



*A descriptive study on understanding if lockdown restrictions eroded the in-store experience:  
The case of H&M*

By

Lufuno Thovhakale [REDACTED]

A research project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for Bachelor of Arts  
Honours (BA Hons) in Strategic Brand Communication

at the

Independent Institute of Education: Vega School

Supervisor: Nicole Mason

Submission date: November 2021

**Word count: 14 961** (excluding cover page, contents page, reference list and appendices)

*I hereby declare that the **research report** submitted for the **Bachelor of Honours (BA Hons) in Strategic Brand Communication** to The Independent Institute of Education (The IIE) is my own work and has not previously been submitted to another University or Higher Education Institution for a postgraduate qualification.*

## ABSTRACT

There exists a large body of literature focused on the realm of retail that underscores retail store attributes as the primary determining factor that dictates store choice and purchase behaviour (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003: 371; Terblanche & Boshoff, 2004:3; Leszczyc & Timmermans, 2001:493). The literature further highlights the array of merchandise and its subsequent assortment as the components of the conventional retail marketing mix (Terblanche & Boshoff, 2004:3-4)

Although true, Sands, Oppewal and Beverland (2009:386) bring to attention the heightened significance for in-store experiences to fall within the marketing mix and the continuous pressure around the need to develop novel and innovative lenses to view these experiences. The authors relate this need to how the holistic understanding of in-store experiences and its integration into the marketing mix carries the potential for retail stores to differentiate themselves from their competitors, and adapt to ever changing and accelerating environmental circumstances (Sands et al, 2009:394)- as seen with the state of the environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of this research was to understand the importance of the in-store experience and if its reduced presence affects consumers overall experience and thus their perception of H&M and consequent behaviour and loyalty towards the brand. The study followed a qualitative approach that favoured a hermeneutic phenomenological design, in order to develop an in-depth 'human' based understanding around the phenomenon.

The study additionally made use of non-probability sampling, where 9 South African Generation Z (Gen Z) participants who had visited an H&M store during the nationwide lockdown period were purposively selected as the individuals to participate in the collection of data. The data collection was implemented as an online questionnaire, whose results were then interpreted by way of thematic analysis.

The key findings as a result of the data analysis allowed the researcher to unearth four (4) themes that largely affected participants' in-store experience, namely, **style** which indicated how the type of clothing offered by H&M sits at the centre of whether and why consumers identify as casual shoppers or loyal consumers. **Internal store features** such as the organisation of the store's layout and on-floor staff personnel, follow as another theme that

effects the experience of a brand, and lastly, **product performance** and **consumption habits** were the last two themes found to impact consumer behaviour.

The above findings led to the understanding that without the inclusion of all the factors that fall within each theme in a manner that meets the participants' needs, there exists no real intention regarding purchase as participants are unable to maximise the utility of procuring products from H&M. Hence, the study's focus on the in-store experience as a whole.

**Key words:** *in-store experience, consumer behaviour, loyalty*

## Table of Contents

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| List of tables.....      | 7 |
| List of figures .....    | 8 |
| List of appendices ..... | 9 |

### CHAPTER 1

|                           |    |
|---------------------------|----|
| Introduction .....        | 10 |
| Contextualisation .....   | 10 |
| Rationale.....            | 12 |
| Problem statement.....    | 12 |
| Purpose statement.....    | 13 |
| Research question.....    | 13 |
| <i>Sub-question</i> ..... | 11 |
| Objectives.....           | 13 |
| Conclusion .....          | 14 |

### CHAPTER 2

|                                  |    |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Introduction .....               | 15 |
| Conceptualisation .....          | 15 |
| Theoretical foundation .....     | 16 |
| <i>In-store experience</i> ..... | 16 |
| <i>Consumer behaviour</i> .....  | 17 |
| <i>Brand loyalty</i> .....       | 18 |
| Review of literature .....       | 22 |
| <i>In-store experience</i> ..... | 22 |
| <i>Consumer behaviour</i> .....  | 23 |
| <i>Brand loyalty</i> .....       | 25 |
| Conclusion .....                 | 27 |

### Chapter 3

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Methodology.....                  | 28 |
| Introduction .....                | 28 |
| Research paradigm.....            | 28 |
| Research approach and design..... | 29 |
| Population .....                  | 30 |

|                                                     |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Sampling</b> .....                               | <b>31</b> |
| <b>Data collection</b> .....                        | <b>32</b> |
| <i>Application of data collection process</i> ..... | <b>32</b> |
| <b>Data analysis</b> .....                          | <b>34</b> |
| <i>Application of data analysis process</i> .....   | <b>35</b> |
| <b>Conclusion</b> .....                             | <b>37</b> |

## CHAPTER 4

|                                                                                    |           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b> .....                                                          | <b>38</b> |
| <b>Presentation of findings</b> .....                                              | <b>38</b> |
| <i>Loyal consumer or casual shopper</i> .....                                      | <b>38</b> |
| <i>Aspects that maximise shopping in H&amp;M</i> .....                             | <b>39</b> |
| <i>Levels of symbolism attached to trying on clothes while in-store</i> .....      | <b>39</b> |
| <i>Impact on the connection to H&amp;M</i> .....                                   | <b>40</b> |
| <i>Perceptions</i> .....                                                           | <b>40</b> |
| <i>In-store environment during the lockdown period and levels of loyalty</i> ..... | <b>41</b> |
| <b>Interpretation of findings</b> .....                                            | <b>41</b> |
| <i>Style</i> .....                                                                 | <b>42</b> |
| <i>Internal store features</i> .....                                               | <b>42</b> |
| <i>Product performance</i> .....                                                   | <b>43</b> |
| <i>Consumption habits</i> .....                                                    | <b>43</b> |
| <b>Trustworthiness</b> .....                                                       | <b>44</b> |
| <b>Conclusion</b> .....                                                            | <b>46</b> |

## CHAPTER 5

|                                                         |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b> .....                               | <b>47</b> |
| <b>Research question and objectives addressed</b> ..... | <b>47</b> |
| <i>Primary research question</i> .....                  | <b>47</b> |
| <i>Secondary research questions</i> .....               | <b>47</b> |
| <i>Research objectives</i> .....                        | <b>48</b> |
| <b>Implications of the findings for H&amp;M</b> .....   | <b>48</b> |
| <b>Evaluation of the research</b> .....                 | <b>49</b> |
| <b>Ethical considerations</b> .....                     | <b>51</b> |
| <b>Anticipated contribution</b> .....                   | <b>51</b> |
| <b>Limitations</b> .....                                | <b>52</b> |
| <b>Conclusion</b> .....                                 | <b>52</b> |

|                             |           |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Reference list .....</b> | <b>54</b> |
|-----------------------------|-----------|

## LIST OF TABLES

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Table 1. Key concepts.....            | 14 |
| Table 2. Thematic analysis steps..... | 35 |
| Table 3. Key themes.....              | 42 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|                                                     |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Figure 1. Dick and Basu's (1994) Loyalty Model..... | 17 |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----|

## LIST OF APPENDICES

|                 |    |
|-----------------|----|
| Appendix A..... | 60 |
| Appendix B..... | 61 |
| Appendix C..... | 62 |
| Appendix D..... | 63 |
| Appendix E..... | 71 |
| Appendix F..... | 74 |

# Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1 | Introduction

This chapter focuses on contextualising the research background that led to the study as well as a rationale on the importance of the research that has been conducted. Additionally, the problem characterising the in-store store experience will be outlined which will then be followed by the study's purpose and the research question it sought to answer as well as the objectives it aimed to address.

### 1.1 | Contextualisation

There exists a large body of literature focused on the realm of retail that underscores retail store attributes as the determining factor for store choice and purchase behaviour (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003: 371; Terblanche & Boshoff, 2004:3; Leszczyc & Timmermans, 2001:493). The literature further highlights the array of merchandise and its subsequent assortment as the components of the conventional retail marketing mix (Terblanche & Boshoff, 2004:3-4)

Although true, Sands, Oppewal and Beverland (2009:386) bring to attention the heightened significance for in-store experiences to fall within the marketing mix, and the continuous pressure around the need to develop novel and innovative lenses to view these experiences. The authors relate this need to how the holistic understanding of in-store experiences and its integration into the marketing mix carries the potential for retail stores to differentiate themselves from their competitors and adapt to ever-changing and accelerating environmental circumstances (Sands et al., 2009:394)- as seen with the state of the environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The year of 1947 saw Erling Persson create what would eventually become the world's second largest fashion retailer, with almost four thousand stores worldwide, H&M has grown to global phenomenon status as a result of their fast fashion model, which Forbes describes as the "movement of large volumes of merchandise from the designer table to the showroom floor in the shortest amount of time" (Tun, 2019). From a consumer perspective, fast fashion can be understood as a brand's provision of the most recent fashion items at the cheapest price which enables consumers with the ability to continuously purchase these items and discharge them after a single season, only to then replace them with more up-to-date apparel.

The multichannel fashion retailer's 2019 net sales placed it amongst the strongest financial performers in the countries where it does business and ranked it a leader in the RXUK Top500 research (Business Insider SA, 2021). H&M proceeded to start 2020 strongly "with a positive momentum" (Business Insider SA, 2021), until the first wave of COVID-19 hit where the results were a plummet in the brand's global first quarter sales, followed by a 6 percent decline in South African sales as compared to the previous year (Business Insider SA, 2021).

Holland and Knight (2020) assert that "the 2019 novel coronavirus known around the world as COVID-19, has led to unprecedented economic and public health concerns which have transformed how businesses operate going forward". The pair go on to mention that this transformation is not bound only to the operation of businesses, but also extends into how they preserve and expand their brand and consumer base (Holland and Knight, 2020).

The pandemic drastically reshaped the economy and left industries such as hospitality, aviation and retail under the most pressure due to the fact that lockdown restrictions called for '*non-essential*' businesses to shut their doors in order to combat the spread of the virus (Holland and Knight, 2020). As a result, H&M shutdown 250 stores worldwide, with South African stores accounting for 27 of those (Ringstrom, 2021).

However, as the third quarter of the financial year steadily approached, profit margins grew by 10 percent due to the reopening of almost all these stores and a redefined 'return-to-business' approach (Ringstrom, 2021). Despite the reopening of nearly all the stores within the South African market, the new approach took one thing away, experience, but moreover in-store experience.

Hence this study sought to understand the result of lockdown restrictions on H&M's in-store experience, in order to gain insight into whether a reduced in-store experience will affect consumer behaviour and subsequently brand loyalty. This analysis will be presented in the form of a discussion around this paper's rationale, research problem, purpose and objectives, and the paper's holistic research question.

Following this will be an in-depth analysis of the key and authoritative scholarly works related to this paper's topic as well as a conceptualisation of the central concepts relevant to this proposed study. This will then be followed by a thorough discussion of this paper's methodology, research plan, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations. This paper will then be rounded off by a succinct conclusion that condenses all the points addressed during its formation.

## 1.2 | Rationale

In retail research, a considerable amount of attention has been devoted to consumer's experiences. However, despite this fact, a number of scholars continue to place emphasis on the need for the use of new approaches when examining consumers' in-store retail experiences (Bäckström & Johansson, 2017:241). Hence this study will use H&M's predicament to offer retailers insight into the effect of tailored in-store experiences, so that they are able to leverage the understanding in order to direct business's change in terms of business strategies during economic fluctuations. The study further fills in the gaps in research by placing consumer's subjective experiences at the centre in order to provide marketers and businesses with meaningful information derived directly from *'the source'*.

## 1.3 | Problem statement

A number of fast fashion brands have built business models around the idea of providing consumers with in-store exclusivity (Borràs, 2020). H&M similarly drove the experience consumers could receive through physically entering their stores and trying on clothes (Borràs, 2020). This, however, was until they began prohibiting this activity in order to adhere to the aims of the lockdown restrictions, which although was integral to the mitigation of the spread of the virus, majority of Gen Z consumers- H&M's primary target market- thrive off of the in-store experience (Warnock, n.d.).

According to White (2019), Gen Z's favouring of the in-store experience can be largely attributed to the level of personalisation that can be obtained through physically seeing, selecting and trying certain pieces of clothing on, as opposed to ordering them online only to see them when they arrive or purchasing and only trying the clothing on at home. Warnock (n.d.) reflects this in his assertion that 77 percent of Gen Z shoppers prefer to purchase in-store rather than online.

Despite the plethora of literature relating the retail store (Bäckström & Johansson, 2017:249; Erdumlu, Saricam, Tufekyapan, Cetinkaya, & Donmez, 2017:4; Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003: 371), and the internal features that create the in-store experience (Terblanche & Boshoff, 2004:3; Leszczyc & Timmermans, 2001:493), there remains limited research investigating the impact of a reduced in-store experience as it relates to the process of trying on clothes and its subsequent impact on consumer behaviour and brand loyalty. Thus, this study's aim of

acquiring insight into consumers' relationship with the process of trying on clothes and the result of its decreased presence in H&M stores.

#### **1.4 | Purpose statement**

The purpose of this study is to understand the effects of the lockdown restrictions on consumer's in-store experience and subsequently loyalty towards H&M.

#### **1.5 | Research question**

What aspects of H&M's in-store environment contribute to the formation of an experience-whether positive or negative?

##### *Sub-questions*

- How do these aspects form consumers' experiences while in-store?
- How does in-store experience affect loyalty?

#### **1.6 | Objectives**

- To determine the foundations on which H&M's in-store experience is built; and
- The effect of the decreased presence of such experiences

## **1.7 | Chapter outline**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Chapter one introduces the research background and rationale as to why the research is being conducted, it further introduces the research's purpose, the research question and lastly the objectives of the study.

### **Chapter 2: Review of literature**

Chapter two begins with a conceptualisation of the study's key concepts, followed by a discussion on the study's theoretical foundation and is ended with a theoretical review of previous literature that is relevant to the aims of this study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Chapter three discusses the qualitative approach taken by this study as well as its selected design, population, sampling, data collection method and lastly analysis method.

### **Chapter 4: Presentation and interpretation of findings**

Chapter four presents the findings of each research question as well as an interpretation of the results which includes the derived themes in tabular format.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

Chapter five marks the end of the research report as it includes the answer to the study's research question and objectives, as well as the implications of the findings for H&M. The chapter goes on to discuss the heuristic value of the study and ethical implications and any limitations that the researcher faced during the research process.

