



Exploring brands' use of brand experience to communicate their brand positioning to increase market share in the food retail industry; a case study of checkers' rebrand in 2017.

By

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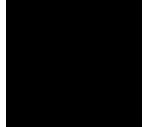
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ABSTRACT

With retail remaining the most competitive industry, with major brands lobbying for their piece of the market share (Mathee, 2018), many brands lack brand experience in their stores. This lack of focus on designing an in-store brand experience when 70% (Clark, 2008) of sales are conducted in store, only contributes to unsatisfied customer experiences as the brand isn't consistent in all touchpoints. Therefore, this research explores Brand's use of brand experience to communicate their brand positioning to increase market share in the food retail industry: focusing on Checker's rebranding. With the newly designed Checkers FreshX Concept stores, Checkers' rebranding aimed at targeting affluent consumers, to increase their market share within that market, originally dominated by Woolworths, where their rebranding experienced success (Roux, 2021). With that said, this research looks at Pine and Gilmore's (1998) Experience Economy Theory, which argues how experiences act as an economic affiliate to a brand. This theory is further understood within the literature and explored using Schmitt's (1999) Strategic Experiential Module through an ethnographic approach in the checkers FreshX concept store to decipher if an experiential approach has been employed and achieved in conjunction to the targets interest, wants and needs for an appropriate competitive edge. Further synthesis from the ethnographic findings and interpretation concludes that Checkers has employed brand experience characteristics with additional use of the Strategic Experiential Module in their store by ensuring that all experiential concepts and themes within the module worked together to bring forth a memorable experience that develops a relationship with consumers as well as build positive memories which translates to preference for the brand, where Checkers strategically placed themselves to be a one-stop-shop, target a new audience and incorporate a themed brand experience, namely; retailtainment to ultimately increase market share. All in all, this research aims to provide other brands in South Africa the opportunity to understand the role the physical environment plays in communicating their brand positioning through an experience as it provides retail brands a unique proposition in the market, in accordance with the literature review and the assessment of Checkers.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the Research Report submitted for the Honours in Strategic Brand Communication degree 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 and other degree purposes.



11/22

Signature

Date

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INTRODUCTION

Title:

Exploring Brands' use of brand experience to communicate their brand positioning to increase market share in the food retail industry; A case study of Checkers' Rebrand in 2017.

Contextualisation:

With retail remaining as the most competitive industry, with major brands lobbying for their piece of the market share (Mathee, 2018), many brands lack brand experience in their stores. This lack of focus on designing an in-store brand experience when 70% (Clark, 2008) of sales are conducted in store only contributes to unsatisfied customer experiences as the brand isn't consistent in all touchpoints. In this competitive food retail industry, selling produce and providing a service is not enough to stand out, where these brands need to uniquely position themselves to ultimately provide an experience that consumers prefer and latch on for brands to gain market share in the Living Standards Measure (LSM) of their preference. Therefore, this research explores Brand's use of brand experience to communicate their brand positioning to increase market share in the food retail industry: focusing on Checker's rebranding.

With the newly designed Checkers FreshX Concept stores, Checkers' rebranding aimed at targeting affluent consumers, to increase their market share within that market, originally dominated by Woolworths, where their rebranding experienced success (Roux, 2021). It is said that incorporating brand experience within the brand could increase market share, therefore, the purpose of this research is to identify if Checkers employed brand experience by exercising design elements, technological advancement and interactive engagement, influenced by Schmitt's (1999) Strategic Experiential Module, which will be further expanded in the conceptualisation and literature review, to communicate their brand positioning as a tool to reach success through ethnographic research.

These concepts within Schmitt's (1999) Strategic Experiential Module, have been influenced by the Experience economy theory, developed by Pine and Gilmore (1998), which discusses the importance of brands implementing brand experience, which adds value to the brand, further discussed in the theoretical framework and literature review where the framework of the literature ensures extensive incorporation and understanding of brand experience. This will then provide other brands the opportunity

to understand the role the physical environment plays in communicating their brand positioning through an experience, providing retail brands a unique proposition in the market.

In addition, there's extensive research behind elements that contribute to a brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009), but little that assesses its success when implemented in physical stores, where, as mentioned, Checkers will be assessed in accordance, to open doors for many food retailers to implement it in their stores demonstrating that experience isn't limited to luxury brands and the hospitality industry. The literature review will give the reader an understanding of how retail has changed and developed to a point of trading value through an experience in addition to the service or product offered, where themes such as; 1) History of retail, consumer culture and its role today; 2) The importance of brand experience in physical environments; 3) Facilitation of experience through positioning, to penetrate a market; 4) Shoprite group limited and Checkers growth over the years and 5) Catering for luxury while serving and maintaining existing audience will be unpacked. The review will then communicate characteristics in which a brand communicates a memorable experience uniquely positioning themselves, using the Strategic Experiential Module, after the literature review has documented enough about Checkers and its rebranding.

From these themes, a thematic literature review direction emerges, as the literature is organised according to brand experience, in which each theme develops and influences the next theme to strengthen the understanding behind fruitful brand experiences and considerations. With this, an interpretivist paradigm will be used due to the researcher trying to understand experiences in a social and interactive environment.

Rationale:

The researcher has decided to undertake this research due to their interdisciplinary studies, such as Strategic Brand Communication and Interior Design. This research highlights the gap of understanding brand experience and how a brand can successfully communicate a successful experience through understanding the importance of design implementation, by strategically employing marketable solutions to ensure consumers of a brand positively experience it, whether through digital or traditional forms. The gap usually lends its hand to the common practice of traditional marketing, which views consumers as rational decision-makers who are solely interested in functional features and benefits (Kapferer, 2011). Where importance lies in experiential marketing, which in contrast views consumers as rational and

emotional human beings who are engrossed with achieving pleasurable experiences. This concern of brands swearing by traditional marketing only weakens their competitive value due to the shift and rise of Omni-present information technology, which lends its hand to the importance of a brand and its message, over the product or service which enhance customer experiences and lastly, the Ubiquity of Communications and Entertainment, where corporate identities provide customer communications, entertainment and orientation (Schmitt, 1999).

Therefore, this research answers the gap many brands fail to employ, such as thought out experiences through design and strategy, to attract target audiences, enabling a missed opportunity for interest, awareness and relationships with brands, as many come to know of them in physical environments, i.e. malls. Ultimately, the importance of this research of experiential marketing is to understand and assess the implementation of holistic experiences with the integration of individual experiences, carefully considering a focus on customer experiences, occurring as a result of encountering, undergoing or living through things. Experiences provide sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and relational values that replace functional values, wherein to target an audience, careful consideration to their interests, needs and wants in the dimensions of the brands functional and beneficial attributes allow for a competitive advantage within a saturated environment due to customer focus, relation and attention (Schmitt, 1999). In addition, there's been quite a lot of research behind elements that contribute to a brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009), but little that assesses its success when implemented in physical stores. With the help of ethnographic observations, brand experience will continue to be redesigned to mirror any new developments in our lifestyles or personal preferences (Crouch and Pearce, 2012).

Problem statement:

Today the place that a product is sold from is considered one of the 7p's of marketing and contributes its efforts to shopper touchpoints, which each element within the shopper touchpoint are sought out to be well executed to bring forth a satisfactory experience for the consumer in the presence of the brand. In addition, the place of a product or service supports a bulk of a brand as it allows the consumer to experience all five senses, communicated in accordance to the brand's identity, as 70% (Clark, 2008) of purchasing decisions and sales are carried out in stores, ultimately acting as a tool to influence consumer's perceptions, causing intrigue, satisfaction, purchases and ultimately loyalty and preference (Tlapana, 2009). A number of brands, more so in hotels, restaurants and luxury retail have each communicated their

brand positioning through their design and service that communicates a strong brand experience, attracting targeted consumers through design elements and aesthetics, technological incorporation and interactive engagements, while many brands in the retail food industry lack this focus in their physical environments. With retail remaining as the most competitive industry (Mathee, 2018), this lack of focus on designing an in-store brand experience only contributes to unsatisfied customer experiences as the brand isn't consistent in all touchpoints. In the event of a poorly designed store and experience, it will not stand out to consumers, nor intrigue them about their offerings, rather, consumers will not perceive the store well, causing consumers to avoid the store and shop at places that provide sought out experiences, ultimately losing consumers from face value before completely engaging with the brand, struggling to build relationships and loyalty with consumers, discouraging the opportunity for successful market gain, more so with individuals who experience brands first through physical shopping, especially when other brands offer better experiences. Therefore, it is crucial for brands to invest in their physical environment thoroughly as it acts as a deciding factor and tool for brand awareness, relationships, loyalty, purchases and market gain, ultimately aiding in a crucial point of communications in a brand.

Research aim/purpose statement:

With the introduction of the newly designed Checkers FreshX Concept stores, Checkers' rebranding aimed at targeting consumers belonging to a higher LSM, to increase their market share within that market, originally dominated by Woolworths, where their rebranding experienced success (Roux, 2021). The purpose of this research is to identify if checkers employed brand experience by exercising design elements, technological advancement and interactive engagement to communicate their brand positioning through ethnographic research, to understand the potential and effect of considering brand experience in their stores. This research is conducted to explain the importance behind the physical environment, being the store, in which 70% (Clark, 2008) of purchasing decisions and transactions of a brand take place, to be used as a marketing strategy, as the store plays a role in how people perceive, experience and engage with a brand (Tlapana, 2009). This may provide other brands the opportunity to understand the role the physical environment may or may not play in communicating their brand positioning through an experience as it provides retail brands a unique proposition in the market. Therefore, this research intends to highlight the importance of brand experience as a marketing tool to attract a market, by observing if brands employ brand experience elements/ characteristics in their stores.

Research question/s:

Does brand experience implemented in the retail food industry increase market share?

- How do brands communicate positioning in the place touchpoint to target a new audience understood through the literature review in accordance to Checkers?
- What does Checkers do to target a new audience while maintaining the presence of the existing target to ultimately grow their net margin explored in the literature review?
- Is the Strategic Experiential Module evident in Checkers's rebranding to position themselves and provide an experience ethnographically researched?

Research objectives and/or hypotheses:

It is said that exercising brand experience in your brand aids in the success of the brand. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify whether or not Checkers FreshX Concept stores employed brand experience to communicate their brand positioning through Sensory ethnography.

- To establish the connection between brand positioning and a brand's target audience through the literature review.
- To understand the maintenance of existing audience while targeting a new audience through the literature review.
- To understand how a touchpoint can communicate positioning through the literature review.
- To analyse Checkers FreshX Concept store in relation to brand experience characteristics through a case study using Sensory ethnography. Make subheading question and objectives

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical foundation

The emerging attention put on experiences can be defined as a mega-trend, and has given value to the proposition that experiences act as a source of intel for the stories people tell about their lives which indicate importance to their self-perception (Engen & Mehmetoglu, 2011). This take implies that there is an influence experiences create for individual fulfillment with a given product or visit. This assumption has been and will be assessed in this research through Pine and Gilmore's (1998) Experience Economy Theory. They argue that businesses must organise memorable events for their customers, and that the memory itself becomes the product: the "experience". Simply said, value is established through experience, in which a competitive advantage can be derived, where the experience can trigger a perception of a brand in the mind of the consumer in which they buy into or want to portray. This becomes the theory that has birthed brand experience in which the research speaks to. Checker's rebranding has employed various characteristics that influence perception of the brand to target a new and higher market segment, whereas Checkers may still be selling the same products at the same affordable prices before the rebranding. This theory has four dimensions, namely; education, escapism, esthetics, and entertainment. Education revolves around the increase of the consumer's skills, enhancing his/her knowledge through active participation in the experience (Fiore, Hausafus, Jeong, Niehm and Oh, 2009). Esthetic experiences inform customer enjoyment of a physical environment designed uniquely, where the consumer passively enjoys being present in the environment (Fiore, et al., 2009). Active participation in the events of a real or virtual environment are required in the Escapist dimension (Fiore, et al., 2009). Entertainment warrants the consumer to watch performances from others, through the interest of the active mind (Fiore, et al., 2009). From this, Schmitt(1999) formulated a module in accordance with these dimensions, namely, the Strategic Experiential Module, which expanded these dimensions into 5 concepts that delve into factors that evoke experiences, such as Sense, Think, Feel, Act and Relate. These concepts each encapsulate all four dimensions by breaking down how these dimensions can be achieved, where all these dimensions are evident in each concept of the Strategic Experiential module, where it emphasises how each component relates and works together to illustrate an experience.

With customers today taking functional features and benefits, product quality and a positive brand image as a given and expectation for a brand, products, communications, and marketing campaigns that dazzle

their senses, touch their hearts, and stimulate their minds are what customers long for, that they can relate to and incorporate into their lifestyles, delivering an experience. The degree to which a company is able to deliver a desirable customer experience - with the use of information technology, brands, and integrated communications to do so - will greatly determine its success in the global marketplace of the new marketing revolution. That is why Pine and Gilmore's (1998) Experience Economy Theory present a great fit for this research as the influence on Schmitt's (1999) Strategic Experiential Module assesses and establishes whether or not brands take into consideration and apply valuable experiences, through the characteristics exposed in the rationale, being the focus on customer experiences through sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural provision, and relational values that replace functional values. This theory also focuses on consumption as a holistic experience by means of broadening the concept of a category and examines the meaning of the specific consumption situation in its broader socio-cultural context. Simply put, holistic experiences move from thinking about an isolated product for consumption, into the customer's broader space of meaning. This theory also aids in viewing Customers as rational and emotional beings as customers may frequently engage in rational choice, they are just as frequently driven by emotions as consumption experiences are often orchestrated toward the pursuit of fantasies, feelings, and fun. Lastly the theory encapsulates understanding of experiential marketing with methods and tools that are eclectic, where the experiences evoked are not solely based on a rigid-one dimensional approach, but encapsulates a wide range of options to cater for varying target groups.

All in all, this theory is perfect as it dives in the importance as well as the execution of what experience looks like, in which Checkers may possess and possibly aid in other grocery store brand's experiential success. These concepts are further explained in the conceptualisation of the research, expanded in the literature. The consumer contributes or shapes the experience, offering the consumer a way of employing a new persona. Therefore, the Theoretical framework revolves around experiential marketing as a way to create value for a brand.

Conceptualisation

From Pine and Gilmore's (1998) theory that informs the literature review's theoretical framework, Schmitt, 1999, explains how consumers aren't just buying products but are emotional purchasers, in which he introduces the Strategic Experiential Module, that taps into using the five sense and other emotive

triggers to promote customer experiences marketers can use to aid in yielding ideal experiences for customers to value and prefer specific brands in a competitive industry. This is relevant as the researcher speaks about the physical environment being a hub for all senses and feelings to be explored and experienced, in which ultimately supports the successful execution of brand experience explored throughout the literature. The module includes SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT, RELATE marketing approaches which each possess characteristics that aid in successful experiences, which will be used to assess if Checkers has employed such characteristics through sensory ethnography. Each concept is explained as followed:

The **SENSE** module appeals to the senses with the objective of creating sensory experiences, through sight sound, touch, taste and smell. Its primarily used to differentiate companies and products, to prompt customers and to add value to products (e.g., through aesthetics or excitement). A key principle of SENSE is "cognitive consistency/sensory variety," where the ideal approach provides an underlying concept that is clearly detectable of a brand but appears always fresh and new (Schmitt,1999).

FEEL marketing pleases customers' inner feelings and emotions, with the goal of creating affective experiences that span from mildly positive moods linked to a brand (dormant, non-involving static features/ products and services) to strong emotions of joy and pride (involvement, technology, or social marketing campaign). A close understanding of what stimuli can evoke certain emotions as well as the willingness of the consumer to engage in perspective thinking and empathy is needed for FEEL marketing. Standard emotional advertising and in-store considerations both lack because it does not target feelings during consumption which should be considered for a good experience (Schmitt, 1999).

THINK marketing targets intellectual objectives of creating cognitive, problem-solving experiences that engage customers creatively. This also appeals to target customers' convergent and divergent thinking by means of surprise, intrigue and provocation. THINK campaigns are common for new technology products and environmental considerations (Schmitt, 1999).

ACT marketing supplements customers' lives by targeting their physical experiences, showing them alternative ways of doing things, alternative lifestyles and interactions. It also influences changes in lifestyles and behaviours which are often more motivational, inspirational and emotional in nature, usually motivated by role models (such as movie stars or athletes) (Schmitt, 1999).

RELATE marketing contains aspects of all the addressed marketing. However, RELATE marketing expands beyond the individual's self, relating the individual to something outside his/her private morale. RELATE campaigns intrigue the individual's desire for self-improvement (ideal self that he or she wants to relate to) and the need to be perceived positively by others, relating to a broader social system (a subculture, a country, etc.) (Schmitt, 1999).

Each of these concepts will be further explored; within the literature review and further used a research method; this will then be operationalised through an ethnographic approach in which the researcher will partake in a two day four visit research trip, wherein they assess Schmitt's(1999) Strategic Experiential Module by means of identifying characteristics within each conceptual module in the Checkers store to conclude whether or not an experiential approach has been employed and achieved in conjunction to the targets interest, wants and needs for an appropriate competitive edge, where field notes and photographs will be taken to better describe and demonstrate the experience in accordance to Schmitt's(1999) module, where further synthesis will be best attended to in the findings and interpretation. Because these modules relate and are interchangeable due to Pine and Gilmores's (1998) theory and each component heavily influencing and being present in each module, conclusions of trying to find a link in experience and its electability will be drawn.

Review previous literature:

History of retail, consumer culture and its role today

Early civilization introduced a system of sharing, bartering, selling, and consuming resources, in an attempt to benefit, profit and support oneself, as far back as 9000BC (Meyer, 2022). As time has passed, history has cemented crucial activities that have influenced social-cultural, economic, environmental, medical and political sectors. These have each been influenced by means of historical industrial revolutions, which have transfigured largely rural, agrarian societies globally, into industrialised, urban ones (Editors, 2019). This phenomenon demonstrated a shift in locations, goods availability and saturation, manufacturing, pricing, selling and purchasing, awarding consumers the ability to practice shopping where the presence of a wide assortment of products in one destination allowed the emergence of a consumer culture, moving away from needs to a social status indicator. Consumer culture refers to

a society organised around the consumption and display of commodities through which individuals gain prestige, identity, and standing from said commodities (Sassatelli, 2007).

