably within the constructivist paradigm, according to both Yin (2003) and Stake (1995). The proximity of the researcher to the participants allows for an objective interpretation of subjective human accounts of the experienced phenomenon.

An intrinsic case study, according to Baxter and Jack (2008), is not necessarily undertaken because the case is similar to other situations or representative of identified problems in related types of research, but rather because the ordinariness of the case in question is of particular interest.

3.3.5 Research Approach

This study used primary and secondary sources of data collection. Secondary desk-based research methods were used for literature review purposes. An intrinsic case-study approach to the research design was adopted, using multiple methods of qualitative primary data collection that included exploratory observational, group and individual face-to-face engagement. This approach elicited an abundance of relevant primary qualitative data from participants and the observed settings, helping the researcher to achieve crystallisation (see section 3.6.2 below).

3.4 POPULATION

The total group of people and/or social artefacts deemed necessary of being measured or investigated one way or another is considered the population (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014). The population under investigation for the purpose of this study included all internal and external stakeholders of the Exclusive Books brand.

3.4.1 Target Population

Within the population, the internal and external stakeholders of Exclusive Books who were targeted as participants for this qualitative research study were:

- Exclusive Books' Marketing Manager
- Exclusive Books' Operations Manager
- Exclusive Books' customers over the age of 18 who reside in the greater Umhlanga and Hyde Park precincts and who are familiar with the brand's retail spaces at the Gateway and Hyde Park shopping centres

3.4.2 Sampling

Quantitative research methodologies require a larger sample of the population for the purpose of statistical analysis and generalisation. Qualitative methodologies, conversely, do not necessarily rely on population representation in sample selection, because the nature of the enquiry is geared more towards construct exploration, which cannot be generalised with any degree of confidence (Maree, 2016). As such, the

sample size for this research study was smaller than it would have been in the case of a quantitative study, but it remained in line with qualitative research methodologies.

Internal Stakeholders (three people): A purposive sampling method was chosen, on account of the selected participants' proximity to the processes of developing, interpreting and executing the brand's customer experience.

External Stakeholders (six people): An opportunistic sampling method, which takes advantage of unforeseen opportunities to help mould the context of field work (Maree, 2016), was used to identify participants who closely matched the brand's target market: namely, members of the SEM 8–10 household income bracket, either female or male, with access to the specified retail outlets.

Stores (two stores): The Exclusive Books' retail outlets at Gateway and Hyde Park shopping centres were specifically targeted because of their contrasting atmospheric variables. The Gateway store forms part of the brand's old retail strategy, while the flagship store in Hyde Park forms part of the brand's new retail strategy. This distinction presented a valuable opportunity for comparison. More specifically, these two stores' contrasting atmospheric variables created the potential for an investigation within the parameters of the research gap identified in the literature review.

3.5 DATA-COLLECTION METHODS

The methods used to collect primary data in this study included group and personal interviews and observational field work, with structured task-and-reporting methods employed for capturing social experiences.

The research instruments for the observational field work and for the personal face-to-face interviews were designed and adapted from the Mehrabian–Russell (1974) Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, which is typically used to evaluate the emotional impact of an atmosphere, and were subsequently linked to Pine and Gilmore's (1998) "Four Realms of an Experience" model, in an attempt to capture a holistic account of the experienced atmospherics.

TABLE 3.1: Atmospherics Under Observation

Atmospherics Under Observation:		
Ambient	Background features that influence the senses	Smell Light Sound
Design	Aesthetic characteristics: Directly noticed and experienced by the customer	Architectural design Colour Materials of construction Layout and zoning Air quality Comfort
Social	People and personnel	

3.5.1 Group Interview

There is very limited publicly available information on the history, ethos and brand identity of Exclusive Books, outside of typical brand messaging. The group interview was an opportunity to get an inside perspective on the personality of the brand. One group interview with the organisation's marketing and operations department managers at their head office in Johannesburg was conducted by the researcher. This informal and unstructured group interview was used to introduce and expand on the research topic, for the purpose of establishing rapport with the business.

Prior to developing the research instrument, the researcher assumed that the brand's approach to atmospherics may have evolved organically as the business grew. There was also an assumption that typical brand theory in relation to atmospherics might not necessarily play out in neat and precise ways in the real-life situations under investigation. Exploring the brand's approach to experience-crafting within a retail setting outside of academic jargon was seen as a critical step in meeting the identified research objectives.

The research instrument was designed with five sub-sections: brand identity, customer, space, layout and design, and experience. This approach was chosen both to help the researcher steer the conversation towards these topics and to ensure that all the research objectives were covered during the interview process. The group interview lasted just over one hour. The full interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed. Copies of the interview guide and questionnaire are included in sub-sections A.1 and A.1.1 of Appendix A.

3.5.2 Observational Research

The two identified retail outlets (Gateway and Hyde Park) were observed following the group interview with the brand. Observational research was used to establish a frame of reference between what the brand envisages its in-store experience to be, on the one hand, and how the researcher interprets this phenomenon according to the data received from the face-to-face interviews, on the other. Data collection from the observational research included a descriptive analysis of the two stores' contrasting atmospheric variables, within the context of a holistic environment, using field notes and photographic evidence. Copies of the observational research guide and the field work template for recording observations are included in sub-sections A.2 and A.2.1 of Appendix A.

The type of observational research conducted was a hybrid of the "complete observer" and "observer-as-participant" modes. Complete observer is the least obtrusive mode of observation, as the observer focuses on the situation from a distance and does not become involved in the environment. In the observer-as-participant mode, the researcher plays a role in the situation – without, however, influencing the observed dynamic – for the purpose of better understanding the patterns or behaviours that are identified (Maree, 2016).

The researcher spent time observing the brand's retail customers within the desired space, as a means of exploring how the identified contrasting atmospheric variables might be influencing the customers' in-store experience from a holistic perspective. Pine and Gilmore's experience model (1998) was used to explore the holistic impact of retail atmospheric design decisions and their role in crafting customers' brand experience across the two different Exclusive Books stores.

The purpose of the observation was not to compare design aesthetic between the stores but rather to compare and investigate how people occupy, interact with or feel in each space, in order to better understand how each variable contributes to the fulfilment of a certain type of brand experience (see Table 3.2).

TABLE 3.2: Contrasting Atmospheric Variables Under Observation

VARIABLE	GATEWAY (Umhlanga)	HYDE PARK (Johannesburg)
Entrance	Strip mall: Cluttered decompression zone	Strip mall: Uncluttered decompression zone
Lighting	Artificial (task and accent)	Combination: Natural and artificial (task and accent)
Layout	Unstructured/disconnected	Structured/experience-driven
	Coffee shop: Positioned adjacent to EB	Coffee shop: Positioned inside EB
Volume	Low ceiling, narrow aisles	High ceiling, wide aisles
Zoning (space planning)	Limited: POS, coffee shop, display, adjacent retail	Extensive: POS, coffee space, recreational space, reading space, quiet space, adjacent retail space

3.5.3 Participant Research

Researching the customers' holistic experience of the retail atmospherics at Exclusive Books was designed as a two-step process. The participants were first given a brief on which tasks to experience (or perform) in-store, and this step was then followed by a face-to-face debrief and a semi-structured interview with the researcher.

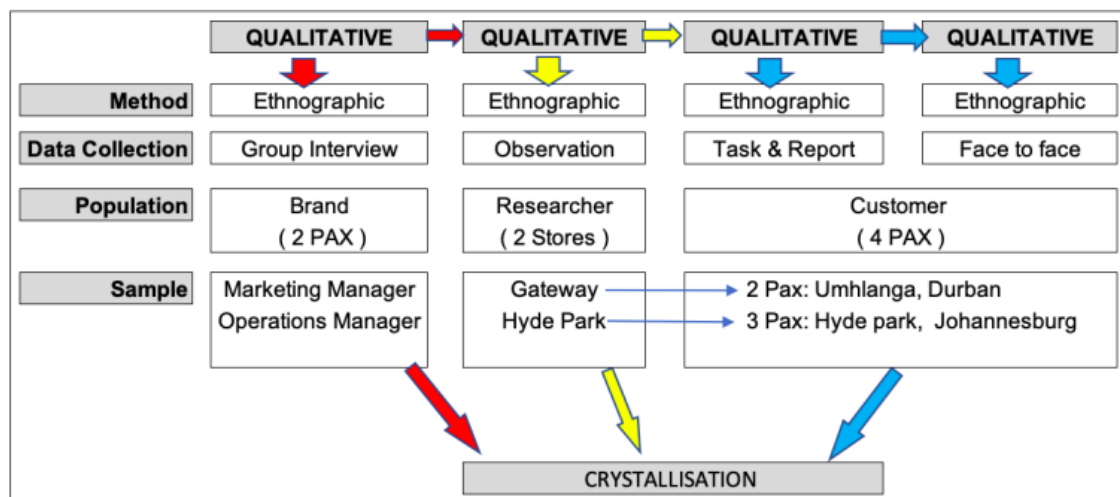
3.5.3.1 Task and Report

The identified participants for the study who were willing to take part were first given the opportunity to spend time at the earmarked locations. Participants were briefed beforehand, via a Google Drive link that provided them with a structured brief on the specific objectives of the tasks that they needed to perform while they were inside either of the identified retail spaces. These specific tasks included situational immersion and familiarisation with the environment. Specific atmospheric variables were highlighted, to try and encourage participants to become slightly more aware of these variables within the boundaries of their holistic experience than they might normally be. Participants were required to spend at least 10 to 15 minutes in one of the two identified retail spaces. The tasks that needed to be completed in-store included book browsing, interacting with staff members, and reading books or magazines, such as they might normally do on any given shopping excursion. A copy of the participant research guide, along with the brief and the template for response protocols during immersion, has been included in sub-section A.3 of Appendix A.

3.5.3.2 Face-to-Face Interviews

All four participants who concluded the task-and-report immersion were debriefed afterwards: initially via an informal discussion, which then transitioned to a semi-structured interview. This process lasted approximately half an hour per participant. The purpose of the debriefing discussion was to understand why each identified contrasting variable had been assigned either a positive (✓) or a negative (X) mark during the task-and-report process. This step was included in the data-capture process in order to link Mehrabian and Russell's S–O–R model with Pine and Gilmore's "Four Realms of an Experience" framework and produce a holistic account of the experienced environment. All of the interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. A copy of the questionnaire that accompanied each debriefing discussion is included in sub-section A.3.1 of Appendix A.

TABLE 3.3: Research Design Approach



3.6 DATA-ANALYSIS METHODS

The researcher was central to data collection and played a critical part in contextualising and interpreting the collected data. The data-collection process was framed by the theoretical tenets underpinning qualitative research approaches, within the specific context of a self-reflective, immersive social experience (Maree, 2016).

The research process was holistic in nature and required some degree of flexibility. The data extracted from the first-person accounts, group interviews, observations and tasked experiences was analysed through a systematic process of pattern or topic

matching, in order to highlight emerging thematic trends against the research objectives (Maree, 2016).

3.6.1 Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

3.6.1.1 Validity and Reliability

Questions of validity and reliability are more suited to quantitative research, because the instruments used to capture research data are numerically based and it is therefore easier to extract statistical results that produce definitive conclusions for the identified causal relationships. Qualitative research does not look to draw conclusions that can be generalised across the population, so the concepts of validity and reliability are instead applied in terms of trustworthiness (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

3.6.1.2 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness looks at aspects of the research process that have been put in place in order for the concluded study to make a valid contribution to the existing body of knowledge through its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility looks at how accurate the data-collection and interpretation processes are, in order to ensure that the reader believes in these processes. Increasing time spent with participants and triangulation both help in achieving credibility.

Transferability deals with the likelihood of reapplying the research process beyond the original scope to alternative typical phenomena and still achieving similar results. Transferability is increased when the identified participants of the study closely match the population, and when the researcher provides in-depth purposeful descriptions of the research context, the participants and the design, which allows readers to make up their own minds about transferability.

Dependability is guaranteed through the transparent demonstration of the research design and the execution of data-collation techniques within the confines of the allowed flexibility for qualitative research. There is an interrelationship between credibility and dependability that allows the reader to clearly see the decision

processes during the data-collection journey that ultimately led to the arrived-at interpretations.

Confirmability looks at how well the data-collection process was executed in relation to whether the researcher interpreted the findings void of bias, motivation or preconceived interests. Qualitative research allows the researcher to play a critical part in the data-collection and interpretation processes and draw up meaningful descriptions of slice-of-life phenomenon. The more involved the researcher becomes in a study, however, the more chance there is of bias creeping in. Confirmability is increased when the researcher admits these limitations. This transparency enables the reader to understand how the study's conclusions were achieved (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014; Maree, 2016).

3.6.2 Crystallisation

Having multiple methods of data collection for the purpose of validating results is referred to as crystallisation. Where triangulation looks at separate individual measures to corroborate findings, crystallisation instead seeks to holistically link contrasting voices, opinions and feelings that may differ from those held by the researcher during the interpretation and analysis process (Jenesick, 2000). This method of analysis is used to enhance the trustworthiness of a study (Maree, 2016) and, according to Jenesick (2000), is better suited to quantitative data.

3.6.3 Anticipated Contribution

This research study hopes to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on atmospherics and the ways in which they can be manipulated to influence emotional reactions to experienced environments. Most of the existing research, as identified in the literature review, has only focused on the causes and effects of one atmospheric variable at a time, using quantitative research methods. This study explored how emotional responses to experienced space might be understood from a more holistic perspective. The study also seeks to bring atmospherics into the foreground of brand strategy, as a significant vehicle of communication that has the potential to help marketers and designers understand how spaces might be conceptualised to elicit desired emotional responses from customers.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To establish transparency, all participants and relevant role players were informed of the purpose of this study. Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis, and informed consent from respondents willing to participate was secured once they were advised, and had accepted, that this research was conducted under terms of total confidentiality. All participants had a clear understanding that they were free to withdraw at any time. A redacted copy of the signed informed consent letter is included in sub-section B.2 of Appendix B.

The above held true in all cases, except where the researcher was performing participant observation, for which a gatekeeper's letter from Exclusive Books was necessary. A redacted copy of the gatekeeper's letter is included in sub-section B.1 of Appendix B.

Research bias was minimised by conducting a factual and objective thematic analysis against each research objective, without subjective interpretation. To avoid any misrepresentation of the findings, all results were shared with participants. Effort was made to arrive punctually for all appointments with Exclusive Books and with research participants. Emphasis was also placed on attire and etiquette during all forms of correspondence and engagement, whether in person or online. The researcher adhered to all the ethical guidelines set out by the Vega School of Brand Leadership. A copy of the signed ethical clearance letter signed is included in sub-section B.3 of Appendix B.

3.8 LIMITATIONS

The design or methodology aspects of a study that influence or impact on the interpretation of its results constitute the research limitations (Maree, 2016). The below limitations have been identified for the present study.

3.8.1 Resources

It would have been beneficial to contrast the brand's flagship store in Hyde Park with a combination of alternative Exclusive Books retail spaces that have and have not yet gone through the redesign process. This would have helped to achieve a diverse set

of descriptive atmospheric brand experiences. The study was self-funded, however, and resources only allowed for two trips to Johannesburg: first, to conduct a group interview with the brand's marketing department and, subsequently, to conduct face-to-face interviews and observational research at the Hyde Park store. Short visits to the Sandton and Rosebank spaces in Johannesburg only afforded the researcher the opportunity to photographically capture the essence of those spaces for reflection purposes.