## **1.8 | Conclusion**

This chapter provided a thorough contextualisation of the study in order to lay way for a well-rounded understanding of the entire paper. This was undertaken through the provision of a background as to why the topic has been selected, the relevance of the investigation and the contribution it would be making to the body of research. Furthermore, the research question was defined, including its sub-questions as well as detailing the study's overall objectives.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1 | Introduction

This chapter outlines the central concepts that form part of the research, through the process of conceptualisation as well as a discussion about the literature that forms the foundation of the study. The chapter further includes a contextualised summary of previous theory that aids in addressing the study's central research question: what aspects of H&M's in-store environment contribute to the formation of an experience- whether positive or negative, with the purpose of providing a comprehensive understanding of the in-store experience, but moreover to place the research into perspective through the identification of models that best augment the study's argument in order to determine what is known or unknown regarding the in-store experience.

### 2.2 | Conceptualisation

| Term                       | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>In-store experience</b> | Consumers' attitude towards retailers will be determined by their assessment of all merchandise-related aspects encountered during their shopping process (Mazursky & Jacoby, 1985:110). This research was carried out in context of H&M's in-store experience and supplements the study as it stands as the main idea that grounds all theory.                                                                                                           |
| <b>Consumer behaviour</b>  | Consumer behaviour may be observed as the study of the processes used by consumers to select, consume and dispose of products and services, including their emotional, mental and behavioural responses (Radu 2021; Smith 2016). The research places consumer behaviour into the context of how consumer behaviour is more of a collection of direct and indirect influences that positively or negatively, affect consumer's buying behaviour. Cant, Van |

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                      | Heerden and Ngambi (n.d.:121) go on to suggest the aspect of experiences and ideas that influence consumer behaviour.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Brand loyalty</b> | Brand loyalty may be observed as the materialisation of consumer's perceptions towards a brand, based off of the relationship between their relative attitudes and repeat patronage (Coker, 2013:209). Brand loyalty is integral in establishing and ensuring the long-term success of a brand. Brand loyalty was further contextualised in analysing patterns and perceptions towards H&M based off of consumer reactions towards brand products, service and activities, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the brand strategies that maintain, propel or decline brand loyalty. |

**Table 1: Key concepts**

## **2.3 | Theoretical foundation**

This study's theoretical foundation views brand loyalty as an essential framework that is necessary when seeking to explore the role of the in-store experience on H&M's consumer behaviour. Due to this study's use of an interpretivist paradigm, the outlined frameworks awarded the researcher with the opportunity to fully gain insight into and an understanding around the paper's identified problem in a rich and subjective manner that supported an in-depth understanding of the paper's topic.

### **2.3.1 | In-store experience**

In this study, the term in-store experience is introduced as the main idea that grounds all theory. Terblanche and Boshoff (2004:10) suggest that in-store experience can be described as a multi-dimensional construct that is largely shaped by what can be termed "store image" and service-quality related considerations. Mazursky and Jacoby (1985:111) similarly see the in-store experience from the lens of store image. The pair, however, further the definition by stating that consumer's attitude towards retailers will be determined by their assessment of all merchandise-related aspects encountered during their shopping process (Mazursky & Jacoby,

1985:110). As previously discussed, a number of authors often omit the aspect that this study seeks to add to the body of knowledge which contributes to the general pleasantness of the shopping experience, which is physically trying on items of clothing, hence the importance of including the in-store experience into this study.

### **2.3.2 | Consumer behaviour**

Radu (2021) describes consumer behaviour as the study of the processes used by consumers to select, consume and dispose of products and services, including their emotional, mental and behavioural responses. Smith (2016) supports this definition, but advances it by not solely viewing consumer behaviour from a consumer's perspective.

He goes on to include individuals, groups and organisations, and sees consumer behaviour as the study of these members and all the activities associated with their purchase decisions, use and disposal of goods and services, and how their emotions, attitudes and preferences affect their buying behaviour (Smith, 2016).

The catalyst of consumer behaviour rests in acquired experiences, reflected by Cant, Van Heerden and Ngambi's (n.d. :121) stance, which condenses each of the above author's definitions by describing consumer behaviour as "the study of individuals, groups or organisations, and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas in order to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society".

Over the last 20 years, consumer research has produced a whirlwind of data that addresses the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:868). However, most research is characterised by nebulous epithets that make the understanding of the theoretical commonalities and linkages within this research tradition more obscured than clarifying (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:868). Hence, the development of the consumer culture theory (CCT).

The primary misconception of the CCT is that a number of scholars believe that the differences between it and other theories of consumer research are based on methodological approaches (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:868). Despite these adverse beliefs, qualitative data and an array of related data collection and analysis techniques quite literally sit at the centre of CCT (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:868).

The central focus of this theory aids this study by providing a method through which other factors influencing consumer behaviour can be understood, as it includes the analysis of experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption that are not overtly noticeable through experiments, surveys or database modelling (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:871). CCT additionally includes topics such as product symbolism, ritual practices, the consumer stories in product and brand meanings, and the symbolic boundaries that structure personal and communal consumer identities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:871).

The inclusion of such points enabled the researcher with the understanding of the heterogeneous distribution of meanings which systematically influence consumer behaviour (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:871). This understanding further aided the researcher in unearthing the embedded in-store experiences that drive meaning in order to address the study's research question.

Furthermore, this study sought to describe the effect of lockdown restrictions on the in-store experience, hence the necessity for the individual meanings that consumers ascribe to certain aspects to be understood, mainly through assessing the aforementioned aspects, as this understanding assists in highlighting the factors that influence the purchasing decisions or subsequently hinder consumers from making a purchase as a result of a reduced in-store experience.

### **2.3.3 | Brand loyalty**

Consumer behaviour patterns demonstrate brand loyalty which can be understood as the materialisation of consumer's perceptions of a brand based off of the manner in which they react towards to a certain brand product, service and/or activity (Jönsson & Martinsson, 2016:10).

The insertion of the term in this study is largely attributed to the fact that distinguishing between existing market types is an integral process as the characteristics of each segment reflects how the methods used to capture loyalty must differ, thus supporting the researcher's stance against a single brand loyalty measurement for all market types.

Dick and Basu (1994:133) define brand loyalty as "the relationship between relative attitude and repeat patronage". The term can further be understood as a concept that consists of different components (Jönsson and Martinsson, 2016:10). Consumer satisfaction is a construct that is commonly connected to loyalty, with Coker (2013:209) seeing it as a function

of the consumers' perceptions that conceptualises their expressions towards a specific product.

Introducing satisfaction is integral in gaining an in-depth understanding of brand loyalty, because through a satisfying experience with a brand or its products, the factors that aid in the establishment of loyalty can be understood. A brand is a trust mark and can act as a symbol of quality and assurance (Coker, 2013:210). The importance of the trust construct lies in consumer's beliefs in a brand's ability to deliver on promised services (Coker, 2013:212). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) see brand loyalty as "the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function".

Abu-Alhaija, Yusof, Hashim and Jaharuddin (2018:106) state that there are two types of loyalty, namely, active loyalty and passive loyalty. Dick and Basu's (1994) Loyalty Model (*Figure 1*) goes on to categorise consumer's loyalty into four types based on two dimensions. These types include, true loyalty, latent loyalty, spurious loyalty, and no loyalty.



Figure 1: Dick and Basu's (1994) loyalty model.

The model reflects that it is possible for a consumer to have different types of loyalty depending on the strength of their repeat patronage and the relative attitude of the consumer towards a brand. Below are the definitions for each type of loyalty:

- *True loyalty*

This type of loyalty occurs when repeat patronage and relative attitude are high. This means that regardless of the circumstances and the consumers attitude, the likelihood of the individual switching to an alternative brand or product is low (Jönsson & Martinsson, 2016:10). By gaining an understanding of the in-store experiences that elicit true loyalty, this study was able to understand the 'under-the-surface' elements that positively position H&M in the minds of its consumers and create true loyalty.

- *Latent loyalty*

The second type of loyalty that exists according to Dick and Basu's (1994) Loyalty Model is latent loyalty. Latent loyalty occurs when repeat patronage is low and relative attitude is high. This type of loyalty exists when consumers favour a specific brand due to it solely offering a particular product or service (Jönsson & Martinsson, 2016:10). However, when the consumer's preference changes, so does the brand they consume from (Jönsson & Martinsson, 2016:10).

Latent loyalists are most prone to being effected by a reduced in-store experience, because as previously stated, H&M's primary target market prioritise physically trying on clothes, as opposed to only trying on the purchased items once they get home (White, 2019). Therefore, the preference for trying on clothes and the inability to do so is most likely to affect their relationship with H&M. The understanding of latent loyalty directly correlates with the understanding of the study's research topic, as this type of loyalty reflects how consumer's preference could change as a result of the presence or absence of a particular 'need'.

- *Spurious loyalty*

This type of loyalty occurs when repeat patronage is high and relative attitude low, meaning that consumer's choice of a particular product is due to familiarity, as spurious loyalty is highly connected to habit (Jönsson & Martinsson, 2016:10).

Spurious loyalty would mean an inconsistent consumer base for H&M, potentially resulting in an inconsistent profit margin for the brand. However, by understanding the behaviour of spurious loyalists, the research is able to build an understanding on the

types of consumers that affect H&M's long-term profitability, and those whose behaviour is least driven by loyalty, thus enabling the finding of the factors that create a sense of familiarity and breed habit.

- *No loyalty*

The last type of loyalty is no loyalty. In this, consumers have a low repeat patronage and low relative attitude. This means that there exists almost no loyalty towards businesses who have had little time to build a brand, or in competitive markets where there seems to be no point of difference between two brands (Jönsson & Martinsson, 2016:10).

No loyalty could exist due to the saturation of the market by newer businesses who are disrupting the operation of incumbent firms such as H&M, resulting in higher marketing budgets being required to target and attract customers, and then turn them into consumers.

The loyalty model provides support to the aims of CCT by creating a method through which the symbolic nature of commodities and desires are mediated through markets (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:868). According to Arnould and Thompson (2005:875), consumer culture does not define action as a causal force, instead, it sees it as an ideology that conveys consumers' understanding of conceivable action, feeling, and thought. Through the loyalty model, CCT is able to be conceptualised because the model helps in developing the understanding of consumer's action as a result of their personal choices- which CCT is heavily reliant on.

From this viewpoint, the CCT provides this research with a method to augment the entire body of knowledge by providing a means to interpret certain patterns of behaviour, while further encouraging the investigation of experiential aspects of consumption in order to locate the issues that affect the in-store experience and how this is translated through consumer behaviour. Additionally, because this study aims to look for the aspects that create an in-store experience, CCT would make sense of the manifestations of consumer culture, based off of Dick and Basu's (1994) model, in order to gain an understanding of specific socioeconomic circumstances and marketplace systems that seep into consumer's decision making process that affect end states (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:875).

## **2.4 | Review of literature**

The literature review will incorporate a number of relevant online articles, journals and books that have been used to guide the understanding of the study's topic and address the purpose of the research. The literature review will further define key concepts through the use of existing literature that is relevant to the study in order to provide the researcher with a means of gaining insight into the arguments that have already been made and viewpoints that have already been discussed, while assessing any potential gaps within the existing research in order to form supported arguments relating to the in-store experience.

### **2.4.1 | In-store experience**

Currently, there is no rejecting the fact that the shopping experience has truly transformed and the consumer experience (CX) has become one of the prime factors in the maintenance of a business's competitive advantage (Bascur & Rusu, 2020:7644). In Yoon and Park's (2018:111) study on in-store experience and socially embedded measures, the pair address how there is a long standing belief that previous literature has consistently supported, which states that consumers' experiences have an effect on their loyalty behaviour, but research that focuses on in-store shopping experiences is limited.

Some of the recent studies on in-store experiences have elicited to the importance of the role of brand based stimuli. For instance, Hong (2016:231-251), in a study of specialty coffee shop, mentioned that in-store shopping experience triggered by subjective responses (sensual, affective, cognitive, and actual) led to positive outcomes. Which Song and Park (2009:120) briefly support in their study on family restaurant, which reported that in-store experience results from usage experiences including participation and observation.

Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Raghubir, and Stewart (2009:15) hold similar sentiments in terms of the aspects that contribute to creating in-store experiences. They loosely refer to dated beliefs, but primarily reference the need for consumer aspects such as involvement - which for the purpose of this study will be understood as the involvement with physically trying on clothes.

By taking Song and Park's (2009:120) and Puccinelli et al's (2009:15) participation, observation and involvement aspects of in-store experience into account, it becomes easier to create a foundation on which the arguments of this study can be built. A number of research has been rooted on the tangible aspects of the in-store experience (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003:

371; Terblanche & Boshoff, 2004:3; Leszczyc & Timmermans, 2001:493), and although a necessary facet in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the concept as a whole, contemporary times call for contemporary measures. Hence, this paper seeking to fill in the gaps in knowledge by developing another method through which the in-store experience can be understood.

Bäckström and Johansson's (2017:241-259) research supports the shift in understanding in-store experiences by leading the emphasis on the need for new approaches when examining consumers' in-store retail experiences. The pair stress the significance of a holistic approach to studying consumers' in-store experiences through the subjective lens of the consumers physically experiencing a particular store's environment (Bäckström & Johansson, 2017:249).

For the purpose of this study, in-store experience is important as it helped in creating an understanding around H&M's internal aspects that augment the maintenance of a favourable identity to which consumers feel 'in-sync' with. Additionally, the inclusion of the concept within the study supplements and relays the research's stance around the aspects that create an in-store experience so as to address the subsequent result of its reduction.

## **2.4.2 | Consumer behaviour**

As aforementioned, consumers experiences have an effect on their loyalty behaviour (Yoon & Park, 2018:111). However, prior to drawing a link between the affect of experiences on loyalty, consumer behaviour must first be understood, as the result of loyalty is a choice in behaviour (Yoon & Park, 2018:111). Cant, Van Heerden and Ngambi (n.d.:121) describe consumer behaviour as "the study of individuals, groups or organisations, and the processes they use to select, secure, use and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society".

Existing within such an increasingly competitive environment has required that H&M prioritise the act of differentiation, while simultaneously gaining a more in-depth understanding of the in-store experience and the aspects that contribute to the formation of an experience. This largely relates to the fact that these aspects drive consumer's perceptions and dictate the type of behaviour that will follow (Bindu, Kodali & Kumari, 2021:1739).