Discount department stores, shopping centers and large malls soon became the norm in the western world in the 1970s in accommodation to the growth of the consumer market. These became spaces that created a shopping atmosphere where people felt comfortable to spend more time in the environment, enhancing opportunities for purchasing. With a number of stores residing in one area, offering the same products or services, and the rise of ecommerce today, brands have to adopt ways that would differentiate themselves, providing themselves with a competitive advantage, other than standard brand management conventions. The evolution of increasing competitive pressure allowed businesses to adopt a more value-centric orientation with emphasis on experience and service over the actual core product. This shift in marketing practice towards a service-dominant ideology replaced the traditional product-attribute-oriented approach (Meis, 2018).

Additionally, from its very first occurrence, consumer culture has been used more to critic than to describe, stigmatising the growing and uncontrolled interest for material things (Sassatelli, 2007). However, in a positive sense, brands may benefit off of said culture. Similarly, in relation to other emerging markets, South Africa is developing an increasing selection of middleclass consumers. South African consumers are argued to have a high level of brand consciousness, where the relevance of a retail brand may in addition influence this experience and satisfaction relationship (Biko, Frazer, Gomez, Matthysen, Stiehler-Mulder and Sedibe, 2019). These said consumers are highly ambitious and have many possibilities to spend their disposable incomes, as their local areas are well supplied with modern retail environments. These serve a local consumer culture that places a premium on consumer goods that are high-end, from fashion labels to luxury car models, with an impressive degree of sophistication and spending power amid many of the country's consumer class (Pretoria, 2016). Consumer culture becomes beneficial as local consumers crave luxury components that indicate that they've made it out of the strife of the historical political environment, where brands and businesses may market luxury experiences, as oppose to their products to grow their value amongst consumers, differentiating themselves from their competitors, for individuals who want to identify with the ideal experience brands may implement.

The importance of brand experience in physical environments

In order to strengthen consumers' emotional connections to the brand and bestow a point of differentiation in a hyper-competitive environment, retailers have progressively swivelled their attention to generating memorable retail experiences that appeal to consumers at a psychological and physical level, providing a great brand experience for the consumer (Beverland, Healy, Oppewal and Sands, 2007). Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello (2009) define Brand experience as the evocation of sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioural responses from brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's identity and design, packaging, communications, and environments. This concept combines elements of brand identity, user experience and customer experience together (Beverland et al., 2007). These stores permit customers to interact, learn and experience the values of the brand through in-store design features and all round service where the aim of these experiential retail stores is to generate outlets that express and represent the brand's essence, while considering both the functional components of the product (what it does) with its emotional goals (how it makes one feel) (Pine and Gilmore 1999; Schmitt 2003).

More so, Experiential retail strategies encourage the creation of emotional attachments, which assist customers in obtaining a higher degree of possessive control over in-store activities (Schmitt, 2003). Simply put, customers become their own icon by evolving their self-identity (who they are and what they represent) through what they consume, own and possess. This is known as the extended-self, which is the development of the individual's identity through the association and collection of objects, events and experiences (Belk 1988), in which they actively intend on portraying. Researchers tend to document hard design (static in-store features such as store design), and softer human elements (dynamic features such as service and participation) separately, rather than combining them to make an effective or ineffective in-store experience (Pine and Gilmore 1999) due to the absence of ethnographic research.

Pine and Gilmore's (1999) Experience economy theory recognised that retail experiences embrace holistic realms (aesthetic, entertainment, education, escapist), allowing flow between the various static and dynamic elements within the experiential environment. This flow guides the consumer to become immersed and engaged within the retail proceedings (Beverland et al., 2007). A South African example revolves around the store located in the award winning shopping destination, Cavendish square, Cape Town. We Are Egg is a cracking new, revolutionary department store developed by partners Paul Simon and Arie Fabian. The concept behind the store was an egg; acting as an incubation for inclusivity, creativity

and originality of small local brands and offerings (Jordan, 2021). They believe that everything comes from an egg, and because Covid-19 forced everyone to rethink business, their aim was to rebirth things; to rebirth and give opportunities to SMEs, in which dreams may come true. This influenced their overall design with dreamlike colours and soft, curved structures in-store to reimagine the egg (Team, 2021). To set themselves apart from being an ordinary department store, they incorporated experiences that supported their offerings, where the store has a hair salon, a piercing studio, a flower and plant market and restaurants. The store additionally offers a beauty and wellness centre and a personalisation section, where individuals may customise their clothes and accessories (Jordan, 2021). Additionally, the store has created an immersive experience by providing omni-channel marketing, where both physical and online work together to give consumers a seamless and personalised experience. Examples like We Are Egg allow the customer to embody deep levels of immersion and interaction within their fantasy role, as the central protagonist within their surroundings. These stores intensify the interaction between the customer, the store environment and staff members, all of which are designed to amplify the impact of the overall retail experience.

Essentially, the experience revolves around the customer as if he or she were a critical component of a grand emotional theatrical fantasy within a physical store layout (Beverland et al., 2007), due to the combinations of static and dynamic elements. The shopping trip transforms into an adventurous journey, not denoted by the act of consumption but rather by experiencing holistic immersion (i.e. sensory, enjoyment, fun, pleasure, gratification, social encounter, inspiration) (Arnould and Reynolds, 2003). With covid-19 pushing for the e-commerce experience, Chin and Goh (2017), Huré, Picot-Coupey and Ackermann (2017) identify that the physical store remains the predominant retail channel as people still want to see and feel products, doing so with others, where only a store can deliver that full experience (Contributor, 2021). As this is preferred, the physical store is the perfect touchpoint to provide customers with a concrete, tangible multi-sensory buying experience, where the retail environment enables them to make sound purchase decisions, enhancing their satisfaction and their loyalty to the retailer, increasing customer profitability. These environments are the only platforms that provide assurance, assistance, trust and accountability, helping close a sale. Therefore, the physical store provides the platform for customers to experience the brand fully, where the employment of an experience becomes seamless due to how the brand has identified and positioned itself physically.

Facilitation of experience through positioning, to penetrate a market

The idea of designing brand-based experience is not new (Ludlow and Schmidt, 2001; Ivens and Shaw, 2002; Smith and Wheeler 2002; Schmitt 2003; Merrilees 2017). Similarly, Shaw and Ivens (2002) argued that the customer experience should reflect the brand. Yet, while various authors have discussed the intersection between customer experience and the brand, high-level, generic advice with limited practical and operational insight is delivered (Motta-Filho, 2020). From the company's perspective, brand identity and positioning is a powerhouse of meanings, a collection of functional and emotional values that enable a promise to be made about a unique and welcomed experience to a targeted audience, representing how the organisation wants customers to perceive the brand (Aaker 1996; Böger, Decker, Kottemann and Plumeyer, 2019). From the customers' standpoint, the brand positioning reflects the image and meanings associations appearing from their interactions with the brand manifestations (Aaker 1991) and is the main source of brand equity; defined as the set of assets, liabilities, name and symbolism that either subtracts or adds to the brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2013) determined through customer response and experiences. Brand equity formation begins with the customers interacting with the proposition made by the organisation, evolving through the development of behaviours (e.g., loyalty). These behaviours create a higher market share and positive cash flow for the organisation (Kapferer 2011). The brand value is thus based on its ability to influence customers' perceptions and attitudes (Motta-Filho, 2020). Simply put, it is crucial for the brand to position themselves in which they best want to be perceived by targeted customers, where positioning will then dictate their identity, offerings, service, involvement and actions, improving on their shopper touchpoints to create an experience which will influence their brand equity, where people who are in favour of/ against said equity will gravitate towards/ distance themselves from the brand (Aaker 1991; Keller 2013). However organisations cannot control how customers perceive the brand, but can influence the interactions customers experience with the brand. As the brand value is foundationed on stakeholders' collective perception and the meaning's associations connected to the brand, strengthening the brand entails developing service interactions that fulfil the right meanings and associations to customers (Motta-Filho, 2020). To clarify, employing brand-based interactions that deliver the brand promise to the customers. From these interactions, the customer may decode the brand proposition implanted in the characteristics of the service offering, linking them back to the brand name, to strengthen the associations, strengthening the brand (Keller 2013). Karjalainen (2004) defines this process of translating the brand proposition into the features of the design object as Semantic

Transformation. The concept depicts brands as a meaning proposition (object) conveyed to customers (interpretant) through the characteristics and qualities of the design object (representamen), which functions as a manifestation of the brand (Karjalainen, 2004). Therefore, the goal is to implant the brand meanings into the interactions of which the customer experiences the brand.

Shoprite group limited and Checkers growth over the years

Market development/ penetration requires a clear number of steps that will lead to a boost in the number of potential customers/ markets. Updating or changing specific features of the brand or simply growing businesses into new markets through positioning and rebranding are strategies that may aid in market penetration. These said strategies inform Shoprite Group Limited's recent success in the premium retail market through Checkers, a segment typically dominated by companies such as Woolworths (Roux, 2021).

Founded in 1979 in South Africa, the vision of Shoprite Holdings Limited has been to provide the lowest prices of groceries. In just over 41 years the company has achieved the notable recognition as Africa's largest grocery retailer (Badal, 2021). The company has more than 2,829 stores exhibiting in 15 countries within Africa, supported by over 141,000 associates (Badal, 2021). For the first time, the company decided to market Shoprite and Checkers brands, separately, with Checkers aimed at competing in the middle to higher-income markets. Checkers however, initially didn't fall under the Shoprite Holdings Limited Group. Norman Herber, the chair of Greentermans department stores, was the founder of Checkers. The firm was later expanded and made successful by Raymond Ackerman and later accumulated by Shoprite Holdings Limited in 1991 (Checkers, 2020). A new report from Business Tech demonstrates that the group saw an 8.1% increase (Writer, 2019) in sales for the 53 weeks to 4 July 2021, reporting that Shoprite's Group trading profit grew by 24.9% to R10.3 billion (Writer, 2019) due to strong sales growth and gross margin expansion. The Group's trading margin ultimately improved from 5.3% to 6.1% (Writer, 2019). While they consider the full-year performance as a 'strong performance' even in an ongoing pandemic, one performance that the Group is particularly proud of is the premium market. The concept stores were introduced by Checkers, launched in 2017 as a way for the company to gain market share among South Africans belonging to higher Living standards measures (LSMs) of 8-10, with the idea proving so popular that the Group now plans to revamp at least a third of its Checkers stores to the new look in the medium term (Writer, 2019). In 2021, Shoprite said the number of stores in the Checkers FreshX format increased

to 41 from 28 stores in 2020, targeting 80 of these stores. The group said that its strategy in South Africa of focusing on establishing a 'fresh food theatre' for its customer base continues to improve year on year (Roux, 2021).

As mentioned, these stores were implemented to target the Woolworths customers. Woolworths Holdings Limited is a South African multinational retail company that has ownership over the South African retail chain Woolworths, and Australian retailers Country Road Group and David Jones (WHL, 2022). The South African Woolworths business includes a full-line fashion, home and beauty stores, many of which include a premium food retail offering. In regards to the Food retail offering, Woolworths boasts their exceptional quality and experience in their products and services (WHL, 2022), which they've upheld, where they target a market, belonging to LSMs 8- 10. This positioning has allowed the public to perceive Woolworths as an expensive brand, however SPAR prior to Covid-19 was most expensive and currently contends with Woolworths for the number one spot in high prices (Writer, 2021). SPAR is a warehousing and distribution business that offers fresh produce and merchandise to a network of independent retailers trading under the SPAR brand (SPAR, 2022). SPAR has positioned themselves to cater for local communities targeting the full spectrum of LSM groups with emphasis on LSM group 4-7 (LTD, 2016), however their prices cater for a premium market. Therefore, positioning informs brand decisions through their in-store design, brand colours and image, in a way in which a brand wants to be perceived, irrespective of price. In regards to Woolworths, their touchpoints represent prestige and cleanliness, from their quality produce, efficient service and black and white aesthetic, where that colour scheme produces a general implication of strength, authority, and classiness (Woodley, 2022), which Woolworths employs. Therefore, the value and equity shy away from being informed by pricing but rather focus on the positioning and strategic outcomes developed from the positioning. Therefore, the strategic outcomes need to provide experiences that cater to a targeted group which they may relate, enjoy or aspire to that image and extended-self associations (Aaker 1991; Keller 2013). In the case of Checkers, the brand has profited from the brand equity of Shoprite Holdings, building a strong foundation of trust and goodwill when embarking on their repositioning. They've partnered up with brands that cater to the premium market, like Kauai, so to improve their brand equity and image to cater for that market and offer a world-class shopping experience, emphasising fresh food and convenience, with new, improved and additional offerings that cater to the premium market (Mathee, 2018). Because their concept store's theme is a 'fresh food theatre', they've dedicated themselves to be a one-stop-shop, with a wellness section, party

shop and improved pet department, offering a sushi bar, coffee bar, pizza oven, wine store, imported rodizio grill, a food truck and a high end bakery in their flagship store in Brackenfall, Cape Town (LTD, 2021). This 'food Theatre' tries to improve its value, equity and perception amongst the premium market, through an experience offered in store (Motta-Filho, 2020). They have managed to provide premium experience irrespective of their pricing, where they've increased their market share through altered and influenced perceptions. Additionally, to have experienced growth in the group, the plausibility would be due to their existing market.

Catering for luxury while serving and maintaining existing audience

The Checkers Group continuously and actively manages and controls its value chain while conserving a strong drive to enhance efficiencies, with focus being on four primary areas namely inventory management, transport optimisation, operational productivity and store processes (IDE-JETRO, n.d.). These efficiencies drive costs down and improve cash flow. With inventory levels having increased, a scientific approach to forward buying was implemented, allowing the Group to maintain its "low price" position simultaneously achieving high levels of product availability. Ways in which they've managed to provide the lowest prices amongst the three biggest retailers, Woolworths, SPAR and Pick 'n Pay (Writer, 2021) include:

- The Money Market concept which comprises of an increasingly fundamental part of the sales offering of Shoprite and Checkers, as the Group's two major chains. Its main objective is to preserve consumers time by providing them the ability to undertake most of the activities they'd do "in town" -buying groceries, reserving seats for a show or a sports event, settling accounts, booking a flight- all in one place. This then contributes to positioning the Group's supermarkets as a one-stop-shop destination store that provide consumers a unique range of services. This service attracts a wide range of LSMs due to its offerings that cater for all (IDE-JETRO, n.d.).
- In October 2007 management decided to lower selling prices, specifically on the staple foods sustaining lower income groups. This prompted the growth in value per transaction persisting to settle below the food inflation rate, which led to increasing numbers of consumers into Shoprite's outlets. With operating costs carefully controlled, the increase in sales exceeded the increase in expenses equating to a strong rise in trading profit (IDE-JETRO, n.d.).

Customers value a brand more when it distributes its services in a luxury, high-tech retail environment than a discount store Irrespective of price (Meis, 2018). Therefore, to penetrate the desired market, an identity needs to be developed in which consumers can relate too or aspire to be. By managing to provide a world class experience, that rotates around beneficial luxury shopping, checkers has developed a brand equity and positioning that demonstrates luxury, allowing for a unique proposition that allows people to associate the brand with a higher LSM, however still caters for middle LSM' s ranging from 4-7 due to their strategies in providing lower prices. The extended- self is then catered to customers varying from low to high LSMs in which they can adopt, to experience luxury irrespective of LSM, due to the offerings and experiences Checkers has implemented.

Characteristics of the brand experience in the in-store retail environment

Experiential marketers perceive consumers as rational and emotional human beings who are interested in achieving pleasurable experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1998) developed the Experience Economy Theory that suggests value is established through experience, in which a competitive advantage can be derived, where the experience can trigger a perception of a brand in the mind of the consumer. The theory lends itself to the concept of experiential marketing, which is entirely personal as it relies on the customers' individual perceptions. It also indicates a customer's participation resulting from the customers' response to diverse interactions with the brand, its offerings or other parts of the organization, encouraging the customer to react positively or negatively, influencing purchase behaviours due to the brand experience guiding the value and equity of the brand (Meis, 2018). In the event of Checkers, it has been decided that this specific retailer will be assessed and explored in accordance to brand experience components to understand whether or not Checkers employed brand experience to assist their rebranding and positioning to influence higher LSM'S perception of the brand in favour of it, as they were able to successfully penetrate and gain market share amongst the targeted LSM. In addition to their success in the premium market, Checkers was chosen due to their promise to their customers, that they ensure they get better and better by continuing a tradition of innovation, customer excellence, products and services that inform delightfulness (Checkers, 2020). Better and better allowed them to improve and rebrand themselves through their concept stores through the strategy of focusing on establishing a 'fresh food theatre'. This theme and concept ignite the idea of an experience, in relation to the emergence of local

food and farmer's markets, sprinkled across South Africa that offer a variety of local produce. By employing an experience, Checkers may be assessed through the following components developed by Schmitt (1999), namely the Strategic Experiential Module, informed by Pine & Gilmore's (1998) experience economy theory to understand whether or not the experience aided in their successful growth. The components identified by Schmitt (1999), would be used as a checklist through ethnographic research implemented at Checkers, are as follows:

There are five different types of experiences, or strategic experiential modules (SEMs), that marketers can employ for customers such as: sensory experiences (SENSE), affective experiences (FEEL), creative cognitive experiences (THINK), physical experiences, lifestyle and behaviours (ACT) and social-identity experiences resulting from relating to a reference group or culture (RELATE) (Schmitt, 1999; Beverland et al., 2007). These experiences are implemented through the brands positioning, which dictates all aspects and touchpoints of the brand.

The **SENSE** components include:

- Spatial layout:

When the number of people, objects, or both, in a limited space (referred to as density) restricts or interferes with individuals' activities and goal achievement, the individual will perceive the environment as crowded, where that level of in-store crowding perceived by shoppers can affect their patronage decisions as well as satisfaction with the overall shopping activity (Eroglu, Machleit and Mantel, 2000). From a point of performance, customers are more delighted in a promptly-delivered service, within an ergonomic and functional space.