3.8.2 Sample size

Transferability and qualitative data saturation were impacted due to limited access to a larger pool of willing and desirable participants. The limited time frame only allowed for a maximum of two participants per retail space. It was the original desire of the researcher to have at least three participants per space, with some participants being able to access and experience both stores. This approach would have enabled data for directly contrasted experiences. At the same time, however, this methodology might have led to familiarity with the data-capture process and reduced trustworthiness. Confirmability would have increased with more time and resources and a larger participant pool, which would have allowed for three sets of differentiated data.

3.8.3 Timing

Observational research requires execution over an extended period of time in order to produce a rich set of data (Maree, 2016). The nature of this research project only allowed for limited periods of observational research at each store.

3.9 SUMMARY

Atmospherics are experienced holistically, and a well-rounded method of approach is required to understand the interpreted experiences of a branded space. In this study, an intrinsic case-study approach to research design was adopted, using multiple methods of qualitative primary data collection that included exploratory observational, group and individual face-to-face modes of engagement. A presentation of the findings from the primary qualitative research conducted for this study follows in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The data collected from the group interviews, observational research and face-to-face interviews are presented in this chapter. For the purpose of interpreting the data, word clouds, figures and quotes have been extracted from the interview transcripts and the researcher's field notes made during observation. Data analysis was performed as per the research methodology discussed in Chapter 3. It is important to highlight that this study was a small-scale qualitative study and, as such, its results cannot be generalised, nor are they statistically sound. However, the research approach yielded valuable insights from consumers, which could be used by Exclusive Books in the future.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHICS OF PARTICIPANTS

The demographics of participants were not specifically included in any of the research questionnaires, as there was no requirement for denoting these details based on the research objectives. It was more important to make sure that respondents were at least familiar with the Exclusive Books brand, had experienced one of their retail stores before and were able to access the space within the desired time frame. Respondents were aged between 25 and 60, and there was equal gender distribution.

4.2.1 Group Interview

The group interview was conducted with two internal stakeholders of the business who are responsible for the marketing and operations management of the brand, respectively. A third internal stakeholder who was originally scheduled to be part of the group interview was unfortunately not able to participate.

4.2.2 Observational Research

Observational research was conducted at the Gateway and Hyde Park stores. The researcher spent two hours at each of the stores, over a period of one day each. The researcher conducted the observational component after the group interview with the

brand and before the face-to-face interviews with participants, for the specific purpose of not attaching any unnecessary bias to the retail experience under observation.

The atmospherics observed included the store's entrance, olfactory elements, lighting, layout, volume of space and zoning. Sound, staff, customers and design finishes were also included as observable variables, in order to produce a holistic account of the researcher's emotional responses to the space.

4.2.3 Face-to-Face Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with four external stakeholders once they had each completed the task-and-report brief at either the Gateway or Hyde Park stores. The outcomes of the debriefing discussions were aligned with Research Objective 2: "Establishing the role of environmental stimuli in influencing customers' brand experience". Responses to the subsequent semi-structured questionnaire were aligned with Research Objective 3: "Evaluating the retail experience of Exclusive Books".

4.3 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.3.1 Presentation of Findings from Group Interview with Exclusive Books

The following section extracts the most important insights and findings that emerged from the group interview. The full interview transcript can be found in sub-section C.3 of Appendix C.

4.3.1.1 Background and Business Model

As far back as 1951, Exclusive Books' success has been attributed to the brand's "ability to identify and connect with customers – and [booksellers'] expansive knowledge of books and being able to make that connection" (Group Interview). It was the vision of Philip and Pamela Joseph, the company's founders, to create a space where people "could come and have connections and debate and become enlightened" (Group Interview) – a space that would allow people to safely gather and learn from one another.

The business model is structured in such a way that each of the 39 stores, with guidance from head office, is “run completely independently”, in terms of stock purchase, staffing and budget allocations (Group Interview). This results in the manager, the staff and the market of each store contributing to the development of that store’s “own personality”, because “each store is completely different” (Group Interview). While there is a “chain [store] perception externally”, there is a desire internally to “keep an independent feel” (Group Interview).

4.3.1.2 Brand Identity

A resounding “No, we don’t! We’ve got some official words which nobody uses or knows” was the answer to the question of whether Exclusive Books had either a brand mantra or a clear brand identity: “How can you have one mantra when each store is so different?” (Group Interview). What became clear, though, is that each of the different CEOs over the years has managed to influence the strategic direction that the brand has taken. For example, Fred Withers, who “was not a micro manager”, and Benjamin Trisk, who subsequently “re-galvanised the business” and was all about “retail theatre”, each left a very distinct mark (Group Interview). According to the interviewees, words like “bargain, value and mission statements” do not get used in the business (Group Interview).

A selection of key words and phrases extracted from the group interview to capture the participants’ description of their brand’s identity has been included in Figure 4.1 below.

4.3.1.3 Space, Layout and Design Considerations

“The bookstore that used to be a quiet library spaces has evolved into a meeting place” (Group Interview). This shift in retail design strategy came into being five years ago and, to date, nine stores have received the “BT [Benjamin Trisk] look and feel”, a design concept that “emphasises ‘retail theatre’...in every possible way” (Group Interview). The business acknowledges that there are scientific approaches to how the “layout of space...impact[s] consumer behaviour”, but at the same time it is also seen as an art form (Group Interview). The company’s revised strategy has been specifically developed to “encourage people to sit and stay” (Group Interview). This

shift in thinking has moved the brand from a “walk in, buy a book, walk out” approach to customers to one that provides customers with a sense of place and lets them find a “home away from home” (Group Interview). The inclusion of oversized tables, in-store coffee experiences, a raised platform in the children’s sections and reading nooks scattered throughout the store has created a space that allows “the customers to add to the personality of the store” (Group Interview).

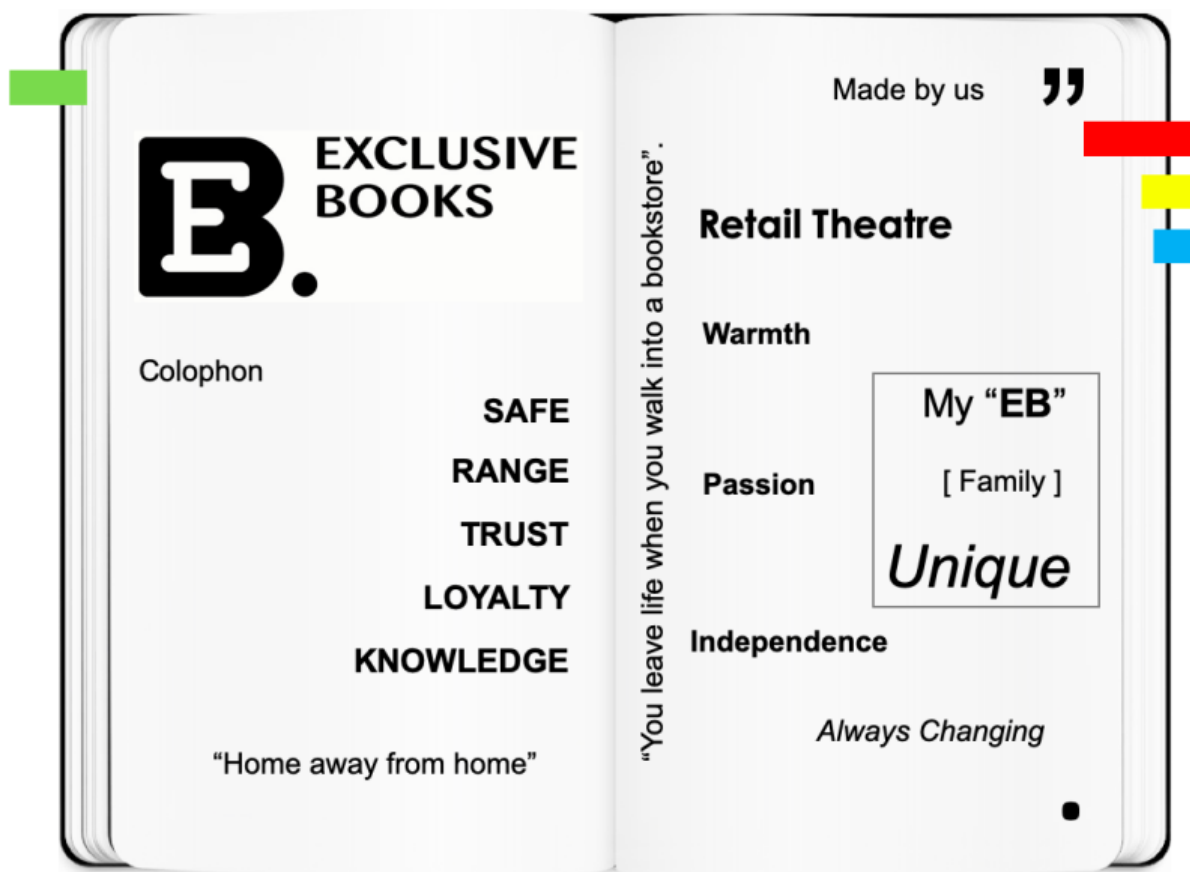


FIGURE 4.1: Exclusive Books’ Brand Identity

4.3.1.4 Brand Experience

“You leave life when you walk into a bookstore” (Group Interview). This desired retail experience has been conceptualised over the years at Exclusive Books, mostly through “happenstance”, and is primarily designed to make people feel “safe” (Group Interview) – in terms of non-judgemental familiarity, comfort and warmth. “Book buying is a deeply personal experience” and at the same time “extremely revealing” due to the “nature of the products that we [booksellers] sell” (Group Interview). As such, customers must feel wholly safe and at ease in their book-buying environment. The

bookstore is envisioned by the brand as a place for knowledge-sharing and for temporary escape from the rush of everyday life, a space for “killing time or waiting on a lunch date”, and a space that one leaves feeling “satisfied and a little bit smarter” (Group Interview). The bookstore should be a place that the customer has “to go back to”: “Unlike finishing a book, when you can never reread it for the first time, each time you come into Exclusive Books you can experience that spirit” (Group Interview).

4.3.2 Presentation of Findings from Primary Research Conducted at Gateway

This section summarises the main findings emerging from the observational research process at the Gateway store. For the researcher’s full field notes, please see subsection C.1 of Appendix C. The same applies for the corresponding section on Hyde Park.

4.3.2.1 Observational Research Findings at Gateway

Upon approaching the store, there was no direct visual of the retail space unless one approached from the adjacent walkway. While the coffee shop (FEGO) was adjacent to the entrance, one was not immediately aware of any coffee scents lingering. The initial threshold was cluttered and required navigation around pyramids of stacked books that blocked the view into the store. The lighting in-store was a mishmash of warm and cool artificial lighting, set in what looked like a ceiling that one might find in a corporate office space. The only apparent destination points other than the point of sale (which was set immediately adjacent to the entrance) were the magazine racks. The shop was set up in a herring-bone layout, off a central axis, with a visual over the bookshelves that allowed one to scan the entire space: it was all the same in every direction. The sitting areas for customers were a combination of three single red benches and two fabric chairs. The floor finish over the balance of the store was a standard office-type charcoal-coloured Berber-point carpet set against black tiles at the entrance. There were more customers in the coffee shop than there were in the bookstore, and those customers who were coming in did not appear to be browsing for very long.

The thrashing music playing in the store appeared to be an effort to mask the environmental noise and the shopping centre music playing outside. The acoustics

appeared to be exacerbated by the choice of very smooth in-store finishes. It was uncertain whether or not the coffee shop was part of the Exclusive Books brand. The space lacked excitement or purpose and came across as squashed and confined. A sense of personal space being intruded upon was observed and felt. The space appeared to lack the comfort factors required to encourage book browsing in a relaxed atmosphere. Instead, it had the feeling of a corporate office park's reception area.

EXCLUS¹VE BOOKS



FIGURES 4.2: Store Entrance at Gateway



FIGURES 4.3: Store Interior at Gateway

4.3.2.2 Debriefing and Semi-Structured Interview Findings at Gateway

The main findings from the one-on-one debriefings and interviews with participants at Gateway are summarised below. Additional images, as well as a thematic analysis of the responses and the corresponding interview transcripts for the primary research conducted at Gateway, can be found in sub-section C.1 of Appendix C. The same applies for the corresponding section on Hyde Park.

TABLE 4.1: Response to Task-and-Report Exercise for Gateway Store

Exclusive Books – GATEWAY			
VARIABLE	S-O-R		Response/Why?
Entrance	✓	X	• “I enjoyed the quick preview of the Top 10 books before walking in, but overall it felt clinical” • “It wasn’t an inviting entrance” • “The bookshelves on the side are blocked by the security boom so you can’t meander in”
Lighting		X	• “It wasn’t really easy on my eye” • “Wherever I stood, there were bright and dims all over” • “I don’t think it’s light enough in certain areas” • “The spotlighting is a bit dim”
Layout		X	• “There was no flow for me” • “It pushed me into the corners of the shop and that was it” • “It felt a bit higgledy-piggledy”
Volume	✓	X	• “The width of the aisle was spacious, very nice” • “I felt the spaces were very claustrophobic” • “The height of the ceiling didn’t bother me much – it was a little low, a bit pressurised”
Zoning		X	• “I don’t like where they had moved the seating area, because it’s too close to the counter, it’s too close to the entrance” • “It’s not user-friendly” • “It felt a bit CNA-ish”
Sound		X	• “It was a lot of noise” • “It wasn’t a nice comfortable quiet space” • “It felt like the music was much louder to compensate for the noise of the centre and the coffee shop” • “It seems like they put the music louder to muffle all the other sounds”

