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Sustaining the Township Economy: An Investigation into the Factors Influencing the Shopping Experience of Spaza Shop Customers in South Africa

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Abstract: The township economy supports many South Africans by creating employment and reducing the socio-economic challenges facing the country. To ensure sustainable growth of the sector, research is required on key businesses within the informal economy. This study empirically investigated the factors influencing the shopping experience of spaza shop customers in South Africa. Spaza shops, an under-researched South African context, continue to expand in various townships and serves as retail outlet where consumers purchase their daily products and services. The study embraced a quantitative research design. A self-administered questionnaire was employed to collect the data for the study. The target respondents include customers who were older than 18 years and had previously purchased from spaza shops. Respondents were selected using convenience sampling. The questionnaires were distributed to six townships in South Africa. 185 usable questionnaires were included in the data analysis. The empirical results provided evidence that supports the existence of statistically significant positive correlations between five independent experience factors, namely: esthetic, distinctiveness, cognitive, affective and social; with customer experience (dependent variable). Additionally, three of the five experience factors (social, affective and cognitive) are significant predictors of customer experience in the context of this study. Based on the identified factors, several recommendations are made for improving customer experience in a spaza shop context. Recommendations made are expected to enhance the competitiveness of spaza shops thereby enabling them to increase their contribution to employment creation and national Gross Domestic Product.

Keywords: *Shopping experience, Spaza shops, Township economy.*

1. Introduction

Spaza shops in South Africa (SA) were conceived in the 1970s and since then, have grown to become the backbone of the SA township economy (Jeeva, 2017). Research suggests that the proportion of SA customers who shop at spaza shops has grown from 45% to 53% between 2016 and 2017 and during the same period, sales grew by 13.4% (Mannak, 2018). The upward growth trend indicates that customer interest in purchasing products and services from spaza shops is growing, increasing the number of spaza shops. Although there has been an increase in the number of customers purchasing products and services from spaza shops (Mannak, 2018), the experience of customers during their purchase activity has not received much attention. Prior research on spaza shops focused mainly on a comparison between the performance and challenges of foreign and domestically owned spaza shops, and management strategies that can be used by spaza owners to grow the number of spaza shops (Liedeman, Charman, Piper, & Petersen, 2013; Perks, 2010; Tengeh & Mukwarami, 2017; Mukwarami, Tengeh, & Iwu, 2018). It is acknowledged that customer behavior towards shops that sell products and services is changing.

Because of the emergence of technology and social media (Holmgren & Olofsson, 2015), resulting in customers now being constantly connected and informed (Khaas, 2017). The latter leads to a rapid increase in the expectations and demands of customers and will continue to do so in the future (Khaas, 2017). At the same time, customers desire experiences that engage them in an emotional, physical and intellectual manner (Bagdare & Jain, 2013). Customers are further attracted to shops that provide stimulating and engaging experiences (Holmgren & Olofsson, 2015). The focus, thus, turns to how spaza shops can build these experiences with their customers. The dynamic behavior of customers requires spaza shops to seek marketing strategies to grow (Moloi, 2014; Perks, 2010) and remain competitive in the informal sector. In support of this view, researchers believe that spaza owners need to be equipped with the necessary skills to manage their spaza shops successfully (Jeeva, 2017; Perks, 2010). Taking into account that providing an exceptional customer experience may be an avenue for businesses (in this context spaza shops) to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Radder, van Eyk, & Koekemoer, The off-line retail experience: A suggested integrated framework, 2019).

This study suggests a need to investigate the factors that influence the experience of customers who purchase products and services from spaza shops. Understanding the factors that influence a customer experience in spaza shops will assist to enhance the experience that spaza shops offer to remain competitive in the informal sector. This study was conducted to fill this knowledge gap by identifying the factors that influence the customer experience at spaza shops. To achieve this aim, the objective of the study was to identify factors influencing the shopping experience of spaza shop customers.