Similar to other research articles (Yoon and Park, 2018:111; Puccinelli, et al., 2009:15), Bindu et al (2021:1739-1744) hold the singular belief that in-store experience is a result of the exterior and internal atmosphere of a store, moreover, that it is these internal and external

forces, namely, atmosphere, store colour, design and layout that aid in differentiation and drive consumer behaviour through positive emotional, cognitive and physiological associations (Bindu et al., 2021:1739-1744)

As stated in the discussion surrounding the phenomenon, this study aims to leverage previously conducted research in order to adopt a novel means of understanding the in-store experience. The change in understanding would then assist in paving a new path for the type of methods that are prioritised when offering consumers an experience. However, despite the accuracy and relevance of Bindu et al's (2021:1739-1744) research, Terblanche and Boshoff (2004:10) propose a new differentiation angle for retailers based off of what consumers want to experience from the moment they enter a store till the moment they leave.

Terblanche and Boshoff's (2004:10) differentiation angle is relevant as it lays the foundation on which the gaps in research are able to be filled by this study, due to the fact that the author's findings dive into causative factors in the environment which could potentially effect consumer behaviour. The authors further assert that these impacts on consumer behaviour formulate in-store experiences as well as additional dimensions that manage consumer behaviour (Terblanche and Boshoff, 2004:10).

Many studies have examined the factors that affect consumer behaviour. Areni and Kim (1993:117) found that lighting may affect the awareness of objects displayed on the showroom, while Levy and Weitz (2002:110-115) found that music and the scent of a store often directly affects consumer's emotions and moods. Nonetheless, with all these aspects at hand, the coronavirus pandemic still reflected the volatility of the market and showcased the need for creative thinking for brands such as H&M in order to support their business objectives (Arab News, 2020).

During the pandemic, a number of businesses learnt to cope, however, their coping mechanisms showed the necessity for new capabilities in order to face the environmental future (McKinsey & Company, 2021). H&M had readapted many of their business procedures when reopening their stores in order to adhere to lockdown restrictions (BBC News, 2020), which unfortunately came at a cost, as despite the congruence between lighting, layout and the smell of the store, South African sales increased, but remained 5 percent lower than the same month in 2019 (BBC News, 2020).

According to Nazir (2021), the basis for H&M's decreased bottom line can be attributed to a number of consumers' inability to revert back to "normality", as the expectations previously

held about the experience associated with shopping at H&M had been altered, resulting in a decreased “thrill” for engaging with the brand.

The difference in profit margins and the inability to revert back to normality despite all the aesthetic and lighting features being present within H&M stores supports the belief of this study that in-store experience can no longer be driven solely by the offerings highlighted in Bindu et al.'s (2021:1739-1744) research. As the lack of a new understanding regarding the relationship between in-store experience and consumer behaviour could result in a further decrease in H&M's quarterly sales margins as well as consumer engagement.

### **2.4.3 | Brand loyalty**

Brand loyalty is an important construct that is based on the emotional involvement that develops between a consumer and a particular brand (Gunelius, 2021). Brand loyalty defines a consumer's emotionally charged decision to continuously purchase from a brand as a result of trust and the belief that the brand and its products will fulfil specific physical needs and/or emotional wants (Gunelius, 2021).

Roberts (2019) states that to create brand loyalty a brand must deliver on quality and value, meaning that it must provide consumers with more than what is expected. For the purpose of this study 'providing more than what is expected' will be understood as going beyond the sole prioritisation of lighting, smell and layout, to including the positive and memorable experience of trying on clothes.

There is a value to loyalty that correlates directly with brand equity, as brand loyalty equates to long-term, sustainable business success due to it being an intangible value that can be utilised as an indicator of a brand's current success, as well as laying the foundation for future performance predictions (Gunelius, 2021). The long-term sustainable business success developed by consumer loyalty is largely driven by brand trust, as “the higher the feeling of trust in a brand, the more consumers are loyal to it” (Punniyamoorthy, Prasanna, Mohan & Raj, 2007:222).

Brand trust sits at the helm of any long-term relationship and can be understood as consumers' inclination to willingly depend on a brand's ability to fulfil its promises (Punniyamoorthy et al., 2007:222). Brand trust is integral in developing positive and favourable attitudes, hence its importance, as it largely contributes to the development of brand loyalty, and therefore long-term brand success (Punniyamoorthy et al., 2007:233).

In Erdumlu, Saricam, Tufekyapan, Cetinkaya and Donmez's (2017:4) study on the influence of brand loyalty in purchasing sportswear products, the researchers mention that there are certain product categories that are more convenient for consumers to develop loyalty towards. Apparel is one category for which consumer decisions are most often made through the consideration of the brands (Erdumlu et al., 2017:1-3). However, despite the existing research conducted on brand loyalty (Roberts 2019; Gunelius 2021; Punniyamoorthy et al, 2007:222-233), studies that specifically aim to understand the loyalty of consumers towards apparel products from retailers such as H&M is limited.

Hence this study's aim of adding to the existing body of knowledge by developing a novel method through which loyalty that enables consumers to bypass retail alternatives can be understood. However, where this study differs from research that already exists is found in how loyalty will not primarily be understood as repeat purchase behaviour, instead, the understanding of the concept will be furthered through the use of Dick and Basu's (1994) Loyalty Model as it aids in augmenting the above argument. This is done by placing emphasis on the idea that the measurement of brand loyalty should equally include consumer attitudes alongside their behaviour.

By favouring this approach, the doors are opened to the inclusion of a large number of variables that can be examined as the subsequent result of evaluative constructs in studies of brand loyalty. This approach additionally aids in drawing a link between this study's 'try-on-model' and brand loyalty, and from this stance, loyalty can then be observed as the development of a liking or attitude towards a brand as a result of cumulatively satisfying usage occasions.

Much like meanings, Rockwell (2010:75-83) states that satisfaction is established by experiences and thus brand loyalty is linked to the degree of liking for a brand as a result of a satisfied need. Sahin, Zehir and Kitapçı (2011 :1288) in their effects of brand experiences, highlight the fact that the input of the relationship between buyer and seller in a long-term consumer-brand relationship is brand experience, and the main output is brand loyalty.

Franzen (1999:30) states that the consumer-brand relationship is a result of a consumer's experiences with a brand and the meanings ascribed to these said experiences. Sahin et al (2011:1300) support Franzen's (1999:30) position by stating that the above relationship is highly dependent on the successful creation of meanings, and that these meanings are generally informed by a consumer's experiences.

According to Sahin et al (2011 :1289), experiences largely appeal to functional benefits with current consumers. However, as previously stated, consumers currently seek more compelling benefits from an experience, because such experiences lead to brand loyalty due to their ability to develop emotional connections between a brand and its consumers (Sahin et al., 2011:1289). Without such context specific experiences, H&M highly stands to forfeit on the establishment of consumer commitment and allegiance to their brand due to the development of negative consumer attitudes as a result of a reduced in-store experience.

Sahin et al's (n.d.:1288-1301), Franzen (1999:30), Rockwell (2010:75-83), Punniyamoorthy et al., (2007:222-233) and Erdumlu et al's (2017:1-4) research is relevant to this study because each author's findings and understanding helped in focusing the research on the specific elements that incite brand loyalty and further helped identify how the marriage between brand experience and consumer loyalty can have an effect on brand success. The authors findings supplemented this study's attempt at showcasing the added value of a furthered understanding of brand loyalty by creating a lens through which the result of a reduced in-store experience can be understood within the context of loyalty towards H&M.

#### **2.4.4 | Conclusion**

This chapter detailed the concepts that lie central to the understanding of the study's topic and further incorporated a theoretical foundation which contextualised this study's basis by unpacking in-store experience, consumer behaviour and brand loyalty, which the study found to be the interlinking point between a consumer's experience within a store and the impact such experiences have on the consumer's resultant behaviour. The theoretical foundation additionally identified relevant frameworks that embody the aspects that support the study's stance which then enabled the critical evaluation of previous literature that is relevant to the exploration of the in-store experience.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 | Introduction**

This chapter provides insight into the selected paradigm for this study, the research approach and design used to investigate the research problem, the population and sampling method as well as its application. The study's data collection is also discussed as well as the data analysis method used to explore the result of H&M's reduced in-store experience.

### **3.2 | Research paradigm**

Unisa (2018) asserts that there is no research that is not founded on some underlying philosophical assumptions about what constitutes 'valid' research, and which research paradigm is relevant to the development of knowledge specific to the given study. Bogdan and Biklen (1998:22) see paradigms as a varied collection of assumptions, concepts or propositions that are each related and that manage the way a researcher views a problem and the type of research to be conducted. The research process has three major dimensions, namely, ontology, epistemology and methodology (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:16), and for the purpose of this study, a methodological position of interpretivism has been used.

Interpretivism integrates human interest into a study and embodies the view that individuals are fundamentally polar to one another and their experience of reality is subjective as the environment is constantly changing, thus their experience of it is dependent on the way in which the individual processes reality (du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014:28). The selection of an interpretivist paradigm informed the type of literature that was chosen in one primary way. That way being based on the fact that because this study lays on understanding the effects of a reduced in-store experience, individual perceptions must be viewed and understood, as the result of the findings unearths the factors that form an in-store experience-whether positive or negative.

However, this study did not aim to understand this effect based off of the elements researched in existing literature, instead it sought to view it from a novel lens. Thus literature such as that of Terreblanche and Boshoff (2004:10) has been included and leveraged to support the purpose of this study. The main aim of interpretivist research is to study human behaviour and see the world through the eyes of the research's participants (du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:28). Through an interpretivist approach, the researcher was enabled to stand not above nor

outside, but within the research, thus allowing the researcher to assess the manner in which participants view the world around them.

Furthermore, this type of paradigm translates reality into a subjective social construction, and through its use, the researcher was allowed to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' beliefs regarding the aspects of H&M's in-store environment. The paradigm additionally enabled the understanding of the meanings ascribed to certain business activities, in order to comprehensively interpret the basis for consumer behaviour and address this study's sub-question: how do these aspects form consumers' experiences while in-store.

Interpretivism helped reframe the researcher's understanding of the research topic and problem, and further created a method through which an in-depth understanding of the subjective perceptions of these individuals towards the aspects of H&M's in-store environment that influence their behaviour and connection to the brand could be understood.

Finally, by favouring a methodological position of interpretivism, this study was provided with a guiding system to empathise with the individuals participating in it. The paradigm also allowed for the use of the researcher's personal points of view to be leveraged in providing a supported argument around the study's focus.

### **3.3 | Research approach and design**

Research approaches selected by a researcher define the resultant methods used to collect, analyse and then interpret the data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014: 93). This study's research question aimed to understand the effects of H&M's redefined in-store experience as a result of lockdown restrictions, thus indicating a qualitative approach. Qualitative research has been selected as the study's approach as it aligns with the study's paradigm by way of enabling the researcher to gain insight into participants' lived experiences and derived meanings based off of individual and subjective experiences within H&M.

The assessment of this shift was informed by the design principles of hermeneutic phenomenology, as it emphasises a subjective approach to understanding the meanings and experiences of individuals and groups, with the overall objective of registering the world as experienced by these individuals (Guillen, 2019:22). This design was most suited for this study as it strengthened the study's inductive approach, which according to Sauce and Matzel (2017:1-8), means that when multiple events are observed, they can be grouped into

generalised statements by reasoning from the specific (H&M) to the general (in-store experience, consumer behaviour, and brand loyalty).

The hermeneutic phenomenological design rests on descriptive research, as the primary focus of this type of research is to describe the characteristics of phenomena based off of individual experiences and perspectives, as well as to describe whether relationships between these phenomena exists (du Plooy-Cilliers et al, 2014:76). Thus, by using this type of research design, the data derived from this study's participants was provided with a means to be understood in relation to the in-store experience.

### 3.4 | Population

A study's population can be understood as the totality of all the individuals who will participate in the study and supply the researcher with information necessary to complete it (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:133). While the target population are all the individuals who fall within the parameters of the established population (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:133). The researcher selected H&M as the **unit of analysis** and developed a framework of certain population characteristics that participants were required to fall within in order to partake in the study. Such as:

*Key characteristics:*

- Generation Z South Africans.
- Avid or casual H&M consumers.
- H&M consumers who visited their stores during the lockdown period.

Consequently, the **target population** for the purpose of this study were all H&M consumers living in South Africa. This population was selected as the result of the interaction with this segment provides the researcher with an in-depth understanding of the feelings, perceptions and opinions of the individuals who engaged with H&M during the lockdown. Furthermore, the **accessible population** only refers to the specific group of participants within the population that the researcher is able to include in his or her study (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:134).

The observed and accessible population for this study was H&M consumers between the ages of 18-24 years old, living in South Africa. The chosen individuals were selected as the accessible population due to the fact that they are active consumers of H&M's products and South African residents, which supplements the goals of the research study as it is aimed at gaining an understanding of the South African Gen Z consumer attitude. Moreover, majority

of them have access to technology which allowed them to participate in an online questionnaire (Melo, 2018).

### 3.5 | Sampling

Due to this paper's qualitative approach, understanding individuals' subjective views and opinions as they interact within society becomes easier (Palmer & Bolderston, 2006:16). Qualitative research examines people's actions in descriptive ways and relies on linguistics rather than statistical data, which enabled the researcher to study human experiences and meanings from participants' perspectives in order to ensure an effective apprehension of the South African Gen Z's consumer attitude towards H&M's redefined in-store experience (Ringstrom, 2021).

A limited amount of time was allocated to collecting the necessary data needed for this research, as well as a limited budget. Therefore, in order to arrive at a general conclusion about the entire population, a relatively small **size** of 9 individuals were used. The research study made use of non-probability sampling, which is qualitative in nature and commonly made use of "when it is almost impossible to determine who the entire population is, or when gaining access to them is difficult" (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:133).

In order to meet the specific objectives of this study, the researcher proposed the use of non-probability sampling due to its cost and time-efficiency as well the ability for results to be generalised to the broader population (Showkat & Parveen, 2017: 6). To select a sample that is most reflective of the population parameters, the researcher made use of purposive sampling, which according to du Plooy-Cilliers et al (2017:142), is the process where the researcher selects sample elements deriving from a specific list of characteristics that are important for the study.

The researcher purposefully chose the elements – H&M consumers- to be in the sample based off of pre-established key characteristics and the important gage for the sample elements was that participants had to have visited an H&M store during the lockdown period. The population whose characteristics were not aligned to the predetermined sample elements were disregarded within this study as their responses would not reflect the aims of the research.

One of the disadvantages that characterises purposive sampling is that the selected participants may potentially not be reliable subjects due to the researchers' bias that can have an impact on which participants are chosen, thus reducing the generalisable and

representative nature of the results against the larger population (Rahi, 2017:3). However, despite these weaknesses, COVID-19 restrictions, and time and budget constraints, the researcher still made use of purposive sampling.