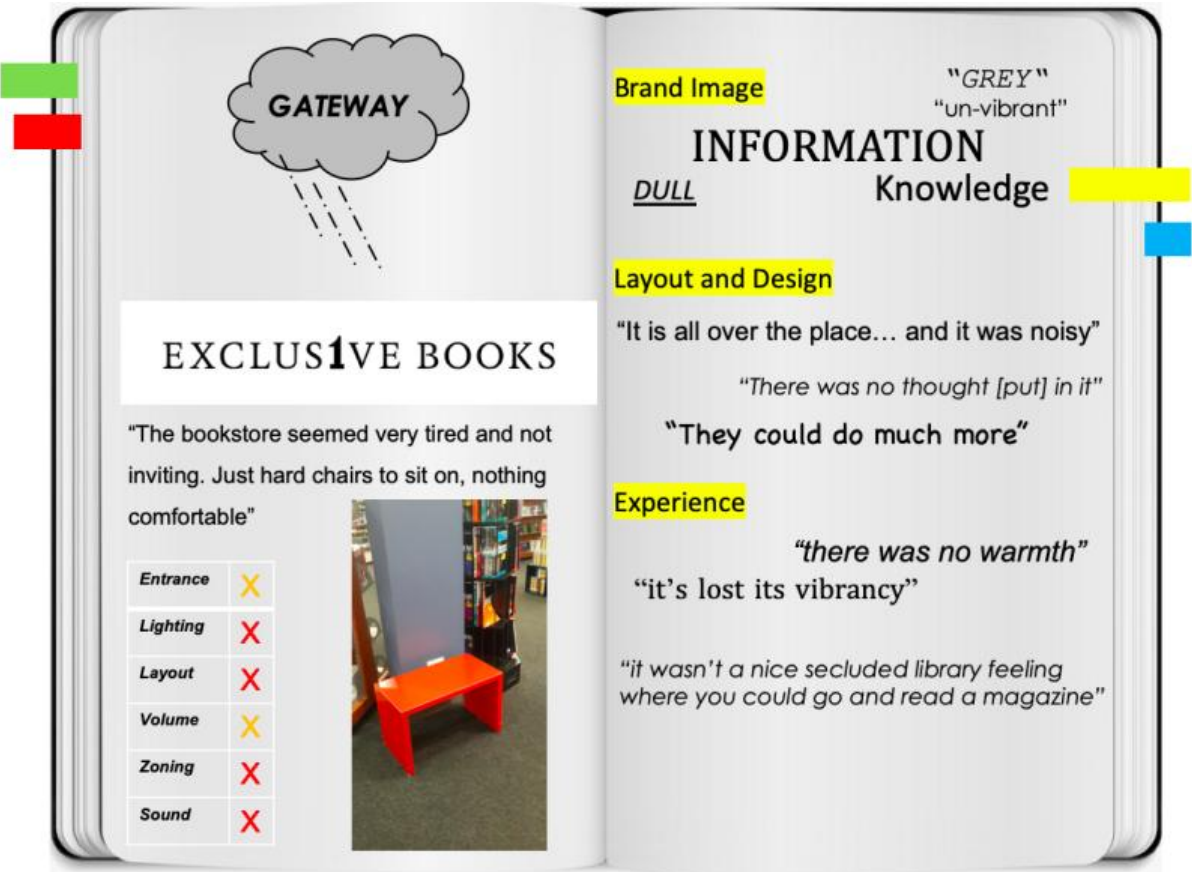


FIGURE 4.4: Customers’ Brand Experience at Exclusive Books in Gateway

4.3.2.3 Discussion of Primary Research Findings at Gateway

The findings derived from the primary research of the Gateway store experience revealed a number of interesting insights. The atmospherics of the space do not seem to be synchronised with how the business perceives its overall brand experience. Customers in the store do not appear to linger or relax in the space for extended periods of time. The store experience is largely disorganised, cluttered and lacking in those elements characteristic of personal escape. The tendency among customers to avoid entering and browsing seems to be exacerbated by the lack of an alluring atmosphere, linked to inefficient space planning, loud music, and bad lighting, among other factors.

4.3.3 Presentation of Findings from Primary Research Conducted at Hyde Park

4.3.3.1 Observational Research Findings at Hyde Park

The entrance on approach was wide, with a decompression zone that allowed for a full visual axis through the space. There was a strong scent of coffee that lingered throughout the store. One was led into the store and funnelled out off the main axis towards different destination points: quiet reading spaces, browsing spaces, the children's area, the coffee area and communal desk spaces – all of which ultimately led the user towards the point of sale on completion of the circuit. The space was flooded with natural light that bounced off the mirrored ceiling detail to create an illusion of extended space. It was not clear whether the in-store restaurant, Olive & Plates, was part of or separate from the Exclusive Books brand. Both brands were advertised at the entrance, which might prompt the question of whose store exactly one is entering.

A warm nutty coffee smell wafting between the wood and the books made for a welcoming and inviting sensory experience. To some extent, there was a feeling of invisibility, which allowed one to become selfishly immersed in the space without any accompanying sense of obligation or expectation. The background chatter of acquaintances bumping into each other that came and went amid the sound of baristas making cappuccino created a sense of community. The subtle selection and placement of finishes and furniture contributed to a somewhat nostalgic and old-worldly feel within the store. There was a sense of familiarity within the environment, as the customers appeared to be using the space more for personal benefit and convenience than one would initially expect in a bookstore. This was a waiting space, a doing space, and a space to “kill time” before the next rush. It was a place that clearly allowed people to relax in an uninhibited manner. The sense of safety in the store came across strongly when one patron left all her belongings unattended at the communal work desk for several minutes, assured via quick eye contact with the other patrons and the baristas that her items would be safe.



FIGURE 4.5: Store Entrance at Hyde park



FIGURE 4.6: Store Interior at Hyde Park

4.3.3.2 Debriefing and Semi-Structured Interview Findings at Hyde Park

TABLE 4.2: Response to Task-and-Report Exercise for Hyde Park Store

Exclusive Books – Hyde Park			
VARIABLE	S-O-R		Response/Why?
Entrance	✓		• “I think the smell of the coffee leads you into the shop” • “I really enjoyed the smell of the coffee” • “It’s a clearly defined space” • “It makes you feel comfortable walking through”
Lighting	✓		• “Nice on the eye and gave it a cosy feel” • “It wasn’t too bright and not too dark” • “The outside light that beamed through gave it a homely feel” • “I really liked the daylight coming through the windows at the back”
Layout	✓		• “It is a big bookstore and the bookshelves...lead you in like a maze and you never know where you come out, which is quite nice” • “You just get lost between the books” • “I didn’t have to bump into anyone and have to ask people to move out the way” • “It was an easy flow”
Volume	✓		• “The spaces between the bookshelf was a nice width” • “You don’t bump into anyone” • “I didn’t feel claustrophobic in the aisles”
Zoning	✓		• “I like the big tables where two small girls kind of looked like they were working on a project” • “It allows for collaboration” • “People have got the space to spread out” • “It’s more than a book shop, where you can do other things in it as well as going and reading books”
Sound	✓		• “There is a hum of noise...one sound wasn’t louder than the other, they all gelled together”

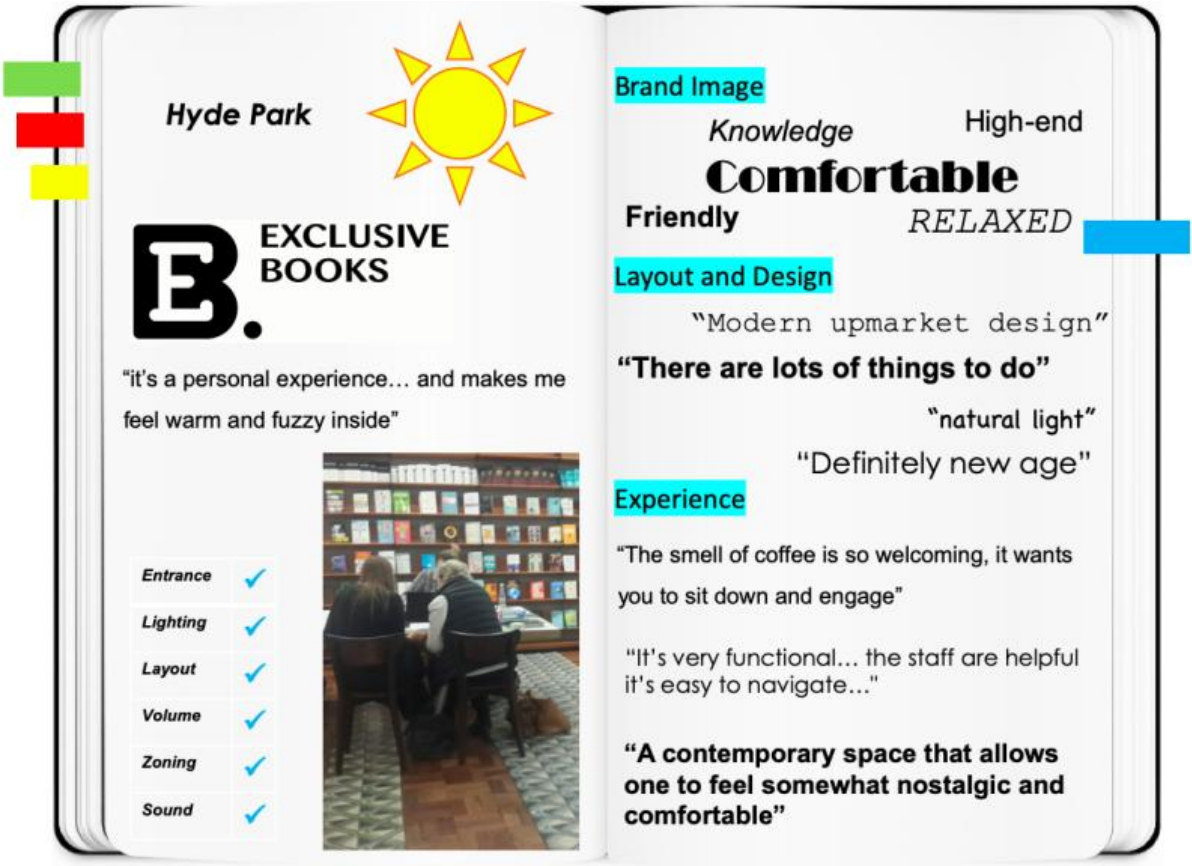


FIGURE 4.7: Customers’ Brand Experience at Exclusive Books in Gateway

4.3.3.3 Discussion of Primary Research Conducted at the Hyde Park

The above overview of the findings from the Hyde Park research process is, as with the Gateway research process, highly revealing. The atmospherics of the space and the effect they have on consumers appear to line up exactly with how the business perceives its overall brand experience to be. The upgraded layout of the store has created a space in which people can unwind, relax, learn and engage. The atmosphere is one that enables customers to feel comfortable and welcomed, with familiarity and nostalgic nuances derived from carefully curated olfactory, lighting and design finishes. There might be some dissonance created by the “restaurant element” of the store, but this does not appear to impact the brand’s overall desired experience.

4.4 SUMMARY

Given the exploratory approach to atmospherics research employed in this study, the results detailed in this chapter can in no way be quantified or generalised across the business as whole, as an accurate measure of its desired shift in brand experience. The triangulation of findings outlined in this chapter does, however, directly relate back the study's research problem statement and reveal useful insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Chapter 5 concludes with a summary of all the findings in relation to each of the research objectives, after which suggestions for further research are presented.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The conclusions and recommendations in relation to each of the three research objectives will be presented in this chapter. For each objective, a brief overview of the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter 2 is provided alongside the main field work results from Chapter 4. This is followed by suggestions for further research and concluding remarks.

5.2 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For the purpose of clarity, the study's findings and recommendations are structured within the context of each research objective.

5.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1

Research Objective 1 of this study was "Reviewing the conceptual models and theoretical frameworks related to retail customers' response to in-store atmospheric variables".

5.3.1 Findings from the Literature

As discussed in Chapter 2, it was Kotler's seminal paper "Atmospherics as a Marketing Tool" (1973) that first formulated the argument that the consumption space should be designed to elicit a perceived response from people by apprehending their emotions. An integrated response to the experience of space is second only to brand name when it comes to customers' evaluation of product quality (Baker, Grewal & Parasuraman, 1994).

5.3.2 Findings from the Research

Exclusive Books in Hyde Park has been designed as a space that allows for a multi-sensory in-store experience, allowing customers a place to "escape". Those participants who completed the task-and-report debriefing discussion and face-to-face questionnaires after their experience at the Hyde Park store provided positive

responses regarding the ambience, functionality and design of the space. This attitude also correlated with their positive descriptions of the Exclusive Books brand.

5.3.3 Conclusion

The findings from the research support those from the literature review, with rich insights derived from the group and personal interviews in particular. Participants' perceptions of the overall space contributed to how they experienced the brand.

5.3.4 Recommendations

When compared to the responses generated at the Gateway store, the above findings suggest that customers' responses to the atmospherics at the Hyde Park store are more in line with what the brand perceives its overall in-store experience to be. While the brand emphasises that each store should be perceived as "unique", it would be advisable to bring the Gateway store up to the level of sophistication and consideration present at Hyde Park.

5.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2

Research Objective 2 of this study was "Establishing the role of environmental stimuli in influencing customers' brand experience".

5.4.1 Findings from the Literature

As highlighted in the literature review, the way a particular individual reacts to colour, noise or dimension is partially the result of past experiences that cannot be unlearned (Brax, Bask, Hsuan & Voss, 2017). Layout and design variables focusing on the allocation of space within the parameters of the built environment are the least researched atmospheric variables (Turley & Milliman, 2000), yet they are key in influencing consumers' experience (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal & Voss, 2002). Given this gap in the research, the literature review identified the need for further investigation into how design and layout atmospheric variables contribute to customers' retail experience.

5.4.2 Findings from the Research

As this was a qualitative study, the findings were not conclusive. However, important correlations were identified between certain atmospheric variables that were noticed during observational research, how participants described the effect of these variables (positive or negative), and how they described their overall brand experience. Those participants who experienced the Gateway store were not as descriptively energised about their overall experience, in contrast with the enthusiasm communicated by participants who experienced the Hyde Park store.

5.4.3 Conclusion

The insights derived from both the literature review and the research suggest that conscious decisions about the placement of atmospheric variables within an experienced retail space impact customers' overall brand experience. For example:

- If the layout appears cluttered, the customer might not be able to feel at ease or relaxed.
- Design choices like wood, natural light and textures can help to elicit a sense of warmth or comfort and a nostalgic mood in customers.

5.4.4 Recommendations

It would be advisable to incorporate atmospheric elements into the Gateway store that help to elicit emotional responses closely aligned to comfort and relaxation. It is also recommended that design elements that might be contributing to a sense of unease and clutter among customers be reconsidered or removed. A layout that includes spaces in which people can feel relaxed enough to unwind helps create opportunities for escape and strengthens the overall brand experience.

5.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3

Research Objective 3 of this study was "Evaluating the retail experience of Exclusive Books".

5.5.1 Findings from the Literature

Space frames people's perception of how they are supposed to experience a brand (Ballantine et al., 2010). Brand experiences are real emotional responses arising during the time of exposure to a brand's design, packaging, environment or identity stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009). It can therefore be argued that space planning curates brand experience through the holistic action, interaction and perception of layout and design variables. Indeed, Pine and Gilmore (1998) pointed out that it is the "whole process" of an environment that influences a customer's experience.

5.5.2 Findings from the Research

The observational research is supported by the insights derived from the debriefing and the semi-structured questionnaires, which were used to evaluate the retail experience envisaged by the brand and experienced by its customers. Participants' retail experience at the Gateway store fell short of the experience of "personal escape" envisaged by internal Exclusive Books stakeholders. At Hyde Park, by contrast, the internal vision and the external experience aligned.

5.5.3 Conclusion

Given that the retail design and layout considerations at the Gateway store are an expression of the brand's identity, there appears to be a disconnect between how the store experience is envisaged internally and how it is perceived externally.

5.5.4 Recommendations

A holistic approach to experience conceptualisation is becoming the key drawcard in "bricks and mortar" retail success. Based on the actual experiences of the participants surveyed in this study, it might be advisable for Exclusive Books to begin looking at ways of extending the successes achieved in its flagship store to the Gateway store.