2. Contextualising the Shopping Experience of Spaza Shops

Spaza Shops: Spaza shops are part of the township economy or the informal sector in SA (Tengeh & Mukwarami, 2017; Van Scheers, 2016), which by nature, do not legally exist and comprise unregistered entities (Basardien, Parker, Saheed, Friedrich, & Appoles, 2014; Coetzer & Pascarel, 2014). Nonetheless, the informal sector provides employment for a substantial number of people (Phalatsi, 2016) and contributes significantly to poverty alleviation (Basardien, Parker, Saheed, Friedrich, & Appoles, 2014; Cichello & Rogan, 2017; Perks, 2010). Over 2.5 million people in SA are employed in the informal sector (Rogan & Skinner, 2018). Of this number, 61% are self-employed (business owners) and 39% are employees (Cichello & Rogan, 2017). The South African informal sector contributes between 6% - 12% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Cichello & Rogan, 2017; Fourie & Skinner, 2018). In SA townships, reducing poverty and unemployment is still a challenge (Hare & Walwyn, 2019; Sekhampu, 2012). The dominant forms of informal township business include enterprises within the health services (traditional healers and medicine), street vendors, haircare, educare (creches), liquor retailers and spaza shops (Charman & Petersen, 2018). Liquor retailers, haircare, and spaza shops had the greatest market share of 19%, 7%, and 15%, respectively (Charman & Petersen, 2018).

The 15% market share of the spaza shops points to their significance, hence the objective of this study, to identify the factors that influence the customer experience in spaza shops, spaza shops will now be examined. The term 'spaza' shop is used in reference to businesses that mimic formal grocery shops and supermarkets but has limited functioning (Spiegel (2002) in Mukwarami, 2017; Van Scheers, 2016). Spaza shops are common in many townships, and sell a limited selection of products and services to customers in the township (Hare & Walwyn, 2019; Mukwarami, Tengeh, & Iwu, 2018; Zanker & Moyo, 2020), including electricity, airtime, cold drinks, milk, sweets, chips, frozen meats and paraffin (Charman & Petersen, 2018; Coetzer & Pascarel, 2014; Mukwarami, Tengeh, & Iwu, 2018; Mutlane, 2017; Phalatsi, 2016; Van Scheers, 2016). Spaza shops normally operate from a house, residential stand, corrugated iron sheet structures or decommissioned container (Basardien, Parker, Saheed, Friedrich, & Appoles, 2014; Lamb, Kunene, & Dyili, 2019; Van Scheers, 2016), and vary in size, format and in the experience that they offer to their customers (Coetzer & Pascarel, 2014). In some spaza shops, customers are served through a small window-like opening while they wait outside the shop (Charman, Bacq, & Brown, 2019; Chipunza & Phalatsi, 2019; Mukwarami, 2017).

While in others, customers are serviced inside the spaza shop (Basardien, Parker, Saheed, Friedrich, & Appoles, 2014; Coetzer & Pascarel, 2014). SA, because of its vibrant economy (Mukwarami, Tengeh, & Iwu, 2018), is one of the most attractive countries to live (Sibanda & Stanton, 2020). The attainment of independence in 1994 (Ngcamu & Mantzaris, 2019) saw townships becoming a haven for foreign nationals, especially from the African continent who sought survival and economic opportunities (Basardien, Parker, Saheed, Friedrich, & Appoles, 2014; Mukwarami, Tengeh, & Iwu, 2018). The resulting influx of foreign nationals (Lamb, Kunene, & Dyili, 2019) eventually reflected in the ownership of spaza shops in townships, where ownership was a combination of domestic and foreign ownership (Chipunza & Phalatsi, 2019; Ngcamu & Mantzaris, 2019). Domestically owned spaza shops are typically operated by women as home-based operations (Lamb, Kunene, & Dyili, 2019; Chipunza & Phalatsi, 2019; Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation, 2015a). Unlike local-owned spaza shops that rely on family for labor, foreign-owned spaza shops employ both foreign and local residents as employees (Chipunza & Phalatsi, 2019; Hare & Walwyn, 2019; Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation, 2015a). Spaza shops have also been found to seldom perform marketing functions within their business (Phalatsi, 2016).

This was corroborated by (Van Scheers, 2016) who established that from 1996 to 2016, marketing in the spaza shops was limited. Moreover, the researcher found that there is a positive relationship between a lack of marketing skills and the business failure of spaza shops (Van Scheers, 2016). This evident lack of marketing skills by spaza shop owners (Van Scheers, 2016) translates to and is associated with low-quality products and poor customer service. A lack of understanding of customer needs (Ligthelm, 2005) and (Van Scheers, 2016). Focus on positive customer experience is thus essential in encouraging customers to support these businesses (Bagdare & Jain, 2013). In view of the above, managers and owners of businesses (in this context spaza shops) need to identify the factors that influence their customers' experience, as this has the potential to assist spaza shops to be more competitive, not only in the spaza shop market but also in the larger informal sector. The section below will briefly describe the concept-customer experience.

