

## **THE INFLUENCE OF GREEN ATMOSPHERICS ON STORE IMAGE, STORE LOYALTY AND GREEN PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The use of green atmospherics is gaining momentum in the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) retail sector in South Africa. With the aid of the Mehrabian and Russell (M-R) model, this study investigated the influence of green atmospherics on store image, store loyalty and green purchase behaviour. The study was based on South Africa's FMCG retail sector using a quantitative research design. Cross-sectional data were collected from consumers drawn from retailers in Johannesburg with the aid of a structured, self-administered questionnaire. Standard multiple regression analysis was used to test the posited hypotheses. The results indicate that green ambience has a positive significant effect on green store image, implying that, among other green atmospheric cues, consumers perceived green ambience favourably. Green design and green social service were found to be related negatively to green store image. The study also showed that store image was related negatively to store loyalty and green purchase behaviour. The findings of the study have important implications for future research and use of green atmospherics in the FMCG retail sector in South Africa.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the years, sustainability has evolved from being a peripheral environmental issue to a vital component of retail strategy (Jones, Comfort and Hillier, 2011: 256; Yusof, Musa and Rahman, 2012: 711). With the growing importance of the triple bottom-line concept in corporate performance reporting, Wilson (2015: 432) notes that retailers are increasingly compelled to disclose the environmental impact of their business operations. One of the sectors where the sustainability agenda has gained prominence is the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) retailer sector (Jones, Comfort and Hillier, 2014: 703; Wiese, Kellner, Lietke, Toporowski and Zielke, 2012: 319). This is so because, as Lehner (2015: 386) correctly points out, retailers are the final link in the supply chain, which positions them to have significant influence on procurement, production and consumption. The European Commission (2010: 13) has acknowledged the strategic role of retailers in generating environmental awareness and promotion of sustainable consumption. For this reason, many retailers are increasingly investing in sustainability-oriented projects such as carbon emissions reduction, energy and water conservation, recycling, green buildings and promotion of green products (Thongplew, Spaargaren and Van Koppen, 2014: 99; Oosterveer, 2012: 159).

Notable examples of global retailers that are investing and reporting their sustainability initiatives include Wal-Mart, Tesco, Ahold and Carrefour (Sinha, 2011: 1). In South Africa, Woolworths and Pick n Pay are at the forefront of promoting sustainability in retailing (Dos Santos, Svensson and Padin, 2013: 104; Pick n Pay Limited, 2013). As the concept of sustainability continues to permeate the FMCG retail sector, the term "green atmospherics" has been coined to refer to the greening of

retail environments with the objective of creating a green corporate image (Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews 2009: 229). Apart from being driven by the need to preserve the natural environment, Dauvergne and Lister (2012: 39) note that attracting consumers, profit maximisation and creation of competitive advantage are some of the motivating factors for investments in green atmospherics. Against this backdrop, this study investigated the influence of green atmospherics on store image, store loyalty and green purchase behaviour.

The remainder of this study is organised as follows: The next section provides the research problem and objectives of the study. This will be followed by a literature review on green atmospherics, store image, store loyalty and green purchase behaviour. This is followed by the discussion of the methodology employed in the study. Next, data analysis approaches and the results of the study are presented. The study concludes by discussing the implications and conclusions drawn from the research.

## **PROBLEM INVESTIGATED**

The rollout of sustainability initiatives in the FMCG retail sector has been characterised as a practice of competing interests (Jones *et al.*, 2011: 256; Amsler, 2009: 125). For instance, environmental pressure groups have criticised retailers for using sustainability as a fodder to prop-up their images and as a covert means to market products with environmental claims (Jackson, 2009: 8). Another concern stems from the lack of a standardised, internationally recognised format of environmental sustainability reporting (Dauvergne and Lister, 2012: 42). This has resulted in subjective reporting of sustainability metrics such as carbon emissions, waste management, energy usage and recycling targets (Janse van Rensburg and Struwig, 2015: 759).

The most visible facets of sustainability at retail level are green atmospherics, which incorporate green ambience, green store design and interactions with the retailer's personnel (Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews, 2009: 236-240). Although investments in green atmospherics are a noble gesture, Ottman (2011: 131) noted that consumers perceive such investments with cynicism and often consider them as misleading.