5.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There is very limited research that studies defined contrasting atmospheric variables across two different store designs within the same brand. To date, moreover, no

research has focused on customer responses to contrasting design and layout strategies that result from a brand's revised in-store experience. The literature review identified that more exploratory research into both of these phenomena is required, and this study was a first step in this direction.

During the course of this study, it became evident that the internal architectural design of Exclusive Books spaces could potentially influence perceptions of "brand architecture". Brand architecture describes how brands are structured and differentiated in relation to one another within an organisation, a portfolio or a space (Klopper & North, 2016). Using this framework, further research might look at how Exclusive Books' partnerships within its retail spaces (for example, with coffee shops and eateries) affect its overall brand image.

5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study explored the extent to which the atmospherics at alternative retail outlets under the Exclusive Books brand delivered the business's desired brand experience. The literature review provided a theoretical framework for the study, which guided the qualitative research process. Primary data collection took the form of a group interview with the brand and personal interviews with participants, along with observational research at both the identified spaces.

The insights gained from the research process suggest that the atmospherics at Exclusive Books in Hyde Park contributed to a positive in-store brand experience for participants by providing them with a multi-sensory "place of escape".

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6. APPENDIX

Appendix A: Primary Research Guides, Templates and Questionnaires

A.1 Group Interview Guide

Sample	Marketing Manager and Operations Manager
Time allocation	60 minutes (confirmed)
Location	Exclusive Books Head office, 31 Commerce Crescent, Kramerville, Johannesburg
Research instruments	Questionnaire, laptop to record the conversation, pen and notebook, digital camera

Objective: While the interview is intended to be unstructured, it will be the objective of the researcher to guide the conversation in the direction of the identified aspects of the interview guide. Because the case study approach to research is ethnographic in its nature, the researcher will be more conscious of the brand's approach to storytelling and brand-experience crafting than trying to ask each and every question within the interview guide. The unstructured approach to the group interview allows for some degree of flexibility. The researcher will need to read each situation and determine what is the most appropriate approach.

Introduction: The brand will be briefed beforehand on the intention of the research, for the purpose of encouraging the brand to expand on how atmospherics have been interpreted within its organisation. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for the purpose of extracting relevant data. This data will help to construct an approach for observational research as well as for building an appropriate questionnaire for the subsequent face-to-face interviews.

Questionnaire: The researcher must be fully familiarised with all of the questions in the questionnaire, in order to be able to guide the conversation towards these topics.

A.1.1 Group Interview Questionnaire

GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE	
A: BRAND IDENTITY	
Q1	What three words capture the Exclusive Books brand essence?
Q2	How would you describe the EB brand identity/personality (its essence/core)?
Q3	Does EB have an internal brand mantra? (YES/NO) (What is it?)
B: CUSTOMER	
Q4	Is there a typical Exclusive Books customer? (How would you describe this EB customer?)
C: SPACE	
Q5	What is the deciding criteria for a store's location?
Q6	How do you go about evaluating a potential space?
D: LAYOUT AND DESIGN	
Q7	As an expression of the brand's identity, how would you describe the design aesthetic for the Exclusive Books store?
Statement: There is a noticeable difference in layout (zoning) and design (aesthetic) considerations between your older-type store layout, such as found in Gateway in Umhlanga, and the layout of your newer concept stores, such as The Junction in Ballito.	
Q8	Can you explain/expand on this shift in concept? Why has it happened?
Q9	What were the internal factors that led to the shift in design strategy?
Q10	Were there any external contributing factors that influenced this decision: economy/technology/customer needs?
Q11	How would you summarise the concept of the design?
E: EXPERIENCE	
Q12	Is there a first impression that EB tries to create for its customers' in-store experience?
Q13	Were there any design decisions you were conscious of during the development stage of the revised store layouts? (The "must-haves" for achieving the strategy?)
Q14	What aspects of the brand's identity/personality do you feel have been successfully translated/incorporated into the design of the updated retail stores?
Q15	What (atmospheric) elements within the design and layout of the store do you believe contribute to a positive in-store customer experience?
Q16	How conscious is the brand in-terms of design layout, zoning, flow and volume of space in an effort to create an in-store experience? (Expand)
Q17	Can you describe the desired emotional response (reaction) you try to elicit from the holistic in-store experience?

A.2 Observational Research Guide

Sample	Gateway and Junction stores
Time allocation	60 minutes per store, split over two separate days for each store. - Time of observations to differ, per researcher's convenience. For example: 9.30 am on a Saturday morning and 3:30 pm on a Monday afternoon.
Location	Umhlanga (DBN) and Hyde Park (JHB)
Research Instruments	Go-Pro for video and photographic images; pens, notebook and copy of templates for field notes

Objective: Capture the essence of the environment through observation and thick description of contrasting atmospheric variables in relation to the customer's holistic experience of the retail space.

Introduction: An electronic copy of the required gatekeeper's letter, signed by the marketing manager on behalf of the Exclusive Books, will be in the researcher's possession during field work. A copy of the signed gatekeeper's letter is included in Appendix C.

A.2.1 Template for Field Work

TEMPLATE FOR FIELD NOTES					
Date		Start		Finish	
Store	Gateway	✓	and/or	Hyde Park	X
ATMOSPHERICS UNDER OBSERVATION					
Ambient	Background features that influence the senses			- Smell - Light - Sound	
Design	Aesthetic characteristics: Directly noticed and experienced by the customer			- Architectural design - Colour - Materials of Construction - Layout and zoning - Air quality - Comfort	
Social	People and personnel				
Atmospheric Variables identified: Mark as either (✓) or (X)					
Entrance	Lighting	Layout	Volume	Zoning	Sound
Field notes:					
Reflection notes:					

A.3 Participant Research Guide

Sample	• Participants over the age of 18 residing in the greater Umhlanga and Hyde Park precincts • An opportunistic sampling method will be used to identify respondents closely matching the brand's target market within the SEM 8–10 household income bracket • Either female or male, with access to specified retail outlets
Time allocation	Total 60 minutes, broken up as follows: • 5 minutes for initial briefing • 10 to 15 minutes for immersion • 30 minutes for minutes for debriefing and structured questionnaire
Location	Umhlanga or Hyde Park
Research instruments	Step 1: Copy of task-and-report template, pen and cellphone camera Step 2: Completed task-and-report template, copy of structured interview, pens, notebook and cellphone cameras, laptop to record interview if required

Researching customers' holistic experience of retail atmospherics at Exclusive Books will be a two-step process. The participants will first be given a brief on which tasks to experience (perform) in-store, followed by a face-to-face debrief and structured interview with the researcher afterwards.

Objective: Identify, capture and experience the contrasting atmospheric variables at play during the shopping experience process at one of two identified retail spaces.

Introduction: Only once participants have been informed of the nature of this research study and have signed and accepted all of the terms and conditions of the consent form will research proceed.

STEP 1: Task and Report

Brief: Spend at least 10 to 15 minutes at the Exclusive Books store, as you would normally do during a shopping experience. Browse the book aisles, page through magazines, interact with staff and enjoy a cup of coffee should you feel like it. (I will cover the bill for the coffee.) It is of particular importance that you generally do what you would typically do inside the store, with the exception that this time you become

more familiar within the overall environment (i.e., notice it more than you might ordinarily do). There are certain aspects that I would like to you to pay attention to and make passing judgements on how they make you feel: either positive or negative. These elements include, but are not limited to, the store's location and entrance threshold, the lighting and where the point of sale is located within the store. Have a look at the height of the ceiling, or the distances between the book racks and the store furniture in the aisles and internally examine how these elements contribute to influencing your feelings about being in the space you are currently occupying. Ask yourself during the shopping experience how you might try to describe this space to someone who had never experienced a bookstore before. How does this space make you feel?

Response Protocol (✓ or X): Participants' responses to noticed and experienced atmospheric variables during their time of immersion should be recorded as either positive (✓) or negative (X), representing approach or avoidance, as per the S–O–R framework, on a copy of the provided task-and-report template.

TASK-AND-REPORT TEMPLATE						
Participant	(Name/reference)					
Date		Start		Finish		
Store	Gateway	✓	and/or	Hyde Park	X	
Atmospheric variables to be identified: Mark as either (✓) or (X)						
Entrance	Lighting	POS	Layout	Volume	Zoning	Sound

STEP 2: Face-to-Face Debrief and Questionnaire Guide

Debriefing: A discussion with participants on the experienced atmospheric variables that form part of the task-and-report process is to take place before the transition to the formal questionnaire. The purpose of this discussion is to understand why each identified contrasting variable was assigned either the positive (✓) or negative (X) mark during the task-and-report process before linking Pine and Gilmore's "Four Realms of an Experience" framework into the participant's holistic account of the experienced environment. This approach intends to render a better understanding of the level of engagement between the two dimensions of the shifting spectrum: active

versus passive customer participation, and absorption versus immersion in the environmental activity, as discussed in the literature review in Section 2 above.

A.3.1 Face-to-Face Questionnaire

FACE-TO-FACE QUESTIONNAIRE	
A: BRAND IMAGE	
Q1	What comes to mind first when you think of Exclusive Books?
Q2	What kind of feelings do you experience when you think of Exclusive Books? (Why?)
Q3	What three words would you use to describe the Exclusive Books brand? (Why did you choose those words?)
B: CUSTOMER	
Q4	Can you describe what type of Exclusive Books customer you are? (This question will require probing and clarification)
Q5	How would you describe your last experience with Exclusive Books?
C: LAYOUT AND DESIGN	
Q6	How would you describe the design and layout of the store you visited?
Q7	What aspects of the design and layout did you notice? (Probe: How/why?)
D: EXPERIENCE	
Q8	What aspects of the retail store design did you find appealing?
Q9	Are there any aspect of store atmosphere that you were particularly aware or that did not appeal to you? (Probe: How/why?)
Q10	Are there any particular aspects of the store that you feel contributed towards a positive or negative shopping experience? (Probe: How/why?)
Q11	How would you describe the store's atmosphere to someone who has never been into Exclusive Books before?

Appendix B: Copies of the Gatekeeper's Letter, the Informed Consent Letter and the Ethical Clearance Letter

B.1 Gatekeeper's Letter



GATEKEEPERS LETTER

Dear **Exclusive Books**

This letter serves to ask your permission to conduct research at your Ballito and Umhlanga stores for a study entitled "Strategic Relationship Between Space and Customers' Brand Experience at Exclusive Books".

The research is being conducted by **Brendon Simmonds** (Student Number 15020692) from Vega School of Brand Communication as part of a Bachelor of Arts degree of Honours in Strategic Brand Communications. The study has been approved by Vega's Ethics Committee and, as part of that approval process, I am required to obtain gatekeeper permission from sites where I conduct research.

Research methods include: Personal interviews and ethnographic observation

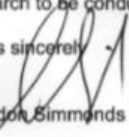
The requirements for permission will be for me to observe customers in-store, photograph design or layout features in-store. No people will be interviewed and no photographs with people will be taken.

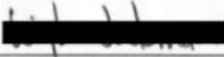
The purpose of this research is to explore the retail design strategy at Exclusive Books, with particular focus on layout, zoning and design atmospheric variables in an experience-based economy.

The researcher would need 1 hour allocated to each research venue. Kramerville, Ballito and Umhlanga.

If you are willing to be involved would you please sign the form below that acknowledges your understanding of the nature of the study being conducted and you give permission for the research to be conducted at the sites.

Yours sincerely,


Brendon Simmonds

[Name: ] as [Role Title: Marketing Manager]

of [Brand: **EXCLUSIVE BOOKS**] having been fully informed of the nature of the research to be conducted in "Strategic Relationship Between Space and Customers' Brand Experience at Exclusive Books" give my permission for the study to be conducted. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at any time.

Signature:  Date: 4 June 2019



MASTERS
HONOURS
DEGREES
DIPLOMAS
CERTIFICATES

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B.2 Informed Consent Letter



INFORMED CONSENT

RESEARCH TITLE: Strategic Relationship Between Space and Customers' Brand Experience at Exclusive Books.

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a research study about **Strategic Relationship Between Space and Customers' Brand Experience at Exclusive Books**. The main purpose of this study is to explore the retail design strategy at Exclusive Books, with particular focus on layout, zoning and design atmospheric variables in an experience-based economy.

It is important that you fully understand what is involved if you agree to participate in this study. If you have any questions that you feel are not addressed or explained fully in this consent form, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher for more information. You should not agree to participate unless you are completely comfortable with the procedures followed. Your identity and job title will remain confidential and will not be disclosed in the report, and all answers will be anonymous.

Recordings of the study are for the researcher to ensure all details are not lost during the interview. Recordings will not be submitted in the final report.

The contact details of the researcher are as follows:
 Email address: brandonsimmonds@icloud.com
 Contact number: 0662531052

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The specific design considerations of multi-sensory atmospheric variables in an experienced space have enabled many brands to achieve a substantially differentiated competitive advantage. With the increased competition of online retail and the customers' need for a more experiences-based brand relationship, more importance needs to be placed on better understanding the relationships between human feelings within a purposefully designed space to positively influence these brand connections.

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

The information in this consent form is provided to assist you in deciding whether you would like to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you will form part of a focus group and will be asked questions about your experiences and perception about this brand.

RISK(S) OR DISCOMFORT INVOLVED

There are no current risks associated with this study. Your perceptions and opinions are asked to be as honest as possible.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Your insights and perception will be beneficial to brands and researchers who are investigating how atmospherics contributes towards a holistic brand experience.



 ADAPTIVE LEARNING	 DIGITAL MEDIA	 CORPORATE TRAINING	 GAME DESIGN	 PHOTOGRAPHY		 FASHION DESIGN	 INTERIOR DESIGN	 EVENT MANAGEMENT	 PUBLIC RELATIONS	 BRAND MANAGEMENT
MASTER'S	HONOURS	DEGREES	DIPLOMAS	CERTIFICATES						

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WITHDRAWAL CLAUSE

- Your inclusion in this study is purely voluntary;
- If you do not wish to participate in this study, you have every right not to do so;
- Even if you agree to participate in this study, you may withdraw at any time without having to provide an explanation for your decision.

CONFIDENTIALITY

ALL information gathered in this study will be held in strict confidence and only the researcher will have access to the original data. Results will only be retained for as long as required for the research purpose and will thereafter be depersonalized and presented in such a way that you will not be identifiable.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I have read the information presented to me in a language that I understand, and I understand the implications of participating in this study. The content and meaning of this information have been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied that they have been adequately addressed. I understand that I am under no obligation to participate in this study and that I can withdraw from this study at any stage without having to provide an explanation for my withdrawal. I hereby volunteer to take part in this study. I have received a signed copy of this informed consent agreement.

PARTICIPANT

Full Name and Surname: [REDACTED]

Signature: [REDACTED]

Date: 4/6/19

PARTICIPANT

Full Name and Surname: [REDACTED]

Signature: [REDACTED]

Date: 04 JUNE 2019

PARTICIPANT

Full Name and Surname: [REDACTED]

Signature: [REDACTED]

Date: 15/3/2019

PARTICIPANT

Full Name and Surname: [REDACTED]

Signature: [REDACTED]

Date: 9/10/19

PARTICIPANT

Full Name and Surname: [REDACTED]

Signature: [REDACTED]

Date: 25/08/2019

PARTICIPANT

Full Name and Surname: [REDACTED]

Signature: [REDACTED]

Date: 28/11



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B.3 Ethical Clearance Letter

ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

Student Name	Brendon Simmonds
Student Number	15020692

VEGA: Durban Campus.

