

Collectable Loyalty Programmes: An Investigation into the use of Embedded Messages to invite a Culture of Collecting in the South African Grocery Retailer SPAR's Angry Birds Programme

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Abstract

Customer loyalty has been established as a crucial component to fostering sustainable sales for grocery retailers. Traditional point accrual loyalty card formats have become outdated and a new wave of collectable loyalty programmes is emerging. Despite the evident popularity of collectable programmes, presently available theories have failed to identify the embedded messages within these programmes which invite a culture of collecting in South African consumers, leaving this phenomenon widely unexplained. This study seeks to unearth the elements of text and colour utilised by SPAR in its Angry Birds collectable programmes. This study employed the use of qualitative and interpretivistic research in the form of multimodal discourse analysis, in order to examine each collectable object as a material culture text according to the investigative modal framework of colour and text which was found to increase personification of the collectable items and increase consumers' desire to complete a set. This research therefore explores the uncharted world of collectable programmes within the South African grocery retail industry and contributes to insights into the collecting habits of South African consumers and the messages that invite such a culture of collecting.

Keywords: *Collectable programmes; loyalty programmes; collecting; South African grocery retailers; SPAR; Angry Birds.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The South African grocery retailing sector is one of the most important contributors to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in South Africa. South Africans spent an average of R31 900 per second in retail stores in 2017 [1] [2]. Within such a competitive marketplace, customer retention is crucial as a loyal customer is up to 20 times more valuable to a business than an uncommitted customer - this is particularly true for South African grocery retailers, as profit and growth for South African retailers are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty [3]. The offering of traditional loyalty cards has reached saturation point in the grocery retail market, and consequently there has

been a shift beyond the traditional loyalty programme structures of points and discounts, to more innovative relationship-building programmes [4]. It seems that collectable programmes have become the new loyalty tactic.

The SPAR Angry Bird's collectable programme was launched in South Africa where consumers were rewarded with a collectable SPAR Angry Bird Lenticular card after spending a minimum of R150 on items in the store [5].

This research is motivated by the absence of work on collectable programmes as replacements to traditional grocery retail loyalty programmes. This study will perform an in-depth multimodal discourse analysis on the SPAR Angry Bird's

collectable objects as texts. Through investigating the multimodal elements of colour and text, the ways in which these programmes evoke collective responses in consumers through fostering set-completion motives, personification and dominance, is proven.



Image 1: SPAR Angry Birds Source: Entertainment SA, 2016.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROBLEM INVESTIGATED

A. SPAR Angry Birds

SPAR is a Netherlands-based franchise retail firm and operates as a wholesaler and distributor to independent retailers in South Africa, operating a network of 2 033 stores in 35 countries globally [6] [7].



Image 2: SPAR Angry Birds album Source: Entertainment SA, 2016; Image 3: SPAR Angry Birds cards Source: Smith, 2016

Children have become active contributors to purchase decisions, as traditional parental models in family structures have been replaced by greater flexibility, with new participatory models that advance children's input status [8]. Renewed emphasis therefore needs to be placed on reaching both children and adults/parents simultaneously, as children are an inevitable partner in the buying decisions and are a future customer base for retailers, with colour being a significant communicator to young children in particular [9]. Collectables highlight the need to explore the analogy between play and consumption as fast-

moving consumer goods are a mundane purchase in South Africa [10].

There is a need for future research to further explore the underlying emotional and experiential conditions that provide a setting for this kind of collectable craving. This study answers this call in-part.

B. Research Objectives

This study can be regarded as exploratory since it considers the previously unexplored world of non-traditional loyalty programmes and attempts to understand how the incorporation of colour and text as a core multimodal element is used to induce repeat consumer engagement with SPAR's Angry Birds programme.

Therefore, the research question for the study is formulated as follows: How do colour as text, as a modes prevalently embedded in the collectable loyalty programmes of SPAR, invite a culture of collecting among South African consumers?

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Interpretivistic Research Paradigm

This research followed a qualitative interpretivistic approach through its use of observing and analysing collectable objects as material culture texts. The exploratory nature of this research, with very little written on non-traditional and non-card loyalty programmes of South African grocery retailers, and no research on the collecting habits of South African consumers and their responses to colour, meant that the interpretivist paradigm was appropriate.