In spite of the widespread use of green atmospherics in South Africa's FMCG retail sector, little is known about the influence of green atmospherics on corporate image, store loyalty and purchase behaviour. Previous studies in South Africa (Morkel, 2013; Nell, 2011) have predominantly focused on the influence of general atmospherics such as store design, layout and ambience on fashion marketing. To date, the majority of studies on green atmospherics were conducted to Western and Asian countries (Yusof *et al.*, 2012; Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews, 2009) and there is no known study that has been carried out in South Africa. In an attempt to close this gap, this study investigates the influence of green atmospherics on corporate image, the influence of corporate image on store loyalty and green purchase behaviour.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the influence of green atmospherics on store image, loyalty and green purchase behaviour. The following empirical objectives were developed in order to achieve the primary objective:

- To investigate the influence of green atmospherics on green corporate image
- To examine the influence of green corporate image on store loyalty
- To examine the influence of green corporate image on green purchase behaviour
- To develop and test a conceptual model on the influence of green atmospherics on store loyalty and green purchase behaviour.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Atmospherics and M-R model

The term atmospherics is credited to Kotler's (1973) seminal work on retailing. Within the retailing context, Kotler (1973: 50) defined atmospherics as the "effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability". In practice, the use of atmospheric cues has evolved from retailing and is widely applied in service marketing, brand management and environmental sustainability (Ling, 2013: 14503; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011: 471; Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews, 2009: 228). In addition, there were also theoretical developments that sought to extend the concept of atmospherics such as the Mehrabian and Russell (M-R) model.

Mehrabian and Russell developed the M-R model in 1974. The central premise of the M-R model is that the use of environmental stimuli in a store has the potential to enhance or constrain consumer approach and avoidance behaviours (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The M-R model further suggests that an ideal retail environment is one that is physically appealing, socially supportive, symbolically welcoming and naturally gratifying (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The M-R model has been widely applied in past studies to explain the role of environmental cues on consumer behaviour (Chang, Eckman and Yan, 2011; Lin and Mattila, 2010; Jang and Namkung, 2009).

In sustainability literature, the term green atmospherics refers to the deliberate effort of designing retail environments that incorporate sustainability dimensions (Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews, 2009: 229). In practice, green atmospherics is a multifaceted concept that consists of a set of pro-environmental stimuli that has the potential to enhance an individual's shopping experience (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011: 483). The use of green atmospherics demonstrates of the commitment of the company to integrate green marketing principles as part of its operating philosophy (Grayson and McNeil, 2009: 517). According to Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews (2009: 236-240), green ambience, green design and green social service factors are the main atmospheric components that influence consumer buyer behaviour.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### Green ambience

Ambience cues include visual, aesthetic, design and layout stimuli that enhance shopping value (Oakes, Patterson and Oakes, 2013: 42). Apart from enhancing shopping value, Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal and Vos (2002: 122) noted that retail ambience offers a soothing effect to the emotional state of the consumer that reduces psychological stress at the point of purchase. From a green atmospheric standpoint, the efficient use of energy, use of renewable energy and energy star ratings are some of the most utilised green cues (Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews, 2009: 238). A number of previous studies have shown that a positive relationship exists between ambience and the corporate image (Pareigis, Echeverri and Edvardsson, 2012: 677; Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews, 2009: 242). In particular, Koo and Kim (2013: 102) acknowledge the role of ambient cues in enhancing the emotional bond with the retail outlet. Based on the preceding discussion, it is hypothesised that:

H<sup>1</sup>: There is a positive relationship between green ambience and green store image.

### Green design

Green design cues consist of functional and aesthetic elements that influence the overall evaluation of the store (Baker *et al.*, 2002: 123). Contemporary green design incorporates the retail greening concept known as biophilic store design (Joye, Willems, Brengman and Wolf, 2010: 58). Biophilia involves the use of natural environmental cues such as botanical gardens with the objective of

attracting consumers (Joye *et al.*, 2010: 58). According to Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011: 483), a biophilic environment promotes retail approach behaviour as it provides consumers with a soothing atmosphere away from their pressing daily routines.

Given the background of the depletion of the natural environment and the trend towards urbanisation, biophilic store designs are expected to gain relevance as they allow consumers to reconnect with the natural environment (Joye *et al.*, 2010: 58). Globally, the market appeal of biophilic store designs has resulted in the emergence of environmentally themed restaurants such as the Rainforest Café restaurant chain (Rosenbaum, 2009: 177). Based on the foregoing discussion, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H<sup>2</sup>: There is a positive relationship between green design and green store image.

