

# How does a fashion brand's customer experience translate in Premium & Luxury retail formats? A parisian retail market outlook

Ghalia Boustani

Hiba Zielinski\*

IAE Nice, Université Côte d'azure, France

## Keywords

Luxury Retail, Fashion Retail, Customer Experience, Retail Customer experience

## Abstract

*This article aims to better understand the customer experience at different fashion brand levels in. Given that many studies have looked closely at the in-store customer experience, there is very little data on the application of the results to different brands with different market positions.*

**Purpose:** *The purpose of this research is to look at different fashion brand physical stores, understand their compositional elements and highlight the type of customer experience they would induce.*

**Design/methodology/approach:** *Nine fashion brands were observed in the heart of Paris in March 2022. The sample consisted of active luxury, high-end and premium brands in the French market.*

**Findings:** *In a highly digital world, brands are investing more in the phygitalization of their retail stores. And yet high-end and luxury brands still retain a more traditional look from their standalone retail stores, concept, and flagship. The aesthetic of the physical retail environment is mirrored in a theatrical setting that tells a story; the customer is the protagonist. Along the way, the social and societal aspects of retail stores are highlighted. The level of involvement, knowledge, and expertise of brand representatives, as well as the environments created for clients to weave their social activities, help induce, and influence their experience. In high-end and luxury boutiques, hedonist experiences are guided by design and reinforced by social and societal dimensions.*

**Original/value:** *Current research has demystified the client experience in a physical retail environment and has identified the dimensions that greatly affect it and how they affect it.*

**Research limitations and outlook:** *The limited external validity of qualitative research methods encourages us to pursue observations and corroborate results on the one hand. On the other hand, empirical testing would help to confirm the relationship between variables and their relevance in the area studied.*

Corresponding author: Ghalia Boustani

Email addresses for the corresponding author: ghaliaboustani@gmail.com

The first submission received: 7<sup>th</sup> March 2023

Revised submission received: 20<sup>th</sup> April 2023

Accepted: 30<sup>th</sup> April 2023

## Introduction

Consumers often view products and services as identical and homogeneous, challenging brands to invest in the experiential dimension applicable at the retail level. In their opinion, a unique and distinctive retail environment translates into a positive customer experience. The shopping experience needs to be creative and memorable so that consumers can immerse themselves in the brand's retail environment and create a connection with it (Petermans et al., 2013). With the advent and development of online retail, access to products has become much easier and customer friendly. Traditional retail formats have begun to emphasize the retail and service experience (Harris et al., 2010) to maintain customer interest.

As experience has become an important element of shopping (Pine & Gilmore, 1996), and experiential marketing techniques have provided what consumers are looking for, brands have placed their customers at the heart of their processes. They switched from a push strategy to a pull strategy (Trott, 2003). After the broader shift to a user-centric paradigm, concepts such as experiential context, optimal shopping experience, consumer experience, immersive experience, and customer journey, took a central role in the brand's retail formula. Shopping may not meet functional, physical, or economic requirements (Babin et al., 1994). While retail strategy still focuses on dimensions of price, assortment, format, and service

features, it also suggests hedonic (Naylor et al. 2008) and ideological appeals that influence retail experience and success (Arnold et al. 2001; Kozinets et al. 2002). In the age of the experiential economy, most brands strive to provide exceptional brand experiences, drive differentiation, and create a competitive advantage (Jahn, et.al, 2018). Brand investments in physical formats reflect their promise of offering a unique and intense client experience (Grewal et.al, 2009; Verhoef et.al, 2009).

Today's retail landscape is faced with changes affecting brands and customers. Brands imagine investing in brick-and-mortar stores, online stores, and mobile apps. Online shopping was also significantly accelerated during and after the pandemic. COVID-19 has disrupted consumer shopping behaviours and habits. These have retained their recently acquired pandemic behaviours and do not seem to return to what retail was like before the sanitary situation. As physical store visit is facing challenges in providing compelling customer experiences (Bilgihan et al., 2016), and that today's consumers desire to remain shopping in a store, brands are willing to invest in better ways of delivering value in customer experience (McLean et al., 2020).