### **3.6 | Data collection**

Qualitative data collection is rooted in exploring and describing the collected data (Maree, 2016:26). Maree (2016:26) further states that there are various collection methods available to researchers such as observation, interviews, focus-groups and visual data.

In relation to the study's interpretivist paradigm and the research objectives, the researcher made use of online questionnaires in order to gain insight into the world through participants' point of view. The questions were developed on the basis of emotion, consumer experience and attitude towards H&M's 'new normal' (Warnock, n.d.). Online questionnaires were selected due to their inexpensive nature, ability to bypass geographic boundaries, as well as them having the ability to support the ethical considerations of this research study which aim to maintain anonymity (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:321).

These benefits have grown the popularity of online questionnaires as they are more convenient and manageable for respondents to complete (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:208). The questions asked within the questionnaire were all constructed in English in order to simplify data analysis and safeguard the consistency within the responses.

#### **3.6.1 | *Application of data collection process***

There are two types of data that exist, namely, primary and secondary data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:164). Secondary data refers to instances where the search for information is not exceptional and a third party gathers the data (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:164). While the data that is seen as being primary, stipulates that it has been gathered by the researcher through the process of investigation, thus making it original (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:164).

The researcher gathered primary data relating to brand loyalty, consumer perceptions, behaviour and in-store experience while investigating the brand H&M through online questionnaires. The questionnaires were constructed on Google Forms as this platform utilises an easy-to-use interface which allowed the researcher to have a first-hand view of how the questionnaire would look prior to it being disseminated (Melo, 2018).

The Consumer Culture Theory and Basu and Rasu's loyalty model were leveraged in benchmarking and structuring the questionnaire's questions (see Appendix A), for which the researcher received prior ethical clearance (see Appendix B). The questionnaire consisted of six (6) questions aiming to inform the objectives and research question(s). The first and fourth questions were in relation to two (2) of the four (4) themes of Dick and Basu's Loyalty Model, namely, true loyalty and spurious loyalty. While the second and third questions aimed to investigate if there was truly a level of symbolism attached to the study's proposed 'try-on model', as the Consumer Culture Theory holds that this symbolism has an effect on consumer behaviour (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:871).

The last two (2) questions sought to either confirm or reject the basis on which the Consumer Culture Theory stands. By trying to understand if the reduced presence of a potentially valuable aspect such as trying on clothes will impact consumer perception and choice, as the theory further purports that consumers are constantly in the pursuit of maximising the utility of procuring a good (IGI Global, 2021).

The researcher identified participants through posts on social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram, where the population parameters were highlighted, including the population being made aware that 'the intentions of the research are solely for the purpose of an academic research report, and the researcher is in no way affiliated with H&M's marketing team nor that of competing organisations'. The use of WhatsApp and Instagram is linked to the population's increased time spent on the platforms, which increases the likelihood of awareness and engagement (GWI, 2021).

At the bottom of each post on the WhatsApp stories and Instagram posts was a URL link to the questionnaire. The researcher chose to post the URL link as this process removed any bias which might have arisen from being able to choose family and friends, as well as guaranteeing variety in the type of responses to be received. Once the participant had clicked into the link they were automatically redirected to the questionnaire whose beginning was characterised by a 'consent form', as it outlined all relevant information pertaining to the research (see Appendix C).

After completing the questionnaire, participants were immediately thanked for their responses (which were automatically updated online for the researcher to see and track), and due to the study's time constraints, the posts further highlighted that participants had only seven (7) days to complete the questionnaire from the date of the researcher making it public.

During the seven (7) period, the researcher monitored the responses received daily to ensure enough individuals were engaging with the questionnaire, and moreover that the questions were being understood and answered in a manner that aligned to study's objectives. On day three (3) and five (5), posts reminding participants about the questionnaire's deadline were put up to ensure the completion of the questionnaire prior to it being closed, as well as to potentially reach an even greater number of the population.

Once the seven (7) day period had lapsed, the researcher announced through the same platforms used to raise awareness about the research study, that the questionnaire had closed and further thanked all those who had participated in the study. The online questionnaire's reliability was ensured through the meticulous effort that was placed into its creation which additionally helped in protecting the identities of its participants as their names were not asked, and further guaranteed that the questionnaire measures specific concepts that were intended to be measured, as well as ensuring that the content is aligned to the study's aims.

### **3.7 | Data analysis**

Once all the data has been collected, it is then essential for the researcher to determine the methods through which the data will be sifted, sorted and organised (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014: 229). As previously mentioned, this research study takes a qualitative approach to research, thus, the data need be translated into findings (du-Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:88). The process of data translation begins when the common themes presented within the data are identified, arranged and described in order to address the research question and achieve research objectives (Sanders & Stappers, 2008:5-8).

In line with the above, the researcher saw it most appropriate to utilise thematic analysis as the study's data analysis method. This type of analyses was chosen by as it supports an interpretivist paradigm which reinforces the overall research study and allowed for the data to be logically organised into categories of relating themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012:3). Furthermore, thematic analysis enabled the researcher with a method of interpreting the collective meanings and experiences from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2012:3).

Braun and Clarke (2012:3) argue that due to the adaptable nature of thematic analysis, researchers are able to focus on the relevant data and analyse the derived meanings across the entire data set. Furthermore, it can be said that this type of analysis forms part of the most commonly used methods of analysis across the epistemologies (Braun & Clarke, 2012:3). The foundations on which thematic analysis is built provided the researcher with a method of

observing respondent's perspectives, highlighting commonalities and then generating meaningful insights that are not overtly visible at first glance.

Due to this study qualitative nature, an inductive data analysis strategy forms the basis of how the meaningful and symbolic data through the administered online questionnaires was analysed. The study's use of an online questionnaire enabled the process of transcription to be an automatic result as the platform 'self-transcribes' responses (Melo, 2018).

As a result, the researcher moved straight into thematic coding. This type of coding reinforced the data analysis method and supported the research objectives as it enabled the researcher to leverage the reduction process and find common themes within the data, which then assisted in the identification of specific meanings, and participants' attitudes towards trying on clothes while in store (Thomas, 2006:241-242).

As previously mentioned, the Consumer Culture Theory addresses the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption, as well as the theoretical commonalities and linkages associated with consumer consumption patterns (Arnould & Thompson, 2005:868). The theory is rooted in finding the points of commonality in research that dictate the "why" aspect of consumption. Hence, the thematic coding, which drew out the common words, patterns and themes that either hindered or encouraged consumption.

Moreover, to understand the value associated with procuring clothing from H&M, it was integral to draw linkages between to the Loyalty Model, as understanding if the reduced presence of something as potentially valuable as trying on clothes affects the perceived benefits of shopping at the store, and in turn the loyalty or connection consumers have towards the brand.

### *3.7.1 | Application of data analysis process*

The data gathered in the form of linguistic values has been analysed by the researcher according to the different CCT and Loyalty Model themes. This has been done through the application of six steps which have been adapted from Clarke and Braun (2006), and are as follows:

| Step | Data analysis technique       | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Become familiar with the data | Every qualitative analysis begins with reading and re-reading data. In this step the researcher read over the responses consistently for a two (2) day period, where important notes were written on a separate Word document about the responses that had phrases which left an impression or eluded the researcher to viewing the in-store experience under a different light.        |
| 2    | Generate initial codes        | After the researcher became familiar with the data, it was organised in a systematic way by having it grouped into chunks of meaningful data through open-coding where no pre-set codes had been identified. The groups were assigned to broader groups of related meaning, which enabled the researcher to capture points of interest as they relate to the study's research question. |
| 3    | Search for themes             | As there was no preconceived conceptual framework for the type of codes the researcher sought to attain, it became easier for the raw data to individually reveal the codes which when thoroughly examined through continuous comparison, created themes. These themes were then placed in hierarchal order to allow for the most dominate to be observed.                              |
| 4    | Review themes                 | In this phase, the researcher shifted focus from identifying themes to reviewing, modifying and developing the preliminary themes that were identified in the previous step. This was allow for the assessment as to whether the data supports and works in the context of the entire data set.                                                                                         |
| 5    | Define themes                 | The researcher refined the identified themes in order to understand the 'essence' of what each theme was about. As well as see how and if the themes relate to each other and if they are                                                                                                                                                                                               |

|          |                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          |                  | applicable to the research problem- does H&M's reduced in-store experience influence South African Gen Z's perception and loyalty to the brand. Thereafter, each theme was named and defined.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>6</b> | Writing a report | The research concluded with the researcher writing up a report that incorporates all the relevant themes, patterns and concepts that were derived from the raw data, as well as making links between the ideas presented in the data in order to create a clearer understanding and picture of the effect of H&M's reduced in-store experience. The write up reflects how the collected data addresses the research study's problem and question, while achieving its objectives. |

**Table 2: Thematic analysis steps**

### **3.8 | Conclusion**

In this chapter the research methodology that supported the collection and analysis of the data was outlined. The chapter detailed the study's interpretivist paradigm, along with its qualitative research approach and hermeneutic phenomenological design. Following this was a discussion around the study's population and the key characteristics that defined the population parameters, as well as the non-probability sampling that was used in the study to target the study sample size that comprised of 9 H&M consumers. The chapter ends with a discussion around the data collection methods and how the data from the online questionnaires was analysed.

## **Chapter 4: FINDINGS AND DATA INTERPRETATION**

### **4.1 | Introduction**

Post the collection of the relevant data needed to address this study's research question: which aspects of H&M's in-store environment contribute to the formation of an experience-whether positive or negative, as well as the data needed to address this study's sub-questions (1) how do these aspects form consumers' experiences while in-store, and (2) how does in-store experience effect loyalty. The researcher began the process of data analysis through thematic analysis where colour-coding was utilised (see Appendix D).

The study replicated a small-scale qualitative research study, as only 9 responses have been used in addressing the paper's research questions and fulfilling its objectives of: determining the foundations on which in-store experiences are built, and the effect of the reduced presence of such experiences. This chapter will incorporate the presentation of findings, followed by the interpretation of the findings, the data's relationship to the study's research questions and objectives, and will be rounded off with a conclusion of all the points brought forward in the chapter.

### **4.2 | Presentation of findings (see Appendix E)**

#### **4.2.1 | Loyal consumer or casual shopper**

This section reveals the extent of Gen Z's relationship with H&M, in order to understand whether a reduced in-store experience will affect brand perceptions and subsequently brand loyalty. A total number of 9 individuals between the ages of 18 to 24 years old participated in this study's online questionnaire, which did not place the individuals' geographic location within a South African context, or gender as its primary focus. Consequently, participants were made up of two (2) groups, classified according to the type of consumer the individual identified as and the basis thereof.

As such, it is clear that a majority of South African H&M consumers identify as being casual shoppers as opposed to loyal consumers. There is a shared feeling amongst H&M's consumers around the brand's product performance, being that style and the fit of the clothing is a constant dilemma many face as what often presents as being appealing at first glance, does not always remain appealing when put on.

Furthermore, in response to the question on loyal consumerism or casual shopping. One respondent stated that "if I were to compare the present to the past, I have noticed a lot of

changes in terms of the style and fashion of clothing. The newer trends do not interest me as such". This suggests that while H&M is considered a leading fast fashion retailer within the South African market, it has clear style characteristics that may appeal more strongly to a younger or less rigid following (Yamama, 2021).

Consequently, many consumers are actively choosing to manage engagement with the brand and limit it to, as one respondent mentioned, shopping "at H&M whenever I come across it", therefore highlighting the effect of perception on loyalty as it relates to Dick and Basu's (1994) Loyalty Model.

#### **4.2.2 | Aspects that maximise shopping in H&M**

From the nine (9) participants, four (4) asserted that in-store personnel is the primary guiding factor that maximises the in-store experience. From this, it can be deduced that despite the reduced in-store experience- on the basis of trying on clothes- the overarching guidepost for a number of consumers' casual shopping tendencies is linked to factors beyond this study's primary focus.

This finding is further augmented by the remaining five (5), whose responses can be distributed across store layout and space. With two (2) respondents discussing how the store's spacing offers a breathable environment that avoids one feeling overwhelmed while shopping.

In the analysis of this finding, the researcher found that beyond the discovered link between the study's proposed 'try-on-model' and H&M's financial performance, majority of its consumers derive pleasant experiences from other extended factors as they relate to the aspects discussed by Yoon and Park (2018:111), Hong (2016:231-251) and Song and Park (2009:120), thus showing their continuous necessity even in contemporary climates.

#### **4.2.3 | Levels of symbolism attached to trying on clothes while in-store**

The responses to the level of symbolism are evenly varied with three (3) participants stating that trying on clothes is integral to their shopping experience as it allows for the participant to "see if the clothes you like actually look good on you, instead of getting home and being disappointed". While the other group of three (3) suggest that trying on clothes is less important as their level of symbolism is linked less to importance and more to convenience.

The remaining set propose that there is no level of symbolism attached to trying on clothes while in store. From the results of the question, it becomes clear to see that symbolism is a subjective matter, as opposed to constructing it on a universal bias, because while many attach meaning to trying on clothes, there still exists a group with contrasting viewpoints, hence the need for H&M to ensure that all business activities cater to the views of both target audiences.

#### **4.2.4 | Impact on the connection to H&M as a result of being unable to try on clothes in-store**

Eight (8) out of the nine (9) participants strongly suggest that the consequence of being unable to try on clothes as a result of the lockdown was a hindered connection to the brand, with two (2) participants highlighting a complete disengagement with the brand due to the extensive “energy” needed to constantly return clothes, as well the regulation taking away from the “shopping experience”.

The findings showcase that despite the continued presence of the factors presented in question one- in-store personnel, store layout and space and the assertions of (Paulins & Geistfeld, 2003: 371; Terblanche & Boshoff, 2004:3; Leszczyc & Timmermans, 2001:493), the inability to try on clothes, largely influences consumer behaviour, and thus consumer loyalty and H&M’s profitability.

#### **4.2.5 | Conditions under which perceptions of H&M’s shopping experience, whether in-store or online increased or decreased**

Due to the lockdown restrictions many began by stating that their perceptions decreased as purchasing clothing “for just sitting at home and lounging all day was a waste of money and time”. However, in these responses was an overwhelming admission to a decreased perception on the in-store environment due to consumers being unable to try on clothes, with one participant mentioning that had the ability to still try on clothes exist, despite restrictions calling for all to remain indoors, the individual would have continued to purchase from the brand.