- Background Music

Considerations to music is an important element of store atmosphere directly influencing consumer buying behavior (Levy and Weitz, 2002). Matilla and Wirtz (2001) discovered that music can influence impulse behaviour as well, where slow music and jazz allows consumers to linger longer, which increases sales.

- Store scent

Aroma usually directly affects the emotions and moods of customers (Levy and Weitz, 2002). The shop's pleasant aura encourages customers to spend more time browsing through merchandise, which can contribute to purchasing urge, as opposed to an unpleasant smell that wards consumers away, where scents may generate various perceptions of the quality of the store (Bindu, Kodali and Ratna, 2021).

- Store colours

The retail store should initially be decorated in the brand's dominant colours, for brand recognition and communion. From there, a series of colour combinations are permitted in order to induce a certain state to customers (Bindu, et al., 2021), where a chromatic colour scheme produces a general implication of strength, authority, and classiness, while colours like red, grabs attention, increases heart rate, and prompts immediate decisions (Woodley, 2022) .

- Use of hi-tech equipment

Modern equipment, which may also be associated with the THINK approach, allow for extra services such as access to wireless Internet, financial and business news, etc. All these generate, for a certain public, the appreciation of effectiveness, efficiency and create the interest of returning to that location as soon as possible (Bindu, et al., 2021).

- Signage

The use of signs, symbols and artefacts would allow explaining the process of unfolding services, reducing time spent by customers, and creating the feeling of effectiveness for customers. In the case of multi-brand retail stores, signs and symbols help in brand recognition (Bindu, et al., 2021).

- Social media component

People love sharing their experiences on social platforms like Instagram, hence the rise of IG-friendly museums, flower walls, back drops, restaurants and more (Nicasio, 2021). Considering an aesthetic component aids in a greater number of customers from shared experiences online to experience that aesthetic for themselves.

FEEL marketing components include:

- Expert salesperson:

In a conceptual discussion of customer-salesperson relationships, Lee and Dubinsky (2010) present that perceived attributes of salespeople (e.g. trustworthiness, expertise, empathy) influence customer's emotional responses (positive or negative), which then determine relationship satisfaction and purchase intention.

- In-store campaigns and advertising
- Safe shopping experience

COVID-19 has drastically altered consumer behaviors, prominently when shopping offline. Consumers are more health and safety conscious, where cleanliness, hygiene, and sanitisation are must-haves for an in-store experience strategy, especially when targeting a Higher LSM, where lack of safety and cleanliness dictate negative perceptions of the establishment, associating such with negligence to their products and services where business may be lost (Nicasio, 2021).

- Redefined checkout experience

An Omnicro Group Study found that Americans abandon checkout lines, leaving without a purchase after waiting in a checkout line for eight minutes (Gingles, 2014), where British shoppers leave after six minutes (Gingles, 2014). In addition, 77% of Americans who have experienced long checkout lines are less likely to return to that store (Gingles, 2014). Therefore, innovative solutions to checkout lines in the event of a congested store is essential for positive feelings of the in-store experience.

THINK marketing includes:

- Product packaging and design

Packaging supplies the manufacturer with the final opportunity to persuade prospective buyers prior to brand selection (Ezie, Newman and Oayaa, 2017), where consumers are conscious in what they associate themselves with. Aesthetics, colour, material, shape and usability significantly play a role in purchase choices. Colours in association to a specific product, sustainable materials, easy navigation

and use, text placement and pictorial elements all contribute to the likelihood of a products purchase (Ezie, et al., 2017).

- Physical and digital collaboration.

Modern consumers use multiple channels and devices in their shopping journeys. Aside from shopping in-store, phones, computers, and tablets are used to research and buy products. Therefore, it's important to be an omni-channel retailer, providing seamless information and interactions for the consumers, giving the retailer a competitive advantage as all touchpoints in a digital sense are employed, with association to their in store experience (Bolton, Cheung, Gallan, McColl-Kennedy, Orsingher, Witell and Zaki, 2018).

ACT marketing includes:

- Co-Branding and collaborations

Co-branding combines the reputation and competencies of one brand and transfers the associated value to another brand, ultimately benefiting from the equity of the brand where the brand equity isn't highly perceived. By collaborating with people/ other brands to improve equity and associations, customers will intend on consuming a brand due to its associations to the other high equity brand, to establish and feed or grow the extended-self-image as the brand has initiated that platform to do so (Priluck,Till and Washburn, 2000).

- Hands-on fun

Allowing customers to experience your products in unique and experiential ways as opposed to them packed on shelves lends its hand to an in-store experience as it engages the audience in physical experiences, showing them alternative ways of doing things, alternative lifestyles and interactions through their offerings (Nicasio, 2021).

RELATE marketing contains:

- Promote a sense of community

It's important to find ways to bring people together in a store. Inviting customers and community members to events hosted by the retailer where they can learn new things, interact with like-minded

individuals, or catch a break, provides an atmosphere of belonging amongst like-minded customers (Nicasio, 2021).

- “Retailtainment” an immersive experience.

Ultimately, combining all experiential modules, the aim of the retailer is to provide customers with fun, unique experiences that elevate shopping above anything it’s previously been, to create memorable experiences that consumers are intrigued by, setting them apart through entertainment (Motta-Filho, 2020).

Therefore, a study performed by Fortes, Moreira and Santiago (2017) points out that brand experiences are increased by the means of multi-sensory stimulation in accordance to Schmitt’s (1999) theoretical module, which then leads to increased purchase intention. Sensory Ethnography will then be employed to assess if Checkers has implemented Brand experience components documented in the literature review, lending its hands to the possibility of brand experience as a tool that may have aided to their growth.

Using ethnographic research to help understand Brand Experience

Ethnographic methodologies allow researchers to holistically understand the retail phenomenon by immersing themselves in the field and experiencing the events of the retail atmosphere and store. Consequently, ethnography is intrinsic for capturing the natural flow of this holistic phenomenon understood and assessed in relation to brand experience components documented in the literature review. Ethnographic approaches provide a holistic narration of the experiential retail phenomenon through understanding, description and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). With that said, ethnography provides a viable vehicle for data collection and analysis of an in-store experience. Ethnography can benefit experiential retail research by confronting and capturing human activities. It directly exposes the nature of transactions between the consumer and environment, allowing the customer to clearly articulate/express their own understanding. In addition, ethnography allows researchers to explore and engage in the discovery of meanings within the authentic context of the customer and retail outlet. Here the researcher can witness what is being done, experience what is being expressed and listen to what is being said. The researcher is exposed to the facts linked to the real

environment, as opposed to customer verbal accounts that may not truly reflect their actions. As such, researchers are compelled to experience and witness customer immersion within the fluid mix of in-store elements (Beverland et al., 2007).

Conclusion

In ending, customer immersion within the fluid mix of in-store elements prompt an ideal experience for customers (Beverland et al., 2007). By understanding the immersing middle to upper income households in South Africa, and the evident consumer culture, which South African's use to demonstrate their level of success, Brands may use an experience to increase their value proposition and position themselves in a position they best want to be perceived in accordance to experiences, irrespective of their pricing to target any consumer, where a rebranded brand may still cater for the existing target as pricing and services continue to stay the same. With that said, it is important to understand a service provided and an experience are not the same, where a service may aid in the experience of the brand. Additionally, customers value a brand more when it distributes its services in a luxury, high-tech retail environment than a discount store Irrespective of price (Meis, 2018). Therefore, to penetrate the desired market, an identity needs to be developed in which consumers can relate too or aspire to be. By allowing individuals the ability to relate to a brand throughout an in-store experience, employs a growth in brand equity and value perceived by the customers. It is also important to note that these branded experiences initiate added value to a brand due to the memories the brand has initiated from a sound experience. The value initiated by memories allows a preference amongst other competitive brands, initiating growth in the targeted markets. Importantly, brands can only communicate a successful experience and reach a desired outcome when they understand their brand entirely where the brand influences the outcomes of the brand experiences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research paradigm:

Interpretivist paradigm has been chosen to understand and describe the implementation of meaningful social action and experiences in grocery stores. This allows the researcher to understand the impact of

the physical environment in yielding a greater market share amongst targeted audiences. The Interpretivist epistemology is defined as something that is seen as knowledge when it feels right to those being studied. Common sense is an important source of knowledge. Therefore, common sense could be employing experiences for the consumer to increase preference for grocery shopping stores, or to not at all, dependent on the researcher's researched outcome. Reality is fluid and subjective and is created by human interaction, in accordance to the interpretivist's ontology, where, for Checkers to increase its market share, will be through the brand experience employed in the physical environment, and how the brand has provided interactive experiences, therefore too understand the growth behind checkers would be to ensure people experience all aspects of Checkers positively. Uniqueness is valued, according to Axiology, in a sense that people are attracted to brands with Unique selling propositions that differentiate them from the rest of the market. Therefore, in a grocery sense, a brand that employs unique experiences in their physical stores provides preference and lasting memories valued by customers.

Research design/approach:

The reason behind the researcher's decision to follow an interpretivist paradigm is to understand how brand experience plays a role in consumer interest for a brand, more so by implementing exploratory means, through sensory ethnography in a physical environment. This paradigm allows the researcher to employ a qualitative research approach to understand a social phenomenon in a natural setting, allowing the researcher to understand brand experience (social phenomena) in the grocery store, namely Checkers (natural setting) as this emerging phenomena, brand experience, has allowed for stores to gain the interest of consumers, build relationships and ultimately loyalty due to how well a brand's positioning has been executed through their brand experience. This approach allows the researcher to implement sensory ethnography. Sensory ethnography acts as an assessment to analyse, through sensory components and triggers, every aspect of brand experience in the physical environment identified in the literature review to see if a grocery store implements the brand experience to communicate their brand positioning. This research will be cross-sectional as the as research does not expect the researcher to assimilate into the environment and assess it over a period of time, but rather identify and analyse if characteristics of brand experience are present in the Checkers FreshX store, implementing a "step in step out" approach, especially due to school time constraints. Therefore, if the grocery store implements all aspects from the literature review assessed through sensory ethnography, this allows the researcher to understand that

brand experience may increase the grocery stores market share as brand experience conceptualises that its successful implementation draws in consumers. The research will also adopt a deductive approach, by developing objectives from existing theory, and then designing a research strategy (using the Strategic Experiential Module documented in the conceptualisation and literature review in the physical environment) to test whether or not brand experience has been implemented in the rebranded Checkers stores, by means of assessing if checkers has implemented such characteristics, which ultimately is exploratory. This exploratory research will then answer the research questions and problems through the ethnographic methodology in addition to the literature review.

Population:

In order to directly and successfully deduce the criteria from the purpose statement, which outlines the need for experiential marketing in a brand's touchpoint, specifically in its place touchpoint as well as align, target and reach objectives of rebranding and repositioning the brand to target a different SEM segment while maintaining its existing target, the population was the Checkers Concept stores. The nature of the population is social artefacts in the form of retail/grocery stores, where the target and accessible population is all Checkers FreshX concept stores in Johannesburg, Gauteng. The unique characteristics of the population was the specific social artefact of the checkers FreshX concept stores as opposed to other Checkers types, like Hyper and so forth. The researcher believes these particular stores boasts brand experience as it implements co-branding, by the likes of Kauai and Starbucks, a wine cellar, various departments and various elements the consumer can explore. Checkers also wants to target consumers belonging to 8-10 LSMs, where these concept stores have initially been implemented in areas that host the homes of these targeted consumers such as Brackenfell, Rosebank, Menlyn and Sandton to name a few, with the unit of analysis being the Checkers FreshX Concept store (the store). These stores ultimately meet the objective and purpose criteria due to its documented in-store experiential factors, its positioning for varying LSM markets through its deliberate physical positioning in its targeted LSM's expansion areas.

Sampling:

The sample was the Checkers FreshX Concept store at Sandton city mall, Johannesburg. Sandton particularly had been chosen as it was the flagship store for the new Checkers FreshX store and is strategically located in an area home to many consumers with living standard measures ranging from 8-

10, to aid and supplement their target objective. Therefore, the sampling method was non-probability convenience sampling as the researcher deliberately targeted the Checkers FreshX stores, to better analyse how a premium conceptualised store established in-store methods and characteristics that directly highlighted and emphasised a premium rebrand and quality, as opposed to sampling methods (probability) which would find the researcher evaluating a sample store like other Checkers types, which haven't employed brand experience or premium ideologies, only yielding findings that contradict Checker's positioning, when the concept store exists, which spoke somewhat directly to the research literature and objectives. Non-probability is further favoured by the researcher as they are aware of the areas the concept stores have been implemented in, due to the new target audience, who belong to higher Living standard measures and live in those areas. In addition, Sandton city was/is also accessible and convenient to the researcher, where the sample size is 1 FreshX concept stores

Data-collection method:

Due to the researcher choosing a qualitative approach, a field research study was used to observe and analyse the distinct behaviour of a subject in that setting. In the event of the research, sensory ethnography was used which allowed the researcher to observe and analyse brand experience through its physical implementation in the store, through photographs and field notes, in the form of a checklist, provided in the annexure. Photographs were used as tool to credibly answer if Checkers FreshX Concept store had implemented the brand experience characteristics documented in the literature review. Field notes were taken in correspondence to the photographs to best describe and narrate each brand experience adequately, what it was and the experience it evoked, which images tend to lack. 4 visits to Sandton were exercised, twice a day during the middle of month and 2 visits a day at the end of the month.

The middle of the month visit, was done on the 16th of August being a weekday at 10am to understand the social dynamics as many were working, and at 5pm, the time when many who were working had knocked off work. However, the researcher opted to stay the whole day observing the transition of social dynamics.

The second day visit happened on the last Saturday of August, this time following the late morning and 5pm times as stated in the proposal. These times and days were strategically chosen to identify the range of consumers entering the store to understand and generalise the experience the environment evoked for the customers, as well as to note the social dynamics and engagement the environment established

amongst a varying group of individuals, whether it was dependent on the week, the availability of funds and the times on a specific date.

Data analysis method:

Visual ethnography was used in the study based on the concepts and characteristics of brand experience noted in the literature review, in which the researcher went out into the field to analyse and observe if in fact Checkers had implemented them in their FreshX stores. The data collection and analysis methods married into one another as the photographs and field notes, were then organised in accordance to each other, by means of relating the photo to the field notes, in which categorising these data collection tools with the correct characteristic within the specified concepts, identified in the literature review, were implemented. The identified characteristics in the literature review was used to interpret the characteristics Checkers employed in their stores and how they executed it. The notes taken were then addressed and further expanded in explaining how an experience was curated through such noted characteristics with adequate research behind the characteristic choices employed, transcribed digitally, to which, shared codes appeared amongst varying themes within the concepts. Additional reference was added as the researcher tried to further understand why certain in-store solutions were executed to further analyse if those solutions successfully aided in a positive brand experience. These codes aided in answering the objectives and assisting the research design, to provide an overview of how brand experience is best executed in retail stores, in which, regardless of themes and varying solutions, all these solutions should have these similar codes within them to encourage consistency in the brand. Conclusions were drawn on how successful a brand experience characteristic was and is for Checker's particularly, giving other researchers a point of reference of understanding that certain brand types where specific brand experiences executed, may or may not work for all brands. This also helped in answering the research questions as this analysis of the brand experience characteristics provided answers to whether or not The Strategic Experiential Module was evident in the store and allowed the researcher to understand how brand experience resolutions were intricately added in or thought through in accordance to their positioning. From this, in the event that a concept, from the Strategic Experiential Module (Sense, Think, Feel, Act and relate) had no single characteristic filled out, brand experience had not been implemented, in the Checkers FreshX concept store and in other stores the research may aid in.

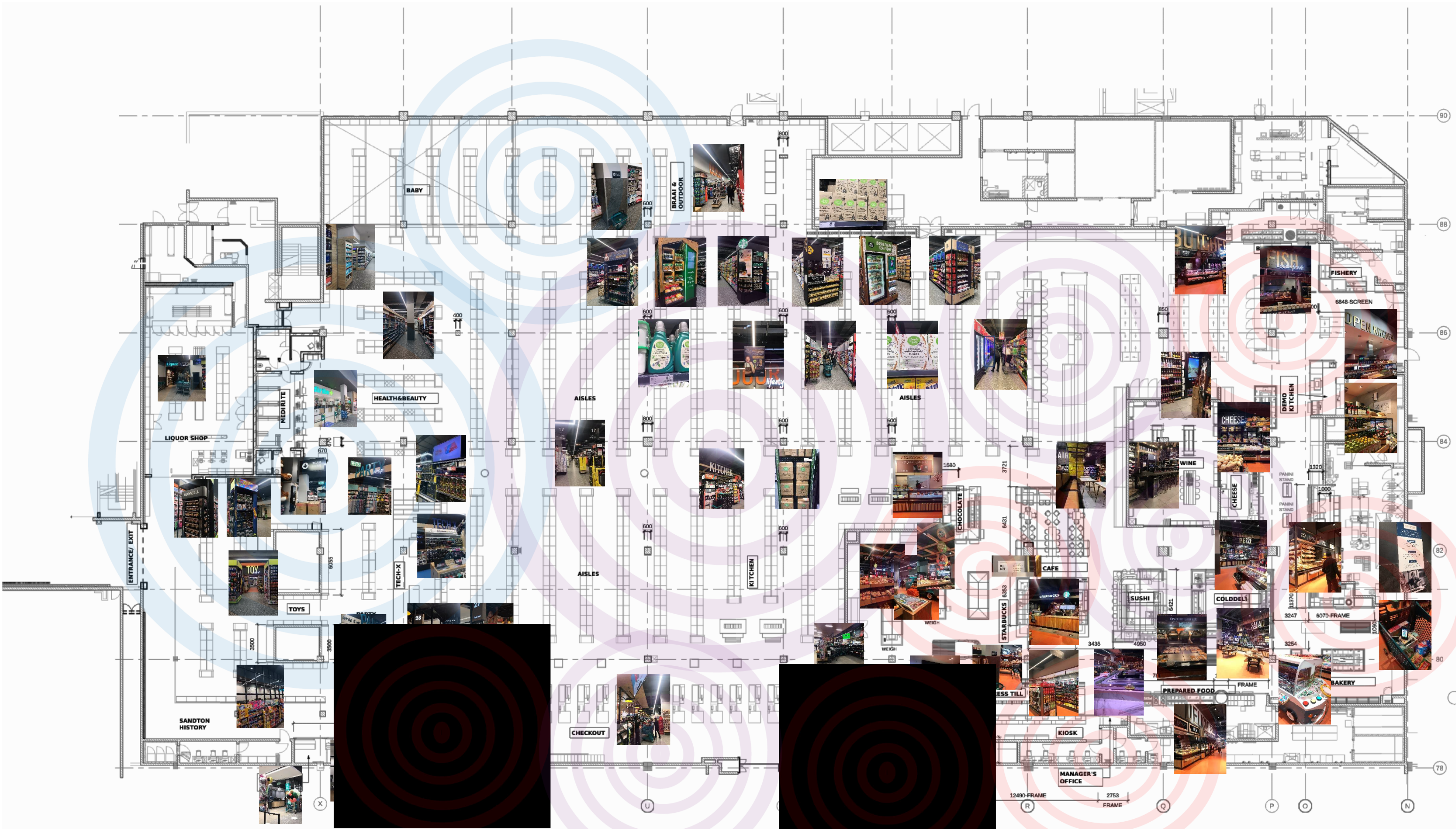
FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction to chapter

In this chapter, the understood and documented literature will then be further dissected to understand sensory ethnography in South African stores. Academic literature focuses on a theoretical approach to sensorial ethnography in the stores, however research specifically in grocery stores struggles to provide its conduction or is rather approached specifically to one or a few characteristics of Schmitt's (1999) module. From this, following will be an engaging and experiential (carrying through the research purpose in documentation form for readers) visualisation of the findings, understood by further explanation, supported by the interpretation of findings in linkage to the literature as well as the conceptual module. This chapter concludes by addressing the research problem, question and objectives to better understand if Sensory Ethnography was understood and used in the grocery store to support and improve customer experiences directly and positively affecting preference and the success of the brand.