### Literature review

#### *Customer experience: what does it consist of?*

Understanding the customer experience over time is essential for brands (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Many definitions of customer experience can be found in the literature. An example is Schmitt (1999), who takes a multi-dimensional perspective and identifies five types of experiences: sensory, emotional, cognitive, physical, and social. This act not only evolves the senses of an individual but is a relationship and an understanding of the environment in which he himself associates himself with. From a physical retail perspective, Verhoef et al. (2009, p. 32) define the customer experience as a multifaceted and holistic concept. Furthermore, they argue that the customer retail experience is a result of both elements that the retailer controls (service interface, retail atmosphere, assortment, price, store brand) and those elements outside of his/her control (influence of third parties, reason for buying, situational factors). Other authors describe the experience as a series of integrated events that lead to a pleasant, relaxing, rewarding, and delightful client experience (Bagdara & Jain, 2013).

In addition to his understanding and processing of the retail environment, the customer is actively participating in constructing a journey and that will, eventually, lead to positive emotional reactions. To improve customer experience, a customer journey map is often used. Grewal & Riggeveen (2020, p. 54) define customer journey management (CJM) as "*understanding and managing customers' experiences throughout their shopping journey*", whether it is a product, a service, an online or retail experience (Richardson, 2010). Other literature identifies the customer journey map touchpoints in three different phases: Pre-service, during-service, and post-service (Rosenbaum et al., 2017).

At the physical store level, multisensory items can encourage, promote, involve (Bagdara & Jain, 2013), and motivate customers during their visit (Kim, 2022). The retail environment should involve the customer in the buying situation and with other/customers. The shopping experience can also satisfy customers by allowing them to indulge and contribute to the creation or co-creation of products or ideas. Finally, customers who see value in their buying experience may find a sense of joy and satisfaction. The physical retail luxury experience is affected by a range of external factors (Kim et.al, 2016) that begin with an individual's state before entering the store and their objective of entering it; whether to purchase, browse, or both. Furthermore, their familiarity with the brand is a decisive factor in their perception and emotional state before entering the store. In a luxury environment, the influence on customer emotions should be carefully managed to ensure a positive shopping experience and, ultimately, a positive customer experience before leaving the store.

The luxury purchasing experience is disturbed by rituals that structure a customer's contact with the offer. They are invited to participate in the magical luxurious environment throughout all its dimensions. In terms of aesthetics, a closed front door gives the impression of exclusivity. A well-dressed doorman opens the door to greet the customer. The ritual separates the outer environment and marks the entrance to a place of privilege (Campbell 1961; Wunenburger 2001). This rite could be accompanied by an exaggerated theatrical atmosphere, and a carefully attended-to customer (Kapferer 2009; Stoller and Olkes 1987) to help immerse them into the heart of the brand's magic. What is more important is that this will create a climate of reverence. Hence, the luxury retail experience reflects the brand's charisma. It reflects

the “extraordinary” brand persona, on one hand, and brings consumers into the magic of the brand story, on the other hand.

Luxury is connecting with customers on an emotional level and has a high “ratio” of intangible value to the price. Stories are told through boutique designs, sales rituals, communications, or window displays; they reflect the brand's heritage and evoke singularity and magic.

*Physical retail formats induce immersive customer experiences.*

Retail environments have developed into contact points through which customers satisfy their need for multisensory, fantastic, and emotional aspects of the shopping experience (Blázquez Cano, 2014). It is not the product that customers are looking for, but the research or access to an experience that they are most appreciative of (Babin et al., 2022). From that perspective, an individual assesses all stages and elements involved in that process, starting from a pre-visit or pre-purchase, and ending at a post-visit or post-purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The physical retail environment makes it possible for customers to interact with the brand, through all the atmospheric elements, brand representatives and other customers. In addition to the environmental and aesthetic aspects, a brand heavily invests in marketing and service activities to have a greater impact on customer emotional and behavioral reactions.