The findings work towards reinforcing the statement mentioned above, that suggests that while integral factors such as in-store personnel, store layout and space were still prevalent during the lockdown period, the inability to try on clothes largely directs consumer perceptions and behaviour.

#### 4.2.6 | In-store environment during the lockdown period and levels of loyalty

The findings from this question undeniably highlight the relationship that exists between the inability to try on clothes and consumer loyalty, with one (1) out of the six (6) participants who pointed to no effect being enacted on their loyalty still drawing attention to H&M's reduced in-store experience (as it relates to this study's try-on-model).

Another consumer loosely purports having a relatively similar connection to the brand, but due to financial constraints as a result of the pandemic their loyalty eroded. The results led the researcher to the understanding that despite consumer's conscious attachment to tangible in-store elements, the unconscious connection to trying on clothes directs consumer behaviour and influences loyalty in a much higher regard than many retail literature has awarded it (Bäckström & Johansson, 2017:241-259; Yoon & Park, 2018:111-119; Puccinelli, Goodstein, Grewal, Price, Raghubir & Stewart, 2009:15-30).

#### 4.3 | Interpretation of findings

The analysed data from participants' responses are depicted below (see Table 3). The table showcases the elements that form an experience-whether positive or negative, with the left hand-side of the table reflecting first-order concepts and the right hand-side highlighting the identified themes.

| First-Order Concepts                                                                                                                                                     | Second-Order Concepts          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Range of style</li><li>• Reduced production of styles that meet certain criteria</li></ul>                                       | <b>Style</b>                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Breathable environment</li><li>• Organisation of in-store environment</li><li>• Staff personnel</li><li>• Store layout</li></ul> | <b>Internal store features</b> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clothing cuts</li><li>• Trust in favourable a correlation between perception of outfits and the actual look</li></ul>            | <b>Product performance</b>     |

|                                                                                                               |                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying clothes on in-store</li> <li>• Shopping experience</li> </ul> | <b>Consumption habits</b> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|

**Table 3: Key themes and elements that form an in-store experience**

### **4.3.1 | Style**

When presented with the question regarding the foundations on which consumers built the type of loyalty they bear towards H&M and the aspects that maximise shopping in their stores, many consumers discussed style. The discussion around style took many forms, ranging from H&M offering clothes that cater to both the “classy casual lady” as well as the “boss lady at work” to the brand offering clothing that gives room to integrate different style avenues.

However, most overt in the participants’ responses was the misalignment between consumers styling preferences and the brand’s offering. Consequently, in regards to whether participants identify as loyal consumers or casual shoppers, the questionnaire revealed that the basis for many identifying as casual shoppers is inherently linked to the brand’s product offerings.

On the other hand, despite some participants articulating a favouring for H&M’s variety, they continue to manage their engagement with the brand. The finding indicates that as a result of H&M’s fast fashion model which primarily caters to a targeted segment within their market as opposed to their entire market segment (Tun, 2019), the brand’s consumer base is largely characterised by spurious loyalty, which according to Dick and Basu’s (1994:22) Loyalty Model, indicates purchase as a result of familiarity and habit as opposed to a deep psychological bond.

The results suggest that style is a subjective concept, thus making it is essential for H&M to gain a deeper understanding of their target audience in order to ensure long-term profitability and a consistent consumer base.

### **4.3.2 | Internal store features**

Participants conveyed the sense of another general consensus that unconsciously exists amongst H&M’s target market. Primary to this concern are the on-floor sales representatives whose engagement with consumers creates an experience. This finding supplements that of Sahin, Zehir and Kitapçı’s (2011:1288) in their effects of brand experiences, which found that

the input of the relationship between buyer and seller in a long-term consumer-brand relationship is brand experience, and the primary output is brand loyalty.

Moreover, participants highlight that experience is driven by more than just on-floor sales representatives, but by the stores physical layout and spacing. This creates a lens through which experience as a whole can be understood as well as the meanings derived from such experiences.

### **4.3.3 | Product performance**

Parallel to the suggested quality of H&M's clothing (Tyler, 2018), fit occupied the second most essential factor directing consumer behaviour. Its emphasis stayed prevalent in the questionnaire, thus affirming it as a dictator when purchasing clothing item(s). Conceivably, it could also relate to the fact that the majority purchase their clothing with the intent of creating a mental image for "when you could wear the piece of clothing", as Mica (2017:13) found that Gen Z consumers are more cognisant of their spending habits, therefore seek to consciously shop as to avoid post purchase dissatisfaction.

The questionnaire's findings supports Mica's (2017:13) assertion, as it revealed that the hesitation that arose as a result of H&M's reduced in-store experience is linked to an uncertainty about whether the product's performance will truly satisfy the catalyst for their purchase intent.

Fit relates to the theme of utility as the Consumer Culture Theory holds that consumers are constantly in the pursuit of maximising the utility of procuring a good (IGI Global, 2021). In this case, participants reflect the immediate value associated with trying on clothes as the process has the ability to, as one participant mentioned "calm one's doubts".

The perception consumers have towards the overall fit of H&M's products is one that possesses detrimental effects to the brand, especially when paired with lockdown restrictions which limit consumers' ability to approve of the product's functionality, look and feel.

### **4.3.4 | Consumption habits**

When confronted with the questions around the conditions under which participants' perceptions of the brand shifted as well as whether the brand's in-store environment during

the lockdown period effected their loyalty, majority attributed a negative behaviour in both instances to the reduced in-store experience.

Participants' consumption habits are largely attributed to the ability to try on clothes and assess the previous theme of product performance in order to truly maximise the utility of procuring a good. This finding indicates the relationship that exists between utility, perception, and consumer behaviour, which ultimately influences loyalty. The data suggests that in the absence of certain consumption habits, such as trying on clothes, there exists no real intention regarding purchase. This means that if all previously mentioned themes were present in a manner that meets the participants' needs, it is safe to predict that the participant would still have no incentive to engage with H&M.

This insight is clear as one participant mentioned that "if I had the experience of fitting the items in store, I feel I would've been more receptive to the idea of purchasing items". White (2019) furthers this insight by highlighting how Gen Z's favouring of the in-store experience is largely attributed to the level of personalisation that can be obtained through physically seeing, selecting and trying on certain pieces of clothes. This theme showcases how participants' subjective norms form the perceived benefits of engagement, and when not present the experience ceases to have any impact on consumer behaviour.

#### **4.4 | Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research studies do not make use of numbers when aiming to identify meaningful findings within data, instead descriptive data is leveraged when seeking to gain an in-depth understanding of the 'why' surrounding certain phenomenon (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014: 258). However, Koonin (2014:253) states that due to qualitative research's use of descriptive data, it is essential to ensure that the decontextualising and reconstruction of the data can be trusted so as to successfully achieve validity, reliability and trustworthiness. Despite validity and reliability being more quantitative than qualitative, the terms are often used interchangeably across the two research approaches. The difference, however, is found in how each research approach goes about determining validity and reliability.

This study focused on persuading validity and reliability through trustworthiness according to its criteria, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

- *Credibility*

Credibility occurs when there is accuracy between the data that has been collected from participants' responses, and the manner in which it has been interpreted by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study achieved credibility by implementing by a hermeneutic phenomenological design which aligned with the study's overall purpose, therefore ensuring that the interpretation of the analysed data is believable from the participants' perspectives.

Credibility was further achieved through the data collection method (online questionnaires) that was favoured. This data collection method removed the potential for the researcher to sway responses or influence participants to arrive at desired answers, and further ensured that all responses will remain accurate and valid (Melo, 2018).

- *Transferability*

Transferability refers to the ability for this study's research analysis and findings to be applied beyond this study (to a study with similar objectives), and produce similar results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher ensured transferability by keeping all the data that had been collected from the online questionnaires and thoroughly detailing the application of the data collection and analysis phases, as well as the researcher's perspectives of the in-store experience and intentions of furthering its understanding. By so doing, other researchers are provided with an in-depth understanding around the topic and the study's approach to addressing the phenomenon in order to provide context and enable transferability judgements.

- *Dependability*

Dependability is centred on the quality of a research study's ability to maintain a 'golden thread' between its selected data collection method, the analysis of the data and the theory generated from these processes (Shenton, 2004). This study achieved dependability through the use of past literature to understand the data collection,

analysis and interpretation that best suited a qualitative study but moreover addressed the specific aims of the research.

The selected elements were then reviewed and audited by the researcher's allocated research supervisor- Nicole Mason- during various in class and digital consultation sessions. The process helped in ensuring that there remained a common linkage between all the elements and that the collected data was indeed achieving the study's purpose. A full description of the research process forms part of this study, thus allowing the reader to scrutinise the accuracy of the study's findings as they relate to H&M's in-store experience.

- *Confirmability*

Confirmability can be understood as the seamless flow in understanding between the researcher's identified meanings and findings and the data that has been collected, so as to assess whether the two support each other (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The researcher achieved confirmability through the data collection method the study favoured as it aided in maintaining neutrality of the data collected and removed the potential for bias.

## **4.5 | Conclusion**

This chapter presented the study's findings as they related to each question within the study's online questionnaire, as well as the themes that were gathered from the analysed data. Thematic analysis supported the interpretation of data which found 4 key themes which were then evaluated in context of the research study's literature, theoretical frameworks, and research objectives. The chapter further addressed the concept of trustworthiness through a discussion of the four criteria that characterise the concept, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **5.1 | Introduction**

This chapter focuses on answering the study's research question and showcasing how and if the study's research objectives have been addressed. The chapter additionally discusses the heuristic value of the research by providing the reader and other researchers seeking to analyse the in-store experience, with the implications of its findings for future practices, and an evaluation of the success of the research. Finally, this chapter ends with the study's ethical considerations and encountered limitations.

### **5.2 | Research question and objectives addressed**

The purpose of this study was to understand the result of lockdown restrictions on the in-store experience, with H&M residing at the centre of this concern in order to see if a reduced in-store experience will affect brand perceptions and subsequently consumer behaviour and brand loyalty.

#### **5.2.1 | Primary research question**

Which aspects of H&M's in-store environment contribute to the formation of an experience-whether positive or negative?

The study found that most integral to the formation of a positive experience is the presence of the 'try-on-model', as previously mentioned. The absence of this model hinders participants' shopping experience, resulting in an unfavourable impact being on inflicted on consumer behaviour.

Additionally, the presence of sales representatives who are "always there when you need assistance", drives the formation of a positive experience, which when coupled with an organised store layout and spacing that allows consumers to breathe, enhances the overall shopping experience.

#### **5.2.2 | Secondary research questions**

1. How do these aspects form consumers' experiences while in-store?
2. How does in-store experience affect loyalty?

The insights derived from the study revealed that engagement with “friendly” staff personnel, the ability to try on clothes and the store’s physical layout, reinforce the development of a positive disposition towards the brand. As the coherence between the participants’ mentally constructed ‘norms of shopping’ and the reality of engaging with the brand, form memorable experiences.

These experiences subsequently heighten the perception of the brand, which in turn influences consumer loyalty as the developed dispositions transform into actual purchasing behaviour.

### **5.2.3 | Research objectives**

1. To determine the foundations on which H&M’s in-store experience is built; and
2. The effect of the reduced presence of such experiences

Similar to the findings from the study’s primary research question. Participants’ experiences are built on the ability to physically try on clothes, as it increases the utility of the purchase as well ensuring that the purchase intent is satisfied in a manner that relates to consumer’s purchase desires.

Additionally, store layout and sales representatives play a role in building the in-store experience. However, the consequence of a reduced presence of either of the previously mentioned foundation builders, results in the dismissal of engagement with the brand, as well as a decreased perception which effects consumer behaviour and thus H&M’s profitability. As such, it is essential for the brand to ensure the unhindered presence of the essential elements that work towards creating positive experiences. As the maintenance of such experiences, will as the study found, persuade consumers to continuously purchase from the brand.

### **5.3 | Implications of the findings for H&M**

The participants’ previous experiences with H&M helped facilitate credibility for the brand, but has been unable to maintain positive perceptions surrounding the brand as a whole. The implication driving this realisation has been consumers’ ability scrutinise aspects about the brand that limited engagement, resulting in consumers feeling less confident in the brand’s product performance and overall capabilities in satisfying purchase intent.

The developed dispositions towards the brand are ultimately linked to consumer behaviour and brand loyalty, hence the need for further attention to be given to the relationship that exists

between in-store experience, consumer behaviour and brand loyalty, including specific engagement antecedents and consequences, and the relative importance of the interactions within the realm of brand and consumer engagement.

Keller's (2001:3) notion of what makes a brand powerful provides a useful avenue to explore factors of consumer engagement and their effect on H&M, as the consumer-brand relationship that exists between H&M and the participants has largely driven their willingness or indifference about supporting the brand. The implication of this willingness or indifference stand parallel to one another and carries both positives and negatives, due to the realisation that brand loyalty remains even with a reduced in-store experience, but that this loyalty is spurious, thus making it easier to be captured by competing brands (Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeek, 2013:105).

In the evaluation of the in-store experience, H&M has managed to provoke a mixed response of feelings amongst its consumers, with most being negative, some maintained and others, as previously mentioned, indifferent. These responses were characterised by feelings of disapproval, familiarity and discontent, which in turn has an influence on the behaviours that consumers will take to avoid some of these feelings (Brodie et al., 2013:109). Consequently, the break in the emotional consumer-brand bond negatively influences the brands credibility and heightens the feelings of disengagement or managed interaction with the brand (Brodie et al., 2013:115).

Hence the emphasis on the need for H&M to lead the narrative surrounding engagement with the brand and its subsequent value in order to evoke the conscious and unconscious sentiments towards the brand and highlight the utility attached to procuring from the store, thus feeding into influencing the perceptions around brand value which maximises equity (Warnock, n.d.).

## **5. 4 | Evaluation of the research**

The approach that the research study took helped the research objectives as it brought to light, (1) the foundations on which H&M's in-store experience is built (in-store personnel, store layout, and trying on clothes) and (2) the effect of the reduced presence of such experiences (limited and sometimes complete disengagement with the brand), which helped draw a relationship between the key concepts introduced in the study.

The findings further highlighted the study's stance on the importance of adapting the understanding of the in-store experience and incorporating a furthered definition of brand loyalty, as the research revealed that repeat purchase is not always an indicator of loyalty, but that attitude equally influences the type of connection an individual has to a brand. The research was able to meet all of the objectives and address the purpose of its focus through the theoretical framework that proved the essential nature of heightened levels of utility and engagement on brand success.