VISUALISATION OF FINDINGS

TRAFFIC DENSITY	
KEY:	DESCRIPTION
	HIGH TRAFFIC
	MEDIUM TRAFFIC
	LOW TRAFFIC



Plan 1: Tshifularo, V. 2022. Floor Plan of Checkers FreshX Visualisation.[Plan]

Findings and interpretation

SENSE

Spatial layout

The aisles measured an average of 10 feet in space in which the researcher conducted that they were approximately 2400mm in size. The store accommodated lighting that was dim, matched with red flooring, which served the food areas, and bright lighting that of a cold temperature matched with grey flooring, in the non-perishable and non-edible aisles. The store itself forcefully directs the consumer to the right as the left is barricaded by the checkout points and the middle is obstructed with a flower display that leans against the magazine display and positioned adjacent to the trolleys. The first visual encounter of prominence when entering is Starbucks as well as the aesthetically pleasing café area. Checkers also employs both a loop (food area) and grid formats in their store.

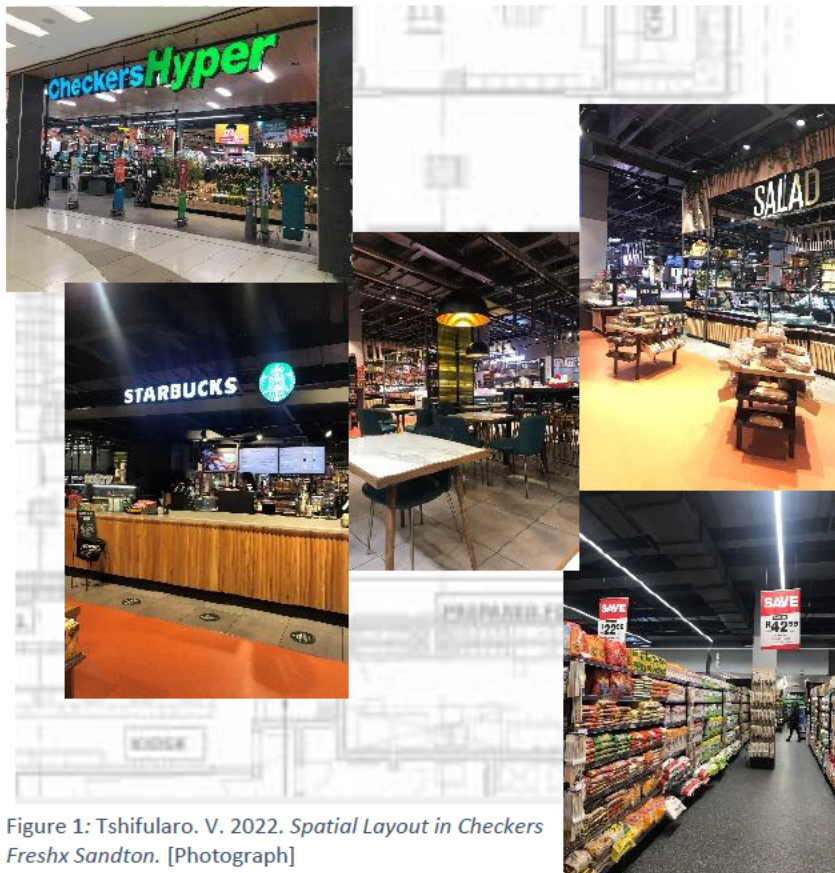


Figure 1: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Spatial Layout in Checkers Freshx Sandton*. [Photograph]

CODES:

Strategy | positive perception
Premium brand | Sophistication
Achromatic colours | Orange/appetite
Food theatre/ market | Sushi Bar
Deli | Chocolate bar | Café | Purchase
Relaxed | layout | Opportunity
Convenience | Preference | In-store
Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 2: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Spatial layout code in Checkers Freshx Sandton*. [Photograph]

Interpretation

Although the researcher prefers to enter the store on the left, especially in cases where they are browsing, researchers have found that people are prone to enter the store on the right (Woodley, 2022), where Checkers has strategically placed obstacles to force the customer to the right. Although the flowers, trolleys, and the immense in-store advertisement initially greets the customer, the first conscious visual encounter is the Starbucks stall and café. Usually the first visual encounter should make the biggest impact to the consumer, as they are still in the process of perceiving the brand. Starbucks exudes high status and sophistication which allows consumers to perceive the Checkers brand as a sophisticated premium brand in conjunction to the black, whites, greys and wooden paneling of the store understood at the entrance, in which the brand has positioned themselves towards. The orange flooring and warm lighting only encourages appetite on the right of the store, namely the food theatre, encouraging the customer to hang out, relax, and spend more time in their Checkers. The eyes of the consumer begin to note the sushi bar, the wine area, the Deli and the chocolate area, encouraging them to browse, where the seating area at the sushi bar, the wine area and café allow consumers the opportunity to relax and encourage a purchase, in which the researcher found themselves doing. In accordance to the literature, the type of layout chosen greatly impacts the image the store has on consumers (Baker et al., 1994), affecting in-store consumer behaviour and satisfaction, ultimately contributing to preference and store profitability, due to the operational efficiency of a well-designed store layout. This food area encompasses various loop layouts, where research highlights that this layout is the best choice for a more relaxed shopping experience, with a simple guided experience, lending itself to a great storytelling opportunity (Woodley, 2022), where Checkers has grasped on this opportunity to demonstrate a food theatre and market concept to the right of the store, highlighting the story of people browsing, sitting, watching and enjoying the products they're indulging in. After a guided market experience, the path leads the consumer/ researcher to the more cooler lighted grid layout areas of the store, which is best for grocery stores, as it is easy for customers to navigate and save time, reading and viewing products best in the brighter, cooler lighting and skipping to the areas with the products they need, aided by the signage (Woodley, 2022), which promotes the idea of convenience that Checkers exercises. This grab and go attitude for the grid layout may not be the best for preferred profitable sales as it doesn't quite invite browsing leisurely, where Checkers has combatted this by strategically ensuring consumers enter to the right of the store to leisurely browse through the food theatre, to ultimately lead them out to the areas they the prefer.

Music:

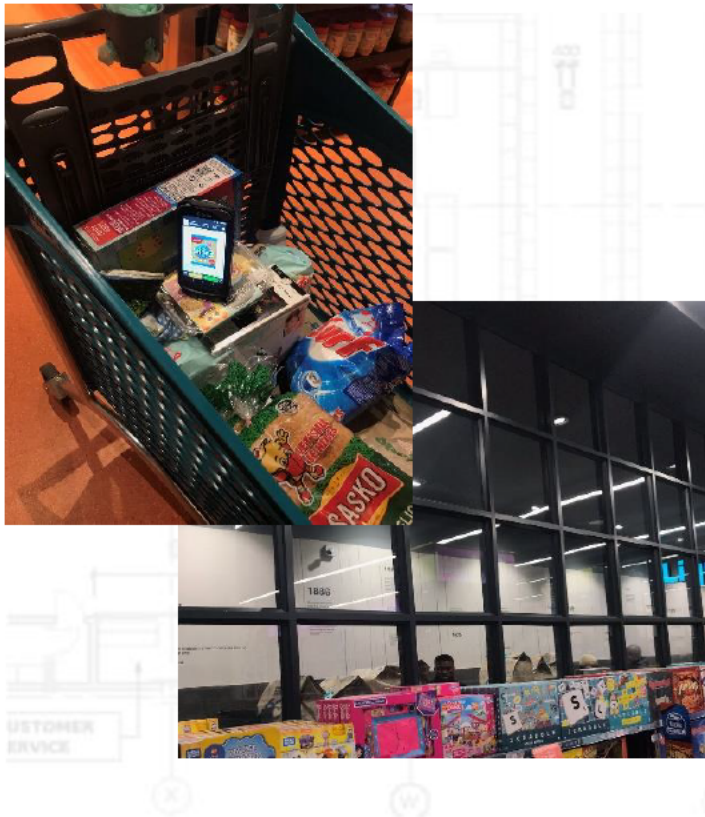


Figure 3: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Music in Checkers Freshx Sandton*. [Photograph]

CODES:

Strategy | positive perception

Checker Sixty60 | Digital & physical

Reliability | Innovation | Health

Memorable | Brand Identity

Convenience | Preference | In-store

Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 4: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Music code in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

Checkers FreshX Concept store does not provide overall music, however on the first Saturday visit, house music boomed through the speakers of the TechX market area, and retired when the researcher appeared for their last visit. Overall sound radiates from the chatter of customers as well as employees, the continuous humming of the refrigerators, the 'pings' from the Checkers Sixty60 app scanners, the employees packing the store goods and the intercom summoning employees to designated areas within the store every now and then. The various sounds merge together complimenting one another to create a music genre of its own, which those paying attention are likely to take note of the sounds, where the researcher would pick up the sounds that have been unconsciously digested by the consumers that walk in and out of the stores.

Interpretation

Considerations to music is an important element of store atmosphere directly influencing consumer buying behaviour. Levy and Weitz (2002), noted in the literature review, emphasise the importance of music as it directly influences buying behaviours on consumers. People have then invested their time and energy in researching the science behind music and sound to find out what kind of audio engages, retains and resonates well with audiences, where brands are encouraged to develop a distinguishable sound identity. Although checkers discards the idea of music, the researcher believes that an example of a Sound identity in Checkers would be the 'pings' of the Checkers sixty60 scanners. This allows consumers to recall Checkers's omni-presence, effectively tying digital and physical experiences together. Checkers prides themselves with convenience and reliability (Checkers, 2021) as a brand, where the pings remind in-store shoppers of its convenience in online shopping and delivery, the innovation and ease of the app, groceries conveniently delivered to consumers in 60 minutes. Reliability samples an example of the app aiding those during the governance of the covid-19 pandemic and still aiding those who are currently health conscious today, where the sonic DNA of the 'ping' innovatively creates a distinguishable sound identity for Checkers, with uniformed thoughts across both the website and the brick-and-mortar store.

Store scent

Checkers neglects the presence of an overall store scent but smells are rather evident in specific areas relevant to the product being sold, where a whiff of cold meat was caught in the meat market, African hair butters and products perfumed the hair and body areas, with a banquet of cooked delicacies marinating the prepared food environments, the aroma of baked bread occupied the bakery, while other in-store areas lay dormant with no prominent smell.

CODES:

Strategy | positive perception

Memorable | Emotional | Encourages

Connection | Preference | In-store

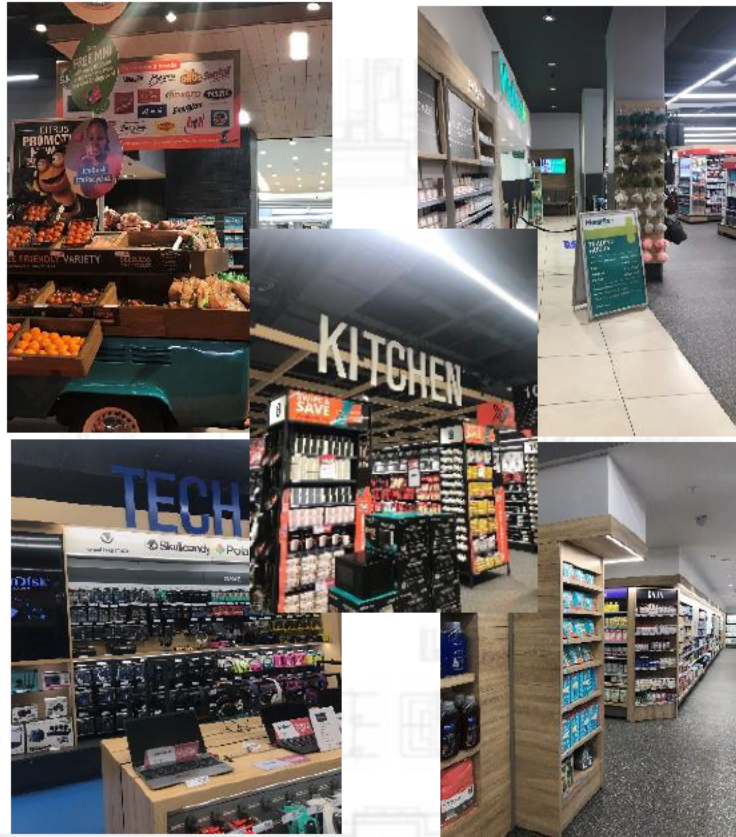
Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 5: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Store Scent code in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

Interpretation

As noted in the literature review by Bindu, Kodali and Ratna (2021), the aroma of the store affects the emotions of customers, where unpleasant odours would rather repel customers, leaving an emotional discomfort and an unhappy experience, while a pleasant scent encourages an attraction to the store, leaving a pleasing emotional connection. The researcher believes that it is rather appropriate to not have a specific smell for Checkers as it would interrupt the mood of the given environment. Having the general store smell like cold meat, like many retailers do today, leaves customers dissatisfied with an unhappy memory due to such cold meat overpowering areas like the hair and body store areas, where a lavender scent in the bakery will only affect the emotional moods of the customer as the cognitive processing would not align with the visual intake. Therefore, Checkers has used Scent marketing correctly by diffusing strategically chosen scents at different markets in the store. This has aided in creating a memorable and pleasant shopping experience to increase sales. Although an overall ambient scent for stores allowed consumers to perceive a store with luxury and high-end connotations, in which Checkers strive to promote (Keenan, 2021), the Checkers retailer wouldn't be plausible where selected and thematic scenting in various areas are more plausible. Customers tend to spend increased time in scented locations with a study from Samsung revealing how consumers underestimated shopping time by 26% (Keenan, 2021) and visited three times more products when exposed to themed fragrances in relation to non-themed ones. The researcher reflected back to her experience and realised that indeed she found herself spending time in the fragranced spots more so the food areas and body sections and rarely visited but found herself speeding and peeping through the packaged aisled products areas, when the methodology and checklist prompted her to.

Store colours



CODES:

Rebrand | positive perception | In-store

Premium brand | Sophistication

Achromatic colours | Orange/appetite

Sushi Bar | Café | Purchase | Influence

Clean | Brand identity | Elegance

Modern | Preference | Target Market

Overpopulated advertisement | Sleek

Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 6: Tshifularo. V. 2022. Store Colours in Checkers FreshX Sandton. [Photograph]

Figure 7: Tshifularo. V. 2022. Store Colour code in Checkers FreshX Sandton. [Photograph]

Blacks, grey and browns, informed the stores overall look, while consistent blues and whites aided the colour scheme with dashes of greens and oranges. The colour black illuminated as the white noise of the store and the signage, while greys were exercised on the tiling on both walls and floors, with browns saturating the wooden bulkheads and shelving around areas in the market with wood finishes plotted around the store to create a sense of uniformity. Blues and greens more so briefed the Checkers sign at the entrance, trolleys, the food truck the sushi bar, the Pharmacy, own-brand packaging, and the TechX side to highlight the branding of the store for recognition. Oranges primed the food area's flooring and the in-store advertisements plotted all over the store, dominating removable fixtures, such as the Xtrasavings advertising. Whites acted as filler, informing in-store text, and acted as white noise which the black didn't entertain. The further back in store one trotted, the white replaced the black specifically in areas where the aisles followed a grid layout.

Interpretation

An achromatic colour scheme which comprises of black, white and grey is a popular colour scheme for interior designers as it denotes themes of simplicity, sleek, clean, elegance and modernity (Denomme, 2022), in which Checkers has employed in their store design. Retailers are catching on this trend and rebranding and revamping their store to entertain these colours as it helps with influencing perceptions. Because Checkers opted to target a premium market, black and white exude sophistication and elegance which the premium market more so indulges in. Adding features that are warm and organic such as wood is a way to break up the store layout, ensuring the customer experience is calming and enjoyable. There are times when a small wooden feature placed in the right location will be extremely dramatic and add just the right look (Elmwood, 2019), such as the wooden bulkhead at the entrance, setting the tone for the entire store layout, and softening the entrance lighting in comparison to that of the bright lighting in areas with little wooden finishes. The literature suggests that the retail store should initially be decorated in the brand's dominant colours, for brand recognition and communion. From there, a series of colour combinations are permitted in order to induce a certain state to customers (Bindu, et al., 2021), wherein the researcher visually noted Checker's success in implementing this technique, with the brand name dominating the entrance, the blue trolleys, blue, white and orange advertisements populating and suffocating the entrance, indicating that it is not just another elegant store but specifically that of the Checkers FreshX Concept store. While the achromatic colour scheme induces a sense of minimalism and sophistication, the researcher believes that the overpopulated advertisements in the front of the store and throughout only slightly contradict the colour scheme meanings. Although the orange advertisements overpopulate the store, orange is often associated with stimulating the appetite, as evidenced flooring marking the food areas, which then did influence the researcher to buy prepared food.