Thanks to recent technological developments, consumers have developed a strong interest in entertaining and interactive retail environments. To attract new and existing customers, the retail industry studied innovation through immersive in store experiences (Pantano & Laria, 2012). Immersion is perceived as a means of accessing and producing a consumer experience (Caru & Cova, 2007). By combining physical and digital elements, brands can create a new retail store approach. As technology has become strongly present in stores, it has allowed brands to interact with customers and enriched the purchasing experience. Today, to enjoy the in-store experience, customers need new stimuli. For that, the use of interactive technologies manages to mobilize their five senses (Caboni, 2022).

With increasing innovation in the luxury industry, luxury brands are also seeking to offer their customers immersive experiences. One of the new ways luxury retailers have created immersive experiences is via augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). These technologies enable customers to access an “improved version of real-time physical space through realistic interfaces”. This results in improved client perceptions of the physical retail environment. Augmented Reality also offers new possibilities for showing objects that are not “*physically available in the real world*” thereby enriching the content and information at the users’ disposal (Boletsis and Karahasanovic, 2020).

Technology also led to presenting “Augmented Places”; a commonly practiced immersive experience for luxury retailers. Augmented places are physical places improved by augmented reality. They recreate and improve the experience of the environment in question. Brands overlap virtual reconstructions of past heritage and actual places, supporting users’ understanding of their historical value. It also leads to a greater emotional attitude of users toward the place and a better understanding of the significance of multicultural places (Bonetti et.al, 2020). These types of immersive experiences are essential to create a better experience for the luxury customer while providing an innovative, yet traditional, luxury shopping experience.

Distinct retail formats	
Luxury brand store	Prestigious physical stores are at the core value proposition of a luxury brand (Kapferer, 2017). Their main strategic challenge is to constantly be on luxury consumers’ radar, discovering new and different ways to express their desires (Atwal & Williams, 2017).
Concept store	Concept stores share similarities with flagship brand stores and pop-up stores, which accomplish a similar goal of reinforcing customer-brand bonds, communication, and brand image enhancement (Soloaga, 2014). It is no longer enough that the store offers products or services: it must also provide a surprising and stimulating shopping environment. The difference between traditional retail and concept stores is the emotional factor involved. When the customer’s emotions and senses are stimulated, their purchase intentions and behaviours are conditioned (Triki, 2017).
Physical store	Boutique stores create experiences with consumers and conversation that is not

	<p>available in a digital reality. Brands allow their products to be tested, felt, worn, and have positive, tangible experiences with informative staff guiding for any questions consumers may have at the time (McIntosh, 2005). So, when entering a boutique, consumers experience all possible five senses. The small micro-moments a consumer experiences all contribute to an in-store shopping experience that they cannot experience virtually (Gupta, 2012).</p> <p>The goal for brands is to create a personalized experience with products but focus on the entire experience from the moment a consumer walks into the boutique. In the current digital age, companies are having a harder time connecting with customers and overall having a positive customer experience, especially larger brands (Gao, 2012).</p>
E-commerce website	<p>While online stores can open an internationalization for fashion brands, luxury exclusivity is threatened by the very nature of the Internet (Kapeferer 2014 and Guercini &amp; Runfola, 2015). As customers interact with more digital media, it is beginning to appear as a preferred source for new product discoveries. Besides, it is a more convenient method for purchasing. This allows customers who may not have access to a physical location to be educated by the brand and find products more readily. The advancement of digital media has also allowed for a more personalized experience through the curation of each customer's landing page.</p>

Table 1: Distinct retail formats

### Research Gap

While brands use modern retail methods based on traditional marketing principles, they consistently deliver highly sophisticated and culturally diverse customer experiences (Nagasawa, 2008). Physical commerce evokes a deeper philosophical sense that provides its clients with a comprehensive emotional and sensory experience (Fauconnier, 2014). Most recently, the retail fashion industry has reinvented and innovated to give customers the best shopping experience. One of these methods is through the store design, which is best described as a retailing tool that utilizes “innovative store elements, such as creative design and in-store technology, and a limited store assortment consisting of private label items” (Burt, 2021).