B. Corpus Construction

Within a research study, the corpus that is selected can be defined as all of the individuals, or units relevant to a study [11]. The overall corpus of this study includes all collectable items and display cases of the SPAR Angry Bird's collectable programme (29 items in total).

C. Non-probability Purposive Text Selection

This study made use of non-probability sampling techniques, with the ultimate decision to include purposive sampling in selecting a relevant

body of text [12] [13]. The researcher limited the selected text group to include items from the SPAR Angry Birds collectable programme. The text data set therefore consisted of a total 29 items which included all pages from the display albums as the user experiences the album as a whole, not just the collectable lenticular cards individually. Meaning resides in a system of relationships between signs and not in the signs themselves, as a sign considered in isolation would be meaningless [14].

D. Text and Data Collection Process

For the purpose of this study, data collection took place by finding complete sets of SPAR Angry Birds collectable programmes, sorting, photographing, recording and categorising each object and the various modes that it consists of and identifying common textual and visually communicated tactics to induce collecting.

E. Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis was the core research method employed. Modality can be defined as a means of impressions analysis [15].

When consumers see colour, they draw on physical as well as symbolic modes, which combine into inferred messages [16]. Each element of material culture production is an embodiment of the relationship between signs and other signs, which reach out beyond themselves and towards others, becoming amplified or subdued in specific contexts [17]. There is therefore an increasing volume of literature in the area of text mining and the practice of analysing text in order to unearth and capture such semantic information [18]. This analysis is often done through a preselected group of modes, which the researcher uses as a framework for analysis. This research has focused on colour and text as illustrated in Figure 1.

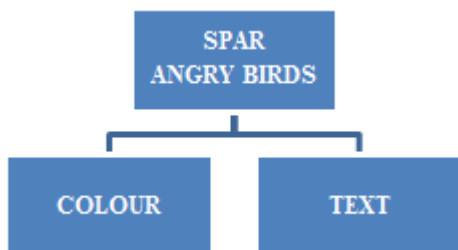


Figure 1: Multimodal discourse analysis framework elements

Source: Author's Own

IV. RESULTS/FINDINGS

A. Use of Colour

The study of colour, and the ways in which certain hues and shades are used within certain ideological perspectives, is an important method of meaning construction [19]. Within the context of pester power and child consumers, colours are one of the main factors children consider when deciding to purchase something [20]. Nine to ten-year-old children prefer colourful packages, regardless of product quality [21]. This was noticeable in all five of the collectable programmes, which employed combinations of bright colours such as blue, green, pink, yellow and red throughout the objects and the albums and cases in which the collectable objects were displayed. Research indicates that children prefer the colours at the primary end of the spectrum (red, yellow and orange) [22]. This was utilised in SPAR Angry Birds programme where four out of the six key headings on the display album incorporated a combination of red, orange and yellow (see Images 4-7).



Image 4: SPAR Angry Birds Heading front page
Source: Author's Own;

Image 5: SPAR Angry Birds Heading page 2
Source: Author's Own;

Image 6: SPAR Angry Birds Heading page 3
Source: Author's Own;

Image 7: SPAR Angry Birds Heading page 5
Source: Author's Own.

B. Use of Text

When considering text as a mode, it should be remembered that language, like consumption, is never neutral as the choice of language constructs meanings [23]. There is therefore no innocent or

transparent text as all facts and events speak to their culturally conditioned observers and participants and so every comma, exclamation mark and capital letter used in the text has meaning [17].

C. Completing a Set

Collecting satisfies the collector's need for order as the active exploratory task of organising and cataloguing the objects through patterning, creating connections and contrasts, are strategies for reducing uncertainty [24]. Collecting is a sheltered means of confronting the disorder of reality by creating order out of chaos [25] This set-completion motive is inspired by the pursuit of closure, which incorporates elements of tension and tension reduction [26].