Customer Experience: This study is founded on the theory of customer experience. Holmgren and Olofsson (2015) describe the term experience as encounters that people have while participating in events that occur in their daily lives. Yakhlef (2015) builds on the description and adds that customer experience emerges as a complex encounter between spatial materials (the physical layout, objects and atmosphere aspects of a store) and social dynamics (cultural, emotional, historical and cognitive aspects of the customer). Furthermore, Bagdare and Jain (2013) suggest that customer experience occurs in the mind of customers which is affected on an emotional, physical and intellectual level. Researchers (Kranzbuhler & Kleijnen, 2018; Yakhlef, 2015) agree that collecting and connecting information from a customer's perspective and a business's perspective leads to a better understanding and management of customer experience. From a business's perspective, customer experience is designed and staged through its processes and systems (Kranzbuhler & Kleijnen, 2018). From a customer's perspective, customer experience considers how customers' reactions, senses, behaviors and feelings are affected by the processes and systems of the businesses that they are exposed to during their experiences (Kranzbuhler & Kleijnen, 2018).

Thus, this perspective suggests that businesses alone cannot determine how much value customers derive from their experiences or how customers view or evaluate their own experiences (Kranzbuhler & Kleijnen, 2018). It is, therefore, important for businesses to take notice of the present customer tastes and preferences, as they are important when customers make their purchase decisions (Brumfield, Adelaja, & Lininger, 1993). Customers are increasingly seeking unique experiences that go beyond just consuming products and services (KPMG, 2018 ; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). Businesses therefore increasingly need to provide consistently high levels of products and services, leading to the provision of a wider choice of products and services for customers to choose from (Botha & van Rensburg, 2010). This variety of options available makes it difficult for the customers to choose between their options (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007), and the experience associated with the purchase then becomes pertinent. To identify the factors that influence customer spaza shopping experience, this study identified preliminary five constructs namely aesthetics, distinctiveness, cognitive, affective, and social based on the models provided by Bustamante and Rubio (2017); Oh et al. (2007); Bagdare and Jain (2013). The literature on the five constructs is discussed below.

Aesthetic: Aesthetics become evident when customers feel immersed in an experience (Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012). Aesthetics is associated with the attractiveness and pleasantness of an environment (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007), and research indicates that an esthetic experience has a significant relationship with customer experience (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). In an aesthetic experience, people enjoy being at a destination without affecting or changing the nature of the destination that has been presented to them (Lee, Jeong, & Qu, 2020; Yichen, Arcodia, Ma, & Hsiao, 2018), as they are content with just observing the environment as it is (Cassel, 2015; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007), or passively appreciate the way an environment appeals to their senses (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). For example, in SA, tourists visit Hobie beach in Gqeberha to enjoy the serenity and beauty of the beach, and to observe the constant rhythm of the warm Indian Ocean. In such experiences, tourists do not alter the environment's natural appearance (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). Instead, tourists appreciate the destination according to how their senses have been stimulated by the environment. These elements create a pleasant physical environment or atmosphere for customers.

Distinctiveness: Distinct, is presented in the model by Bagdare and Jain (2013) and represents an important contributor to the lifespan of a business (Frederiksen, 2018). Distinctiveness is how well retail environments

stand out from competitors in terms of uniqueness and differentiation (Foster & McLellan, 2015; Niu & Wang, 2016; Schmitt, 1999). LaFrance (2009) explains that distinctiveness refers to the tendency to identify offerings as coming from a particular source. For example, individuals or customers can easily identify spaza shops by the distinctive signage or branding that appears on the external wall of the businesses (Sustainable Livelihoods Foundation, 2015a). It is possible for businesses to distinguish themselves through experiences and events that they provide for their customers (Kotler & Keller, 2016) and this provides businesses with an experiential image amongst customers (Bagdare & Jain, 2013).