Academic literature provides a great deal of evidence on experiences, in general, and client experiences, in particular. At times when studies contextualize their research on one brand type or one retail format, a lack of evidence on how “customer experience” could present points of difference or similarities in different retail formats is interesting to look at. This research aims to answer, “how does a fashion brand’s customer experience translate in premium and luxury retail formats?”. We limit this research to the Parisian market.

### Methodology

This exploratory research aimed at understanding the nature of customer experience, and, specifically in the context of premium & luxury brands. Data collection was restricted to the French market and to the city of Paris more specifically.

A group of 4 researchers to observe 9 brands between March 16 <sup>th</sup> and March 21 <sup>st</sup> , 2022
Delimitation of the area of observation of the city of Paris
Brand selection criteria: premium, high-end and luxury brands
Preparation of the in-situ observation guideline
Determining the in-situ observations’ visit time and date
Scheduling the timing and place of the 9 store visits
Determining data collection tools and data organization tools
Ensuring all permissions are taken before the visit

Table 2: Process of Preparing the In-Situ Observation

An in-situ observation’s purpose is to describe how customers interact with different retail formats (Pomodoro, 2013 and Ghosh & Craig, 1983) and to understand the nature of this experience. A total of 9

premium & luxury stores were observed in March 2022 in the area of Paris, Ile de France. Information was gathered in the form taking notes and photos (Pomodoro, 2013 and Picot-Coupey, 2014) as well as texts.

Observed Brand	Location	Retail format	Date	Time	Comment
Christian Dior	30 Av. Montaigne, 75008	Concept store	March 21st, 2022	12:20 pm	French luxury brand, Timeless femininity, Elegance
Vivienne Westwood	175 Rue St Honoré, 75001 Paris	Stand-alone boutique	March 20 <sup>th</sup> , 2022	12:15 pm	An affordable luxury brand in which the designer emphasizes her continuous social and political struggles. Keeping environmental issues at heart and focusing on sustainability
Chloé	50 Av. Montaigne, 75008	Stand-alone boutique	March 21st, 2022	5:00 pm	Boho Chic, Free Spirit, Parisian Aesthetic
Jacquemus	60 avenue des Champs Elysées	Concession in a department store (Galeries Lafayette)	March 16 <sup>th</sup> , 2022	2:30pm	A “naïve” brand that is stylistically accessible and close to looking like popular fashion
Prada	7 rue de Grenelle, 75015	Stand-alone boutique	March 17 <sup>th</sup> , 2022	3:55pm	Described as both classic and eccentric, frumpy but hip, marked by an ambiguous techno-retro sensibility.
Balenciaga	336 rue St. Honoré, 75001	E-commerce site	March 17 <sup>th</sup> , 2022	1:00 pm	Balenciaga is most known for revolutionizing women’s fashion with never-before-seen shapes in the mid-20th century, such as the “ballroom hems” of the early 1950s, the “semi-fit” lines of the mid-50s and the introduction of the “sack dress” in 1957.
Yves Saint-Laurent	6 Pl. Saint-Sulpice, 75006	Stand-alone boutique	March 18 <sup>th</sup> , 2022	3:30 pm	At the dawn of pop culture and when there was an unquenchable thirst for new ideas and designs.
Isabel Marant	1 Rue Jacob, 75006	Stand-alone boutique	March 21 <sup>st</sup> , 2022	11:30 am	A ubiquitous mix of French <i>je-ne-sais-quoi</i> , rock-n-roll, boyish details, and bohemian elements.
Sandro	16 Rue du Vieux Colombier, 75006	Stand-alone boutique	March 21 <sup>st</sup> , 2022	12:00 pm	Chic, relaxed and glamorous, it adapts to the desires of modern young women.