Date: 26 August 2019

RE: Approval of Honours in Strategic Brand Communication Proposal and Ethics Clearance

Your research proposal and the ethical implications of your proposed research topic were reviewed by your supervisor and the campus research panel, a subcommittee of The Independent Institute of Education's Research and Post Graduate Studies Committee.

☒ Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns. We hereby provide you with ethical clearance to proceed with your research methodology.

OR

☐ Your research proposal posed the following minor concern:

Please mention how your research design will address this issue:

In the event of you deciding to change your research methodology in any way, kindly consult your supervisor to ensure all ethical considerations are adhered to and pose no risk to any participant or party involved. A revised ethical clearance letter will be issued on such instances.

We wish you all the best with your research!


Simon Grainger
Supervisor


Alec Bozas
Academic Manager












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Appendix C: Observational Field Notes, Images, Thematic Analysis of Responses and Interview Transcripts

C.1 Primary Research Data for Exclusive Books, Gateway

C.1.1 Observational Field Notes

TEMPLATE FOR FIELD NOTES						
Date	23/08/19	Start	11:00 am	Finish	01:00 pm	
Store	Gateway	✓	and/or	Hyde Park	X	
ATMOSPHERICS UNDER OBSERVATION						
Ambient	Background features that influence the senses			- Smell - Light - Sound		
Design	Aesthetic characteristics: Directly noticed and experienced by the customer			- Architectural design - Colour - Materials of construction - Layout and zoning - Air quality - Comfort		
Social	People and personnel					
Atmospheric variables identified: Mark as either (✓) or (X)						
Entrance	Lighting	POS	Layout	Volume	Zoning	Sound
X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Field notes: Entrance: • Visual: There is no direct visual of the retail outlet (brand presence) from the exterior walkway unless you are walking on the adjacent side of the strip mall. • Busy decompression zone with pyramid book piles on square displays. • Olfactory: No particular effort for scent is present, even though the coffee shop is adjacent to the entrance threshold. Lighting: • Artificial lighting: a combination of downlights and fluorescent fittings within a standard 600 x 600 mm ceiling grid format, often seen within a corporate environment. POS: • Immediately present at the entrance on the LHS. • Cluttered. Layout: • Layout is in a standard herringbone format along a central axis fanning out either left or right. The main axis is wide enough to accommodate at least two to three people, but the fanned-out aisles are particularly narrow. • Books racks are low enough to see over and scan the entirety of the store. • No immediate destination points to explore. • Aisles are narrow and the “brush-past” effect is evident.						

Volume:

- The volume of the space does not appear to be considered and has not been integrated into the overall design concept. Ceiling and bulkhead details appear non-differentiated.

Zoning:

- The only destination points visible are the magazine rack stand.
- The children's section does not appear to be differentiated from the balance of the store design except for the rubber floor mat.
- There is a sitting area for customers that can accommodate two or three people
- Single-seater red timber benches are sporadically placed in the aisles to encourage seating

Sound:

- Background music is loud.
- Noise from the adjacent coffee shop is present throughout the store: background chatter, cups and plates clashing, and the frothing of the espresso machine is consistent. All of this is against the backdrop of a very busy shopping centre, with noise permeation from the exterior into the store.
- No effort has been made to help with sound-proofing except for the standard Berber-point corporate-style carpet.

Customers:

- There are not many customers browsing the book aisles. More customers appear to be at the coffee shop.
- Some customers are sitting in the designated seating area. None of the customers are sitting on either of the two single-seater red benches.
- A cross section of the demographic is observed – the gender split is equal.
- Customers do not seem to be spending too much time browsing – it looks like a quick in-and-out.
- The coffee shop is full.

Staff/personnel:

- No staff members seem to be present, other than the two behind the sales counter.
- There is not a clear differentiation between the staff and customers.

Design finishes:**Furniture:**

- Book racks: A combination of wood and metal
- Seating: 3 fabric chairs and 2 red single-seater benches
- Sales counter and back wall constructed in clean lines with limited design details

Flooring:

- Entrance threshold: Black tiles
- Balance of shop: Black Berber-point carpet

Lighting:

- Downlights: A combination of warm and cool lighting
- Fluorescent: Ceiling grid fittings with stranded metal reflectors
- Bulkhead strip lighting to accentuate the ceiling design details

Wall treatments:

- Timber as an extension of the wall shelving detail

- Plaster and painted walls

Reflection notes:

- The thrashing music playing in the store appears to be an effort to mask the environmental noise and the shopping centre music, which are outside of the retailer's control
- Chatter coming from the coffee shop appears very loud – the acoustics appear to be exacerbated by the selection of very smooth finishes in the design and construction.
- It is uncertain whether or not the coffee shop is or is not part of the EB brand. Layout/floor finishes and structural details create a visual barrier that makes one presume they might be disconnected, even though one can meander between the spaces.
- The space lacks excitement or purpose.

Emotional response:

- Squashed and confined
- Busy and impersonal
- One can't imagine wanting to spend too much time here beyond looking for something specific – even then, it may be better to ask for assistance
- It is very loud and claustrophobic – close
- A sense of personal space being intruded upon is observed and felt. The space lacks the comfort factors required to encourage browsing for something of interest or enlightenment in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Corporate office parks look and feel like this: "The Reception Area"

C.1.2 Images of Exclusive Books in Gateway

EXCLUS1VE BOOKS



C 1.3 Thematic Analysis of Responses to Questionnaire from Gateway

Experience

Note: Copies of transcripts with participants available upon request.

BRAND IMAGE

Q1	What comes to mind first when you think of Exclusive Books?
	• “Variety of books and magazines” • “Information” • “Knowledge” • “Grey, dull and “un-vibrant”
Q2	What kind of feelings do you experience when you think of Exclusive Books?
	• “Not a nice feeling” • “Far rather walk into Bargain Books” • “Comfortable”
Q3	What three words would you use to describe the Exclusive Books brand?
	• “Changed for the worst” • “Lost their friendliness” • “Exciting” • “Fresh”



FIGURE C.1: Brand Image from Customers Visiting the Gateway Store

CUSTOMER

Q4	Can you describe what type of Exclusive books customer you are?
	• “Twice-a-year customer” • “Used to be an avid customer” • “The occasional browser”

Q5 How would you describe your last experience with Exclusive books?

- “It wasn’t a good one”
- “It was exciting – they had lots of sales on”
- “Okay – they had what I needed”

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Q6 How would you describe the design and layout of the store you visited?

- “They could do much more”
- “It felt too business-orientated”
- “It is all over the place...and it was noisy”
- “There was no thought [put] in[to] it”

Q7 What aspects of the design and layout did you notice?

- “The colouring has become too grey”
- The seating area – it’s too close to the counter, it’s too close to the entrance”
- “The cashier’s desk was very cluttered – and it’s not like you can sit there and browse because people are walking past”
- “They had a little kiddies’ area but there was nothing for them to be interactive with besides the sponge letters on the floor”

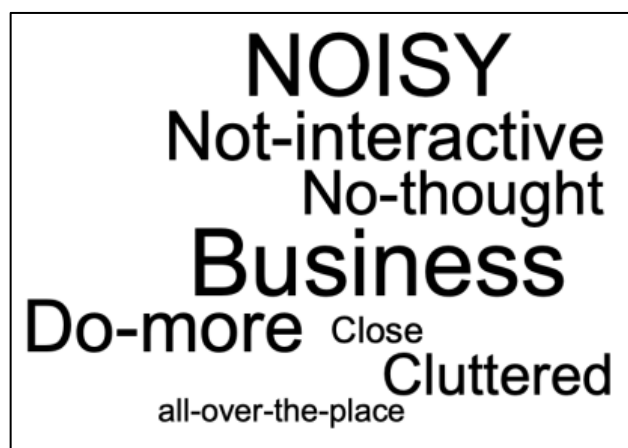


FIGURE C.2: Store Layout from Customers Visiting the Gateway Store

EXPERIENCE

Q8 What aspects of the retail store design did you find appealing?

Participants were non-responsive [negative]

Q9 Are there any aspect of the store's atmosphere that you were particularly aware of that did not appeal to you?

- "It's lost its friendliness"
- "It's lost its vibrancy"
- "There was no warmth"
- "I don't see the cluster of people actually standing around in the book aisles"
- "The noise for me was a big thing – it wasn't a nice secluded library feeling where you could go and read a magazine"

Q10 Are there any particular aspects of the store that you feel contributed to a positive or negative shopping experience?

- "I also felt the location was a bit odd because it was by the clothes – I feel it should have been closer to the food court where people are more relaxed"
- "It would have been nice if there was someone just walking around watching their patrons, being aware of the customer"

Q11 How would you describe the store's atmosphere to someone who had never been into Exclusive Books before?

- "The atmosphere and the look off it is very, very [pause] – it's like a hospital effect – it's clean"
- "The bookstore seemed very tired and not inviting – just hard chairs to sit on, nothing comfortable"

no-warmth
Hospital
Hard-chairs
not-inviting
Lost-its-vibrancy
NOISE
Lost-its-friendliness

FIGURE C.3: In-store Experience of Customers Visiting the Gateway Store

C.2 Primary Research Data for Exclusive Books, Hyde Park

C.2.1 Observational Field Notes

TEMPLATE FOR FIELD NOTES						
Date	22/08/19	Start	9:30 am	Finish	12:00 pm	
Store	Gateway	X	and/or	Hyde Park	✓	
ATMOSPHERICS UNDER OBSERVATION						
Ambient	Background features that influence the senses			- Smell - Light - Sound		
Design	Aesthetic characteristics: Directly noticed and experienced by the customer			- Architectural design - Colour - Materials of construction - Layout and zoning - Air quality - Comfort		
Social	People and personnel					
Atmospheric variables identified: Mark as either (✓) or (X)						
Entrance	Lighting	POS	Layout	Volume	Zoning	Sound
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Field notes: Entrance: • Visual: Open decompression zone with full visual axis through the space. • The eye is drawn to the natural light (which is not expected within a typical strip-mall setting). • The textured floor-finishes create a welcoming entrance that leads you directly past the coffee station. • Olfactory: There is a rich smell of coffee that immediately grabs the senses as you start to enter (cross the threshold) and that lingers throughout the store. Lighting: • A combination of accent and task lighting and decorative pendent chandeliers has been considered within the overall layout of the space and works to enhance the natural light that streams into the space. POS: • It is a destination point that forms part of the integrated store design. • The placement is not obvious. Layout: • Consideration has been made in terms of flow: one is led into the store and then funnelled out off the main axis towards the different zones, set in a grid-like format. • Aisles are wide and circulation through the environment is easy. • The restaurant is adjacent to the bookstore but requires patrons to stream through the space (between the communal desks and books racks) to reach it. Volume:						

- The illusion of the invisible mirror ceiling helps to make the environment appear much bigger than it really is (even though the ceilings are already quite high).

Zoning:

- All of the key areas have been made into destination points about the store space (spaces within the space): book section, coffee bar, seating tables, quiet breakaway seating and relaxing spaces, all leading off the central axis.
- Floor finishes (carpet, timber, tile) and raised platforms have been used in conjunction with the wooden book racks to help denote the different zones.
- There is a combination of open and private nook areas, to allow customers to either enjoy the space with others or feel completely cocooned.
- The timber book racks in contrast with the textured floor finishes give the environment a sense of comfort and warmth – being able to see over the book rack takes away the sense of claustrophobia one might feel if the racks were taller.

Sound:

- The overall sound appears dampened, almost like a sound booth, yet consistently broken up by the clattering of plates and cutlery coming from the restaurant.
- There is a pleasant hum of activity that one would not always expect in a typical book store: the subtle clutter and clanging of the coffee baristas making espressos against the background chatter of local customers bumping into each other and having light conversation makes one feel somewhat part of a community.
- In contrast – the background hum of the restaurant gets louder and then dies down and picks up again. You hear it, then it goes away, and then the kitchen door opens and it's loud again and you hear the plates crashing – it consistently breaks the melancholy of the space.

Customers:

- At first there appears to be more people mingling and working at the communal tables and chairs than there are people browsing the book aisles. As the morning progresses, it evens out somewhat.
- One customer has felt safe enough to leave all of her belongings (bags and laptop) out on the table before stepping out of the store for a few minutes – a quick nod and some eye contact were all the satisfaction she needed to know that her stuff was going to be OK.
- A full spectrum of demographics (age range/ethnicity), with equal balance between men and women.

Staff/personnel:

- They blend into the crowd and, if one were not paying too much attention, they would appear as ordinary customers.
- Only on closer inspection of their activities does it become apparent that some of the people on the floor are actually staff who are possibly doing a stock-take or reorganising the books that have been randomly placed back by customers.

Design finishes:

Furniture:

- Book racks: Cherry-wood finish
- Tables: Oversized on caster wheels, with an appearance of repurposed timber legs

- Chairs: Refashioned globe chairs (pine-stained)
- Couch chairs: Brown leather
- Bar stools: Timber seat with metal frame legs

Flooring:

- Carpeting: Integrated striped carpet tiles
- Wooden parquet tiles
- Patterned ceramic tiles

Lighting:

- Down lights
- Recessed strip fluorescent lighting
- Drop-down wooden basket pendants

Wall treatments:

- Books used as wall detail for the underside of mirrored ceilings
- Slatted timber frames with backlighting
- Exposed face brick
- Gift packets are placed over the timber slats at both of the central columns

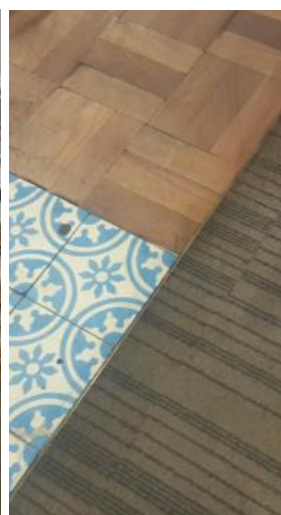
Reflection notes:

- A warm nutty coffee smell between the wood and books makes for a cosy, homely and welcoming sensory experience.
- Pyramids of books are placed to the right of the walkway as you enter. The latest Top 10 reads are all stacked up in pyramids. One might feel a bit intimidated by this balancing act. I have not noticed any customers actually going towards them – in fact, they walk past and later circulate back towards them.
- There is a conflict (some obscurity) between the “Olive & Plates” restaurant and the EB branding at the entrance: which store are you entering?
- The customers appear to be using the space more for personal benefit and convenience than one might initially expect – “a waiting place, a doing place, a place to kill time before the next rush” – a place to get lost.
- The environment is more than a bookstore – it has become a space that allows people to be.
- To some extent, the entrance axis is a “runway” or a “thoroughfare” towards the restaurant.
- A disconnect is observed with the noises that permeate from the restaurant area: the patrons chatter and there are typical restaurant noises, in combination with the “background music”. It appears out of place.