The research findings demonstrate the importance of understanding the aspects that contribute to the formation of an in-store experience and the consequences of its redefinition. The research indicates that engagement with the brand in the form of trying on clothes enhances consumer loyalty, satisfaction, connection, and trust which ultimately dictates behaviour.

The study also illustrates the furthered understanding of brand loyalty and the in-store experience, by highlighting the necessity of consumer attitudes and engagement in co-creating brand meanings. The study also found how consumers easily support brands whose engagement heightens the utility of procuring goods, which in turn increases the overall perception of the value of engagement. The findings emphasise the need for the importance attached to engagement to be listened to as this understanding drives the co-creation of value.

However, the focal role of engagement with employees on the co-creation of value is an area that also warrants future research as their effect on the creation of positive dispositions while experiencing a brand were continuously made evident throughout the data collection, therefore highlighting its importance as another integral aspect on loyalty and behaviour.

While trying on clothes has been an important focus in this research, engagement with other dyadic principles needs further research, as consumer-consumer engagement has the ability to influence the in-store experience even in the absence of this study's proposed try-on-model. Further research needs to also be done on the broader aspects that influence the in-store experience through comparative studies which focus on both the effect of a reduced in-store experience within 'luxury' retail outlets and the effect of a reduced in-store experience within 'economically affordable' retail outlets to assess if the absence of these factors has objective consequences or if the consequences are subjective due to the expectations surrounding consumption from higher end retail outlets.

## **5.5 | Ethical considerations**

When conducting research it is essential to incorporate ethics into the overall procurement of data and its interpretation thereof (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:238). Ethical considerations regarding the study's participants include: informed consent, collecting data from participants, dealing with private information and deception (du Plooy-Cilliers et al., 2014:238). The study made sure to that its participants knew the type of research they were engaging in, the purpose of the research as well as the manner in which it will be used through the online questionnaire (see Appendix C).

The second ethical issue taken into consideration was how the data was to be collected. The online questionnaires used in this study ensured the continuous psychological comfort of participants and highlighted that if discomfort arises or the individual feels the need to disengage with the questionnaire they would be allowed to, and face no consequence of their choices.

To ensure that any sensitive or personal information is not used against participants, their names were not asked and the data that had been collected remained confidential, as only to be seen by the researcher and the document's reader (which the participants were made aware of). Lastly, the researcher made use of online questionnaires as they avoided the potential for deception on the side of the researcher as well as removing the ability to falsify data and sway responses to be in favour of the research's objectives.

## **5.6 | Anticipated contribution**

The key contribution that this study is making is found in how its favouring of a truly subjective study and an unconventional method towards understanding the phenomenon has the ability to add to and fill in the gaps within literature by providing researchers with a method of understanding the holistic in-store experience, and business owners with a supported argument for the importance of the phenomenon on consumer behaviour and loyalty in order to provide them with a method for organising business strategies during economic fluctuations. The study does this by highlighting previously omitted aspects of the in-store experience such as trying on clothes, and addressing the effect of its reduced presence, while simultaneously highlighting the relationship between the in-store experience and its influence on consumer perception, choice and ultimately loyalty.

## 5.7 | Limitations

The research encountered limitations relating to resources. Due to the specific characteristics of the study's population it became difficult to find human resource as many might have only met 2 of the 3 criteria needed to partake in the study. At a theoretical level, the topic and approach that the study has taken is one with limited research that connects the study's key concepts with each other. Therefore making the search for literature more difficult and decreasing the number of frameworks and foundations on which the study could be supported by.

Lastly, due to time constraints the process of triangulation, which can be described as the use of 2 or more data collection methods for the purpose of increasing the trustworthiness of a study (Heale & Forbes, 2018), unable to occur. The research process had specific time constraints which made the act of triangulation unfeasible to this study due to its qualitative nature which required more time to be spent on interpreting the collected data.

## 6 | Conclusion

Prior to this study, there existed a variety of confirming and debunking literature (Cant, Van Heerden and Ngambi n.d.:121; Areni and Kim 1993:336-340; Levy and Weitz 2002: 447-464), devoted to consumer's in-store experiences. However, despite this fact, similar to the findings of the previously mentioned authors, Bindu, Kodali and Kumari's (2021:1739-1744) research holds the singular belief that in-store experience is a result of the exterior and internal atmosphere of a store. The trio expand to suggest that it is these internal and external forces, namely, atmosphere, store colour, design and layout that drive behaviour through positive emotional, cognitive and physiological associations (Bindu et al., 2021:1739-1744).

However relevant these findings are to the formation of a positive in-store experience, as further found by this study, this study sought to leverage previously conducted research in order to adopt a novel method of understanding the in-store experience. The result allowed the study to answer its question as to which aspects of H&M's in-store environment form an experience-whether positive or negative in a seemingly alternate manner to the way in which previous authors have.

In favouring a truly subjective study and an unconventional method towards understanding the phenomena. This study is able to potentially add to the existing body knowledge by

highlighting the effect of the reduced in-store experience as well as its relationship with and influence on consumer perception, choice and ultimately loyalty.

## **Reference list**

Abu-Alhaija, A., Yusof, P., Hashim, H. and Jaharuddin, N., 2018. Determinants of Customer Loyalty: A Review and Future Directions. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences*, 12(7): 106-111. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326742546\\_Determinants\\_of\\_Customer\\_Loyalty\\_A\\_Review\\_and\\_Future\\_Directions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326742546_Determinants_of_Customer_Loyalty_A_Review_and_Future_Directions) [Accessed 16 June 2021].

Arab News, 2020. H&M's fourth quarter sales hit by second coronavirus wave. Arab News, 6 June 2020. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1850426/business-economy> [Accessed 18 May 2021].

Areni, C. and Kim, D., 1993. The influence of in-store lighting on consumers' examination of merchandise in a wine store. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 11(2):117-125. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256431765\\_The\\_influence\\_of\\_in-store\\_lighting\\_on\\_consumers'\\_examination\\_of\\_merchandise\\_in\\_a\\_wine\\_store](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256431765_The_influence_of_in-store_lighting_on_consumers'_examination_of_merchandise_in_a_wine_store) [Accessed 27 November 2021].

Arnould, E. and Thompson, C., 2005. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4):868-882. [Online]. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article/31/4/868/1812998> [Accessed 19 May 2021].

Bäckström, K. and Johansson, U., 2017. An exploration of consumers' experiences in physical stores: comparing consumers' and retailers' perspectives in past and present time. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 27(3):241-259. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316816852\\_An\\_exploration\\_of\\_consumers'\\_experiences\\_in\\_physical\\_stores\\_comparing\\_consumers'\\_and\\_retailers'\\_perspectives\\_in\\_past\\_and\\_present\\_time](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316816852_An_exploration_of_consumers'_experiences_in_physical_stores_comparing_consumers'_and_retailers'_perspectives_in_past_and_present_time) [Accessed 19 May 2021].

Bascur, C. and Rusu, C., 2020. Customer Experience in Retail: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Applied Sciences*, 10(21):7644. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346602253\\_Customer\\_Experience\\_in\\_Retail\\_A\\_Systematic\\_Literature\\_Review](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346602253_Customer_Experience_in_Retail_A_Systematic_Literature_Review) [Accessed 25 November 2021].

BBC News, 2020. Coronavirus: H&M to close 250 shops as Covid drives sales online. BBC News, 1 October 2020. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-54369802> [Accessed 27 November 2021].

Bindu, S., Kodali, S. and Kumari, D., 2021. The Impact of Store Environment on Consumer Behavior. *International Journal of Current Microbiology and Applied Sciences*, 10(2):1739-1744. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350122248\\_The\\_Impact\\_of\\_Store\\_Environment\\_on\\_Consumer\\_Behavior](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350122248_The_Impact_of_Store_Environment_on_Consumer_Behavior) [Accessed 25 November 2021].

Bogdan, R. and Biklen, S., 1998. Qualitative research for education. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 3:22.

Brodie, R., Ilic, A., Juric, B. and Hollebeek, L., 2013. Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community: An exploratory analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1):105-114 [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232957437\\_Consumer\\_Engagement\\_in\\_a\\_Virtual\\_Brand\\_Community\\_An\\_Exploratory\\_Analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232957437_Consumer_Engagement_in_a_Virtual_Brand_Community_An_Exploratory_Analysis) [Accessed 28 November 2021].

Cant, M., Van Heerden, N. and Ngambi, H., n.d. Marketing Management: a South African perspective. Juta Academic, 1:121.

Clarke, V. and Braun, V., 2013. Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist*, 26(2):120-123. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269928387\\_Teaching\\_thematic\\_analysis\\_Overcoming\\_challenges\\_and\\_developing\\_strategies\\_for\\_effective\\_learning](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/269928387_Teaching_thematic_analysis_Overcoming_challenges_and_developing_strategies_for_effective_learning) [Accessed 19 August 2021].

Coker, B., 2013. Antecedents to website satisfaction, loyalty, and word-of-mouth. *Journal of Information Systems and Technology Management*, 10(3): 209-218. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:953030/FULLTEXT02> [Accessed 16 June 2021].

Cooper, B. and Schindler, P., 2006. *Business Research Methods*. McGraw Hill International, 11:143.

Dick, A. and Basu, K., 1994. Customer Loyalty: Toward an Integrated Conceptual Framework. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 22(99-113). [Online]. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1177%2F0092070394222001> [Accessed 16 September 2021].

Du Plooy-Cilliers, F., Davis, C. and Bezuidenhout, R., 2014. Research Matters. Claremont: Juta and Company Ltd, 1:28-300.

Erdumlu, N., Saricam, C., Tufekyapan, M., Cetinkaya, M. and Donmez, A., 2017. Analysing the consumer behaviour and the influence of brand loyalty in purchasing sportswear products. *Materials Science and Engineering*, 254:1-4. [Online]. Available at: <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1757-899X/254/17/172010> [Accessed 16 June 2021].

Fincher, M. 2018. What is customer satisfaction and why is it important. Landing, 26 December 2018. [Blog].

Available at: <https://landing.com/blog/customer-satisfaction> [Accessed 28 November 2020].

Guillen, F., 2019. Qualitative Research: Hermeneutical Phenomenological Method. *Advances on qualitative research in education*, 7(1):22 [Online]. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20511/pyr2019.v7n1.267> [Accessed 27 November 2021].

Gunelius, S., 2021. Building Brand Loyalty – Part 1: What Is Brand Loyalty and Why Your Brand Needs It. AytM, 28 March 2021. [Blog]. Available at: <https://aytm.com/blog/building-brand-loyalty-part-1> [Accessed 16 June 2021].

GWI, 2021. Social Media Trends In 2021: Latest Trends & Statistics. GWI. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.gwi.com/reports/social?utm\\_source=Social+Trends+-+Social+Media&hsa\\_net=adwords&hsa\\_tgt=kwd-%20stats](https://www.gwi.com/reports/social?utm_source=Social+Trends+-+Social+Media&hsa_net=adwords&hsa_tgt=kwd-%20stats) [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Hong, S., 2016. The Effects of Brand Experience and Personality on Consumer - Brand Relationships, Attachment, and Loyalty - A Comparison of Domestic and Global Brand Coffee Shops -. *Culinary Science & Hospitality Research*, 22(5):231-251. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Effects-of-Brand-Experience-and-Personality-on-Ji-Soo168775b9c8f> [Accessed 25 November 2021].

IGI Global, 2021. What is Consumer Utility Theory. IGI Global 12 January 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/consumer-utility-theory/53444> [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Keller, K. 2001. Building Customer-Based Brand Equity: A Blueprint for Creating Strong Brands. *Cambridge: Marketing Science Institute*, 10(3):3-17. [Online]. Available at:

<http://www.msi.org/reports/building-customer-based-brand-equity-a-blueprintforcreatingstrong-brands> [Accessed 28 November 2021].

Leszczyc, P. and Timmermans, H., 2001. Experimental choice analysis of shopping strategies. *Journal of Retailing*, 77(4):493-509. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247258643\\_Experimental\\_choice\\_analysis\\_of\\_shopping\\_strategies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247258643_Experimental_choice_analysis_of_shopping_strategies) [Accessed 24 November 2021].

Levy, M. and Weitz, B., 2002. Retailing management. 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, pp.110-115.

Lincoln, Y. Guba, E. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage

Maguire, M. and Delahunt, B., 2017. Doing a Thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (AISHE-J)*, 8(3):3351-33514. [Online]. Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3170/1b4100ebabae16deba055c28a6bad28e6467.pdf> [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Maree, K., 2016. Planning a research proposal. In: Maree, K. ed. 2016. *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 3: 26.

Marketing Evolution, 2021. What is Brand Equity? How to Build and Measure It. Marketing Evolution, 12 February 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.marketingevolution.com/marketing-essentials/what-is-brand-equity-marketing-evolution> [Accessed 16 June 2021].

Mazursky, D. and Jacoby, J., 1985. Linking brand and retailer images: Do the potential risks outweigh the potential benefits?. *Journal of Retailing*, 60(2):105-122. [Online]. Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1985-21660-001> [Accessed 25 November 2021].

McKinsey & Company., 2021. COVID-19: Implications for business. McKinsey & Company, 3 February 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/risk/our-insights/covid-19-implications-for-business> [Accessed 19 May 2021].

Melo, S., 2018. Advantages and disadvantages of Google forms. DataScope. [Blog]. Available at: <https://mydatascope.com/blog/en/advantages-and-disadvantages-of-google-forms> [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Nazir, S., 2021. H&M "significantly affected by pandemic" as profits drop 88%. Retail Gazette, 29 January 2021. [Blog]. Available at: <https://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog/2021/01/hm-significantly-affected-by-pandemic-as-profits-drop-88> [Accessed 19 May 2021].

Nowell, S., Norris, N., White, E. and Moules, J., 2017. Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Method*, 16(1). [Online]. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1609406917733847> [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Palmer, C. and Bolderston, A., 2006. A Brief Introduction to Qualitative Research. *Canadian Journal of Medical Radiation Technology*, 37(1):16-19. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237892956\\_A\\_Brief\\_Introduction\\_to\\_Qualitative\\_Research](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237892956_A_Brief_Introduction_to_Qualitative_Research) [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Paulins, V. and Geistfeld, L., 2003. The effect of consumer perceptions of store attributes on apparel store preference. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 7(4):371-385. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235261809\\_The\\_effect\\_of\\_consumer\\_perceptions\\_of\\_store\\_attributes\\_on\\_apparel\\_store\\_preference](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235261809_The_effect_of_consumer_perceptions_of_store_attributes_on_apparel_store_preference) [Accessed 24 November 2021].