Table 3: List of Parisian observed brands.

Content analysis is the most widely used method for studying qualitative observations (Andreani & Conchon, 2006). An in-situ observation guide set the basis of the observation process. Inspired by rich literature on client experience, the guide consisted of a set of items to be examined during the visit. The first observations focused on the exterior of the store, its location and its surroundings. Next, the guide defined the main references for viewing interiors, layout and space, display, product mix, theme, and so on. Team presence, interaction as well as the presence of visitors and interaction with space, is also one of the main elements observed.

Title/Reference	
Brand	
Signage	
Place/Address	
Date of Visit	
Time of Visit	
Exterior (surroundings/neighbourhood)	
Exterior (shop window, façade)	
The layout of the store space	
Size of the store	
Aesthetics	
Fun	
Price/Quality Ratio	
Interactions of the store employees	
The time spent	
Customer Journey	
Hedonic values (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003)	
Utilitarian values (Kim, 2006)	
Communication Actions	
Other notes/observations	

Table 4: In-situ observation guideline

### Presentation of the findings

A customer's overall experience is affected by various brand aspects, and the retail format, whether on a premium or luxury level. The customer experience is the sum of all reviews that are collected from the time he contacts the retail format until the time the contact is stopped. Various retail formats have their methods of presenting to consumers. These consumers draw a holistic evaluation of all the fragmented experiences that they recorded during their visit to the brand's retail format. A total of seven cases were recorded based on data gathered through our in-situ observations.

#### *The brand retail format's location*

Imposing presence: Stand-alone premium and luxury brand exteriors are principal components of the customer's perception of the brand. The bigger the façade and the more exclusive the site, the greater the sense of humility towards the brand. A brand's accessibility is also important. At times when the brand's retail format stands on a busy High Street and has ease of access to the location, it only welcomes those few privileged to enter its universe. When the brand takes the form of a concession, its "guards" seem less present and its premises more accessible.

First impressions are made outside: Although the architectural shape is impressive, the windows are seductive. They highlight the brand's offer and relate it to seasonality or other pertinent events. The more luxurious the brand, the larger the exhibition and display. Standalone display cases are well maintained, well designed and present the brand's products.

#### *The brand retail format's atmosphere*

Homogeneity: At the level of the store's atmosphere lies the connection and homogeneity between the conception of the brand's retail atmosphere, then, its conception at the level of the offering/product lines. First, in the case of a stand-alone premium or luxury boutiques, different collections (such as women and men) and different collection categories (such as garments, shoes, accessories, bags, makeup, and perfumes) are allocated to different areas of the store. This creates several *micro-atmospheres*. One thread line links all *micro-atmospheres* into the global brand's homogenous retail atmosphere.

Aesthetics: Brands pay much attention to details. The style, finishing and quality of in-store furniture reflect the brand's identity and its positioning. Furniture highlights and supports the offering by projecting its correct value to the customer. If the brand does not pay attention to the smallest details, its

image will be adversely affected. Naturally, brand furniture and decorations reflect the brand's identity. This reassures customers; it confirms what they have acquired from the brand's persona by seeing and touching elements during their visit to the store.

The "feel": Intangible brand elements support associations that customers could have built during their visits. A retail atmosphere, that seems very luxurious and pleasurable, is the sum of aesthetic tangible design elements and non-tangible elements. Lighting, fragrance and music are some examples of non-tangible design elements. When entering a physical luxury store flooded with natural light, when travelling into a different dimension through fragrance, or transported by the music, customers enclave in the brand's universe. Luxury brand concept stores invest greatly in intangible elements to influence customers' moods during their visits.

#### *The brand retail format's product selection and presentation*

Visual merchandising attractiveness: Visual merchandising and product presentation play a role in the impression that customers have of the brand. An unclear, unreadable, collection and lacking clear product presentation guidelines, confuse customers. On the one hand, it negatively reflects the attention of the brand and the attendance of its offer, and on the other hand, questions the quality and price of the presented items. Premium brand retail formats might have presented very attractive visual displays; however, when entering the store, visual merchandising and product presentation might seem basic and less sophisticated.