Furthermore, through framing a set, collectors deliberately create an agenda for the construction of, and reduction of, tension. In lessening tension, collection sets increase feelings of completeness as completing the collection, completes the individual with collectors with a whole collection feeling more like a whole person [27]. In SPAR Angry Birds this is embodied in the ways in which the colour slots for the lenticular cards have images representing the cards printed on the album itself. This serves as a type of foreshadowing of what the complete set would look like if all collectable objects are acquired thus, motivating the user to fill in these foreshadowed slots with the real collectable cards (see Image 8).

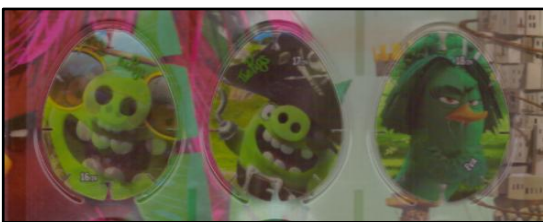


Image 8: SPAR Angry Birds printed images
Source: Author's Own.

Furthermore, throughout the SPAR Angry Birds Album, textual reference is made to "collect all 24," "get all 24" and "24 lenticulars to collect" thus reminding the user of how many more he or she needs to complete the set. This tactic is used not just on the display cases, but on the collectable objects themselves such as the SPAR Angry Birds

lenticular cards which display a number out of the total number of 24 in the bottom right hand corner of the card (see Image 9). This serves as a reminder that the card is "1/24" and therefore once again reminds the user that he or she still has 23 objects to collect.

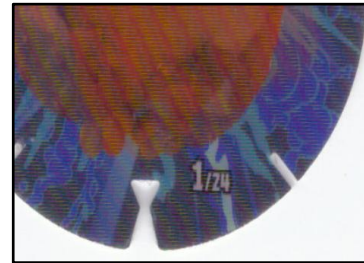


Image 9: SPAR Angry Birds 1/24 Source: Author's Own

D. Personification

Personification can be defined as the attribution of a personal nature or human characteristics to something non-human and so the collectable programme objects are infused with personality in various ways [28]. Each of the SPAR Angry Birds has a name which appears on the lenticular card. This leads to users becoming emotionally invested in each object and missing one feels like leaving someone behind. Completing the set therefore feels like completing the family (see Image 10).



Image 10: SPAR Angry Birds lenticular card name
Source: Author's Own

In this way, when a card is missing from the collection, the user refers, not just to the card in its physical description for example, the "red bird," but refers to the card by the character it represents namely "Red" or "Stella" or "Matilda" or "Judge Peckinpan." This intimate relationship with objects through the elements of personalisation which are incorporated into the collectable programmes furthermore manifests in the users' need to "visit"

the collections after not interacting with the objects in a while, in the same way that humans feel the need to visit old friends when time has passed. Favouring objects instead of people is often a means of coping with social exclusion and so affection is attached to objects which are named in the same way that a person would offer companionship [29]. This personal relationship is created with a “back story” provided in the SPAR Angry Birds display album where context is given to the “characters” (see Image 11). The text in the Angry Birds album describes the characters’ home, namely “Bird Island,” as “a happy bird community” and a “flourishing island” with “diverse nature, ranging from savage jungle to the friendly bustle of the cozy village built by the birds.”

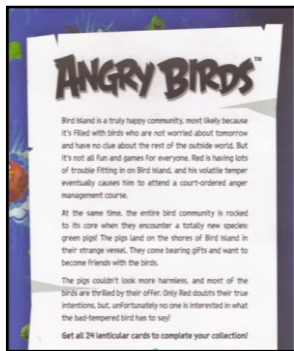


Image 11: SPAR Angry Birds backstory Source: Author’s Own.



Image 12: SPAR Angry Birds they’re here Source: Author’s Own

It furthermore adds personality to the protagonist Red, who is described as having a “volatile temper.” This was manifested in the SPAR Angry Birds collectable programme which frequently referred to the Angry Birds as “arriving” with exclamations such as “Angry Birds are here!”

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(see Image 12), as if the SPAR Angry Bird lenticular character cards were old friends that had arrived at a gathering.

E. Dominance and Control

Society can be seen to be inherently collective as it thrives on classification, rule, labels, sets and systems and so collectors often exhibit desires for ownership which replicate broader societal patterns [30]. Furthermore, this need to possess is often driven by a need for control as collections are objects of affection, as well as objects of dominance [31]. This dominance is a theme reflected in the rule’s collectors have as to who may touch the collection.