Puccinelli, N., Goodstein, R., Grewal, D., Price, R., Raghubir, P. and Stewart, D., 2009. Customer Experience Management in Retailing: Understanding the Buying Process. *Journal of Retailing*, 85(6):15-30. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223063763\\_Customer\\_Experience\\_Management\\_in\\_Retailing\\_Understanding\\_the\\_Buying\\_Process](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/223063763_Customer_Experience_Management_in_Retailing_Understanding_the_Buying_Process) [Accessed 19 May 2021].

Punniyamoorthy, M., Prasann, Mohan. R., and Raj, M., 2007. An empirical model for brand loyalty measurement. *Journal of Targeting, Measurement and Analysis for Marketing*, 15(4): 222-233. [Online]. Available at:

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/palgrave.jt.5750044> [Accessed 16 June 2021].

Rahi, S., 2017. Research Design and Methods: A Systematic Review of Research Paradigms, Sampling Issues and Instruments Development. *International Journal of Economics & Management Sciences*, 6(2): 1-5. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316701205\\_Research\\_Design\\_and\\_Methods\\_A\\_Systematic\\_Review\\_of\\_Research\\_Paradigms\\_Sampling\\_Issues\\_and\\_Instruments\\_Development](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316701205_Research_Design_and_Methods_A_Systematic_Review_of_Research_Paradigms_Sampling_Issues_and_Instruments_Development) [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Ringstrom, A., 2021. Fashion giant H&M's sales recover in March as stores reopen after lockdowns. Reuters, 16 February 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-h-m-sales-idUSKBN2B70R0> [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Roberts, G., 2019. How to Generate Brand Loyalty (And Reward Loyal Customers). Orientation Marketing [Online]. Available at: <https://www.orientation.agency/insights/how-to-generate-brand-loyalty-and-reward-loyal-customers> [Accessed 16 June 2021].

Robinson, M., 2021. Which Generation Are You?. Career Planner, 12 April 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.careerplanner.com/Career-Articles/Generations.cfm> [Accessed 17 June 2021].

Rockwell, C., 2010. The Mathematics of Brand Satisfaction. *Design Management Review*, 19(2):75-81. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Mathematics-of-Brand-Satisfaction-Rockwell/e641e7380249f0033b9d507657f43a23353c9ff6> [Accessed 27 November 2021].

Sage, 2019. *Thematic Analysis of Survey Responses From Undergraduate Students*. SAGE Publications, 1(2). [Ebook]. Available at: <https://methods.sagepub.com/base/download/DatasetStudentGuide/thematic-analysis-students-technology> [Accessed 15 September 2021].

Sahin, A., Zehir, C. and Kitapçı, H., 2011. The Effects of Brand Experiences, Trust and Satisfaction on Building Brand Loyalty; An Empirical Research On Global Brands. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 24:1288-1301. [Online]. Available at:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042811016715> [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Sanders, N. and Stappers, J., 2008. Research Matters.pdf. Co-creation and the new landscapes of design. 4:5–18.

Sands, S., Oppewal, H. and Beverland, M., 2009. The effects of in-store themed events on consumer store choice decisions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 16(5):386-395 [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247177644\\_The\\_effects\\_of\\_in-store\\_themed\\_events\\_on\\_consumer\\_store\\_choice\\_decisions](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247177644_The_effects_of_in-store_themed_events_on_consumer_store_choice_decisions) [Accessed 24 November 2021].

Sauce, B. and Matzel, L., 2017. Inductive Reasoning. *Encyclopedia of Animal Cognition and Behavior*, 1-8. [Online]. Available at: [https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-3-319-47829-6\\_1045-1](https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-3-319-47829-6_1045-1) [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Showkat, N. and Parveen, H., 2017. Non-Probability and Probability Sampling. *Pathshala*, 1(3):6-10. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319066480\\_Non-Probability\\_and\\_Probability\\_Sampling](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319066480_Non-Probability_and_Probability_Sampling) [Accessed 18 August 2021].

Smith, K., 2016. How to Understand and Influence Consumer Behavior. Brandwatch, 26 May 2016. [Blog]. Available at: <https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/how-understand-influence-consumer-behavior> [Accessed 19 May 2021].

Song, K. and Park, K., 2009. The Effect of Experience Marketing in Family Restaurant on Brand Image, Reliability and Royalty: on Consumers in Their Twenties to Thirties. *International Journal of Consumer Services*, 16(3):120-150. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/ci/sereArticleSearch/ciSereArtiView.kci?sereArticleSearchBean.artid=ART001384198> [Accessed 19 May 2021].

Terblanche, N. and Boshoff, C., 2004. The in-store shopping experience: A comparative study of supermarket and clothing store customers. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 35(4):1-10. [Online]. Available at:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292751892\\_The\\_in-store\\_shopping\\_experience\\_A\\_comparative\\_study\\_of\\_supermarket\\_and\\_clothing\\_store\\_customers](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292751892_The_in-store_shopping_experience_A_comparative_study_of_supermarket_and_clothing_store_customers) [Accessed 24 November 2021].

Terre Blanche, M. and Durrheim, K. 1999. Histories of the present: Social science research in context. In: M. Terre Blanche and K. Durrheim eds. 1999. Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences. Cape Town: UCT Press, 3:16.

Thomas, D., 2006. A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2):237-246. [Online]. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1098214005283748> [Accessed 19 August 2021].

Tun, Z., 2019. H&M: The Secret to Its Success. Investopedia, 25 June 2019. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/041216/hm-secret-its-success.asp> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

Unisa, 2018. Types of research methodology and design. Unisa. [Online]. Available at: [http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/4245/05Chap%204\\_Research%20methodology%20and%20design](http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/4245/05Chap%204_Research%20methodology%20and%20design) [Accessed 18 May 2021].

Warnock, M., n.d. The in-store experience is still key to winning in unified retail. Speakap, 12 May 2021. [Blog]. Available at: <https://www.speakap.com/en/blog/in-store-experience-key-success-retail> [Accessed 17 May 2021].

Yoon, S. and Park, J., 2018. Tests of in-store experience and socially embedded measures as predictors of retail store loyalty. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 45(2): 111-119. [Online]. Available at: [http://file:///C:/Users/lufuno/Downloads/Tests\\_of\\_in\\_store\\_experience\\_and\\_sociall.pdf](http://file:///C:/Users/lufuno/Downloads/Tests_of_in_store_experience_and_sociall.pdf) [Accessed 19 May 2021].

## Appendices

The following is a representation of all the data that related to the formulation of this study

### Appendix A

Please discuss whether you consider yourself to be a loyal consumer or casual shopper of H&M, including the aspect/(s) that made you either the former or the latter.

Your answer

Please discuss the aspects about H&M that maximise the benefits of shopping in their stores.

Your answer

Is there are any level of symbolism attached to trying on clothes while in-store? Please discuss.

Your answer

Was there an impact on the connection you had to H&M when you were unable to try on clothes in-store during the lockdown period? Please discuss.

Your answer

Please describe the conditions under which your perspective on H&M's shopping experience whether in-store or online increased or decreased.

Your answer

Did H&M's in-store environment during the lockdown period have an effect on your level of loyalty to the brand? Please discuss.

Your answer

## Appendix B



Date 18 August 2021

Student name: Lufuno Thovhakale  
Student number: [REDACTED] Campus:  
Vega Bordeaux

Re: Approval of RESE8419 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

### HONOURS ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER

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 Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Your research proposal posed no significant ethical concerns and your supporting documents and instruments are in order to proceed. We hereby provide you with permission to proceed with your research.

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.

We wish you all the best with your research!

### GENERAL CONDITIONS TO BE FULFILLED IN RELATION TO RESEARCH

*Permission is granted to proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met and may be withdrawn should any of these conditions be flouted.*

**Please note:** The panel has not considered the merits, accuracy or ethical soundness of the research. The only merits examined are the use of The IIE as a sample.

Permission is granted subject to the following conditions:

1. The researcher(s) will need to obtain informed consent in writing from all of the participants in his/ her sample if the study is not anonymous.
2. The researcher(s) may only use the data collected for research purposes and in no other way.
3. Photographs of human subjects may only be taken if relevant to the research, informed consent was obtained, and even with informed consent, the photographs may not be published on any online platforms.
4. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
5. No names or identifying information of participants may be used within the research and the research must be voluntary.
6. Please make it clear that the information will not be used punitively in any way and participants may in no way be counselled/advised based on this.

Supervisor name:

Signature:

Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name: Dr Tish Taylor

Signature: [REDACTED]

## Appendix C



### H&M's Shopping Experience

Hello and Welcome.

My name is Lufuno Thovhakale and I am a student at Vega Bordeaux. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Nicole Mason about understanding whether or not the lockdown restrictions reduced H&M's in-store experience.

For those who are unsure, in-store experience can loosely be understood as the emotions that arise during an engagement with a store. I would like to invite you to participate in my study. In order to help you understand what your participation will involve, I have formulated bullet points at the end of this page, which I hope will address any questions or concerns so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not to participate. If you feel certain questions have not been fully addressed in the bullet points, please feel free to reach out to me for clarity at any point.

What you need to know:

- This survey is targeted mainly at those between the ages of 18 - 24 years old.
- All data collected from this survey is for the purpose of a Vega research project.
- Your identity will remain completely anonymous and at no point will your name be used during any summaries.
- Your inclusion in this study is completely voluntary.

## Appendix D

### Codes

#### Question 1

Please discuss whether you consider yourself to be a loyal consumer or casual shopper of H&M, including the aspect/(s) that made you either the former or the latter.

| Participants | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1:           | I am more of a <b>casual buyer</b> . Reason being that <b>I only shop at H&amp;M whenever I come across it</b> , not necessarily I would be looking for it in every mall I visit                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 2:           | <b>Loyal customer</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 3:           | I would regard myself as a <b>casual shopper</b> at H&M more than a loyal consumer if I were to compare the present to the past as I have <b>noticed a lot of changes in terms of the style and fashion of clothing</b> . The newer trends do not interest me as such and most times I opt for the basics than anything else in the store.                                                                                                                |
| 4:           | I am a <b>casual shopper</b> based on the that I don't regularly shop at H&M neither is it my go to option                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 5:           | I consider myself a <b>casual shopper</b> at H&M. I started shopping there my first year of varsity. I thought the clothes were quite sophisticated prior so I preferred shopping at other establishment. <b>However, as my style evolved, I found h&amp;m catered for my needs, style wise.</b> It's quite expensive and seeing that I am working with a student budget, I only go casually for essentials that I know I won't get at alternative shops. |

|    |                                                                                                                                                   |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6: | Casual shopper. It doesn't always have my sense of style but I do find the occasional items that catch my eye.                                    |
| 7: | Casual shopper, I tend to shop online on superbalist                                                                                              |
| 8. | Loyal customer - I buy there almost every month.                                                                                                  |
| 9. | Loyal consumer of H&M. I love H&M for the their range of style from being a classy casual lady to being a boss lady at work at affordable prices. |

## Question 2

Please discuss the aspects about H&M that maximise the benefits of shopping in their stores

| Participants | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1:           | Style definitely. And I just like the look and feel of their store when you walk in                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 2:           | How they put their clothes in sections nicely                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 3:           | Super friendly staff.<br>Order in the store at all times.<br>There are rarely ever any long queues so that works in their favor too                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 4:           | Due to the fact that they don't have an online store one does not become overwhelmed and confused by the number of options one has                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 5:           | Firstly, and this might be out of the context, however I enjoy the spacing of the store and set up of the clothes. It offers a breathable environment and one doesn't feel overwhelmed while shopping.<br>Secondly, I have a fond appreciation for the cleanliness of their stores, it enhances my previous point. I also appreciate the customer service and the fact that their |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | workers give you space to shop freely until such a point you need assistance with something. Lastly, I enjoy the fact that they cater for both students and the working class, it gives you room to alternate between styles or even integrate the two style avenues.                                                                                |
| 6: | The shops are organized and spacious so you can see the clothes better. They also have really good discounts.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 7: | Affordable prices                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 8: | Their sales people are very friendly and helpful, they're always there when you need assistance and also the quality of the products as well as the prices are very affordable.                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 9: | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The option of being able to try out the clothes before purchasing.</li> <li>2. Access to sale items that are most likely to not be online.</li> <li>3. Engaging with the staff and getting fashion Inspo from the mannequins and individuals in the store.</li> <li>4. Access to the free wifi.</li> </ol> |

### Question 3

Is there are any level of symbolism attached to trying on clothes while in-store? Please discuss

| Participants | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1:           | I am not too sure I understand this question clearly hey. But with what I think is asking, I would say, I don't like fitting clothes at stores, have this feeling that there might be cameras hidden somewhere hey. Hahaha |
| 2:           | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 3:           | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4: | <b>Personally no</b> , I never do try clothes on when shopping.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 5: | <b>Yes there was</b> , besides the obvious which is getting a sense of <b>the fit and feel of the clothing item on your body</b> , you also get to <b>picture yourself in the clothing outside of the store</b> . This gives you an idea of where and when you could wear the piece of clothing and where or not it is suitable for that <b>occasion</b> , be it going on a date or having a class of wine with friends or lazing around at home or even going to the library. In addition, <b>trying clothes enhances your experience</b> at the shop while simultaneously calming your doubts about the clothing items. Which ultimately leads you buying the piece of clothing as opposed to not trying it on and letting your doubts overwhelm you and ultimately leaving the store having purchased nothing. |
| 6: | <b>Not really</b> . But it is convenient to be able to <b>see if the clothes you like actually look good on you</b> . Instead of getting home and being <b>disappointed</b> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 7: | <b>No</b> , I feel comfort trying clothes on in store.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 8: | <b>Yes</b> , you get to <b>pick what best suites you</b> and it minuses the hassle of having to come back to change or return the items purchased.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 9: | I am not sure if I understand the question but based on my interpretation. I have not necessarily heard of any thoughts about trying on clothes in stores. For me trying on clothes in store is to <b>confirm if I really need the outfit based on how it looks on me</b> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

#### Question 4

Was there an impact on the connection you had to H&M when you were unable to try on clothes in-store during the lockdown period? Please discuss.