Signage

Checkers possesses typical signage narrated in white on a black board situated between aisles for consumers to navigate the store and products they were/are looking for in the store and the specific aisle. The signage is easy to read, from signage indicating each market section, to smaller specific signs like the Schoon artisanal bread signage, where these type of signage includes extra information to inform and educate the benefits of the product. Signage had been further explored through product display of various brands in store.

Interpretation

Although typical signage has been employed, the literature review indicates that the use of signage explains the process of unfolding services, reducing time spent by customers, and creating the feeling of effectiveness for customers (Bindu, et al., 2021), where the implementation aids in a positive experience as it eases the process of navigation around the store. The researcher appreciated how the Checkers FreshX store incorporated and implemented signage through product display. Examples such as Knorr, Lindt, as well as Starbucks products were displayed in a way that resembled or rather reminded one of stalls at a market on weekends where vendors have their products displayed authentically to attract consumers. Checkers executed that and ensured the product display spoke to the product, helping with brand recognition. Some brands came with screens that educated many on the brand, while others had barcodes and extra information on the product. The researcher delighted themselves in the extra information dotted down on the signage, where the researcher believes that the more information given, the more a connection is established from the receiver, either through sympathetic and empathetic relations. The store basketed various types of signage where



Figure 8: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Signage in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

one particular one intrigued the researcher. The sign was circular in shape with white handwriting commonly plotted around the food area to further elaborate product specifications, influencing a dreamlike state of walking down the streets of Italian markets or rather Italian styled architecture such as Monte Casino in Johannesburg that has similar signage, giving the environment a feel of walking down a market place and further emphasising a food theatre and market concept addressed by Checkers.

CODES:

Food Market | positive perception

Memorable | Influence | Educate

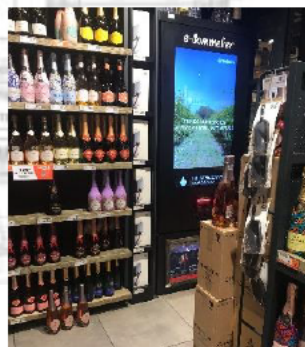
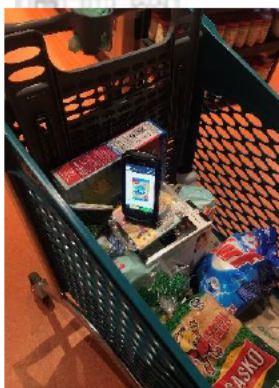
Connection | Preference | In-store

Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 9: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Signage code in Checkers Freshx Sandton.* [Photograph]

High-tech equipment in-store

Equipment or processes used in store was the checkers sixty60 scanners, barcode scanners, both around the store as well as the wine area, where individuals could scan their items to retain information about the product.



CODES:

Hands-on | positive perception

Engage | Digital and Physical | Scanners

Educate | Health | Checkers sixty60

Convenience | Preference | In-store

Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 10: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Hi-Tech Equipment in Checkers FreshX Sandton.* [Photograph]

Figure 11: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Hi-Tech Code in Checkers FreshX Sandton.* [Photograph]

Interpretation

High-tech equipment becomes more plausible when consumers are able to engage in it and with it, as the literature establishes that this equipment ensures efficiency and effectiveness (Bindu, et al., 2021), where consumers develop a preference for that store, finding themselves returning. Because Checkers boasts about convenience for their consumers, the barcode scanners promote convenience, where consumers don't need to find employees and ask about the item and price as the scanners promote a hands on fun experience. The convenience, effectiveness and efficiency is further expanded through the Checkers sixty60 app, where consumers are awarded fast and convenient shopping at the safety and comfort of their home or when grocery shopping isn't as convenient for them at that given time. However, although high-tech equipment was employed, the researcher saw a lack of in-store participation with the barcode scanners and touch screens, in which the high-tech equipment used was from the employees using the Checkers Sixty60 scanners, which in itself showed a high rate of consumer interactivity and participation with the store on a more digital space, emphasising its success with the continuous in-store pings of the scanners as well as the success of an omni-channel experience that all work in accordance to one another in Checkers stores.

Social media component

The Café, the sushi bar, Starbucks, the flower display as well as the winery and the Sandton history wall have all been strategically directed and curated aesthetically to capture the eyes of the consumers for them to take photos and ultimately post on social media platforms.

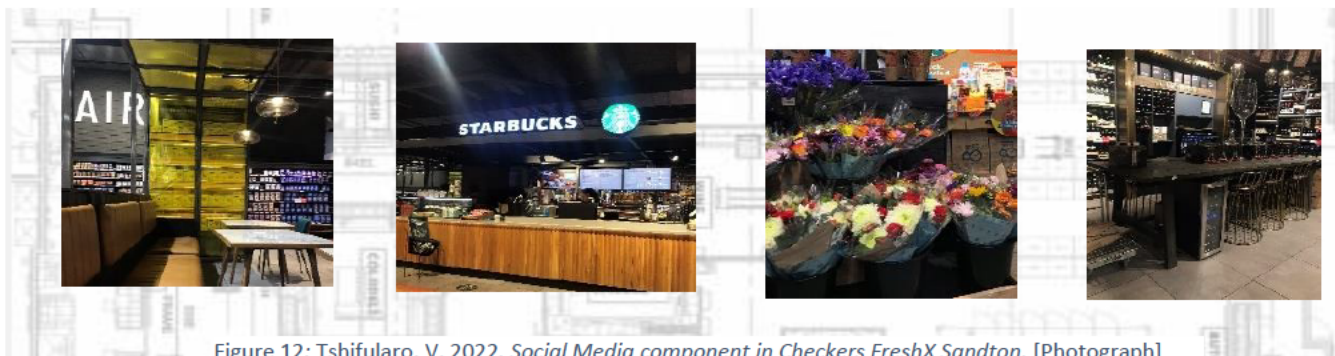


Figure 12: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Social Media component in Checkers FreshX Sandton.* [Photograph]

CODES:

Strategy | Sushi Bar | StarBucks

Wine | Digital & physical | Aesthetic

Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 13: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Social media code in Checkers Freshx Sandton.* [Photograph]

Interpretation

The literature notes that people love sharing their experiences on social platforms like Instagram, hence the rise of IG-friendly museums, flower walls, back drops, restaurants and more (Nicasio, 2021). Given the rise of wine farm tasting and wine cellar photogramable backdrop implemented in restaurants shared on Instagram, Checkers has encouraged a similar objective for consumers to do so through a wine tasting seating area, decorated with wine for people to participate through wine tasting and food pairing, encouraging people to photograph and share their experience on social media for those with similar interests allowing them to come and participate in the luxurious environment. Similar sentiments are shared with the sushi bar where people can sit around the sushi bar and posts their experience and the instagrammable Sushi bar. Both the café and Starbucks also encourage people to photograph their experience where the café adopts a sophisticated aesthetic paired with browns, yellows and whites. For those who marry into the brand image of Starbucks, Checkers is placed in a more convenient place than a standalone Starbucks, where customers are also awarded the opportunity to post their Starbucks coffee runs to promote interest amongst others to go to a Checkers with a Starbucks for consumers who too find the Sandton Mall Starbucks placement a little too inconvenient for them, depending on the entrance used and if they plan on doing grocery shopping altogether. The researcher came to understand that the main attraction was both the café and Starbucks for consumers.

FEEL

Expert Encounter:

Findings and Interpretation

The overall environment was welcoming, with language barriers that were sometimes mistaken for dismissal. A positive and healthy employee culture was evident with everyone getting along with one another, which poured itself to positively assisting the consumers. The first sales employee ensured the researcher felt part of the family, ready to give opportunities, which set the tone for the visit. All in all, the literature highlights that retail salespeople represent an important link for retailers in communicating value propositions to customers and for implementing target market strategies, by influencing their relationship with a brand, wherein friendships and attentiveness should be awarded to consumers to

provide a memorable experience for preference in the future (Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2011). There was a balance between those who could describe the products in each market area best, where the Chocolatier best showed out, in comparison to others who vaguely explained products when the researcher asked, such as the Partyshop representative, which could've been a language barrier. Checkers established a memorable relationship building with the customer/ researcher, through the smiles, laughs and eager-to-help attitude, irrespective of cultural barriers.

CODES:

Positive perception | Memorable
 Connection | Preference | In-store
 Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 14: Tshifularo, V. 2022. *Expert Encounter code in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

In-store campaign and advertisements:

Checkers 60sixty, Checkers Little Shop and checkers XtraSavings advertisements engulfed the entrance with print media advertisements hanging from the ceiling. XtraSavings further exhausted advertisements throughout the store by demonstrating which products had been marked down in the presence of an XtraSavings account prior to purchase. Checkers further improved their XtraSavings advertisements by using their TechX department's TVs for sale, to showcase the Xtrasavings benefits and deals, setting up the account and competitions one would be eligible to partake in. This educates consumers by displaying a sense of care and acknowledgement for consumers.

Interpretation

It is important and beneficial to employ in-store campaigns, as this marketing takes place when the customer is engaged and ready to shop. However, to curate an experiential experience, in-store campaigns and promotions should allow people to engage in and outside of the store. The literature explains that Brand equity formation begins with the customers interacting with the proposition made by the organization, evolving through the development of behaviours (e.g. loyalty). These behaviours create a higher market share and positive cash flow for the organisation (Kapferer 2011). This observed initiative was the Checkers Little Shop Campaign. Checkers is running its third installment of the popular mini-collectibles promotion, where customers receive a free Little Shop collectable for every R200 spent in

Checkers, Checkers Hyper, Checkers Foods and via Sixty60. Checkers encourages customers to swap duplicates with friends and family to complete one's collection, or to simply drop off extras in the bins at every Checkers store.



Figure 15: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Campaigns in Checkers FreshX Sandton.* [Photograph]

CODES:

Hands-on | positive perception

Engage | Digital and Physical | Little shop

Educate | Health/care | Checkersixty60

Overpopulated advertisements | In-store

Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 16: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Campaign code in Checkers FreshX Sandton.* [Photograph]

These campaigns that allow engagement, participation, interest and rewards, yield customer attention and participation as this is the third installment of the campaign allowing for the understanding that these campaigns are successful for the brand, highlighting positive experiences with the brand as it offers more than a printed campaign and the product, but rewards and hands on Community fun, ultimately encouraging strong loyalty to the brand. The researcher had witnessed a customer eagerly collect the collectibles at the till and feel them to guess which mini collectible was in the package. When questioned about her enthusiasm, she expressed how her sons loved the collectibles and further joked that the researcher bring her some if they had any that were not in use.

Safe shopping

Covid-19 introduced and promoted safe and hygienic lifestyles in which public environments employed hygienic practices such as hand sanitizers, and limited numbers of customers. With restrictions easing, Checkers still employs hand sanitizers.

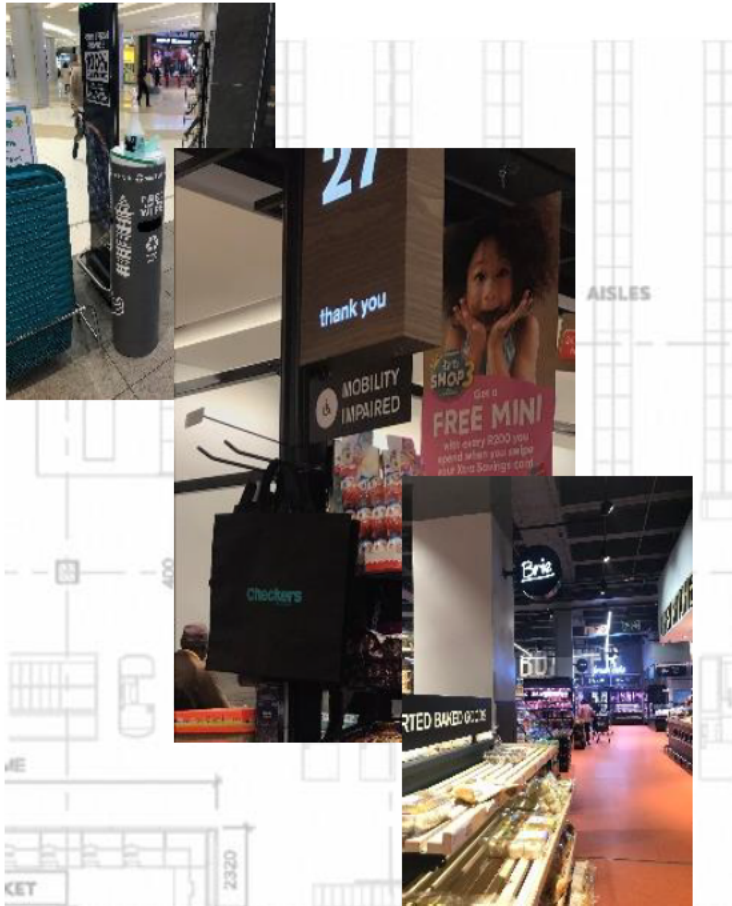


Figure 17: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Safe shopping in Checkers FreshX Sandton.* [Photograph]

CODES:

Hands-on | positive perception
Engage | Digital and Physical | Inclusivity
Educate | Health/care | Checkersixty60
In-store | Checkout | Layout
Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 18: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Safe shopping code in Checkers FreshX Sandton.* [Photograph]

Interpretation

Safe shopping in the retail environment becomes tricky to employ when retail spaces encourage experience that revolve around touching products for engagement, experience and decision making. The literature emphasises that cleanliness, hygiene, and sanitization are must haves for an in-store experience strategy, especially when targeting a Higher LSM, where lack of safety and cleanliness dictate negative perceptions of the establishment, associating such with negligence to the their products and services

where business may be lost (Nicasio, 2021). Cleanliness is an important factor in safe shopping where the researcher wasn't impressed with the dirt left at the café areas, throughout their whole visit, especially when the researcher had spotted a cleaner in the café area. Innovative safe shopping hasn't been implemented in terms of hygienic practices but rather through inclusivity, with spaced out aisles which are wheelchair friendly and a wheelchair friendly checkout till. The Checkers sixty60 has also aided in safe shopping, as its initial core mission was to promote safe shopping in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic, in which many may still opt for it in the event that they prefer to continue to keep safe. Innovation in the realm of safe shopping at Checkers could be better explored outside of the omni-channel presence, with solutions in brick and mortar stores, to encourage safety, without hindrance to immersive participation and experience.

Redefined checkout experience

In addition to typical 1-3 express tills seen at various grocery retailers, Checkers has additionally added an express tills closer to the entrance, as well as at various 'market areas'.

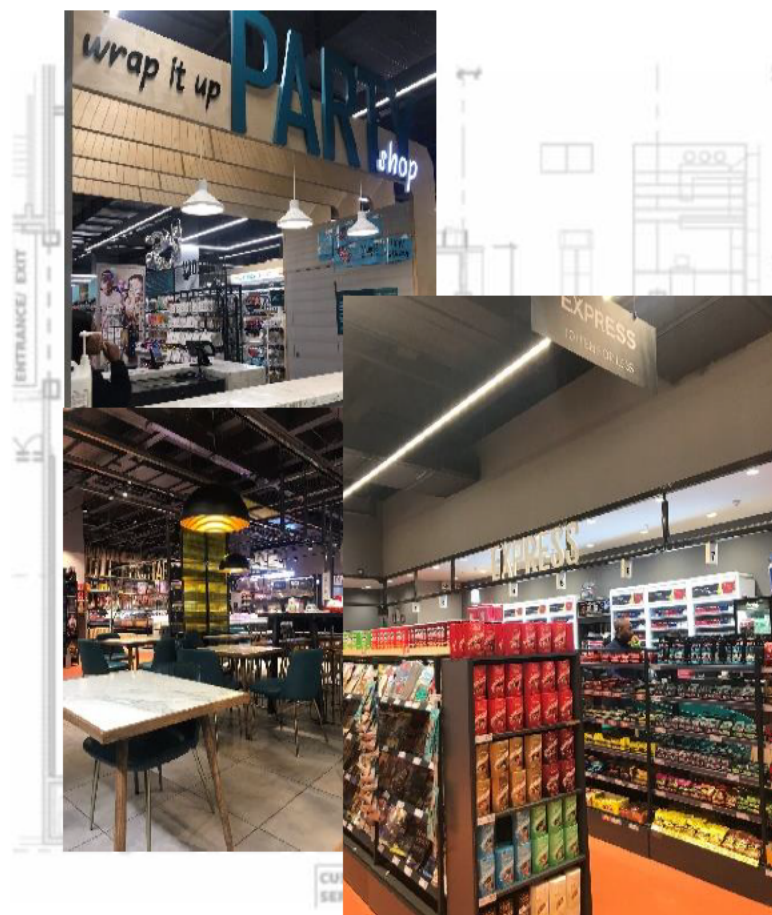


Figure 19: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Redefined Checkout experience in Checkers FreshX Sandton.* [Photograph]



Figure 20: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Redefined checkout experience code in Checkers FreshX Sandton.* [Photograph]

Themed as a food market/ theatre, each stall in these markets all have individual checkouts for individual profit and gain. Checkers has replicated such in which customers shopping at a specific market, be it the PartyShop, the Pharmacy, or Café, are granted permission to purchase items at these markets, as opposed to waiting in line at designated checkout points. Having multiple checkout points in various areas relieves the checkout area from long lines which is costly to the brand, as the literature illustrates that lengthy lines only dampens purchase intent (Gingles, 2014). This is an innovative solution to checkout lines in congested stores promoting positive feelings of convenience, where preference is granted to Checkers due to its memorable and innovative experience and convenience. This was the case as the researcher interestingly saw lengthy lines on both visits throughout the visit, where the visit during the week saw many favouring to stand at the express tills at the entrance while most normal tills stayed vacant which only highlighted that many psychologically saw normal tills as time wasters even though they were empty in comparison to the express tills with lengthy queues.