Cognitive: David, Miclea and Opre (2004), from a psychological perspective, describe that cognition is concerned with the human mind, how it creates meaning, how it produces responses and the influence of those responses. Such responses include positive thoughts, memories and ideas about an experience (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017). Nathan (2000) explains that thoughts occur in a person's mind and are responsible for how individuals (customers) interpret something and respond the way that they do to something. When information on events is stored in a person's mind for a specific period it is referred to as a memory (Zlotnik & Vansintjan, 2019). An idea is something a person imagines or pictures in their mind (Claypool, 2017). Together, thoughts, memories and ideas are part of a person's cognitions and can influence a person's attitude towards a particular object or stimulus. In a different study, Gentile, Spiller and Noci (2007) explain that cognition is concerned with how an experience or offering may engage individuals intellectually.

Cachero-Martinez and Vazquez-Casielles (2017), in the context of retail stores, report that intellectual (cognitive) experiences are associated with the ability of a person's mind to stimulate imagination or mental problem-solving skills. Wu, Lee and Liao (2018), in the context of tourism travel agents, explain that cognitive experiences emphasize the customer's thoughts during interactions with travel agents. Bustamante and Rubio (2017), in the context of retail stores, explain that cognitive experiences include mental responses to stimuli in an environment that engages customers creatively. In the context of their study, Bustamante and Rubio (2017) explain that the cognitive factor of customer experience is influenced by the ability of marketing stimuli to make customers reflect, arouse curiosity, awaken creativity and be inspired. When this occurs, customers are absorbed in their experience (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017).

Affective: The affective factor is a composition of moods and emotions that customers experience during exposure to stimuli (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017; Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007; Lischetzke, 2014). Moods are an affective state that is comparatively weaker and less stable than emotions and their occurrence is not directed towards a particular object or event (Chavez & Mendez, 2008). In the context of their study in retail stores, Bustamante and Rubio (2017) state that when studying customer experience, it is also appropriate to focus on emotions, as emotions provide retailers with valuable information on their customers' well-being and responses to stimuli during the shopping process. Emotions are a formidable indication of a person's internal affective state when they cognitively evaluate an event, or their own thoughts (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017; Verplanken, Hofstee, & Janssen, 1998; Wang, et al., 2017).

Moreover, the occurrence of emotions is specific and in direct response to objects, people, events or situations (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017; Ekkekakis, 2012; Puccinelli, et al., 2009). Emotions are provoked by something, are reactions to something, and happen because of something (Ekkekakis, 2012). Emotions can be classified as positive or negative (Cachero-Martinez & Vazquez-Casielles, 2017). Positive emotions make individuals feel good (Armenta, Fritz, & Lyubomirsky, 2016), and several researchers (Armenta, Fritz, & Lyubomirsky, 2016; Brun, Rajaobelina, Ricard, & Berthiaume, 2017), consider joy, happiness, interest, amusement and surprise as examples of positive emotions that can be felt by customers. On the other hand, disgust, anger, and fear are considered as examples of negative emotions that can be felt by customers after a service interaction in a store (Armenta, Fritz, & Lyubomirsky, 2016; Reinares-Lara, Rodriguez-Fuertes, & Garcia-Henche, 2019; Roy, Gruner, & Guo, 2020). Thus, in view of the foregoing literature, it is possible to view the affective factor as a possible influencer of the spaza shop experience.

Social: In measuring customer experience, one needs to acknowledge that there is an aspect of social experience or interaction in the retail environment. Social interaction is largely the verbal communication that takes place in a social setting (Bales, 1954; Cachero-Martinez & Vazquez-Casielles, 2018) and in a retail

context, can be described as the interactions that take place between customers and employees during the shopping experience (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017; Cachero-Martinez & Vazquez-Casielles, 2018). The latter shifts the focus to the important role of others in customers' experience (Cachero-Martinez & Vazquez-Casielles, 2018). Apart from shopping, research suggests that some other reasons that customers visit businesses are to meet friends, interact with other people and see people (Cachero-Martinez & Vazquez-Casielles, 2018).

In other words, customers enjoy and look forward to socializing with each other and with store employees whilst shopping (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). For customers, being advised, understood and heard by employees and other customers is important (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017; Cachero-Martinez & Vazquez-Casielles, 2018) and leads to a positive social experience when customers experience the latter from employees and other customers (Cachero-Martinez & Vazquez-Casielles, 2018). Therefore, businesses need to ensure that their employees are friendly, informative and can maintain social relationships with customers (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017). Based on the above, the social factor is important and needs to be considered when measuring the shopping experience of customers.