| Participants | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1:           | Never shopped at H&M during all lockdown.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 2:           | <b>Yes</b> there was.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 3:           | <b>Yes</b> . At times you would find that I bought items that do not fit and the admin of having to go back in store and exchange the outfits with the hopes of them fitting again was too much and so I <b>opted to stop shopping for a while</b> .                                                                  |
| 4:           | <b>No</b> , due to the fact I do not normally try clothing on either way.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 5:           | <b>Definitely</b> , as mentioned before it completely changed my shopping experience as I did get to see if the <b>clothes fit me appropriately and secondly it robbed me of the picturing of myself wearing the item outside. Which lead to me having doubts about the items and ultimately leaving them behind.</b> |
| 6:           | <b>Yes</b> . I <b>was discouraged to buy clothes because I wasn't sure if they would suit me.</b> It <b>took away the whole shopping experience.</b> The excitement of seeing yourself in the big changing room mirrors looking good and walking out to show your friend how you look.                                |
| 7:           | <b>Yes</b> . I'd have to return some items because I didn't like the way they fit.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 8:           | <b>Yes</b> , I had to always take the items home and try them out and have to drive back to the mall if they don't fit.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 9:           | <b>Yes</b> , it frustrated me because I still find it <b>difficult to know my exact size at H&amp;M especially clothing items having different</b>                                                                                                                                                                    |

|  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | cuts. Not given the opportunity to try on, I did not necessarily have the "energy" to shop because I dislike the process of returning and exchanging items. Unless I went to H&M with my sister then it was not bad because she knows my size better than me. |
|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### Question 5

Please describe the conditions under which your perspective on H&M's shopping experience whether in-store or online increased or decreased.

| Participants | Responses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1:           | Stayed the same since day one really.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 2:           | Decreased                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 3:           | I still feel like H&M holds its prestige to a high regard but it is not the ideal store for me to shop at anymore.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 4:           | There was an instance whereby I wanted a top from H&M but did not have a size I asked if they could check another store and was told that they couldn't because they do not have an online store which renders them unable to check with their fellow stores of there is stock this made my shopping experience unpleasant.                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 5:           | They definitely decreased in store as I realised that buying clothes for just sitting at home and lounging all day was a waste of money and time. If I had the experience of fitting the items in store, I feel I would've been more receptive to the idea of purchasing items as I can see them on my body and I can picture myself wearing them somewhere. That in itself would've uplifted my spirits and given me hope that lockdown was temporary and looking good was forever - if you know what I mean). |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6: | Due to some scandals I have been discouraged to buy from H&M because I felt like I was supporting a racist brand. But I understand that sometimes mistakes happen.                                                                             |
| 7: | My H&M <b>experience decreased</b> as I tried not leaving the house for non-essential reasons due to COVID19                                                                                                                                   |
| 8: | Honestly it didn't really increase nor decrease because I was <b>still using the traditional way of buying which is in-store</b> , the only <b>boring part was not being able to try out the clothes in the fitting rooms due to COVID-19.</b> |
| 9: | I have never shopped online with H&M so I can't necessarily say that the online option was better for me. <b>Not having the opportunity to try on my shopping experience in store decreased</b>                                                |

### Question 6

Did H&M's in-store environment during the lockdown period have an effect on your level of loyalty to the brand? Please discuss.

| Participants | Responses                                                                                                                               |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1:           | Wouldn't know, since I haven't been there in a while hey.                                                                               |
| 2:           | <b>Yes</b> because of the covid regulations I was too lazy to go to the store.                                                          |
| 3:           | <b>No</b> . The service provided was still the same as before the lockdown period and so I believe my loyalty is still the same.        |
| 4:           | <b>No</b> , my loyalty remained the same during the lockdown period.                                                                    |
| 5:           | <b>Not necessarily</b> , as I mentioned I am a <b>casual shopper</b> so it neither increased or decreased my loyalty but it did make me |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|    | rethink purchasing a few items and lessened the amount of things I would buy under normal circumstances.                                                                                                                             |
| 6: | Yes. I went to other trusted online stores which were better known for being online stores.                                                                                                                                          |
| 7: | No, I remain a casual shopper when it comes to H&M.                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 8: | No, I stayed loyal to the brand because I love it and the products they offer.                                                                                                                                                       |
| 9: | Besides not being able to try on! The environment did not change as much I, I did not experience a lot of people in store but the staff were still friendly. I was still a loyal customer although it was frustrating to not try on. |

## Appendix E

### Questionnaire responses

#### Question 1

Please discuss whether you consider yourself to be a loyal consumer or casual shopper of H&M, including the aspect/(s) that made you either the former or the latter.

9 responses

Loyal customer

I would regard myself as a casual shopper at H&M more than a loyal consumer if I were to compare the present to the past as I have noticed a lot of changes in terms of the style and fashion of clothing. The newer trends do not interest me as such and most times I opt for the basics than anything else in the store.

I am a casual shopper based on the that I don't regularly shop at H&M neither is it my go to option

I consider myself a casual shopper at H&M. I started shopping there my first year of varsity. I thought the clothes were quite sophisticated prior so I preferred shopping at other establishment. However, as my style evolved, I found h&m catered for my needs, style wise. It's quite expensive and seeing that I am working with a student budget, I only go casually for essentials that I know I won't get at alternative shops.

Casual shopper. It doesn't always have my sense of style but I do find the occasional items that catch my eye.

Casual shopper, I tend to shop online on superbalist

#### Question 2

Please discuss the aspects about H&M that maximise the benefits of shopping in their stores.

9 responses

Style definitely. And I just like the look and feel of their store when you walk in

How they put their clothes in sections nicely

Super friendly staff.  
Order in the store at all times.  
There are rarely ever any long queues so that works in their favor too.

Due to the fact that they don't have an online store one does not become overwhelmed and confused by the number of options one has

Firstly, and this might be out of the context, however I enjoy the spacing of the and set up of the clothes. It offers a breathable environment and one doesn't feel overwhelmed while shopping. Secondly, I have a fond appreciation for the cleanliness of their stores, it enhances my previous point. I also appreciate the customer service and the fact that their workers give you space to shop freely until such a point you need assistance with something. Lastly, I enjoy the fact that they cater for both students and the working class, it gives you room to alternate between styles or even integrate the two style avenues.

The shops are organized and spacious so you can see the clothes better. They also have really good

### Question 3

Is there any level of symbolism attached to trying on clothes while in-store? Please discuss.

9 responses

100%

Personally no, I never do try clothes on when shopping

Yes there, besides the obvious which is getting a sense of the fit and feel of the clothing item on your body, you also get to picture yourself in the clothing outside of the store. This gives you an idea of where and when you could wear the piece of clothing and where or not it is suitable for that occasion, be it going on a date or having a glass of wine with friends or lazing around at home or even going to the library. In addition, trying clothes enhances your experience at the shop while simultaneously calming your doubts about the clothing items. Which ultimately leads you buying the piece of clothing as opposed to not trying it on and letting your doubts overwhelm you and ultimately leaving the store having purchased nothing.

Not really. But it is convenient to be able to see if the clothes you like actually look good on you. Instead of getting home and being disappointed.

No, I feel comfortable trying clothes on in store

Yes, you get to pick what best suits you and it minimizes the hassle of having to come back to change or return the items purchased.

### Question 4

Was there an impact on the connection you had to H&M when you were unable to try on clothes in-store during the lockdown period? Please discuss.

9 responses

Yes there was.

Yes. At times you would find that I bought items that so not fit and the admin of having to go back in store and exchange the outfits with the hopes of them fitting again was too much and so I opted to stop shopping for a while.

No, due to the fact I do normally try clothing on either way

Definitely, as mentioned before it completely changed my shopping experience as I did get to see if the clothes fit me appropriately and secondly it robbed me of the picturing of myself wearing the item outside. Which lead to me having doubts about the items and ultimately leaving them behind.

Yes. I was discouraged to buy clothes because I wasn't sure if they would suit me. It took away the whole shopping experience. The excitement of seeing yourself in the big changing room mirrors looking good and walking out to show your friend how you look.

Yes, I'd have to return some items because I didn't like the way they fit

I had to always take the items home and try them out and have to drive back to the mall if they don't fit.

## Question 5

Please describe the conditions under which your perspective on H&M's shopping experience whether in-store or online increased or decreased.

9 responses

There was an instance whereby I wanted a top from H&M but did not have a size I asked if they could check another store and was told that they couldn't because they do not have an online store which renders them unable to check with their fellow stores of there is stock this made my shopping experience unpleasant

They definitely decreased in store as I realised that buying clothes for just sitting at home and lounging all day was a waste of money and time. If I had the experience of fitting the items in store, I feel I would've been more receptive to the idea of purchasing items as I can see them on my body and I can picture myself wearing them somewhere. That in itself would've uplifted my spirits and given me hope that lockdown was temporary and looking good was forever - if you know what I mean)

Due to some scandals I have been discouraged to buy from H&M because I felt like I was supporting a racist brand. But I understand that sometimes mistakes happen.

My H&M experience decreased as I tried not leaving the house for non-essential reasons due to COVID19

Honestly it didn't really increase nor decrease because I was still using the traditional way of buying which is in-store, the only boring part was not being able to try out the clothes in the fitting rooms due to COVID-19

## Question 6

Did H&M's in-store environment during the lockdown period have an effect on your level of loyalty to the brand? Please discuss.

9 responses

No.  
The service provided was still the same as before the lockdown period and so I believe my loyalty is still the same.

No, my loyalty remained the same during the lockdown period

Not necessarily, as I mentioned I am a casual shopper so it neither increased or decreased my loyalty but it did make me rethink purchasing a few items and lessened the amount of things I would buy under normal circumstances.

Yes. I went to other trusted online stores which were better known for being online stores.

No, I remain a casual shopper when it comes to H&M

No, I stayed loyal to the brand because I love it and the products they offer.

Besides not being able to try on! The environment did not change as much I, I did not experience a lot of people in store but the staff were still friendly. I was still a loyal customer although it was frustrating to not try on

# Appendix F

## Concept table

### Annexure A: Concept Document Template

PROVISIONAL TITLE: *Understanding if lockdown restrictions reduced the in-store experience: The case of H&M*

| Research Purpose/Objective                                                                                                                                 | Primary Research Question                                                                                                        | Research Rationale                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Seminal Authors/Sources                                                                                                       | Literature Review – Conceptual Framework                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Paradigm                                          | Approach                                                                                                                                                                                         | Data Collection Method(s)                                                                                          | Ethics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Anticipated Findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | References                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>-To determine the foundations on which H&amp;M's in-store experience is built; and</p> <p>-The effect of the decreased presence of such experiences</p> | <p>What aspects of H&amp;M's in-store environment contribute to the formation of an experience-whether positive or negative?</p> | <p>A number of scholars continue to place emphasis on the need for the use of new approaches when examining consumers' in-store retail experiences (Bäckström &amp; Johansson, 2017). Hence, this study will use H&amp;M's predicament to offer retailers insight into the effect of tailored in-store experiences, so that they are able to leverage the understanding in order to direct business's change in terms of business strategies during economic fluctuations.</p> | <p><u>Arnould</u> and Thompson (2005).<br/><br/>Cooper and Schindler (2006).<br/><br/>Sanders and <u>Stoppers</u> (2008).</p> | <p><b>Theme 1:</b><br/>In-store experience results from usage experiences including participation and observation</p> <p><b>Theme 2:</b><br/>Consumers' experiences have an effect on their loyalty behaviour</p> <p><b>Theme 4:</b><br/>The input of the relationship between buyer and seller in a long-term consumer-brand relationship is brand experience, and the main output is brand loyalty.</p> | <p><b>Paradigm</b><br/><u>Interpretivism</u>,</p> | Qualitative                                                                                                                                                                                      | Online survey questionnaire                                                                                        | No individuals under the age of 18 may participate in this study with the consent of their parents or guardians. Furthermore, it is essential that prior to the study, individuals are made aware that they are taking part in a research study and provide consent for this. And if participants would like their responses to remain anonymous then the right will be respected and given to them. | This study could find that trying on clothes does not have that much of an effect for in-store experience due to the presence of other facts such as lighting and store layout which some consumers might prefer more as opposed to having the ability to try on clothes | <p><u>Arnould</u>, E. and Thompson, C., 2005. Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research. <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>, 31(868-882). Available at: &lt;<a href="https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article/31/4/868/1812998">https://academic.oup.com/jcr/article/31/4/868/1812998</a>&gt;</p> <p>[Accessed 18 August 2021].</p> <p><u>Du Plooy-Cilliers</u>, F., Davis, C. and <u>Bezuidenhout</u>, R., 2014. <i>Research Matters</i>. 1(14-340). Claremont: <u>Juta</u> and Company Ltd.</p> |
|                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                   | Population                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                   | <p><b>Population Parameters</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Generation Z</li> <li>- Must shop at H&amp;M</li> <li>- Must have visited H7M during the lockdown period</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Research Problem</b>                                                                                                                                    | <b>Secondary Questions/Hypotheses/Objectives</b>                                                                                 | <b>Key Concepts</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Key Theories</b>                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                   | <b>Sampling</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Data Analysis Method(s)</b>                                                                                     | <b>Limitations</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Anticipated Contribution</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <p>Maree, K., 2016. <i>Planning a research proposal</i>. In: Maree, K. ed. 2016. <i>First steps in research</i>. Pretoria: Van <u>Schoik</u>. 3: 26.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Due to lockdown restrictions retailers had to shut their doors in order to combat the spread of the virus (Holland and Knight, 2020).                      | <p>-How do these aspects form consumers' experiences while in-store?</p> <p>-How does in-store experience affect loyalty?</p>    | In-store experience, consumer behaviour and brand loyalty                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Consumer culture theory, the Loyalty Model and the Consumer Utility Theory.                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                   | <p>Non-probability</p> <p>Purposive sampling</p> <p>Size: 10</p>                                                                                                                                 | <p><b>Unit of Analysis</b><br/>In-store experience</p> <p><b>Data Analysis Method(s)</b><br/>Thematic analysis</p> | The journals and articles connected to the intentions of this study were in shortage, with a few of them drawing similar links rather than proposing a novel method to understanding                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | This study could assist in understanding the role of the experiential environment in value co-creation processes, as well as assessing the contribution of a new loyalty                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |                                             |                                                                                                                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <p>However, in the third quarter of the financial year almost all of South Africa's H&amp;M stores reopened on the basis of a redefined 'return-to-business' approach (Bingström, 2021). The new approach took in-store experience away which majority of Generation Z (Gen Z) consumers- H&amp;M's target market- thrive off of (Warnock, n.d.).</p> |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | <p>experience as well as brand loyalty.</p> | <p>phenomenon with respect to brand-consumer relationship building through the application of the CCT and brand loyalty models.</p> |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|