THINK

Own brand product, packaging and design.

Checkers makes healthier alternatives to everyday products more accessible and affordable with the launch of Simple Truth, its new wellness range label, in which they adhere to promises of no artificial colours or flavours, sweeteners and MSG as well as non-biodegradable, harmful products and packaging. This range sports green, white and brown packaging, evoking clean, simple, responsible and earth-consciousness-eco-friendly behaviour, in which the products and packaging are produced from recycled matter. The prominent green circle makes Simple Truth range easy to find in stores, with each product's unique benefits clearly communicated on the packaging's front. The press release (Checkers, 2018) noted that the demand for healthier and greater convenience for customers continues to rise in due respect to customer consciousness and responsibility to themselves and the environment, where Simple Truth products demonstrate such, retailing at supermarket prices, consisting of convenience meals, snacks, pantry essentials, breakfast staples as well as multi-purpose house products. These products offer gluten free, high protein, organic, raw, reduced sugar, vegan, vegetarian as well as eco-friendly options.



Figure 21: Tshifularo. V. 2022. Own brand in Checkers FreshX Sandton. [Photograph]

CODES:

Health/care | positive perception

Engage | Premium Brand | Inclusivity

Competitive Prices | Sophistication

Clean | Simple | Brand Identity

Convenience | Preference | In-store

Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 22: Tshifularo. V. 2022. Own brand code in Checkers FreshX Sandton. [Photograph]

Additionally, Checkers launched Forage & Feast in November 2020, setting the supermarket standard for premium food products, including a range of items exclusively found at specialty delis and food emporiums. Endorsed by South Africa's first Michelin star chef, Jan Hendrik van der Westhuizen, he confirms the attention to detail, ingredients, provenance and quality of the Forage & Feast range is admirable. The range is sourced responsibly, keeping seasonality in mind (Africa, 2022). With the gold and dark blue design, the label's look and feel gives it a premium brand identity, exuding elegance at a very accessible price point. Tailored specifically to customers' needs for a sophisticated and upmarket product selection, the range has been so well received, wherein Forage & Feast includes at least 216 products spanning across 34 varying categories, with an introduction of 100 new products over the next 12 months.

Interpretation

Retailers globally are expected to expand their offerings to not just sell products but to additionally offer time-strapped consumers solutions. With this, Checkers continues to improve its range of added-value foods, recently becoming the first South African retailer to launch affordable meal kits (Checkers, 2018).

The Checkers products successfully targets a higher audience who appreciate quality, hold themselves to sophistication and consciousness, while pricing these items at competitive prices to ensure each customer whether new or existing all have access to products that demonstrates their values, perceptions of themselves or what they aspire to be as the literature suggests that Packaging supplies the manufacturer with the final opportunity to persuade prospective buyers prior to brand selection (Ezie, Newman and Oayaa, 2017), where consumers are conscious in what they associate themselves with. Although checkers has been successful with their private brand products, the researcher noted that Forage & Feast doesn't resemble the visual identity, however, it is beautifully designed to catch the eye of the consumer, remaining memorable to the customers due to its uniqueness. Both labels think of the customer, through their values. The packaging represents the product; premium, globally conscious, responsible and quality; communicates the products purpose as well as stands out from competitors, improving the brands perception, preference and experience with the brand.

Physical and digital collaboration

Checkers's notable digital innovations is the wine scanner, and during lockdown was its Checkers sixty60 delivery app in which many other retailers soon adapted to. The app was designed to change the way customers shop for products exclusive to Checkers, providing the convenience of dismantling the procrastination of in-store grocery shopping, with present-time shoppers in store, a simplified billing system, and a trustworthy delivery crew, with conveniently grouped products to make digital shopping faster in 60 seconds all delivered in just under 60 minutes.



Figure 23: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Collaboration in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

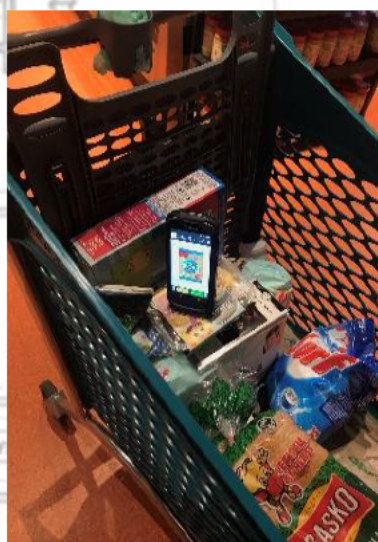


Figure 24: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Collaboration code in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

CODES:

Innovation | positive perception ☐

Engage | Digital and Physical | Scanners ☐

Connection | Health | Checkersixty60 ☐

Convenience | Preference | In-store ☐

Competitive prices | Strategy ☐

Researcher | Customer | Experience ☐

Interpretation

With a strong emphasis on fresh food, convenience and upmarket products and experiences, Customers' needs are catered for through saving their time, staying safe and shopping from the comfort of their home at relatively low prices, with delivery costing R35 (Checkers, 2021). In the event that an item is out of stock, one can choose alternatives happening in real time with the in-store shoppers. The innovative app allows customers to track the driver from the store to the customer's door, with an added convenience of allowing customers to re-order previously purchased groceries. To improve brand experience, it is important to ensure that the ecommerce site works hand in hand with the physical location(s), in which the delivery service ensures real time interaction to ensure groceries are delivered in 60 minutes and to communicate whether a product is available in store or not via the real time shopper. The literature highlights that Modern customers are additionally using multiple channels and devices in their shopping journeys. Aside from shopping in-store, they're using their phones, computers, and tablets to research and buy products (Bolton, Cheung, Gallan, McColl-Kennedy, Orsingher, Witell and Zaki, 2018), emphasising the importance of brands involving an omni-channel approach to keep up with customers for their benefit and convenience. XtraSavings has launched a website that allows customers to assess all the products that are discounted in accordance to possession of a membership, where customers are able to make decisions on what items to purchase prior to setting foot in the store, and whether or not the Xtra Saving account is beneficial to their needs. Ensuring convenience and seamless touchpoints across all channels allows positive and preferred memorable experiences. This was a definite positive and convenient experience the researcher witnessed, from the continuous pings that echoed throughout the store in less than a few seconds apart from another scanner across the store throughout the whole visit. The researcher additionally saw the sixt60 grocery pick up point overcrowded with sixty60 grocery packs with delivery men crowded trying to select their delivery with the help of the checkers employee, highlighting the success of the digital collaboration of Checkers..

Co-branding and collaborations

In-store notable collaborations at the Sandton Checkers FreshX store was Starbucks and recently discontinued stall at Sandton, Kauai.



Figure 25: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Cobranding in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

CODES:

Rebrand | positive perception | In-store

Premium brand | Sophistication

Health/Care | Extended-self

Starbucks | Purchase | Influence

Brand identity | Engage | Innovation

Preference | Target Market

Innovation | Convenience | Connection

Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 26: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Cobranding code in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

Interpretation

The literature argues that collaborations with people/ other brands aid in equity and associations transformation, dependent on the perception of the brands in collaboration (Priluck,Till and Washburn, 2000). In the event that Checkers aimed to improve their rebrand to target a higher market share, collaborations with Kauai who targets a market residing in LSM 8 to 10 segments, who appreciate fast-casual healthy food and Starbucks. November 2021 saw the announcement of Checkers partnering up with Starbucks launching outlets in select supermarkets. This partnership was initiated to gain momentum amongst the South African population, through smaller format kiosks as opposed larger stores, allowing Starbucks to extend to regions and neighbourhoods that are difficult to reach. Checkers themselves saw this as an opportunity to aid in their process to transform the brand to meet the evolving needs of customers of better convenience, connection, and personalisation (Ramalepe, 2021), bringing a world-class coffee experience to its customers as the retailer continues to innovate and customise its offering through an increasingly sophisticated understanding of customers' needs, highly influenced by the repositioning of Checkers to a premium market who are commonly engaging with Starbucks; which is a

sign of status. To the researcher's surprise, Starbucks had been busy throughout the visit where there were times where the Starbucks queue would blur into that of the express tills queue at the entrance, especially as there was an existing Starbucks coffee shop within the mall. These visuals only promoted ideas of convenience in the mind of the researcher as many queued for Starbucks while they shopped, others for the quick convenience of the 'to go' Starbucks, especially as the Starbucks coffee shop promotes a sit down environment.

Hands on fun

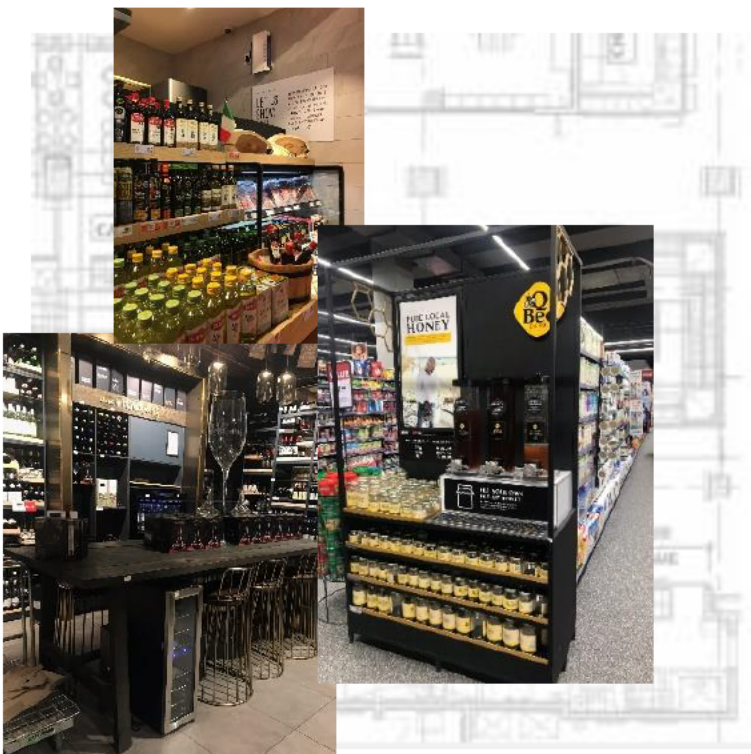


Figure 27: Tshifularo, V. 2022. *Hands on fun in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

CODES:

Hands-on | positive perception
Engage | Digital and Physical | Little Shop
Educate | Fresh Food Theatre
Convenience | Preference | In-store
Researcher | Customer | Experience

Figure 28: Tshifularo, V. 2022. *Hands on fun code in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

A special market area has been dedicated to wine where wine tasting is encouraged. There's a window hatch into the cheese and deli area which allows the consumer to order food to eat in conjunction with their wine, while personnel advise on the best food pairing ideas. There is also an open kitchen concept behind the wine cellar, for food preparation. Queen B Honey has a dispenser where customers are encouraged to fill their honey in empty jars provided near the dispenser.

Interpretation

Hands on fun events provide customers with an experience that teaches and introduces them to a brand's extensive range of products. Literature strengthens this point as Hands on Fun allows customers to experience products in unique and experiential ways as oppose to them packed on shelves, engaging the audience in physical experiences, showing them alternative ways of doing things and alternative lifestyles and interactions through their offerings (Nicasio, 2021). With a strong emphasis on fresh food, convenience and upmarket products and experiences, Checkers has implemented an Open Kitchen area which host various chefs to demonstrate and teach recipes for the customer. The researcher noted that both days had the Open Kitchen closed by product displays symbolising that the Open Kitchen hadn't been used in a while. However, the Open Kitchen wasn't the only kitchen on the premises, where there was a Sushi bar, demonstrating sushi methods for customers to see and engage with the sushi. Both visits saw minimal traffic and customers sitting to watch sushi preparation than anticipated

RELATE

Sense of community interpretation

Implementing environments that support immersive community interactions evoke a brand experience, utilising unique fixtures and storytelling pieces to contextualise products in a relatable lifestyle. Literature further explains that inviting customers and community members to events hosted by the retailer where they can learn new things, interact with like-minded individuals or catch a break, provides an atmosphere of belonging amongst people customers relate to or aspire to be (Nicasio, 2021). Checkers has implemented an open kitchen area in relation to their fresh food theatre theme, which hosts various chefs to demonstrate and teach recipes for the customer, providing convenience by demonstrating product scope in store, engaging with customers on a more intimate level, which ultimately gives customers the tools and opportunities to become their best selves, extending their selves, similarly to the sushi bar and café areas.

Another, example of a sense of community is expressed and illustrated to the Checkers promotion, namely the Checkers Little shop collectibles, wherein with every R200 spent consumers receive a mini-collectible, made from recycled materials – coming in a variety of favourable brands like All Gold Tomato Sauce, Baby Soft toilet paper, Huggies Gold nappies, OMO washing powder, Tastic Rice, and many more. However, the

concealed packaging, makes it difficult to predict the item one will receive, leaving many South African's with duplicate collectibles.

To aid to the issue, most Checkers offer customers the opportunity to swap their repeats at weekly pop-up in-store stands, where checkers encourages friends and family to swap their collectibles to complete ones' collection, or rather simply dropping off extras in the bins at every Checkers store. In the event that in-store fails to provide wanted collectibles, community members have improvised and took a sense of community outside of the corners of the brick and mortar store, where, there are several "swap and sell" Checkers Little Shop 3 groups on Facebook, who are happy enough to lend a hand at a small fee. Facebook Marketplace and Gumtree users are willing to swap items, in the event that you live nearby or are fit to pay the bill of postage (Heever, 2022). If you're open to buying a mini-collectible from a prospective seller, price expectation is roughly R10-R50 each, where collectors are using these platforms to sell older and previous checkers little shop versions.

Similarly, to in-store campaigns, these allow engagement, participation, interest, attention and rewards as this is the third installment of the campaign, allowing for the understanding that these campaigns are successful for the brand, highlighting positive experiences with the brand as it offers more than the product, with rewards and hands on Community fun.



Figure 29: Tshifularo. V. 2022. *Community code in Checkers FreshX Sandton*. [Photograph]

Retailtainment

Retailtainment speaks on behalf of all the characteristics binded together, what the theme of the store is and what they've done to establish such theme. Ultimately, the literature suggests that combining all experiential modules, allows the retailer to provide customers with fun, unique experiences that elevate shopping above anything it's previously been, to create memorable experiences that consumers are intrigued by, setting them apart through entertainment (Motta Filho, 2020). Because Checkers's concept store's theme is a 'fresh food theatre', inspired by a farmers market concept, the researcher observed that Checkers has dedicated themselves to be a one-stop-shop, with a wellness section, party shop and improved pet department, toy kingdom, pharmacy, outdoor store, Partyspot, Open Kitchen, offering a Sushi bar, coffee bar, pizza oven, wine store, chocolatier, cheese section, imported Rodizio grill, Starbucks and a high end bakery in their Sandton Johannesburg store to name a few, all described under the brand checklist. This in store theme allows consumers to experience an environment that promotes a strong brand equity as it provides more than a product or service but experiences that sets the brand apart which promotes positive memorable moments, influencing preference, which develops into loyalty and sales increase amongst targeted individuals.

Overall Interpretation

Throughout the concepts and Brand experience characteristic/ themes, there was evidence that themes overlapped one another and could lend their hand to another theme. Additionally, codes emerged within each theme/characteristic, which all found themselves emerging in various themes outside a singular concept. Prominent codes were experience, convenience, in-store, customer, researcher, engage, educate, positive perceptions, fresh food theatre/ market, memorable, physical and digital collaborations as well as health/ care. These codes ensured some common ideologies that Checkers had implemented to emphasis their messaging, the brand and its image and positioning. It's evident through the themes that Checkers promoted health/ care, whether it was through safe shopping under the SENSE theme, healthy food (through own brand or co-branding), green packaging and environmental consciousness, under the THINK and ACT theme to describe a few. Checkers also encourages educational and engaging characteristics within their store whether through extra information on their signage, which lends its hand to the concept of SENSE from the Strategic Experiential Module, to the wine scanners and barcode

scanners which found itself in the THINK concept. As addressed earlier, the Module saw how concepts overlapped one another, where the scanners were also noted in the SENSE concept. The overlapping of concepts and codes underline how important incorporating or rather ensuring sensory participation and acknowledgement work together to establish and strengthen ideas of Brand Experience. Checkers also wanted to be known for its convenience, in which physical and digital collaborations, own brand packaging and products, safe shopping and checkout experiences all revolved around executing convenience, irrespective of concept. All in all, the Strategic Experiential Module, emphasises how each component relates and works together to illustrate an experience, in which Checkers managed to achieve, to help highlight how they wanted to be perceived by the market. In order to be perceived correctly, consistent messaging and solutions throughout each theme would ensure an experience was additionally being sold.

As stated in the literature review, consistent experiential retail strategies encourage the creation of emotional attachments (Schmitt, 2003). Essentially, the experience revolves around the customer as if he or she were a critical component of a grand emotional theatrical fantasy within a physical store layout (Beverland et al., 2007), due to the combinations of static and dynamic elements. The shopping trip transforms into an adventurous journey, not denoted by the act of consumption but rather by experiencing holistic immersion (i.e. sensory, enjoyment, fun, pleasure, gratification, social encounter, inspiration) (Arnould and Reynolds, 2003), in which Checkers achieved through their Food theatre/Farmer's market concept. The researcher and consumer were prominent codes throughout the findings as the experience to both the consumer and the researcher were/are subjective, wherein strategies by Checkers were employed to ensure this subjective nature from both the consumer and researcher ensured positive interactions and perceptions that most best resembled the brand, in which codes of 'premium' were executed throughout all concepts of the Strategic Experiential Module, whether through packaging and products, store colours as well as brand collaborations that align with meanings of premium connotations, falling under concepts of THINK, SENSE and ACT in that order. All in all, Checkers employed brand characteristics as well as the Strategic Experiential Module in their store as well as ensuring that all concepts and themes worked together to bring forth a memorable experience that develops a relationship with consumers as well as positive memories, insisting preference for all things Checkers, as they strategically placed themselves to be a one-stop-shop, target a new audience and incorporate retailtainment to ultimately increase market share.