### **Green social service**

The buying process constitutes a social interaction between the consumer and the retailer's social environment (Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews, 2009: 239). Social factors, also known as social servicescape, encompass consumer interactions with the servicescape and consumer-to-consumer interactions (Pareigis *et al.*, 2012: 678). According to Koo and Kim (2013: 102), a retailer's employees act as a vital social cue that enhances the shopping experience of consumers and the overall evaluation of store image. In their roles as "directors of first impressions" and "managers of moments of truth", employees should demonstrate their commitment to embrace sustainability values in their daily operations (Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews, 2009: 240). According to Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016: 501), green social service captures the sustainability-oriented service offered to consumers that has the potential to enhance corporate image. Based on the foregoing reasoning, it is posited that:

H<sup>3</sup>: There is a positive relationship between green social service and green store image.

### **Green store image, store loyalty and green purchase behaviour**

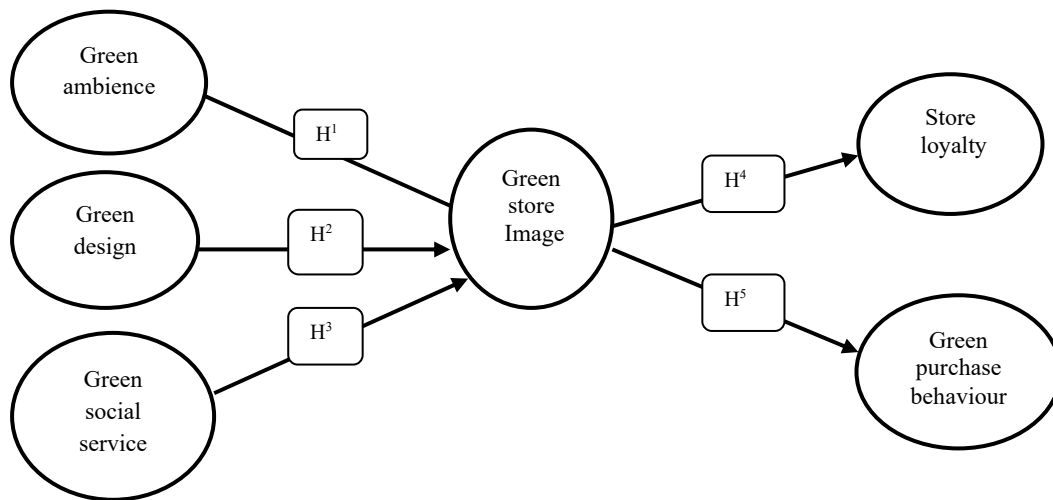
It is widely acknowledged that companies that invest in environmental sustainability enjoy good corporate citizenship status that results in a favourable corporate image (Chen, 2008: 531). In terms of purchase behaviour, Ling (2013: 14505) noted that green atmospherics have the potential to increase green purchase intention, corporate image and store loyalty. To work effectively as a marketing tool, atmospherics need to enhance consumer satisfaction and retention (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011: 483). However, marketers need to realise that in some instances atmospherics are likely to reduce consumer satisfaction if consumers interpret them unfavourably (Robinot and Giannellani, 2010: 164). This realisation presents marketers with a dilemma on whether to communicate their green atmospherics to consumers (Robinot and Giannellani, 2010: 164). Based on the foregoing discussion, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H<sup>4</sup>: There is a positive relationship between green store image and store loyalty.

H<sup>5</sup>: There is a positive relationship between green store image and green purchase behaviour.

Based on the literature reviewed and posited hypotheses, Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study.

**FIGURE 1**  
**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**



## RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. Cross-sectional data were collected from a total of 360 consumers, aged 18 years and above, who buy at retailers that promote sustainability in Johannesburg. Johannesburg was selected because it is regarded as the economic hub of South Africa. Data were collected from retailers located in Johannesburg's central business district and shopping malls such as Eastgate, Fourways Mall and Southgate. The retailers were selected based on their commitment to environmental sustainability as indicated in retailers' sustainability reports. The mall intercept method was employed to collect data with the aid of a self-administered questionnaire. Using this method, shoppers were approached by trained fieldworkers and were requested to participate. No incentives were offered to encourage participation. The mall intercept method was chosen particularly because it allowed researchers to target relevant consumers. In the absence of a sample frame, non-probability sampling in the form of convenience sampling was used to select respondents. Data were collected during a four-month period and participation was entirely voluntary.