Emotional response:

- There is a sense of ease about the store – relaxing.
- There is definitely a sense of “studying at the library” as I sit at the big coffee table with four other complete strangers – or of being at a communal table at the local coffee shop.
- You don’t feel bothered or rushed – to some extent, there is a feeling of invisibility that allows one to become selfishly immersed without any sense of expectation or obligation.
- The subtle selection of finishes and furniture that have an old-world feel, set in a contemporary space, allows one to feel somewhat nostalgic and comfortable
- There is a sense of familiarity: “I have been here before and it feels good”.

C.2.2 Images of Exclusive Books in Hyde Park



C 2.3 Thematic Analysis of Responses to Questionnaire from Hyde Park Experience

Note: Copies of transcripts with participants available upon request.

BRAND IMAGE

Q1	What comes to mind first when you think of Exclusive Books?
	• “Books” • “Definitely knowledge” • “Another activity” • “It’s something to do to pass the time”
Q2	What kind of feelings do you experience when you think of Exclusive Books?
	• “I have always felt kind of nice about it” • “I find this store to be a little too busy” • “I enjoy the space, I feel comfortable” • “It’s a personal experience...and makes me feel warm and fuzzy inside”
Q3	What three words would you use to describe the Exclusive Books brand?
	• “Comfortable” • “Friendly” • “Relaxed” • “High-end”



FIGURE 4.7: Brand Image from Customers Visiting the Hyde Park Store

CUSTOMER

Q4 Can you describe what type of Exclusive books customer you are?

- “Coffee table and art books – the rest I get online”
- “Once a month, once every two months, maybe”

Q5 How would you describe your last experience with Exclusive books?

- “I enjoyed my last experience”
- “It’s a positive experience”
- “Nothing negative about Exclusive Books”

LAYOUT AND DESIGN

Q6 How would you describe the design and layout of the store you visited?

- “Very contemporary”
- “Definitely new age”
- “A very modern upmarket design”

Q7 What aspects of the design and layout did you notice?

- “Lots of trestle tables down the aisles and people sitting”
- “I did like the set-up for the kiddies’ area – the way it was raised up”
- “The raised kiddies’ section – I thought it was quite clever, because if you are busy walking through the bookstore, at least I can just pop my head up and see the kids”
- “There are lots of things to do”

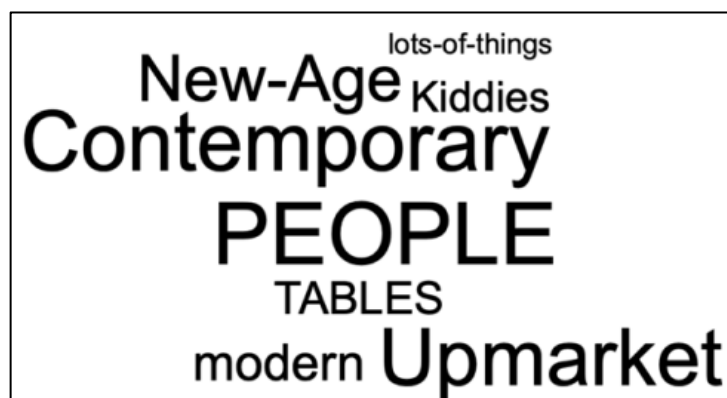


FIGURE 4.8: Store Layout from Customers Visiting the Hyde Park Store

EXPERIENCE

Q8	What aspects of the retail store design did you find appealing?
	• “The chandelier against the window and the natural light gave it almost an old-worldly feel in a contemporary atmosphere” • “As much as the bookshop was very modern, there are aspects of the oldness to it...I enjoyed the look and feel”
Q9	Are there any aspects of the store’s atmosphere that you were particularly aware of that did not appeal to you?
	• “The restaurant – it was too big” • “Um, not really, no – no!”
Q10	Are there any particular aspects of the store that you feel contributed to a positive or negative shopping experience?
	• “The smell of coffee is so welcoming – it wants you to sit down and engage” • “I enjoyed the coffee area – it suited the bookshop itself”
Q11	How would you describe the store’s atmosphere to someone who had never been into Exclusive Books before?
	• “It’s very functional...The staff are helpful...It’s easy to navigate...If you want to try and sit down and engage in what you are doing, you can do it there, and it is a nice space so long as you avoid the restaurant” • “A hum and a buzz”



FIGURE 4.9: In-store Experience of Customers Visiting the Gateway Store

C.3 Transcript of Group Interview with Exclusive Books

Reference key used in the thematic analysis:

Background and business model	Space, layout and design considerations
Brand identity	Brand experience

R: Researcher

Date of interview: 4 June 2019

EB: Exclusive Books representatives

R: I've got until tomorrow afternoon.

EB: Then what I would suggest, as an interesting journey to take, [is] seeing Hyde Park, knowing Ballito, and I would actually go to our Rosebank store, because that was the first to have the new "look and feel" ... and you can see how that has developed, changed, and adapted as well. So when Rosebank opened, it opened with a slightly fresher look, but with a coffee shop. The coffee shop is no longer there—it's a Seattle—but it is still within our look. Then Hyde Park was next. And then Sandton.

R: I have given myself the time, these two days, to really try and understand the brand so that I don't do it an injustice.

EB: I don't think you will.

R: Yeah!

EB: Okay, so how do you want to do this?

R: First of all, it is academic research, so you need to be informed of the ethics around it.

EB: Who are you doing it through?

R: It is through Vega [the Vega School].

EB: Okay.

R: So you are free to not be involved.

EB: No, we volunteer to be here. If there is something, in any explanation, we'll say, Oh, don't mention this, it's just to give you background. Then we trust you are going to do that.

R: Yes!

EB: Otherwise, we would not be sitting here.

R: Yes. The other thing is, do you mind if I record the interview?

EB: No. You would be mad not to.

R: One, because I have terrible handwriting and, two, because it's easier to just talk. Your names will not be included in the research—you will just be referred to as "Exclusive Books". I will need you to sign and initial those [forms], as you are participating. We can do it now or after. It doesn't matter. And then I've got what they call a "gate keeper's letter", because I am going to ask for permission to do observation in your stores. Not that I am going to interfere with any customers, but I want to take photographs and observe.

EB: I'm warning you, if you are taking photographs and observing, you will get customers coming to ask you, "And where will I find...?" [Laughter] If you want to assist them, you are welcome to!

Or just take them over to the counter and get a bookseller rather.

R: So I was explaining what atmospherics is—do you know what atmospherics is?

EB: I've got an assumption.

- R: Okay. So, for my research, it's more about the senses and the environment. It's how the environment makes you feel through the observation and experience of your senses. And that is really where my research is going.
- EB: Cool.
- EB: Where do you want to start? Do you want me to give you some background history?
- R: Yes, please, because I have been really battling on the Internet to get this.
- EB: There is very little [information] because we are a franchise. Where is your recorder?
- R: Oh, I've started it already.
- EB: Okay, good.
- EB: In 1951, a Mr Bernstein sold a business to Philip and Pamela Joseph, and they changed the business to a second-hand book shop called Exclusive Books—because, strangely enough, at that time it was very unusual that a bookshop sold only books. Normally, books came with stationary and magazines and all of those things. So they called it “Exclusive Books”, because it sold books exclusively. It was a tiny little shop in the middle of Joburg. At that time, Philip Joseph was still working within the chemical industry, doing very well, and it was his mom and his wife, Pamela, who actually ran the business. And within a couple of months it was flying—to the extent that within a year he actually gave up working in the chemical industry and started working full-time in the little shop. In interviews later with Philip Joseph, he attributed the reason for their almost immediate success to both his wife and his mom's ability to identify and connect with customers—and their expansive knowledge of books and being able to make that connection. That is what they did well from the very beginning. Within a couple of years—literally, like, two or three years—that little shop was too small to manage the business, as it was now starting to flourish. So they moved to a shop in Pretoria—no, not in Pretoria, in Hillbrow, in Kotze Street. And then they moved to a much bigger premises in Pretoria Street.
- R: Okay.
- EB: When they moved to Pretoria Street, he [Philip Joseph] envisaged a space where people could come and have conversations and debate and become enlightened, especially around apartheid, what was happening. And it became the place for the “politicos”.
- R: A safe space?
- EB: A relatively safe space, but it was the space where they would gather to connect. I'm sure quite a lot of underground stuff was happening and so forth.
- R: Okay.
- EB: He [Philip Joseph] relatively openly stocked books that were banned. But in those days, the craziest books were banned. And because they were being arrested so frequently, it was now affecting the business—so the staff as a whole actually decided *en masse* to take turns to be arrested.
- R: Oh, wow.
- EB: So when the police arrived, they would be spotted as police straight away, and then whoever's turn it was would say, “I brought that”, and off they would go, and then be released, and so they would actually take turns to deal with the government at the time. He [Philip Joseph] was very innovative in terms of his store interiors and designs. He was very innovative in terms of the fact that, very early on, in fact, he was the first retailer to open after hours. So after 5 pm in the week and, on a weekend, after 1 pm on a Saturday, open on a Sunday,

public holidays. And he in fact coined the term, which we still use today, “night staff”—the staff that worked on evenings, weekends and public holidays. And we still use that term for the staff that operate after hours in our business model. Several incidents happened, including a bomb blast that went off on New Year’s Day in the store next door, which was also one of the prompts to move into the bigger store. Exclusive Books really was the buzz place. They then decided to move to—no, not move to, open a store in Cape Town. And it was a major event—I don’t know if you know this, but at the time his [Philip Joseph’s] order with Harper Collins overseas was one of the largest ever for a book shop in South Africa. It was for 300 pounds. [Laughter] As you can see, there is this relationship that has gone back so far.

R: It’s a rich history?

EB: It’s a rich history. Eventually he decided he wanted to move back to the UK [United Kingdom]. So he sold the business to Premier Milling. And when he sold the business to Premier Milling, Premier Milling decided they would form, or have, a sub-business within Premier Milling specifically around book shops. And they bought the CNA, they bought Van Schaik, which is in fact older than Exclusive Books.

R: Is it still part of Exclusive Books?

EB: No, no. They then brought little book shops like the Bookworm up here [in Johannesburg], Pilgrims in Cape Town, and they put that under an umbrella called the Literary Group. Eventually, Premier Milling dissolved and ... they sold off the CNA, which then had its own history. And the Ebousa group evolved out of the Premier Milling group, part sale—you know how these big corporates do their thing. Yeah, anyway, so for many years we were in Ebousa. Ebousa owned Exclusive Books, who by this time had converted all the independent stores that they owned to Exclusive Books. At the time, we were being managed by Fred Withers—no we weren’t, it was before that. Rewind. That was all around 1989, 1990. By this time, we had already closed our store in Hillbrow, because Hillbrow had done a complete about-face in terms of its market, and we had built the largest bookshop in the southern hemisphere: Exclusive Books in Hyde Park, and it became our flagship store.

Several GMs [general managers] came in. We had Steven Johnson who was an unbelievable book man—he was our MD [managing director] for many years. Russell Barnes, who had come through the ranks—he and I were night staff—he’d come through the ranks and was our general manager for a while. And then we had a man called Anthony Ward ... It was under Anthony that we actually changed everyone to Exclusive Books. But while he was our general manager, he and a group of managers decided that they could do better, separate from the corporate environment, and they started a bookshop chain called Facts and Fiction in direct opposition or competition to Exclusive Books. To this day, there are people in Exclusive Books who still carry a hurt. Not because some of our best managers went to Facts and Fiction, and not because some of our best staff went to Facts and Fiction, but [because] it felt a bit like a betrayal ... As it happened, they [Facts and Fiction] overextended, didn’t have the cashflow, had to be liquidated, and Exclusive Books in fact bought them. So all the people who left us we just gathered back into the business again. So when people talk about tenure—“When did you join EB?”—those who joined with Facts and Fiction count that as being part of Exclusive Books.

R: Okay.

EB: And that is one of the very interesting things in our business: it's this flow between the various book shops, the Van Schaiks, the Bargain Books, and even the publishing side to the book shops. It's a complete flow with no restrictions in place [such as] "Oh, but you worked with us, you can't go to Bargain Books, et cetera, because it's very much the ethos of the book industry that ... they're not our competition. They are enabling our market to grow, which means that we will probably benefit. It is completely reciprocal. We have always shared. Yes, there are company secrets and highly confidential things, but in general we all pretty much know what is going on in everybody's business. And it is one of the things we have always said: "If you want to know what is going to happen to you, somebody will tell you from outside the business." The rumour mill is unbelievable. So before you've decided to resign and go somewhere else, someone will tell you, "Oh, I believe you're going to join so and so?" After Anthony left to go and start up Facts and Fiction, we got an incredible man called Fred Withers, as I've said. He came from the legal side of the record industry, from the music industry. And he was opposite to everything we had ever dealt with. First of all, his management style was one of "Well, you're the experts, so get on and do it", so he definitely was not an umbrella kind of leader or a micro-manager. But he was an out-of-the-box thinker. He took the idea that Facts and Fiction had already implemented—the idea of the coffee shop experience [combined] with the experience of reading and books. It was Fred [Withers] who came up with what we at the time as book sellers thought was completely absurd: "He's never been a bookseller, he doesn't know what he's talking about, our customers aren't going to like it, they're going to hate it! A loyalty program like Clicks'? I mean, really?" We hated [the idea] with a passion. But history has shown us—it was one of the cleverest things Exclusive Books ever did. He [Fred Withers] was also the driving force behind our mass expansion. Because when he came in, I think we were at that time about five or maybe six stores, and within maybe three years we were up to 30. At one point I think we went up to 50 stores. It was a massive, massive expansion. In the meantime, politicking was happening, corporate fandangoing was happening, and Ebousa was then sold to Mvelaphanda, who then renamed is as Times Media Group. And as part of that whole thing, they decided, "You know what, our book stream is not our core business. Therefore, we are going to sell off the entities in there." So Bookside Africa, which is the big—huge—book distribution warehouse in Cape Town, Van Schaik, Exclusive Books. And that is when a private entity with big investment from Investec, Global Capital, bought Exclusive Books. That was in December of 2014. And that point we were in Rosebank, in the TMG Building, so we had to leave. And we got this very strange little man come in, again, another strange leader in the business. But we attract strange people.

R: As you do...

EB: And that was Benjamin Trisk. Benjamin Trisk had in fact been one of our general managers shortly after Premier Milling bought the business and Philip Joseph went to the UK, where he started Books Etc., which is a highly successful chain there. He [Benjamin Trisk] employed a young maths lecturer from Wits to come in, learn the business, and run it. This man—really dynamite, exhausting to work with and for, again an out-of-the-box thinker. Nothing was too big or impossible—it just had to happen. He regalanised the business,

because we had become very stale and, when I say corporatised, it is in the sense that we no longer thought for ourselves—we were so used to being told what to do by the big corporation. He renewed our spirits. We had become just an obvious chain store. There was no warmth, no passion. He brought that passion back. And he was a reader second-to-none. As much as our managers were identifying unusual titles, he was as well, because of his passion for the English language—not just the English language, any language and the written word.