Informed by the foregoing discussion, the following research hypotheses are formulated for the study.
H_1: There is a significant relationship between the esthetic factor and customer experience of the spaza shop.
H_2: There is a significant relationship between distinctiveness factor and customer experience of spaza shop.
H_3: There is a significant relationship between the cognitive factor and customer experience of spaza shop.
H_4: There is a significant relationship between the affective factor and customer experience of spaza shop.
H_5. There is a significant relationship between the social factor and customer experience of spaza shop.

3. Research Methodology

A descriptive research design was selected for this study, followed by a quantitative research methodology. Primary data was collected using a survey in the form of a self-administered questionnaire. The target population for this study was customers who are older than 18 years and who had bought grocery items (products and services) in spaza shops located in six townships within Nelson Mandela Bay in South Africa. Specifically, the townships include Walmer Township, KwaZakhele, Zwide, Motherwell, KwaMagxaki and New Brighton. A non-probability sampling method and convenience sampling technique were used to distribute the self-administered questionnaires. The minimum sample size required for this study was 150 customers based on calculations which suggest that 6 x number of variables multiplied by 5 x items (O'Rourke & Hatcher, 2013) multiplied by 5 x respondents (Osborne, 2014). However, a total of 200 questionnaires were distributed and collected. As the data collection process took place in 2021, it is important to mention the Covid 19 measures that have been implemented to safeguard both the researcher and respondent during the data collection phase of this study.

In this regard, a mask and gloves were worn at all times by the researcher. The prescribed social distance of 1.5 meters was adhered to when recruiting respondents. Spaza shop customers (respondents) not adhering to the regulation of wearing a mask were not approached for possible participation. The clipboard (containing the self-administered questionnaire) and pen (used by respondents to fill in data on the questionnaire) were disinfected with a disinfectant spray after use by every respondent; and upon completion, respondents dropped the populated questionnaire in a box supplied by the researcher. This box was only opened by the researcher once the data collection had been completed. Once the data collection phase was completed, the data from the questionnaires were recorded, coded, and cleaned on a single excel spreadsheet. After the latter was done, a total of 185 questionnaires were deemed useable and considered for data analysis, which was conducted with the aid of IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 (computer software). The data collection process took place after obtaining ethical clearance from the university. Respondents voluntarily participated in the study. Furthermore, only respondents who signed a consent form were allowed to participate in the study.

4. Results

Demographic Information of Respondents: The demographic details of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The results indicate that the largest proportion (56.2%) of respondents were male while 42.2% were female. Over a third (40.0%) of the respondents were 19 – 24 years age group, while those between 45 – 54 and 55 – 64 years accounted for 4.3 % of the responses. Respondents were sampled from New Brighton, KwaMagxaki, Zwide, Motherwell, KwaZakhele and Walmer townships; with each township accounting for 19.5%, 18.9%, 15.7%, 15.1%, 14.6% and 11.9% of responses, respectively.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Item		Count	%
Gender	Males	104	56.2
	Female	78	42.2
	Not willing to say	2	1.1
	No response	1	0.5
	TOTAL	185	100
Age	19 – 24	74	40.0
	25 – 34	60	32.4
	35 – 44	30	16.2
	45 – 54	8	4.3
	55 – 64	8	4.3
	65 +	3	1.6
	No response	2	1.2
	TOTAL	185	100
Township	Walmer Township	22	11.9
	KwaZakhele	27	14.6
	Zwide	29	15.7
	Motherwell	28	15.1
	KwaMagxaki	35	18.9
	New Brighton	36	19.5
	No response	8	4.3
	TOTAL	185	100

Validity Test: A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to confirm construct validity (Randall & Jung, 2018). Table 2 below presents various CFA and goodness of fit indices, all of which meet the minimum thresholds for the validity of a factor structure as recommended by Randall and Jung (2018) and Dilbeck (2018). As shown in the Table 2, CMIN/DF (0.185 - 2.681); CFI (0.967 - 1.000); and SRMR (0.0042 – 0.425) values met the thresholds for acceptability. However, with regards to the RMSEA, only distinctiveness (RMSEA = 0.000) and cognitive (RMSEA 0.064) met the suggested threshold of less than 0.08 (Dilbeck, 2018). Nonetheless, Hart (2019) posits that the RMSEA values for esthetic, affective, social and customer experience are less than the 0.10 threshold and thus acceptable. On the whole, the CFA showed reasonably acceptable validity for each factor. The above results indicate the high validity of all the measures used in this study.