## MEASURES

A self-administered structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was divided in four sections. The first section covered questions on the demographic profile of respondents such as age, gender, education level, income and ethnicity. The second section covered questions on green ambience, green design and green social service. Green ambience was operationalised using a five-item scale adapted from Baker (1986: 79). Green design was measured using a six-item scale adapted from Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews (2009: 238), while green social service was measured using a five-item scale that was adapted from a study by Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews (2009: 240). Green store image and store loyalty were measured using nine and seven items respectively. All the items were adapted from a study conducted by Yusof *et al.* (2012: 714). Green purchase behaviour was measured using a four-item scale adapted from a study conducted by Sinnappan and Rahman (2011: 134). A pre-test was conducted with a university student sample of 50 and minor modifications were made to the final questionnaire. A total of 360 questionnaires were deemed valid for analysis.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Studies, version 23. Data analysis consisted of four stages that involve sample composition, assessment of reliability and validity, correlational and regression analysis.

## RESULTS

### Sample composition

A total of 360 respondents provided valid responses for the study. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents (n = 218; 61%) were female and the remaining were male (n = 142; 39 %). In terms of education, almost half of the respondents were holders of a matric certificate (n = 176; 49 %), followed by diploma holders (n = 126; 35%) and those with a degree constituted approximately 16 percent (n = 58). With regards to age, most respondents (45 %; n = 162) were aged between 18-25 years, followed by those between the ages 26-33 years (30%; n = 108). Respondents between 33-40 years constituted 18 percent (n = 65) and lastly, respondents aged 41 and above were almost 7 percent (n = 25).

### Reliability analysis

The internal consistency of measurement items was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Table 1 provides the Cronbach alpha's coefficients, means and standard deviations of variables under investigation.

**TABLE 1**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND SCALE RELIABILITIES**

| Variable                 | No. of items | Mean   | Standard deviation | Cronbach's alpha values |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Green ambience           | 6            | 3.6622 | 0.93245            | 0.913                   |
| Green design             | 5            | 3.7894 | 0.759785           | 0.898                   |
| Green social service     | 7            | 3.7994 | 0.74900            | 0.901                   |
| Green corporate image    | 5            | 2.1994 | 0.72464            | 0.913                   |
| Store loyalty            | 6            | 3.6622 | 0.93243            | 0.708                   |
| Green purchase behaviour | 5            | 3.7894 | 0.93243            | 0.912                   |

As shown in Table 1, all variables under investigation attained Cronbach's alpha coefficient values ranging from 0.708 to 0.913. This signifies the internal consistency of all measurement items used in this study, as the values are above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Malhotra, 2010: 319).

### Correlation analysis

The degree of association between variables that constituted the conceptual framework was assessed using the Pearson's product moment coefficient (r). The findings of the study showed that green ambience (r = 0.637; p < 0.01) and green design (r = 0.641; p < 0.01) were positively related to green corporate image. However, green social service was shown to be negatively associated with green corporate image (r = -0.672; p < 0.01). The study also showed that store loyalty (r = -0.495 ; p < 0.01)

and green purchase behaviour ( $r = -0.609$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) were negatively related to green corporate image. Table 2 presents results of correlation analysis.

**TABLE 2**  
**RESULTS OF CORRELATION ANALYSIS**

| Variable | GA       | GD       | GSS      | GCI      | SL      | GPB  |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|------|
| GA       | 1.00     |          |          |          |         |      |
| GD       | 0.780**  | 1.000    |          |          |         |      |
| GSS      | -0.760** | -0.755** | 1.000    |          |         |      |
| GCI      | 0.637**  | 0.641**  | -0.672** | 1.000    |         |      |
| SL       | -0.623** | -0.656** | 0.652**  | -0.495** | 1.000   |      |
| GPB      | -0.688** | -0.680** | 0.682**  | -0.609** | 0.593** | 1.00 |

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

*GA = Green ambience, GA = Green design, GSS = Green social service, GCI = Green corporate image, SL = Store loyalty, GPB = Green purchase behaviour.*

### Regression analysis

The study employed standard multiple regression analysis to verify the posited hypotheses. First, pre-conditions for conducting regression analysis such as the sample size adequacy and collinearity test were assessed. Using Tabachnik and Fidell's (2007: 123) formula of calculating sample size ( $N > 50 + 8m$ , where  $m$  = number of independent variables), the sample size of 360 respondents was deemed adequate to perform regression analysis. The correlations were all below the cut-off point of below +0.80 and -0.80 suggesting the absence of multi-collinearity (Grewal, Cote and Baumgartner, 2004). In addition, all variables in this study reported tolerance values, which are above 0.1 and variance inflation factor (VIF) values of less than 10 as recommended by Pallant (2011: 158), suggesting non-collinearity. The inspection of the standardised residual plot showed that all values were below 3.3 and -3.3, as recommended by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007: 128), indicating that outliers did not affect the model results.