He left us last year and in September we got our new CEO, Grattan [Rush], who comes from a very retail environment. So we have gone from one extreme on the pendulum now to the other, where we are actually now just finding a medium between the expensive, expansive Benjamin Trisk vision to “Actually, we are in a recession, there is an economic crisis happening, let’s actually just find our spot and hold our ground so that we can get through this”, and that is how Grattan is directing us now.

One of the things that started right from the very beginning and [that] we have fought during the Ebousa/TMG time—and it has proven [to be] the right business model to follow—is that each store is run completely independently.

There is a little bit of central buying here and there, a good deal on a bulk order somewhere, or a national campaign, but even then the managers say to the product team, the buying team: “No, I will have 10 copies.” They’re not told, “You will have 100 copies.” They determine what stock is in their store, both new and replenishment.

R: Okay.

EB: They do the hiring of their staff. They determine their budgets. Obviously, there is a lot of input from head office in terms of guidance, but they do their budgets, manage their budgets. They run their store almost like an independent bookshop. And they are 100% responsible for the highs and lows of that shop—completely.

You mentioned how different Ballito is from Gateway.

R: Yes.

EB: And it’s not just the look and feel. It’s the personality of the manager. It’s the market the manager is buying for. It’s also the stock that the manager buys because of the personalities of the staff that he’s got in his store. So if you’ve got a sci-fi expert as a bookseller, you will eventually, just through the nature of knowledge and sharing and passion and energy, end up becoming almost the specialist sci-fi store, and then your market is now attracted. So each store is completely different.

R: That’s what I love about the brand.

EB: It’s what people love and hate about the brand. You will get customers that say: “But the book’s in Sandton!” And now they’re standing in Ballito: “But the book’s in Sandton!” Yes, because the book is bought by the manager, and the public doesn’t know that.

R: No, they don’t.

EB: So it’s great and it’s frustrating.

R: It’s not like a KFC or a Steers where you know when you walk in, it’s cookie-cutter. Each of your stores, whether it’s the airport or wherever ...

EB: While there is a “chain” perception, there is internally very much a desire to keep an independent feel. And each of the managers goes in their own way to try and create that. Sometimes it’s on purpose: “I’m doing it this way, as

manager.” Other times, it’s just how it happens, because of, as I said, all those various factors and dynamics that are happening within a store. At one point—I’m not sure how well you know Johannesburg, but there is Sandton City and then Mandela Square, which in fact you don’t even realise when you walk from one mall to another ...

R: Yes, I know exactly where that is.

EB: We had a store in Sandton City and we had a store on Mandela Square, and both did exceptionally well. But when you are in the Sandton store and when you are in the Mandela store, they are so completely different in look and feel, in range of stock, in personality, in staff, in every possible way. And we found that customers didn’t go to either one or the other—they went to both.

R: Oh, wow.

EB: So even within one mall, effectively, we had two completely different stores. And successful stores—very successful stores. And then Mandela closed—but that was a landlord issue, it wasn’t because of our business ... It had a great Seattle, which was huge pull, and that was one of the original Facts and Fiction stores that we really took over and [that] became Exclusive Books. In fact, right up until its last revamp it even still had the Facts and Fiction horse in the carpet. If you go into, certainly, our older stores, not just our new ones that have got the “Benjamin” look and feel, you will still see those kinds of elements. You will still see a carpet that has a Facts and Fiction horse or an old Exclusive Books logo. And when we do replace it, on the one hand, we think, “Yes, I’m now finally getting a new store,” but on the other hand, a lot of people think, “Ah, a piece of us, our history, has gone.”

R: There is an emotional attachment to the store.

EB: Yes, hugely. So when you are looking at spaces, which, as far as I understand, is your key focus, the shift came five years ago with Benjamin (one of the shifts, yes). When you look at Gateway versus Ballito: Ballito is a Benjamin shop and has won awards for its interior design. I thought you would be interested in this [pointing]. It’s the old EB [Exclusive Books] logo.

R: Oh, look, I remember that.

EB: You can’t possibly remember that—how do you know that? It’s from the late 80s, early 90s.

R: Yes. When I was young, we used to go to the Johannesburg shop.

EB: That would have been the Hillbrow shop.

R: Yeah.

EB: And then this is the original, original logo from before that, the Philip Joseph logo. It’s funny how we’re still in the whole “EB book” theme ... in terms of, you’ve got your books, your pile of books, and that spine. So when I saw this, it just went *cha-ching* to me immediately. But yeah, we’ve got that. For a while we ...

R: Why did you drop this?

EB: It was becoming very outdated. Benjamin hated it—it was Benjamin that changed the CI [corporate identity]. No, this was before this [pointing]. We were using this [pointing], and then this [pointing] was done away with. Fred [Withers] actually did away with this one with the little man. And then we moved to this and we got that [pointing], and Benjamin hated that and that’s when we then got that [pointing]. So this brand again, it’s the spine and then also using the idea of

- the—I don't know if you know the term, but if you look on the spine of a book, every book, there is a little picture at the bottom.
- R: Oh, yes!
- EB: It's called a colophon.
- R: Okay?
- EB: It comes from even mediaeval times, when the monasteries basically had a blind stamp into the leather to say "Made by us" and all imprints—all publishing imprints, but I'm not going to go into detail on that—have their unique colophon. And so we've played with that idea of a colophon as our logo.
- R: I do love it. Because without the word, you still know exactly who it is, which is what I liked about it.
- EB: That is taking a bit longer—because you'll notice some of our stores when you fly back to Durban, you will still see this [pointing]. Some of them have this [pointing], some of them have this [pointing], some of them have this [pointing]—it's a little schizophrenic. But it's also who we are. For you [colleague], yes it's a stress. But I'm not sure if the public are entirely familiar with that, with who we are, yet, but they are getting there slowly. So our shopping bags now have that [pointing], just to keep trying to driving home the "EB" message. But this also talks to, coming back to these two [pointing], which is very interesting, because people refer to us not as Exclusive Books, but as "EB". And they always refer to "my EB in...", "my EB"—and then you find out whether it's Clearwater, or Cresta or Ballito. They refer to it as "theirs", and the regulars in those shops, if you move a section, boy do the booksellers get hampered by them. "How can you move it like that?" Because we didn't ask their permission.
- R: Have you tested how it affects your brand? This is off-topic completely, sorry...
- EB: We're going to do that.
- R: How it affects your brand from the [perspective] of having different logos out there?
- EB: No, we have not done any research on it. The plan is to rebrand the entire business. It is just taking a lot longer than one would hope. I think Pick n' Pay rebranded in six months. It was extraordinary. ABSA have done a phenomenal job of rebranding in a very short period of time. We are slower. But there is a practical reason why we are slow—this is one of the reasons why our history...
- R: It might not have any negative affect on your brand?
- EB: This is the strange thing ... An example: In Bloemfontein, when we were in the Mimosa store, we were in a shop and our customers came in, came in, came in. And then Mimosa was doing a complete revamp, so they moved us to a different part of the centre. And people would walk into this and think, "Oh, this must be a new shop". They did not realise. "So why are you competing with Exclusive Books down the corridor?" [They didn't know we] were Exclusive Books. It was just for them ... the visuals ... "Oh! So you're Exclusive Books! Okay!" Then they were happy. They were almost oblivious to what is the "thing" that we are, because it is always changing. And because each store is so different, they are almost expecting it to be different. So I suspect—with no scientific analysis done at all—it probably doesn't have *much* of a negative impact, being all mixed up.

As long as people know where they're standing.

Yes, as long as they know where they're standing.

R: That brings me to my first question, because it is about your brand identity. Because your brand identity has progressed, how would you explain that identity? Have you got an identity? What words do you use to describe it?

EB: We don't! We got some official words, which nobody uses or knows.

R: So you probably don't have a brand mantra either?

EB: No. No, we don't. How can we have one mantra when each store is so different?

R: That makes sense now. You have theory and then you have practicality.

EB: There are a few things that we say across the board. We talk about "range" over anything else. Because when it comes to Exclusive Books, we do have the widest range of any bookseller. Most of your money is made from our range, not from our bestsellers. So the range is critical, and the customer expects to be able to walk into an Exclusive Books and find something obscure and different.

Discoverability is very important in their browsing experience.

So "range" is a word we talk about a lot. Another word we talk about a lot is "trust". Our shops are found to be a space where people feel safe. When children get lost in shopping malls, they come to Exclusive Books, which is cool, in one way, and not so cool in another. So that sense of trust is very big with us. Loyalty is another word that is thrown around a lot, primarily on an internal scale. Staff members have been around anywhere between 5 and 45 years, if not more. And when you start here, you don't really leave. And people who do leave—we actually encourage people to explore, because when they come back ... they are bringing a huge amount of experience—when they come back, they truly value what this space is. The beauty of EB is that we sell a product, where every single product is entirely unique. So it makes the job interesting every single day, whereas baked beans or woollen jerseys is a different story. Another word we throw around a lot is "knowledge". Our booksellers are profoundly and deeply knowledgeable about what they sell. And everybody in the group is—apart from our new, current CEO, who's trying to get there—a reader, a deep reader. So we sell what we love, which is very cool. It makes it an interesting "culture" ... We are a corporate in one way—only because of your size, not because of any other reason, really—but we try and bring that sense into the shops as well. Come into our bookshop and you find a family outing, often! You get mom, dad and two kids on a Saturday afternoon. Everybody is doing their browsing and they get their book and they go home. Which is lekker, to have us as an experience.

R: I think that is what really grabbed me the first time about the Ballito store. You have that kids' section at the back, and on that particular day there was some big bear dressed up. So there is that whole extra experience that is unexpected?

EB: Yes! So when Benjamin Trisk came into the business, his mantra was "retail theatre", over and over and over again. He took Seattle out, converted it into EB Café which has now gone back to Seattle, because coffee people must do what coffee people do.

Yeah, we're book people, what do we know about coffee?

But he wanted the visual of the store to be one thing. He wanted the smell of the store to be one thing, and coffee was what he wanted in there. And then

- everything needed to be theatrical, in every way possible. I think that is where most of his changes came in, in terms of the design and layout of the stores.
- R: There is such a clear distinction where you—the way that shop is laid out, you know exactly how to enter, and you know exactly to turn left, and you are guided through that store, and you finish at coffee. So the way it is planned, it's just beautifully laid out, in contrast to Gateway.
- EB: Well, but there's a whole science to that. The layout of the store is a very interesting thing, because, on the one hand, it is very scientific. There is research, like you cannot believe, on consumer behaviour and how do you tap into it and guide it and make it so that they will buy what you want them to buy. But at the same time there is also an art, there is an instinct that certain people will have, and Colleen, who is our children's book manager, has that. She just has that ability to be able to walk into a store and say, "This isn't working." She will step back, she will look, and she says, "Right, this must just be moved back two feet. I want that bookshelf pulled here and we need to turn those that way." And it will be a tweak and a small thing—although it doesn't feel like it when we are the ones doing it!—and suddenly she's got it doing something that then enables the customer to experience the space. Which I don't think the customer cognitively knows that?
- R: No, they don't, and that's a good thing!
- EB: You can teach to a certain degree the theory of it, exactly as you said—you know when the customer comes in, you want them to enter the decompression zone, et cetera. But how you actually make it happen? It's an instinctive thing, and we are just very fortunate that we have somebody like Colleen who can just walk in and—she is just able to do that. So you can design the most beautiful store, and Ballito, as I said, has won awards—Colleen walked in and said it's not working. We went in there to build a Christmas tree and we ended up moving the whole store around. That's Colleen for you. But it's unbelievable how, from what it was, which everybody else felt was fine, Colleen walks in says, "Change, change, change." And you walk in and it's different. It's just better.
- I think one of the things that Benjamin did that was brilliant, small but brilliant, with his redesign is that all of his stores, and there were probably seven or eight, under the Benjamin Trisk look and feel—the BT look and feel, as we refer to it—is that he put long tables down all of them so it became a place—you will see them in Hyde Park when you go there. Hyde Park has become an office hot-spot. So many people work there. We've never put wi-fi in any of our stores, it was completely against his feel, and he was adamant it wasn't going to happen, because you read books—you don't read Kindles. You don't download books on there, or whatever. But even that didn't deter people coming in with their own dongle to do their work in a space that people wanted to work in. We have got resident authors who only write in Hyde Park. And it is because of those long tables. And it was one of the best things. In Ballito, you'll see them. They aren't in Sandton, actually. There are a few, but they've been taken over by Seattle coffee drinkers—which is fine. But it was all about encouraging—not "walk in, buy a book, walk out"—it was always about encouraging people to sit and stay. And Benjamin used to speak about "A home away from home".
- R: Like the third place?
- EB: Yes! And that's worked well. Those tables are beautiful. I think in a retail space or retail mentality when you are choosing to use a space instead of a gondola

stacked with books that you can sell and make money on—to put a table in I think is risky. But it worked. And it's good for business.

Again, we have not done any analytics to say, "All right, how many of the people sitting around the table are actually being converted to sales?" We have no idea. But we are very sensitive to the fact that it's the customers in the store that add to the personality of the store.

R: Yes.

EB: So, you know what, if they're adding to the personality, well, then, let's encourage them.

R: I've seen them building puzzles on there. There are a whole lot of things that go on at those tables.

EB: And it's like a restaurant. I don't walk into an empty restaurant. No. I walk into a full one. It's just the same. A bookshop I guess in the day used to be like a quiet library, but now it's like a meeting place.

R: That's the whole juxtaposition of Exclusive Books, is that you would expect that library feel, but you've got this buzz of people all in the different zones—books, coffee—and smells and kids. That's really what I wanted to understand: how did you get that point of creating this theatre of experiences?

EB: I think it's years of experience, and years of happenstance. I think you stumble upon something that works well. So Anthony [Ward] put coffee into his "Facts and Fiction". Facts and Fiction went under, but Fred [Withers] said, "Hang on, that's actually a good idea." Fred partnered with Seattle to come into our stores. We have had a long relationship with Seattle. So, yeah, pretty much everything at Exclusive Books has been somebody's bright idea, "Let's try it!", and then over the years we sort of adapt and change and do away with, then regret we did away with and bring it back in a new form. It's very fluid. One of the things that Exclusive Books seems to be able to do really well is deal with change. Because it seems to be happening all the time. And in fact Rob, who unfortunately couldn't join us today, one of his favourite things is "As much as things change, they all stay the same". Because that's what we all experience. He is hilarious—he actually cuts bullet points out of minutes that were taken in meetings in 2003 and he's like, "Guess what we discussed in EXCO today—and 30 years ago." [Laughter] He does it every time.

I think the fact that we have an acceptance of diversity, and I mean diversity in terms of the independence of the managers and the strangeness of the booksellers and the strangeness of the staff, the acceptance of that, because—exactly as we said—the nature of this thing we sell is that each one is different. And it is not replaced come season-end. It's there. It is available. We can get it for you if you want. And I think that is possibly the driving force—if you want a message, it's that every single thing, in all aspects of our business, is unique.

Words we don't use are things like "bargain", "value", "mission statement"—we don't have one. We're going to get one—he [the current CEO] is going to try, like all the previous people have tried. We've got 39 brick-and-mortar stores and then our online store. And next week we have the managers' conference, where we all come together, and he's going to see that when he asks for a mission statement he's going to get 40—how many of us are going to the conference?—deadpan faces.