Table 2: CFA - Goodness-of-Fit Indices for Factors

Experience Factor	CMIN/DF < 3	CFI > 0.95	SRMR < 0.05	RMSEA < 0.08
Esthetic	1.473	0.980	0.0425	0.097
Distinctiveness	0.185	1.000	0.0042	0.000
Cognitive	1.753	0.985	0.0353	0.064
Affective	2.241	0.977	0.0353	0.082
Social	2.681	0.967	0.0357	0.096
Customer experience	2.377	0.970	0.0326	0.087

Reliability Test: A Cronbach alpha analysis was conducted to establish the reliability of the constructs in the study. Only those factor items with a minimum Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978 in O'Rourke & Hatcher, 2013) and a minimum item correlation score of 0.4 (Xiao & Dasgupta, 2022) were deemed to be reliable and acceptable. Table 3 shows all factors were thus accepted and retained as part of the spaza customer experience factor structure. Cronbach alpha coefficient scores for all factors are high and above the 0.7 threshold (Nunnally 1978 in O'Rourke & Hatcher, 2013).

Table 3: Cronbach Alpha Results

Experience Factors	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha Score
Esthetic	6	0.873
Distinctiveness	4	0.831
Cognitive	6	0.853
Affective	6	0.863
Social	6	0.857
Customer experience	8	0.892

Correlation Analysis and Hypothesis Testing: Pearson's correlation analysis (see Table 4) was used to measure correlations between the variables as hypothesized in the study. The results show a steady pattern of significant positive correlations between each of the independent variables with the dependent variable, customer experience. Based on the work of Cassel (2015) and Mumaka (2012), social ($r = 0.725$; $p < 0.01$) has the strongest correlation with customer experience, followed by affective ($r = 0.708$; $p < 0.01$). Esthetic ($r = 0.640$; $p < 0.01$), cognitive ($r = 0.614$; $p < 0.01$), and distinctiveness ($r = 521$; $p < 0.01$) have a moderate positive correlation with customer experience.

Table 4: Pearson's Product Correlation Results

	Aesthetic	Cognitive	Affective	Distinctiveness	Social	Customer Experience
Aesthetic	1	0.546**	0.703**	0.694**	0.585**	0.640**
Cognitive		1	0.673**	0.441**	0.522**	0.614**
Affective			1	0.541**	0.652**	0.708**
Distinctiveness				1	0.506**	0.521**
Social					1	0.725**
Customer Experience						1

All correlations are significant (**) at the 0.01 level. Considering the above correlation coefficients, all five hypotheses are empirically supported, and thus accepted (see Table 5 below).

Table 5: Hypotheses Tested

Hypotheses		Statistical Evidence	Verdict
H_1:	There is a significant relationship between the esthetic factor and customer experience.	$r = 0.640$; $p < 0.01$ – moderate positive correlation	Accept
H_2:	There is a significant relationship between the distinctiveness factor and customer experience.	$r = 0.521$; $p < 0.01$ – moderate positive correlation	Accept
H_3:	There is a significant relationship between the cognitive factor and customer experience.	$r = 0.614$; $p < 0.01$ – moderate positive correlation	Accept
H_4:	There is a significant relationship between the affective factor and customer experience.	$r = 0.708$; $p < 0.01$ – strong positive correlation	Accept
H_5:	There is a significant relationship between the social factor and customer experience.	$r = 0.725$; $p < 0.01$ – strong positive correlation	Accept

Regression Analysis: A multiple regression analysis was performed to evaluate if the independent factors (esthetic, distinctiveness, cognitive, affective and social) can predict spaza shopping experiences. The resulting model summary is shown in Table 6 below. The R squared value is 0.652, meaning that the independent predictor factors (esthetic, cognitive, affective, distinctiveness and social) explain 65.2% of the variation in the dependent factor (customer experience).