Model 1, which had green ambience, green design and green social service as independent variables and green corporate image as a dependent variable showed an adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.466, indicating that independent variables explained approximately 47 percent of the variance in green corporate image. Model 2, that included green corporate image as an independent variable and store loyalty as a dependent variable showed an adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.243, indicating that green corporate image explained almost 24 percent of the variation in store loyalty. Lastly, Model 3, that has green corporate image as an independent variable and green purchase behaviour as a dependent variable, showed an adjusted  $R^2$  value of 0.369 indicating that green corporate image explained almost 37 percent of the variance in green purchase behaviour. As recommended by Pallant (2011: 161), the criterion to accept posited hypotheses was a p-value of .05 or below. Table 3 summarises the results of regression analysis.

**TABLE 3**  
**RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSES**

| Dependent variable: Green corporate image  | Beta   | T       | Sig   | Collinearity statistics |       |
|--|--------|---------|-------|-------------------------|-------|
| Model 1: Independent variables   |        |         |       | Tolerance               | VIF   |
| Green ambience   | 0.183  | 2.059   | 0.040 | 0.188                   | 4.322 |
| Green design   | 0.114  | 1.196   | 0.233 | 0.164                   | 4.103 |
| Green social service   | -0.419 | -5.160  | 0.000 | 0.226                   | 4.430 |
| R=0.686; R <sup>2</sup> = 0.471; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.466; F change = 105.565   |        |         |       |                         |       |
| Dependent variable: Green corporate image  | Beta   | T       | Sig   | Collinearity statistics |       |
| Model 2: Independent variable  |        |         |       | Tolerance               | VIF   |
| Store loyalty  | -0.495 | -10.783 | 0.000 | 1.000                   | 1.00  |
| R=0.495 R <sup>2</sup> = 0.245 , Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.243; F change = 116.274   |        |         |       |                         |       |
| Dependent variable: Green corporate image  | Beta   | T       | Sig   | Collinearity statistics |       |
| Model 3: Independent variable  |        |         |       | Tolerance               | VIF   |
| Green purchase behaviour   | -0.609 | -14.528 | 0.000 | 1.00                    | 1.00  |
| R = 0.609; R <sup>2</sup> = 0.371; Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.369; F change = 211.069 |        |         |       |                         |       |

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study investigated the influence of green atmospherics on green corporate image, store loyalty and green purchase behaviour. The findings of the study are as follows:

**Hypothesis 1** posited that green ambience positively influences green corporate image. This hypothesis was supported ( $\beta = 0.183$ , t-value = 2.059,  $p < 0.01$ ). This result was also corroborated by the existence of a strong positive correlation of ( $r = 0.637$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between green ambience and green corporate image. This result was supported by a study conducted by Miller and Merrilees (2013: 441) that showed that sustainability initiatives enhance corporate reputation. As ambient factors are perceived subliminally by consumers (Baker, 1986: 79), they are more likely to be favourably evaluated by consumers since they are not vocalised. The result implies that investment in green ambience cues, such as the atmosphere of the internal environment, has the potential of enhancing corporate image.

**Hypothesis 2** predicted that green design positively influences green corporate image. This hypothesis was not supported by the data ( $\beta = 0.114$ , t-value = 1.196,  $p < 0.233$ ). This result suggests that, for respondents surveyed in this study, green design did not influence their perceptions of corporate image. The most plausible reason for this result could be that the visibility of green design cues such as signage may be construed by consumers as a ploy by retailers to bolster their corporate image. For instance, Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews (2009: 241) noted that green design is often interpreted by consumers as a cost saving measure as opposed to an indicator of commitment to sustainability. This view gains support from Jones *et al.* (2014: 712) who cautioned retailers against investing in physical infrastructure with sustainability attributes that do not resonate with consumer needs.