There are 60 of us in total.

You'll get 60 different mission statements.

R: You should put them all into a hat and get him to pick one? [Laughter]

- EB: No, because you pick one, and all the rest of them will still continue. That's *their* mission statement. That's the nature of the business—it's pretty cool.
What else?
- R: You've covered a lot.
- EB: The raised kids' section—I know with BT on the redesign, they got raised. Were they always raised? Because I remember that being a distinct conversation of them being raised so moms could see their kids when they ...
Okay, when you talk about "were they always", remember we're looking at a long period.
No, pre-BT, pre-renovations.
Okay, so pre-TMG and late Mvusa—so in fact when we were the Premier Milling Literary Group—all the stores had a raised area behind the counter. So the staff stood higher, so we could see over the counters. It was also of an era where—it was pre-computers—we had all the knowledge. So when you came into the store, you came to us: "Do you have any idea if there is going to be a new John Grisham at any point in time?" And we would have the knowledge and we, being higher than you, would dispense this knowledge. [Laughter] We were seen in this very high regard. Then we got this strange thing called the interweb and now our customers are coming in with information that we don't know. It's funny how the psychology of this society changes what happens to our floors. Behind the counter now, we are at the same level as the customer, so we're seeing them eye-to-eye, rather than with that difference. And as a result of that, our booksellers are now below the shelves and I think subconsciously we thought, "Oh, we can't see the children in the section, let's raise the section." But the children's sections have always been, somehow, in some form, whether it was just a different coat of paint or different wall fixtures or a mural or placards or something, defined as a section on its own. Almost like a bookshop within a book shop. We've always had that
- R: It even has little gates and balustrades to define the space.
- EB: You can see in the design history. I mean, at one point, in the Sandton Store, which was Bookworm—I don't want to lie now, but I would say about a third of the shop was, literally, as in it had shelves that you actually would walk through, almost like a door, it was the children's bookshop.
It makes the kids feel like they've got their own space.
Yeah. Then when we moved into Sandton to where you know it, they did away with it and that's when they opened up Rosebank as "the children's bookshop". So it was moved across to Rosebank.
- R: Okay. Thank you. You have covered quite a lot of my questions in the conversation.
What I really want to find out is: Can you explain how you want your customer to feel when they leave? Have you ever discussed an emotion, what you want your customer to feel?
- EB: Do you want one word for it?
- R: As many as you can give—let me tell you why. Because part of the research is that people are going to get asked, "How do you feel about this store?" Because, really, atmospherics is an emotional response to an environment.
- EB: I go and spend time in poetry sometimes, just to chill, to calm down. If I'm feeling anxious, I'll walk into poetry.
- R: That's the environment.

EB: You used to walk into EB until you started working for it. [Laughter] So I bumped into a—I was at a market on Sunday with my boyfriend. He bumped into a school friend of his that he hadn't seen for 10 years, a girl I didn't know. And she was like, "Ah, you know, what are doing?" I said, "I work for a publishing house. We supply books to CNA, EB, and Bargain Books." And she didn't know anything about me—I was just standing there and she said, "Exclusive Books, it's the place where I feel the safest." Which was extraordinary. She's a grown woman, and she wasn't prompted in any way. It was a beautiful little piece of information that came back to me.

R: Because there isn't really one [word]—it's more like a positive or negative [sentiment]. There are so many positive ways to explain an emotion that each person is going to have their own word, but it still sits in the positive space.

EB: Exactly. And I think the word "safe"—safe is not necessarily being away from physical harm.

It's comfortable, warm, familiar.

It's "I know that they will be able to help me with what I want, give me what I want."

I think that our booksellers—they don't pounce on customers.

No, it's something we actually [train our staff not to do]. It's always been very interesting for me when dealing with new senior managers, executive management. My job is to train. I'm the training coordinator here, and they want us to, you know, increase sales. So how do you increase sales? Well, you approach the customer. And I said, "No!" At one point, we were overridden and, no, we were going to now have the salesperson thing: "You will greet customers!" And we said, "Eek, don't go there!" Did we get a barrage of customer complaints because our staff were approaching them? So two things that we actively, with new staff, explicitly explain to them: "We are not salespeople. Our objective is not to sell a book." And of course you try and tell that to a new CEO or CFO [laughter] and they just don't get it. Because we have learnt that, particularly in the malls that we are in, because we are in all the top-end malls, the noise, the bombardment of salespeople—and not just in the malls but on the phone, on the radio, on the TV, on social media—you are constantly bombarded by people demanding your attention and wanting you to give them money for something. And that is one of the safe spaces, because they come into EB—and we have seen this, certainly at Christmas—you can see how many people come in, and they have been in this mall with the noise and everything else, and they come into EB and you can actually see them do this [gestures] and they may just go and sit on one of the poofs or something somewhere, and they are not even looking at the books, but they are just gathering themselves to face the onslaught when they leave the store. They are not intruded on. They are allowed to browse, they are allowed not to browse, equally.

They are allowed not to buy. They are allowed to read an entire book and leave the store—which has happened.

Oh, all the time.

I think one of the things I find is that book-buying is a deeply personal experience.

And when somebody goes in and they are looking for something that can help them to manage their anxiety or their depression, they don't want to have to admit that. "Can I help you? What are you looking for?" I don't want to say, "I'm

trying to get out of my deep-seated depression, have you got anything for me to read?" You don't want to say

that. Those people will eventually go to a bookseller and say, "I'm looking for something on the topic of depression", when they are ready.

And being in that environment where they are not harassed by the staff—and this is something we actively engage with as part of the customer engagements that I teach them. I teach them the fact that **books themselves are extremely revealing**. And I ask them the question: I say, "You are all book lovers. What's the first thing you do when you enter a stranger's home?" Every single one of them says, "Look for the bookshelf."

Because in one glance on a bookshelf, we as book sellers, certainly, as book people have a very good picture of what that person is like. So they know how revealing it is about who a person is. So simply asking about the title reveals something about the customer. That's before they've even come to the counter, underneath a magazine, you know. And our booksellers are very sensitive to that.

They know that they may not judge anybody on what they have bought or are asking about. And so you talk about "safe", you talk about "trust"—almost a cocoon, familiarity, comfortable, familiar—all of those words are what they feel in the store.

But the question you asked us was what do you think they feel when they leave?

So I would want to use the word "satisfied", and "knowledgeable"—a little bit more knowledge [than when they arrived].

I wouldn't even use those. I would—I'm trying to—I'm sorry, I'm not very good with feelings, but there is a particular thing ... You know when you do something and you thoroughly enjoy it. So maybe it's a regular holiday place you go to, for instance. And you know that every time you go there, when you leave you are heartsore, because you're leaving it, but at the same time there's a *frisson* of excitement, of pleasure, in the potential of the next holiday.

R: **So it's coming back? You want them to come back?**

EB: I hope that that is what it is. But it's not a regret: "Oh, woe is me, my wonderful time at Exclusive Books is over." It's more **"I've got to get back to real life, thank goodness there is that place to go, that I can go back to."** You know—unlike finishing a book, when you can never reread it for the first time, each time you come into Exclusive Books you can experience that spirit.

So I guess the feeling of having had the opportunity to escape for a bit, which a holiday would do for me. **You can leave life when you walk into a book shop.** It's quite cool.

R: I mean, I've never gone in and bought for the purpose of "I need a book". I go in just to browse, and then whatever catches me there, then that's the book that I take.

EB: **That is so critical in the experience.**

Yes. I think it's bookshops in general—they are time-killing spaces. You're waiting for someone to have lunch, you're waiting for the movies, you've got half an hour before. A lot of our customers are just killing time. **You don't want to kill time in space that stinks.** So I think I'd love our customers to feel just a little bit smarter when they do leave. They've learnt something new, they've brought something that is going to teach them something new, a book seller has shown them something new—

Or they've told the bookseller [something] and feel smarter as a result of passing on information.

Which they may well have done.

Because that is one of the things our book sellers [say] ... If you ask them, "What is the thing that gives you joy?" they always talk about the conversations with the customer. And when a customer is now as animated as you are about a particular thing, and they start suggesting to you as the bookseller: "Ah, but have you read this?" "Yes, I have, but I didn't like it." "But then you must try this." And that's when—when you want to see the real passion in our booksellers, have the conversation around what do they suggest, but then start suggesting back. That's when the energy begins.

There is nothing more rewarding then selling a book. I've done it only a few times, because I work here, so I don't get that opportunity, but on that day where you manage to convince a complete stranger that they should spend their money on what you are telling them—

Not even their money, their time, to read it—

It's stunning. It's a wonderful, wonderful experience. And you immediately have a commonality. There is a relationship there, even if it's brief, when you've both read something that you love. There's a book that came out ten years ago called *I am Pilgrim*. I don't know if you've ever read it? Terry Hayes. It came out, it was another crime thriller, and it was a door stopper. Like, it's a mammoth task. And it's almost like it's printed on Bible paper! And I was, like, I'm never going to get through this. And I read it in five days. It's outstanding, that book. But that book didn't sell because we did any major marketing around it or anything like that—that book sold because the bookseller read it. And somebody came in and said, "I need something gripping." This! And it flew. That book just flew. So the booksellers are critical. They have to know, and they choose to know, which is what makes it so cool.

EB: What else have you got?

R: That's it.

EB: Okay. So when you go back and transcribe this, email me all of your missing links and we will answer them.

And CC me on that email and email Rob as well.

R: I might have a few. But I know in my head what I wanted to achieve today. I got a good understanding of the brand, how you felt about the shift in design—

EB: If you want more shifts in design imagery, I've included—these are from our induction course that the booksellers go on. Every year, we run two major national campaigns, so you can see the various iterations.

R: What's this "Home bru" one? It has popped up a little bit on my research, but I haven't given it much of my attention. Is it South African authors?

EB: It's a South African authors campaign. And very often we try to get debuts on there, so that authors can get their time in the limelight. They are voted in by the store managers. The list is presented to a select group of store managers, they vote theirs in, and then we push those particular titles. And it is South African authors only. Because we have some outstanding titles.

This also, to a certain degree, does reflect the change in Exclusive Books, that same evolution in its look and feel.

R: I noticed in your advertising as well, you did some radio adverts, which I thought were fantastic.

EB: That was ages ago,

- R: Yes, it was in the style of the book, if that makes sense. So the advert was written as if Jane Eyre was talking.
- EB: Oh! That was actually a campaign that Penguin asked us to do.
- R: Because, and this is again off-topic, I love alternative advertising,
- EB: You see, what's so beautiful about selling books is that you have **no choice but to be pushed into the imagination**. It's very cool.
- R: When the lady got to spend the night in the shop ...
- EB: Yes! Her birthday night.
- R: For me that, in terms of advertising, that's just so alternative.
- EB: And that cost us a can of Peaceful Sleep and a bottle of water. And everything else—the bed was brought up from the bed store downstairs, and it cost us absolutely nothing. And it flew so far in the press that the article was translated into a magazine in Paris.
- R: It was unbelievable. It cost us nothing. Just a bit of time and a bit of thought.
- R: Because that angle of communication I love. That alternative, different ...
- EB: You cannot believe how many we've had—we've had a wedding in one of the branches, we have a lot of engagements, and then the staff go out of their way to do whatever it is that's needed, that the young man wants to do for the lady or the lady wants to do for the lady, because everything goes in our business. We've had birthday surprises—in fact, I think we've even had a memorial service.
- R: **It's almost like each of your stores taps into the community that it's in.**
- EB: **Yes, they have to.** That is how they survive and that is why they've survived. When the massive recession hit worldwide, a lot of the major book chains around the world, in Australia, in the UK, and in the States, collapsed. **The "indie stores" are the ones that survived**, and the chain stores that enabled their stores to do some buying adaptation, and then of course you've got the Exclusive Books model where they do all of their buying. Because they could change quickly and adapt to whatever their market was now wanting, because obviously that all shifted with the recession as well. **That individuality is a very, very powerful thing**, and [name of colleague] has the most difficult job, I think, in the business, in terms of trying to take the, as I said, 60 different messages, identities—and I'm including the stores and not just the managers but equally the GMs [general managers] and senior management here, because each one is a very strong and powerful opinionated individual, and each of them is coming with a slightly different stance. And how do we put a message across, or a message that at least can be read in multiple ways, depending on where it's situated. She's going bald here, because she's about to present to the managers our Christmas campaign.
- R: And presenting to 40 of them is never a good idea, but it has to be done. Also, our stores are—for Christmas, you have to create a campaign that brings magic, in a shop where every single jacket has magic on it, and make it stand out.
- R: That's why you get paid the big bucks to do it, and not me.
- EB: The medium bucks!
- R: Can I thank you for your time?
- EB: Sure. It was a pleasure.

[Conversation continues]

Appendix E: Concept Document Table

TITLE: The Strategic Relationship Between Space and Customers' Brand Experience at Exclusive Books

Research Purpose	Primary Research Question	Research Rationale	Seminal Authors/ Sources
Explore shift in retail strategy at EB. Focus on how atmospheric variables holistically accommodate an in-store, experience-based brand relationship.	How do emotional responses to space-planning considerations influence customer experience and contribute to the relationship between the brand and its customers?	Physical retail is shifting from a place of purchase to one of experience. It is important to understand the relationship between feelings and expectations within a space in order to positively influence customer experience.	Kotler Pine and Gilmore Mehrabian and Russell Turley and Milliman
Research Problem	Objectives	Key Concepts	Key Theories
It has been perceived that poor retail layout and design decisions can adversely impact consumers' in-store brand experience.	O1: Customer response to atmospheric variables O2: Atmospherics' role in influencing brand experience O3: Evaluate experience at Exclusive Books	Brand experience Customer experience Emotional response to space	Atmospherics Stimuli–Organism–Response (S–O–R) Four Realms of an Experience
Literature Review – Conceptual Framework		Paradigm	
Themes Linked to Research Objectives Theme 1: Atmospherics, S–O–R, Four Realms of an Experience Theme 2: Atmospheric variables, marketing with atmospherics, atmospherics in the context of academic research Theme 3: Brand experience, branding with proxemics, communicating with space		Paradigm: Interpretivist–objective interpretations of ontological subjective human perceptions and opinions about reality, based on the implementation of epistemological analysis of personal interviews and primary observations of experiences within an environment.	

Approach	Population	Sampling	Data Collection Method(s)	Data Analysis
Secondary: Desk-based Primary: Qualitative	Stakeholders: Marketing Manager, Operations Manager, Store Manager, Customers matching brand's target market	Internal: (3) Purposive External: (6) Opportunistic	Group interviews, Observational research, field work, personal interviews	Thematic topic or pattern matching, NVIVO (if required)
Ethics	Anticipated Findings		Limitations	Anticipated Contribution
Informed consent, Confidentiality, Gate keeper's letter, Ethical clearance, Minimising bias, Thematic analysis, Manners, Respondents free to withdrawal, Transparency	Space planning impacts brand experience More research will need to be conducted to understand how space, form, flow and proportion can positively or negatively impact brand experience		2 stores Small sample size	Valuable information for: Exclusive Books Interior design community Strategic brand communicators
References				
See Reference List				

E.1 Originality Report

A copy of the originality report is included on the following page.