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients				R^2=0.652
	β Coefficient	Standard Error	Beta Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Esthetic	0.130	0.068	0.141	1.918	0.057
Distinctiveness	0.027	0.059	0.029	0.460	0.646
Cognitive	0.165	0.059	0.169	2.785	0.006*
Affective	0.230	0.078	0.221	2.949	0.004*
Social	0.388	0.060	0.396	6.509	0.000*

*$p < 0.05$.

The results show that esthetic (β = 0.130; t = 1.918; sig = 0.057) and distinctiveness (β = 0.027; t = 0.460; sig = 0.646) are not significant predictors of customer experience while cognitive, affective and social factors are. Social is the most significant predictor of customer experience (β = 0.388; t = 6.509; sig = 0.000). The second most significant predictor of customer experience is affective (β = 0.230; t = 2.949; sig = 0.004). Of all the significant variables, cognitive has the smallest impact on the dependent variable, customer experience (β = 0.165; t = 2.785; sig = 0.006). All the relationships of the latter three factors are positive and statistically significant, implying that a one-unit increase in one factor corresponds with an increase in customer experiences while other factors are kept constant.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Spaza shops form an important component of the township economy in South Africa. Therefore, research in this sector will not only assist spaza shop managers but will help strengthen the economic potential of the sector and alleviate poverty. This study sought to investigate the factors influencing the shopping experience of spaza shop customers. The empirical data confirm the existence of positive correlations between the independent factors (esthetic, distinctiveness, cognitive, affective and social)–collectively termed 'experience factors and the customer experience in a spaza shop context. The esthetic factor had a significant positive moderate relationship with customer experience ($r = 0.640$; $p < 0.01$). This study accepts H_1 and confirms that esthetic is a factor of customer experience in spaza shops. The multiple regression analysis results pointed out that esthetic (β = 0.130; t = 1.918; sig = 0.057) is not a significant predictor of customer experience in the spaza shop context. Aesthetics constitute the appeal of the building design, color and setting of the spaza shop in the context of this study. Thus, considering the above, managers and owners of spaza shops should focus on creating an attractive spaza shop that offers an esthetically pleasing environment to its customers. Despite aesthetics not being a significant predictor of customer experience, its relevance as a factor of customer experience is acknowledged and with this in mind, it is thus advisable that spaza shop managers focus on less costly ways of enhancing aesthetics.

By finding esthetic to be an important customer experience factor, this study confirms findings by Cassel (2015), Oh et al. (2007) and Radder and Han (2015) who found esthetic to be a factor of experience in retail, Bed and Breakfast and museum context, respectively. This study also found that the distinctiveness factor has a significant positive moderate relationship with customer experience ($r = 0.521$; $p < 0.01$). This provides

adequate empirical evidence to accept H_2, meaning that distinctiveness has a significant positive correlation with customer experience in a spaza shop context. According to the results of the multiple regression analysis, distinctiveness ($\beta = 0.027$; $t = 0.460$; sig = 0.646) is not a significant predictor of customer experience in a spaza shop context. As with the esthetic factor, distinctiveness is a factor of customer experience but does not act as a significant predictor of an experience, and recommendations made will relate to the more affordable options. The finding of the study also indicates that the cognitive factor has a statistically significant positive moderate relationship of ($r = 0.614$; $p < 0.01$) with customer experience. This provides enough evidence to accept H_3 which states that cognitive has a significant relationship with customer experience ($r = 0.614$; $p < 0.01$). The results of the multiple regression analysis further confirm that cognitive ($\beta = 0.165$; $t = 2.785$; sig = 0.006) is a statistically significant predictor of customer experience in a spaza shop context.

Therefore, spaza shop managers and owners should focus on strategies that can engage customers cognitively during the shopping process. Affective is concerned with how the shopping environment affects the customer's feelings and moods whilst shopping (Bagozzi et al., 1999 in Lee & Chen-Yu 2018; Wu et al., 2018). A study by Bustamante and Rubio (2017) reports that affective has a statistically significant relationship with in-store customer experience in a retail context. This finding is supported by this study as the affective factor has a significant positive strong relationship with customer experience ($r = 0.708$; $p < 0.01$). This provides enough evidence to accept H_4 which states that the affective factor has a significant relationship with customer experience. The multiple regression analysis results point out that affective ($\beta = 0.230$; $t = 2.949$; sig = 0.004). Bustamante and Rubio (2017) report that the social factor has a statistically significant relationship with in-store customer experience in a retail context. Similarly, Song, Altiny and Wang (2018) found that social interaction (with employees and other customers) has a positive effect on customer experience in the hospitality business context (restaurants and cafés). The above results are consistent with the result of this study, as society has a significant positive strong relationship with customer experience ($r = 0.725$; $p < 0.01$). The empirical evidence leads to acceptance of H_5 which states that there is a significant relationship between the social factor and customer experience. Social is the biggest predictor of spaza shopping experiences amongst the independent variables. Therefore, managers and owners of spaza shops should intentionally encourage social interactions during the shopping process (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017).