**Hypothesis 3** predicted a positive relationship between that green social service and green corporate image. In contrast to the predicted hypothesis, the study showed a negative relationship ( $\beta = -0.419$ , t-value = -5.160,  $p < 0.000$ ). This result was also confirmed by the existence of a positive association



of ( $r = -0.672$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). As green social service also captures employees and consumer interactions (Kreidler and Joseph-Mathews, 2009: 239), this result may suggest that retailers' employees are unable to portray a consistent green image in their interactions with consumers. This result, therefore, calls for retail managers to develop employee competencies in order to offer a green social service that is consistent with sustainability principles.

**Hypothesis 4** predicted a positive relationship between green corporate image and store loyalty. This hypothesis was not supported by the data. This result mirrors that of Yusof *et al.* (2012: 718) where the relationship between green corporate image and store loyalty was found to be insignificant. Contrary to the hypothesised relationship, the study showed a negative relationship between green corporate image and store loyalty ( $\beta = -0.495$ ,  $t\text{-value} = -10.783$ ,  $p < 0.000$ ). This result suggests that a green corporate image projected by South African retailers is not adequate in enhancing repetitive store patronage.

**Hypothesis 5** predicted a positive relationship between green corporate image and green purchase behaviour. This hypothesis was not supported ( $\beta = -0.609$ ,  $t\text{-value} = -14,528$   $p < 0.000$ ). This result suggests that, for respondents surveyed in this study, a green corporate image evokes negative perceptions towards the purchase of green products. This result gains support from a related study conducted by Ramirez (2013: 424) that showed consumers viewed sustainability initiatives with scepticism. In order to enhance green purchase behaviour, Oosterveer and Spaargaren (2012: 135) emphasised the importance of transparency in terms of what green products can do.

## LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study should be interpreted in view of the following limitations: First, the study relied on cross-sectional data to verify the posited hypotheses. Cross-sectional data limits the researcher in understanding the variations in consumer behaviour over time. Future studies may remedy this by employing a longitudinal design that allows for a richer data set and rigorous verification of relationships between variables. Secondly, the focus of this study was retailers in Johannesburg and as such, the findings cannot be generalised to represent the perceptions of South African consumers. Further research may seek to extend these findings to other retailers and other sectors such as the hospitality industry where the trend towards the use of green atmospherics is more noticeable. Lastly, the study relied on self-reported responses generated from a questionnaire survey, which makes the findings to be susceptible to inflated responses. Thus, future research in this area may use a mixed method approach that includes a qualitative design in order to have an in-depth understanding of the subject under investigation.

## CONCLUSIONS

Retailers are emerging as key stakeholders in promoting environmental sustainability. Thus, this study set out to investigate the influence of green atmospherics on corporate image, store loyalty and green purchase behaviour. The study confirmed the positive relationship between green ambience and corporate image. Thus, retailer managers need to devote more resources to the development of green ambience as consumers perceive it favourably. Of great importance to retail managers is the insignificant relationship between green design and corporate image. This result challenges retailers to invest in green design elements that enhance the shopping experience of consumers. The negative relationship between green social service and corporate image challenges retailers to ensure that their commitment to sustainability is consistent with the green corporate image they intend to project to consumers.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study offers several implications on the use of green atmospherics in South Africa's FMCG retail sector. First, this study assists marketers in evaluating the effectiveness of green atmospherics in promoting store image, store loyalty and green purchase decisions. Secondly, the negative sentiments attributed to surveyed retailers' green social service compel retail managers to enhance the legitimacy and credibility of their sustainability initiatives. To gain legitimacy, retailers need to dispel the notion that their investments in green atmospherics are motivated by the desire to maximize profit. This can be done through honest disclosure of sustainability metrics such as carbon emissions, energy usage and water conservation and honesty in sustainability reporting.

Thirdly, it is important to train employees so that they deliver messages that are consistent with the green corporate image they intend to convey. The training may focus on embedding a value system that supports the green image projected by the retailer including educating employees to communicate the environmental benefits of green products in an honest manner. This will go a long way in dispelling green washing claims from consumers and other interest pressure groups. Lastly, investment in green atmospherics is of strategic importance as it results in cost savings and a good corporate citizen often translates into enhanced corporate image. It is also important for retailers to dispel the perception by consumers that green atmospherics are a marketing ploy used to create competitive advantage. In order to enhance store loyalty and sustain competitive advantage, it is important to invest in green atmospherics that enhance consumer value during the buying process.

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