When an object is stripped of its practical function and is removed from its working context in order to now serve as a sacred collectable object, it achieves a strictly subjective status. Objects are wrenched out of their true contexts and become dead to their living time and space, in order that they may be granted an immortality within the collection by the authority of the collector [35]. Therefore, it can be theorised that once an object is no longer defined by its function, its meaning and identity is entirely up to the subject, namely the collector. This is perhaps the ultimate sense of power and control as the very essence of an object is created by the user of the collectable programme.



Image 13: SPAR Angry Birds display album. Source: Author’s own

On a physical level, this is represented practically within the SPAR Angry Birds collectable programme as the user literally gives movement, and subsequently life, to the inanimate object. The user can “slot one lenticular card into

another” by using the “large slots at the top or bottom” or the card after which he or she “FLICKS” and “FLINGS” the card (see Image 13). This game aspect which incorporates energetic references to movement, means that the user is the creator of life for the objects as he or she, through aspects such as slotting in and flicking, adds movement to static and inanimate lenticular cards.

V. PRACTICAL MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The nature of interpretivistic and qualitative research means that a study often raises more questions than it answers. The message elements that emerged from the multimodal discourse analysis, such as colour and text, highlight the ways in which SPAR was able to successfully invite collective behaviours from consumers through including certain features and elements in their collectable programmes. In order to increase a culture of collecting in consumers, future collectable programmes could include the features and elements discussed in the section to follow.



Image 14: SPAR Angry Birds display album.
Source: Author's own.

The programmes should employ colours on the primary end of the spectrum that appeal to children specifically, in both the headings and background of the display cases or albums (see Image 14). Colour should furthermore be employed to create product brand loyalty through incorporating the colours of the company logo. Textual cues that encourage consumers to complete the full set by reminder the user how many items are in the full set should be included. The objects should furthermore be personified as much as possible

through colour and text cues which strengthen the personal connection the consumer feels with the items. In addition, the use of textual phrases that emphasise the power of the user in bringing the items to life, should be included.

VI. CONCLUSION

Far from being a relic of the past, the act of collecting has been proven to be a significant social phenomenon as it continues to represent how material culture constructs the social roles and identities of consumers. Customer loyalty has been established as a crucial component in fostering sustainable sales for grocery retailers. Within a highly competitive industry, customer retention is crucial, yet the assumption cannot be made that satisfied customers will remain loyal to a retailer and dissatisfied customers will defect. Increased shopper mobility has meant that changing store allegiance has become common practice, as consumers are far more fickle than retailers would like to believe. Emphasis has therefore been placed on finding means to attract and retain core consumers through rewarding consumers for repeat purchases. The means by which such loyalty is stimulated in the South African grocery retailing industry have become increasingly complex.

In investigating the SPAR Angry Birds collectable programme, it is clear that there are recurring messages embedded in each collectable programme centred around colour and text, that have contributed to the success and increased prevalence of these collectable programmes. Through gaining an understanding of the motivations behind why consumers collect, SPAR has successfully incorporated these motives into the framework of its programmes. It is furthermore noted that grocery retailers should be careful that consumers' enthusiasm for a collectable programme does not overshadow the grocery retailer brand. There is a risk that the popularity of a collectable programme could overtake that of the grocery retailer and so retailers should constantly manage responses to programmes and ensure that loyalty is created towards the grocery retailer offering the programme, instead of the collectable programme itself.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Multimodal Frame

LIST OF IMAGES

Image 1 - SPAR Angry Birds plush toys

Image 2 - SPAR Angry Birds album

Image 3 - SPAR Angry Birds cards

Image 4 - SPAR Angry Birds Heading front page

Image 5 - SPAR Angry Birds Heading

Image 6 - SPAR Angry Birds Heading

Image 7 - SPAR Angry Birds Heading

Image 8 - SPAR Angry Birds printed images

Image 9 - SPAR Angry Birds 1/24

Image 10 - SPAR Angry Birds lenticular card name

Image 11 - SPAR Angry Birds backstory

Image 12 - SPAR Angry Birds they're here

Image 13 - SPAR Angry Birds album

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