Research Question, Problem, Hypotheses/Objectives Addressed

From the findings it was established that Brand Experience had been implemented in Checkers FreshX concept stores. To establish this, The Strategic Experiential module had been fashioned, as it assesses Brand Experience by tackling all points of a brand that may evoke an all-round stimulus to the consumer, where Checkers had implemented experiences through the store design, packaging, service, communications and environments that allowed consumers to interact, learn and experience, the value of the brand, which was more so dedicated to a premium perception. What is important to note is that there is no fixed execution for experience characteristics as Brand Experience can be implemented in varying specialties in the same industry as well as differing industries which are diverse. As much as Brand Experience isn't tackled in food retailers; in comparison to that of luxury fashion brands, as well as restaurants; the grocery retail industry faces challenges of employing a specific theme that lends its hand to unifying all assorted product offerings and departments. However, Checkers was able to innovatively trample the barricade and opt for a theme that would ensure all products were unified and incorporated, where the Farmer's market concept allowed for a one-stop-shop feel, similarly to general Farmer's markets, where one is able to move to various areas within the 'market', being Checkers, emphasising an In-store market. Additionally, Checkers has strategically used positioning to narrate design outcomes, omni-channel presence and marketing to innovatively give them a competitive advantage. In addition to its innovative nature, Checkers was able to answers questions and objectives documented as follows:

Does brand experience implemented in the retail food industry increase market share?

- How do brands communicate positioning in the place touchpoint to target a new audience understood through the literature review in accordance to Checkers?

As noted in the literature review, From the company's perspective, brand identity and positioning is a powerhouse of meanings, a collection of functional and emotional values that enable a promise to be made about a unique and welcomed experience to a targeted audience, representing how the organization wants customers to perceive the brand (Aaker 1996; Böger, Decker, Kottemann and Plumeyer, 2019). From the customers' standpoint, the brand positioning reflects the image and meanings associations appearing from their interactions with the brand manifestations (Aaker 1991) and is the main source of brand equity; defined as the set of assets, liabilities, name and symbolism that either subtracts

or adds to the brand (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2013) determined through customer response and experiences. Through data collection and analysis specific to Checkers, their positioning to target a premium market was executed through shopper touchpoints, where the store itself incorporated achromatic colours which exuded meanings of sophistication and elegance which imply ideologies of premium quality. Their collaboration, by the likes of Starbucks and Kauai, with associations of high end, class and status, improve the perception and equity of Checkers towards a premium perception. Packaging and products, where Checkers has launched a Forage and Feast range, represent a high end status. Convenience, health, wellness-consciousness and good service also represent premium perceptions which Checkers implements through their staff, their delivery app and their product offering.

- What does Checkers do to target a new audience while maintaining the presence of the existing target to ultimately grow their net margin explored in the literature review?

As expressed in the literature review, Customers value a brand more when it distributes its services in a luxury, high-tech retail environment than a discount store Irrespective of price (Meis, 2018). Therefore, to penetrate the desired market, an identity needs to be developed in which consumers can relate too or aspire to be. By managing to provide a world class experience, that rotates around beneficial luxury shopping, Checkers has developed a brand equity and positioning that demonstrates luxury, allowing for a unique proposition that allows people to associate the brand with a higher LSM, however still caters for middle LSM' s ranging from 4-7 due to their strategies in providing lower prices. The extended- self is then catered to for customers varying from low to high LSMs in which they can adopt, to experience luxury irrespective of LSM, due to the offerings and experiences Checkers has implemented. Although they have implemented all these premium, luxurious shopping environments, Checkers has managed to ensure their own branded products still remain affordable for all and their convenient, reliable and fast delivery app is not exclusive to those belonging to higher LSMs, but is available to everyone, at a reasonable price of R35, in comparison to the petrol consumption one would use to and fro the grocery store. Checkers also has a rewards programme, namely XtraSavings and a Money market situated in-stores unpacked in the literature review. Ultimately the maintenance of the existing audience is through offering premium atmospheres, services and products that convince customers to perceive Checkers in that way, while retailing products at affordable prices.

- Is the Strategic Experiential Module evident in Checkers's rebranding to position themselves and provide an experience ethnographically researched?

In accordance to the Findings and Interpretations, the Strategic Experiential Module was used, where the Module emphasises how each component relates and works together to illustrate an experience, in which Checkers managed to achieve, to help highlight how they wanted to be perceived by the market, through consistent messaging and solutions throughout each Concept, ensuring a premium experience additionally being sold. Because Checkers employed the Module and gained market share, a poorly designed store and experience will not stand out to consumers, nor intrigue them about their offerings, rather, consumers will not perceive the store well, causing consumers to avoid the store and shop at places that provide sought out experiences, ultimately losing consumers from face value before completely engaging with the brand, in which these findings support the research's problem statement. Checkers, however, was able to reposition themselves to target a new audience, and physically implemented change, through their product offering, services, omni-present approach and in-store designs that resembled a premium outcome, while executing a themed store, which was influenced by a food theatre and Farmers market, where a premium positioning and Farmers market concept merged together to provide a high end market, where many retailers may follow through to give them fourth a competitive advantage and increase their market share, similarly to that of Checkers. The questions answered inform the objectives which were addressed through the literature review as well as the methodology and findings.

CONCLUSION

Trustworthiness: Credibility, confirmability and Transferability:

Credibility refers to the truthfulness with which the researcher deciphers data, where credibility is increased when copious amounts of time is spent with participants for better understanding of the insights gathered (Shenton, 2004). In the case of this research, the research was conducted through ethnography to understand brand experience in a given environment. Credibility was ensured by the researcher making 4 visits to the environment (FreshX concept store) to ensure the initial results which was gathered through ethnography were the same. The 4 visits happened on two days, in the middle of the month and at the end of the month, to understand if an experience was still evident irrespective of the time of day and the type of people present, and if an experience catered for all demographics, according to their interest in a particular brand. Increased credibility was also established through the ability to apply various data collection methods to the research. The researcher increased credibility by means of taking notes and writing about the ethnographic experience identified by the researcher as well as taking photographs of the identified brand experience characteristics.

Confirmability and Transferability is the ability of the findings to be repeated to a similar situation, where similar results are evident (Shenton, 2004). In the event of this research, the methodology of the research uses a template, described in the literature review and evident in the appendix, of concepts with characteristics of brand experience in which one may use to assess if a brand has employed such in its physical touchpoint. This research is transferable to an extent as another researcher may use this methodology on the same physical environment and yield the same results as the environment examined remains the same. In the event that another researcher replicates this on another brand, the results may differ as the brand may or may not have employed brand experience characteristics, but is successful and similar/ transferable through the methodology of the template and ethnographic approach. Therefore, to replicate this research, another researcher needs to ensure that they apply this research on the same brand (Checkers) and at the Checkers FreshX stores nationally, specifically the Sandton branch.

Anticipated Contribution:

40% (Damen, 2022) of brands express that offering experiential retail will be an urgent priority for them in the next year, whereas 57% (Damen, 2022) of them say orchestrating it will be a challenge. Explored in the literature review, this research acts as an informative way in which brands may not shy away from experiential retail due to the inability to implement such, where careful consideration of their brand identity and positioning should be studied and developed as a tool to inform brand experience. Additionally, this research will help brand understand how to tackle issues of market growth while ensuring the original target continues to support the brand. The researcher also anticipates that this research acts as a tool to influence the South African retail industry to explore their identity and positioning to employ brand experiences to set them apart from competitors due to the competitive advantage. With that said, a successful solution always ensures critical, creative and design thinking approaches, where brands may learn that both design and strategic roles support one another. This research will also provide brands characteristics in which they can employ in their brand, while ensuring these characteristics are manipulated to support a brand's positioning. Lastly, as most experiential research is outdated, this research aims to contribute to existing knowledge of experiential marketing in physical stores today to fill in the gap of methodological practices of brand experience and the use of The Strategic Experiential Module, for other researchers to understand Brand experience.

Conclusion

The research's ethnographic approach was a success as it provided a holistic narration of the experiential retail phenomenon through understanding, description and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln 2005), aiding in fully answering the objectives and questions, by adequately assessing whether the FreshX concept store managed to narrate experiences that demonstrated its premium positioning. This was understood by exposing the researcher to experiences and witnessing customer immersion within the fluid mix of in-store elements (Beverland et al., 2007). Through this, the researcher and consumer were prominent codes throughout the findings as the experience to both the consumer and the researcher were/are subjective, wherein strategies by checkers were employed to ensure this subjective nature from both the consumer and researcher ensured positive interactions and perceptions that most best resembled the brand.

All in all, Checkers employed brand characteristics and the Strategic Experiential Module in their store as well as ensuring that all concepts and themes worked together to bring forth a memorable experience that developed a relationship with consumers through incorporating retailtainment in line with their positioning to ultimately increase market share. This was seen through data analysis, where their positioning to target a premium market was executed through shopper touchpoints, where the store itself incorporated overall store solutions that exuded premium quality, in which codes of 'premium' were executed throughout all concepts of the Strategic Experiential Module.

Although they have implemented a premium shopping environment, Checkers has managed to ensure their Checkers store is accessible to all to maintain their existing consumers through their affordable and inclusive services, encouraging an extended self notion for all, irrespective of LSM.

Finally, when approaching experiential marketing, in addition to positives of a competitive advantage, it is important that brands consider and understand that this human-centric thinking allows brands the opportunity to understand the need for experiences for the brand, as humans are drawn to environments that encourage innovative ways to interact with a brand.

Ethical Considerations:

Informed consent/ GateKeeper's Letter: Because ethnographic research requires the researcher to take photographs of the environment, the researcher ensured that the physical environment they documented was empty and when they needed to document interactive experiences, the researcher kept their identities private and out of the frame. The researcher also took it upon themselves to document themselves performing these interactive activities to respect consumers. Before all of this research could happen, the researcher asked for permission from the store manager to sign the gatekeeper's Letter for their research. To the researcher's amusement, the manager didn't disagree, where if they did, properly referenced images from the Designers of the store and articles covering the Sandton store would have been used, and sketches would've been done as sketches capture the experience the researcher undergoes in comparison to photographs.

Distorting result: potential for bias was very easy where certain characteristics absent from Checkers could've been manipulated in favour of the problem statement. In the case of the research, it was evident that there were similar and missing experiences of the 'food theatre' retailtainment amongst other FreshX

concept stores from what research and the literature review expressed. The researcher concluded that the stores with more experiences were intentionally exercised to target the high affluent crowd residing in that area. With that said, to avoid distorting results in favour of the literature review of an overall theme, the researcher addressed specific elements that had been removed or was not present from the literature, namely the Kauai restaurant present in Cape Town.

Ultimately recommendations to combat these issue is to appoint someone to go with, for accountability purposes who will aid in both the data collection and analysis to dispose of bias and to help with advising on sketches and people's photographic boundaries.

Limitations and recommendations

Given that an initial limitation was that the store manager would not grant permission for photographs, the researcher would resort to sketching out the space. However, the store manager delightfully agreed to photographs, wherein the researcher discarded sketching. This in itself is a limitation as the researcher could have employed sketches in conjunction with images to successfully communicate the sensory experiences subject to the researcher, in which a photograph could not do. Doing this for future research would be plausible for individuals to manifest an experience to demonstrate an artistic human-centric approach that lends its hand to the design philosophy of this research.

Another limitation is sample size used, therefore a general conclusion may be difficult to draw about all FreshX stores, as one may differ from the other, considering the Kauai availability mentioned in the ethical considerations. This limitation may be combated if the study was longitudinal, where time constraints and deadlines weren't as limiting and travelling expenses wasn't an issue to reach FreshX stores. This however was somewhat combated by multiple visits to the store, where experience evokers may vary according to FreshX concept stores, but may all relate in evoking similar emotions and experiences.

Although this research tackled communications and design, emphasis on the built environment was heavily considered, where this research may align to either digital or graphic design fields to better understand an omni-channel experience.

Concluding remarks

In closing, as lengthy as the research was, it opened a new understanding of how brands and the world employ systemic behaviour where each department within a brand cannot work in silos to execute and narrate a successful and uniform omni-present solution. It allowed the researcher to understand the power brands had, through understanding psychological human centric behaviours and how branding and communications work together with design fields to manipulate these psychological behaviours. This ultimately opened the researcher's eyes to their own inherit behaviours of presence amongst brands due to their associations irrespective of bad prices and products. Lastly, this research allowed the researcher to explore their interdisciplinary knowledge, creating a manifesto for the researcher's life as a working professional.

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APPENDIX



Gatekeeper's letter/ Request to conduct research

Dear Checkers's Branch Manger

This written letter has been compiled to ask for your permission to conduct research at the Checkers Sandton branch.

My name is Vhutali Tshifularo, a Strategic Brand Communication student at the Vega School, a brand of the Independent Institute of Education (IIE). The research I wish to conduct for my Honours Research Project is titled "Exploring Brands' use of brand experience to communicate their brand positioning to increase market share in the food retail industry; A case study of Checkers' Rebrand in 2017".

The aim of this study is to explore the use of Brand Experience in the retail environment. The project consists of a Theoretical framework that insists that I use brand experience characteristics in my methodology, where I need to be present in a chosen brand to explore and assess if in actual fact Brand experience has been implemented; with consideration to your newly rebranded FreshX concept stores. The participation Checkers will contribute to with regards to my research will be through photographs and field notes as the researcher immerses themselves in the environment. Ultimately that with which is involved is the checkers store and your consent.

This project will last a month, where 2 visits (in the morning and evening) will be conducted on two days (on the 15th and the last Saturday of the month consent is given). The data collected will then be synthesised in a research project for my Honour's degree. As I will be taking photographs of the store, issues of confidentiality may arise, where those who happen to be captured in the frame will be blurred if no consent from these individuals is given.

With special thanks in advance for your time and for reading this letter.

Yours sincerely

Student: Vhutali Tshifularo

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Vhutali Tshifularo.

Supervisor: Courtney De Villiers

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Courtney De Villiers.

My contact details are as follows:

Vhutali Tshifularo

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The contact details of my supervisor are as follows:

[REDACTED]

Brand Experience Checklist

Date: 16 August 2022

Time: 11:17:00 PM

Sense:

Background Music:

Consideration to music: Yes ☐ No ☒

Music radiates from the chatter of people, the pings of the 60-second pings, the refrigerators ^{humming} parking, intercom twice

Store Scent: Yes ☐ No ☒

Scent: No specific scent, rather sectioned, food area:

Baby, Women: Smells like child fragrance, hair products, outdoor, faint, calming woodsmell.

Store Colours: White, Yes ☒ No ☐

Additional colours and material: Blue: trolleys, truck, chairs, SUSHI, branding Browns, wooden fixtures, entrance bulkhead, fruit holders, life tables grey, tiles for each market area, column paint and tiles kiost AREA

Spatial layout: Yes ☒ No ☐

Explain: 10 steps each aisle Atleast 20 buy the food area

I'd need to get better floor to ceiling exception by atleast 4.000m in to building

Signage: Yes ☒ No ☐

Consideration to music: plotted all over the store with extra information. Very considerate



Figure 30: Tshifularo, V. 2022. Brand experience checklist 1 in Checkers FreshX Sandton. [Photograph]

Brand Experience Checklist

Date: _____

Time: _____

Redefined checkout experience:

Yes ☒ No ☐

How: paying at party spot, farmer market locations
· Impaired mobility, express tills

Think:

Own brand Product packaging and design:

Yes ☒ No ☐

Description: Brown and white, eco friendly,
aesthetically pleasing, items within packaging are
effective

Physical and digital collaboration:

Yes ☒ No ☐

Channels used: checkers 60 sixty
Scanner, ..
AA so

Act:

concepts → model.

Co-Branding and collaborations:

Yes ☒ No ☐

Namely: Michelin Star, Suzanne, bald gilly, Starbucks,
daniel, extra savings brands → codes

Figure 31: Tshifularo. V. 2022. Brand experience checklist 2 in Checkers FreshX Sandton. [Photograph]

Brand Experience Checklist

Date: 10. August 2022

Time: 12:54

High-tech Equipment:

Yes ☒ No ☐

Equipment used: Scanner barcode in accordance to giving people opportunity to use it. 60 second add at techX could have sport time, sports channel at check out.

Social media component:

Yes ☒ No ☐

Component used: 60 seconds

Feel:

Expert Salesperson:

Yes ☒ No ☐

The Encounter: MANAGER WELCOME

gives her welcome chocolate Man, knows

2 second visit. Wasup.

Instore campaigns and advertising:

Yes ☒ No ☐

What was used: checkers 60 seconds, little shop print

TV

Safe shopping:

Yes ☒ No ☐

Protocols used: Space used to draw out, sanitizer, cameras high ceiling, whereat there are areas in which certain areas may be taken into consideration which only takes defeats the purpose of Hands on fun

Figure 32: Tshifularo, V. 2022. Brand experience checklist 3 in Checkers FreshX Sandton. [Photograph]

Brand Experience Checklist

Date: _____

Time: _____

Hands on fun: improvement Yes ☒ No ☒

Product demonstration: Open kitchen, cheese, chocolate
Berries, usual, scanners, Sushi bar.

* could do something with pet shop? like lego?

Relate:

Sense of community: improvement Yes ☐ No ☐

Created through:

Extra savings, sense of community, extra signage, cafe.
Food market, little shop

Retailtainment: improvement Yes ☐ No ☐

Entertainment provided:

open kitchen, chocolate, Honey bar, food market, theatre
components, battery quarter to dying

Extra Notes:

A race against the ping sound.

Good no the 60 second woman

Need better picks of the wine cellar Sushi bar.