Recommendations: Following the foregoing conclusions and implications, the following recommendations to improve the experience of customers in a spaza context are provided. With regards to improving the esthetic factor, spaza shops are encouraged to keep their store environments clean and tidy, as ideally, one would like the majority of the customers to feel that they are shopping (especially for food products) in a clean environment. Dustbins should be visibly located both inside and outside the spaza shop to keep the environment clean. To assist in making the interior appearance more attractive, spaza shops could incorporate decorations, wallpaper or other visual displays inside the store. Warm paint colors (orange, red and yellow), pot plants, trees, concrete paving or tarring can be incorporated into the exterior environment in spaza shops to make them cleaner, and more attractive and appealing for shoppers. Distinctiveness provides an opportunity for spaza shops to attract more customers and insulate their businesses from competitors. It is thus recommended that spaza shop managers/owners should regularly interact with their shoppers and gather advice, opinions and preferences on how they could stand out more. Doing so can assist spaza shops to obtain information on how to become more distinctive in the market.

It is also recommended that spaza shops decorate their external appearance by incorporating unique themes for their stores. To improve the cognitive factor, it is recommended that spaza shops put up posters (for example appetizing serving suggestions) to entice customers to purchase products. The posters should be regularly changed based on products and services sold in the store. Doing so may inspire customers with creative ideas on how to prepare some of the products they purchased when they return home. Spaza shops should also incorporate expertise or knowledge about their products and services (Cassel, 2015). Brochures or information pamphlets can provide customers with food serving suggestions and important information about some of the products and services available for sale in spaza shops, for example. To promote positive affective experiences (i.e., satisfied customers), spaza shops are encouraged to always sell fresh products to their customers (especially fruit and vegetables) and to refrain from selling spoilt, stale or counterfeit products and services to customers, as doing so may upset customers, causing a negative affective experience

(disappointment, anger, disgust). It is further recommended that spaza shop managers/owners increase marketing activities around their products/services, especially when running promotions.

Doing so may arouse excitement around the purchase activity in spaza shops and may create joy when customers find/purchase products and services at reduced prices (Jin & Sternquist, 2004). Spaza shop owners/managers/employees are further encouraged to always make their customers feel welcome by treating them in a respectful and friendly manner (Song, Altiny, & Wang, 2018) as it may contribute to a positive affective experience. The social factor was found to have the biggest predictive effect on customer experience. It is thus recommended that spaces should be allocated (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017; Cachero-Martinez & Vazquez-Casielles, 2018) at the spaza shop setting for conversations to happen, such as placing a bench outside the spaza shop for customers to sit, relax and enjoy the social experience offered at the spaza shop. It is also recommended that spaza shops employ personnel who are genuinely able to spark meaningful conversation to make the store a social environment (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017) as this contributes to the social factor of customer experience. Spaza shops are also encouraged to solve customer complaints adequately and promptly, as ideally, one would like the majority of the customers to feel that their queries are solved with adequate assistance from employees as opposed to being left unattended indefinitely.

Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

This study acknowledges several limitations. The first limitation is that of age distribution – only 10.2% of shoppers in this sample were 45 years and older. Views of older shoppers are important and need to be investigated as well. The sample in this study constituted customers who had bought products and services in spaza shops that are located in six townships within one metropolitan city in South Africa. This means that the generalisability of the results of this study is limited to customers and spaza shops that are situated in these townships only. In light of this, it is recommended that future studies replicate this study in other spaza shops situated in other townships so that the results can be compared, and benchmarks can be created for each experience factor. The research tool used to measure customer experience demonstrated high validity and reliability for each experience factor; therefore, future researchers could apply this scale in other experience contexts or alternatively, identify other factors that might influence the customer experience in spaza shops.

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