→ Home cooked food areas are most populated

first michelin star chef, → take more of that

→ checkers papers

Figure 33: Tshifularo, V. 2022. Brand experience checklist 4 in Checkers FreshX Sandton. [Photograph]

Draw out space through stiber

→ Express

→ PLAN → hot and cold areas

→ Safe people

→ take pics of entrance

→ Safe protocols

→ find out geo-partnerships

Second visit type of people - women with bag

→ Always a line at the Home made dress

- I am impressed

→ Hardly cleaning - saw the cleaning guy sweep once while chatting to a woman he fancied

- im impressed that they have

- Draw out entrance dynamics, see

→ women asked where the trolleys were

⊗ WHAT THEY could use was for convenience would be the plugpoints

Two plan copies demonstrating the two days -

→ Afternoon, more people using the cafe
..... so far people



majority were women

People I saw

every category of individuals in South Africa

gym moms, friends, families, individuals, workers from both the mall and outside
women in jeans, afternoon

2-3 school uniform - birthday girl & colleagues

Figure 34: Tshifularo. V. 2022. Brand experience checklist 5 in Checkers FreshX Sandton. [Photograph]

Date: 13 June 2022

Student name: Vhutali Tshifularo

Student number: [REDACTED]

Campus: Pretoria

Re: Approval of RESE8419/RMET8429 Proposal and Ethics Clearance

HONOURS/PGDip 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: *Courtney Jade de Villiers*

Signature:



Campus Postgraduate Coordinator (CPC) name: *Courtney Jade de Villiers*

Signature:



<u>Project details</u>		
Your Name: Vhutali Tshifularo	Student Number: [REDACTED]	
Supervisor: Courtney De Villiers	Date: 2/12/22	Version: 5

<u>Proposed Title</u>	
Title	Exploring Brands' use of brand experience to communicate their brand positioning to increase market share in the food retail industry; A case study of Checkers' Rebrand in 2017

<u>Research details</u>	
Problem statement	Today the place that a product is sold from is considered one of the 7p's of marketing and contributes its efforts to shopper touchpoints, which each element within the shopper touchpoint are sought out to be well executed to bring forth a satisfactory experience for the consumer in the presence of the brand. In addition, the place of a product or service supports a bulk of a brand as it allows the consumer to experience all five senses, communicated in accordance to the brand's identity, as 70% (Clark, 2008) of purchasing decisions and sales are carried out in stores, ultimately acting as a tool to influence consumer's perceptions, causing intrigue, satisfaction, purchases and ultimately loyalty and preference (Tlapana, 2009). A number of brands, more so in hotels, restaurants and luxury retail have each communicated their brand positioning through their design and service that communicates a strong brand experience, attracting targeted consumers through design elements and aesthetics, technological incorporation and interactive engagements, while many brands in the retail food industry lack this focus in their physical environments. With retail remaining as the most competitive industry, with major brands lobbying for their piece of the market share (Mathee, 2018), many brands lack brand experience in their stores. This lack of focus on designing an in-store brand experience when 70% (Clark, 2008) of sales are conducted in store only contributes to unsatisfied customer experiences as the brand isn't consistent in all touchpoints. In the event of a poorly designed store and experience, it will not stand out to consumers, nor intrigue them about their offerings, rather, consumers will not perceive the store well, causing consumers to avoid the store and shop at places that provide sought out experiences, ultimately losing consumers from face value before completely engaging with the brand, struggling to build relationships and loyalty with consumers, discouraging the opportunity for successful market gain, more so with individuals who experience brands first through physical shopping, especially when other brands offer better experiences. Therefore, it is crucial for brands to invest in their physical environment thoroughly as it acts as a deciding factor and tool for brand awareness, relationships, loyalty, purchases and market gain, ultimately aiding in a crucial point of communications in a brand.
Purpose statement	With the newly designed Checkers FreshX Concept stores, Checkers' rebranding aimed at targeting consumers belonging to a higher LSM, to increase their market share within that market, originally dominated by Woolworths, where their rebranding experienced success (Roux, 2021). The purpose of this research is to identify if checkers employed brand experience by exercising design elements, technological advancement and interactive engagement to communicate their brand positioning through ethnographic research, to understand the potential and effect of considering brand experience in their stores. This research is conducted to explain the importance behind the physical environment, being the store, in which 70% (Clark, 2008) of purchasing decisions and transactions of a brand take place, to be used as a marketing strategy, as the store plays a role in how people perceive, experience and engage with a brand (Tlapana, 2009). This may provide other brands the opportunity to understand the role the physical environment may or may not play in communicating their brand positioning through an experience as it provides retail brands a unique proposition in the market. Therefore, this research intends to highlight the importance of brand experience as a marketing tool to attract a market, by observing if brands employ brand experience elements, characteristics in their stores.
Research question/s	Does brand experience implemented in the retail food industry increase market share? - How do brands communicate positioning in the place touchpoint to target a new audience understood through the literature review in accordance to Checkers? - What does Checkers do to target a new audience while maintaining the presence of the

	existing target to ultimately grow their net margin? - is the Strategic Experiential Module evident in Checkers's rebranding to position themselves and provide and experience ethnographically researched?
Hypotheses/ Objectives	It is said that exercising brand experience in your brand aids in the success of the brand. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify whether or not Checkers FreshX Concept stores employed brand experience to communicate their brand positioning through Sensory ethnography. - To establish the connection between brand positioning and a brands target audience through the literature review. - To understand the maintenance of existing audience while targeting a new audience - To understand how a touchpoint can communicate positioning - To analyse Checkers FreshX Concept store in relation to brand experience characteristics through Sensory ethnography.
Research rationale	The researcher has decided to undertake this research due to their interdisciplinary studies, such as Strategic Brand Communication and Interior Design. This research highlights the gap of understanding brand experience and how a brand can successfully communicate a successful experience through understanding the importance of design implementation, by strategically employing marketable solutions to ensure consumers of a brand positively experience it, whether through digital or traditional forms. Therefore, this research answers the gap many brands fail to employ, such as thought out experiences through design and strategy, to attract target audiences, enabling a missed opportunity for interest, awareness and relationships with brands, as many come to know of them in physical environments, i.e. malls. In addition, there's been quite a lot of research behind elements that contribute to a brand experience (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009), but little that assesses its success when implemented in physical stores. With the help of ethnographic observations, brand experience will continue to be redesigned to mirror any new developments in our lifestyles or personal preferences (Crouch and Pearce, 2012).

Literature overview

Key theories	Experience economy theory: Pine and Gilmore, 1998, argue that businesses must organise memorable events for their customers, and that the memory itself becomes the product: the "experience". Simply said, value is established through experience, in which a competitive advantage can be derived, where the experience can trigger a perception of a brand in the mind of the consumer in which they buy into or want to portray. This becomes the theory that has birthed brand experience in which the research speaks to as checker's rebranding has employed various characteristics that influence perception of the brand to target a new market segment, whereas checkers may still be selling the same products before the rebranding.					
Seminal authors/ sources	- (Keller, 1993): Note that to build a powerful brand, one must shape how customers think and feel about your product. The right type of experience needs to be built around your brand, so that customers have specific, positive thoughts, opinions, feelings, beliefs and perceptions about it. When your brand equity is strong, they'll be more sales from customers, recommendations and loyalty will be established (Keller, 1993). This is key as it explains that the right type of experiences around the brand need to be built for specific outcomes, in which brand experience in this research will be assessed to see if it is used in checkers and how that provides preferred outcomes for the brand. - Pine and Gilmore, 1998, argue that businesses must organise memorable events for their customers and that the memory itself becomes the product: the "experience". Simply said, value is established through experience, in which a competitive advantage can be derived, where the experience can trigger a perception of a brand in the mind of the consumer in which they buy into or want to portray. This becomes the theory that has birthed brand experience in which the research speaks to as checker's rebranding has employed various characteristics that influence perception of the brand to target a new market segment, whereas checkers may still be selling the same products before the rebranding - (Schmitt, 1999): Schmitt explains how consumers aren't just buying products but are emotional purchasers, in which he introduces the strategic experiential module, in which taps into using the five senses and other emotive triggers to promote customer experiences marketers can tap into. This module developed from Pine and Gilmores, (1998) Experience Economy theory. This is relevant as the researcher speaks about the physical environment being a hub for all senses and feelings to be explored and experienced, in which ultimately supports the successful execution of brand experience.					
Literature review themes	<u>Theme 1</u> History of retail, consumer culture and its role today	<u>Theme 2</u> The importance of brand experience in physical environments	<u>Theme 3</u> Facilitation of experience through positioning, to penetrate a market	<u>Theme 4</u> Shoprite group limited and Checkers growth over the years	<u>Theme 5</u> Elements/ Characteristics/ aspects of the brand experience in the grocery space	<u>Theme 6</u> Using ethnographic research to help understand Brand experience.

Sources	Bolton, R. N., Cheung, L., Gallan, A., McColl-Kennedy, J. r., Orsingher, C., Witell, L. and Zaki, M. 2018. Customer experience challenges: bringing together digital, physical and social realms. <i>Journal Of Service Managaement</i>, 29(1). Eroglu, S. A., Machleit, K. A. and Mantel, S. P. 2000. Perceived Retail Crowding and Shopping Satisfaction: What Modifies This Relationship?. <i>JOURNAL OF CONSUMER PSYCHOLOGY</i>, 9(1): 29-42. Gilmore, G. H. and Pine, B. J. eds. 2011. <i>The Experience Economy</i>. Boston: Harvad Business School Publishing. Keller, K.L. 2013. <i>Strategic brand management building, measuring, and managing brand equity, 4th edn</i>. Pearson: Global Edition Levy, M. and Weitz, B. A. 2002. <i>Retailing Management</i>. New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin. Mathee, M. 2018. <i>Unpacking the Checkers Brand Identity</i>. [Online] Available at: https://stakeholderguru.wordpress.com/2018/03/20/unpacking-the-checkers-brand-identity/ [Accessed 9 May 2022]. Motta-Filho, M. A. 2020. Brand experience manual: bridging the gap between brand strategy and customer experience. <i>Review of Managerial Science</i>, 15(1): 1173 -1204. Meis, M. 2018. The Relationship Between Brand Experience and Customer Perceived Service Quality: Empirical Insights into the Experience-Seeking and Service-Oriented Economy. B. A. Thesis. FH Aachen University of Applied Sciences Merrilees, B. 2017. Experience-centric branding: challenges and advancing a new mantra for corporate brand governance. <i>J Brand Manag</i> 24(1):1-13 Meyer, S. 2022. <i>The History and Evolution of Retail Stores: From Mom and Pop to Online Shops</i>. [Online] Available at: https://www.bigcommerce.com/blog/retail/#what-is-retail [Accessed 1 May 2022]. Beverland, M.B., Healy, M.J., Oppewal, H. and Sands, S. 2007. Understanding retail experiences – the case for ethnography. <i>International Journal of Market Research</i>, 49(6): 751-776. Ezie, O., Oayaa, C. Z. T. and Newman, O. 2017. Impact of Packaging on Consumer Buying Behavior in. <i>International Journal of Sciences: Basic and Applied Research</i>, 36(4): 28-46. Böger D., Decker, R., Kottemann, P. and Plumeyer, A. 2019. Measuring brand image: a systematic review, practical guidance, and future research directions. <i>Rev Manag Sci</i>, 13(2):227-265 Keller, K.L. 1993. Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. <i>Journal of Marketing</i>, 57(1): 1-22. Pretoria, U. O. 2016. <i>Exploring South Africa's retail landscape</i>. [Online] Available at: https://www.up.ac.za/media/shared/130/ZP_Files/innovate-11_2016_exploring-sa-retail-landscape.zp111498.pdf [Accessed 9 May 2022]. SAHO. 2019. <i>Grade 8 - Term 1: The Industrial Revolution in Britain and Southern Africa from 1860</i>. [Online] Available at: https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/grade-8-term-1-industrial-revolution-britain-and-southern-africa-1860-0 [Accessed 5 May 2022]. Schmitt, B. 1999. Experiential Marketing. <i>Journal of Marketing Management</i>, 15(1-3): 53-67.
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Key concepts	• Sense • Feel • Act • Think • Relate
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<u>Provisional Research Approach</u>				
Paradigm	<u>Paradigm</u>	<u>Epistemology</u>	<u>Ontology</u>	<u>Axiology</u>
	Interpretivist paradigm was chosen to understand and describe the implementation of meaningful social action and experiences in grocery stores. This allows the researcher to understand the impact of the physical environment in yielding a greater market share amongst targeted audiences.	Something is seen as knowledge when it feels right to those being studied. Common sense is an important source of knowledge. Therefore, common sense could be employing experiences for the consumer to increase preference for grocery shopping stores, or to not all, dependent on the researcher's research.	Reality is fluid and subjective and is created by human interaction, therefore, for Checkers to increase its market share will be through the brand experience employed in the physical environment, and how the brand has provided interactive experiences, therefore too understand the growth behind checkers would to ensure people experience all aspects of Checkers positively.	Uniqueness is valued, in a sense that people are attracted to brands with Unique selling propositions that differentiate them from the rest of the market. Therefore, in a grocery sense, a brand that employs unique experiences in their physical stores provides preference and lasting memories valued by customers.
Approach/ design	The reason behind the researcher's decision to follow an interpretivist paradigm is to understand how brand experience plays a role in consumer interest for a brand, more so in a physical environment. This paradigm allows the researcher to employ a qualitative research approach to understand a social phenomenon in a natural setting. Therefore, this allows the researcher to understand brand experience (social phenomena) in the grocery store, namely checkers (natural setting) as this emerging phenomena, brand experience, has allowed for stores to gain the interest of consumers, build relationships and ultimately loyalty due to how well a brand's positioning has been executed through their brand experience. This approach allows the researcher to implement Sensory ethnography. Sensory ethnography acts as an assessment to analyse every aspect of brand experience in the physical environment identified in the literature review to see if a grocery store implements the brand experience to communicate their brand positioning. This research will be cross-sectional as the research does not expect the researcher to assimilate into the environment and assess it over a period of time, but rather identify and analyse if characteristics of brand experience are present in the Checkers FreshX store, implementing a "step in step out" approach, especially due to school time constraints. Therefore, if the grocery store implements all aspects from the literature review assessed through sensory ethnography, this allows the researcher to understand that it is in fact the brand experience that increases the grocery stores market share as brand experience conceptualises that its successful implementation draws in consumers.			

<u>Provisional Research Plan</u>	
Population	-The population: Checkers Concept stores in Johannesburg, Gauteng -The nature of the population: social artefacts in the form of retail/grocery stores -Target and accessible population: all Checkers FreshX concept stores in Johannesburg, Gauteng -The unique characteristics of the population: social artefact has to be checkers Freshx concept stores The researcher believes these particular stores boasts brand experience as it implements co-branding by the likes of Kauai, Starbucks, a wine cellar, various departments and various elements the consumer can explore. Checkers also wants to target consumers belonging to 8-10 LSMs, where these concept stores have initially been implemented in areas that host the homes of these targeted consumers such as Brackenfell, Rosebank, Menlyn and Sandton to name a few. -Unit of analysis: Checkers FreshX Concept store (the store).
Sampling	The sample is the Checkers FreshX Concept store at Sandton city mall, Johannesburg. Sandton particularly has been chosen as it is the flagship store for the new Checkers FreshX store and is located in an area home to many affluent consumers. Therefore, the sampling method will be non-probability convenience sampling as the researcher is deliberately targeting Checkers freshX stores in which they

	are aware of the areas they have been implemented in. Sandton city is also accessible and convenient to the researcher. Sample size: 1 FreshX concept stores
Data collection method(s)	Field research study is to observe and analyse the distinct behaviour of a subject in that setting. In the event of this research, visual ethnography will be used which will allow the researcher to observe and analyse brand experience through its physical implementation in the store, through photographs and field notes. Photographs will be used as tool to answer if Checkers FreshX Concept store has implemented the brand experience characteristics or not documented in the literature review. 4 visits to Sandton will be exercised, ideally 2 visits a day during the middle of month and 2 visits a day at the end of the months; -On the middle of the month visit, it will be done on the 15 th of that month or a weekday of that month at 10am to understand the social dynamics while many are working and at 5pm, the time when many who were working have knocked off work. -The second day visit will happen on the Saturday that same month ends at 10am and 5pm again. These times and days are strategically chosen to identify the range of consumers entering the store to understand and generalise the experience the environment evokes for the customers.
Data analysis method(s)	In the case of this research, sensory ethnography used in the study is based on the characteristics, elements of brand experience noted in the literature review, in which the researcher will go out into the field to analyse and observe if in fact Checkers has implemented these characteristics in their FreshX stores. Photographs and field notes, that better describe the photographs will then be organized in accordance to each other, by means of relating the photo to the field notes, in which categorising these data collection tools with the correct theme/characteristic, identified in the literature review, will then be implemented. The existing theoretical framework, which are the identified themes in the literature review will be used to interpret the themes Checkers employed in their stores and how they executed it, if they did, in relation and reference to the themes from the literature review.

Ethical considerations and limitations

Ethics	-Informed consent/ GateKeeper's letter. It is imperative that the people associated with the research are aware of their involvement, however it becomes tricky through an observational research data collection method, where the researcher would need to take photographs for the documentation of the physical environment and how consumers experience the space. Therefore, in the researcher's observation, they'll ensure the physical environment they document is empty and when they need to document interactive experiences, the researcher will ask for consent in taking photographs, with a consent form. Before all of this can happen, the researcher would have to ask for permission from the store manager to sign a consent form for their research. In the event that the manager disagrees, properly referenced images from the Designers of the store and articles covering the store will then be used. Additionally, a more reliable and appropriate alternative option would be to draw out the space where the researcher is awarded the opportunity to express how they interpret the space and the customer's reaction to the space as opposed to online images that promote photographs that rarely emphasise the truth of the actual environment. -Distorting result. This becomes an ethical issue if the researcher uses other images of stores that have applied a brand experience characteristic that Checkers is missing. Therefore, it is important to not manipulate the results in favour of a desired outcome but rather address aspects that may not be employed in the store. To ensure results aren't distorted during data collection, the researcher will be accompanied by someone.
Limitations	-Ethical clearance and consent from store manager: this is limiting as if the manager doesn't allow the researcher to conduct observational studies in their store, the possibility of documenting the research through photographs will only limit the success of their research as it may lend a hand to ethical considerations and the possibility of distorting results through written word as there are no photographs to aid in the validity of the researcher's word. To combat this as addressed in ethics is to use referenced images from the internet to explain findings. However, this may also be limiting as the images found may not be enough to demonstrate brand experience to the fullest, where the results of the study may not be entirely true. To counter the limitations, the researcher will draw the space, and express their observations through their sketches. -Another limitation is sample size used, therefore a general conclusion may be difficult to draw about all FreshX stores, as one may differ from the other. This limitation may be combated if the study was longitudinal and travel expenses were paid due to the inconvenience of traveling far to reach FreshX stores.

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[TOTAL MARKS: 100]