In-store visual merchandising reflects the price/quality assessment of brand products by the customer. The more exclusive the product displayed, the more its quality is perceived. Customers can concentrate on every product and enjoy its qualities. Moreover, compliance with clear visual merchandising guidelines, such as colour, fabric, style and printing organization, makes the offer more attractive.

Failing to pay attention to visual merchandising guidelines, as in the case of high-end brands, the customer could not have a positive image association of the brand. Customers could have the impression of disorder and chaotic organization as they see less structure. Moreover, not ventilating the space between product styles makes it less desirable. If luxury brands are to maintain the standard in their physical stores, they must maintain it in their online stores. When the product and the website are not visually appealing, the customer will be less inclined to pursue their search or purchase.

Categorization and universes: A noticeable difference between traditional independent stores, concessions and concept stores is makeup, perfume and coffee places/dining rooms. These are visible separations from the overall brand universe. Customers who share a brand's values and like it, but cannot afford to purchase from its main offering, are inclined to find their way into these brand offerings. While the price range is always above average commodity prices for a similar category, customers feel the experience is worth it. Premium and luxury brands tend to devote different categories to different parts of their retail store. Such an organization influences the customer's shopping experience. What looks interesting in the case of luxury brand online stores is the opportunity to explore products that go back at least five years.

Brand physical evidence: The brand's physical evidence, such as colours, prints, shapes, volumes or textures, make its categories recognizable and make it easier for customers to travel in stores. Online, fewer items could be invested; however, the brand's design chart is an important criterion for brand recognition and customer navigation among its various categories.

#### *The brand retail format's layout and customer journey*

Embarking on a brand journey: The retail format's shape plays an important role in the feeling of openness or oppression that customers might evoke. For instance, a "U" shaped layout, in the case of a concession, gives the impression of openness and liberty to move around. If rethinking the arrangement is less flexible, brands invest in the retail atmosphere's lighting, wall decoration and comfortable furniture. Additional variables, such as artificial or natural plants, make the retail space more attractive and inviting. Whether it is a physical store (or concept store) that stretches on different formats, the customer

will understand the brand's history by connecting of its representations, very much similar to the process of assembling the pieces of a puzzle.

**Storytelling:** Highlighting the proposed journey through the retail format's atmosphere and layout. When a retail format's aesthetic is attractive, and the offer is well presented, customers will increase their stay time. They will explore all sections and take time to get to know the products. Brands may choose to focus on aspects of their identity, whether philosophical or cultural, to teleport their clients to their universe. The brick-and-mortar store becomes the medium through which a customer journey begins.

#### *The brand retail format's communications*

**Absence of in-store communications:** Very few in-store communications are found in luxury stores and concept stores. Premium brands are more likely to highlight aspects related to product price reductions and/or promotions. The remarkable absence of in-store communication makes the in-store customer journey, a personal journey. At its own pace, at the tempo of its choosing, the customer would navigate between sections of the brand's retail format. One-on-one attendance and customer service could help a customer or guide their journey around the store.

**Brand or product-related information:** Some brands fail to transmit their image through product or in-store communications. This could negatively affect the customer's impression of the brand. Some other in-store communications could be minimal to imaging or distributing video ads across screens. With premium brands, in-store communications are of greater weight. This much-needed tool is a helper. When more visitors are in the store at the same time and cannot be followed by brand representatives, the shared information satisfies customers' needs.

#### *The service at brand's retail format*

Premium and luxury brands value their retail store's atmospheres social dimension. Even if luxury is mainly associated with customer service, there are three apparent situations that customers could face once in-store.

**Welcoming attendance:** The service has a great impact on the quality and price of the brand offer. The employee's way of welcoming, and always saying hi with a smile, on their face as well as having employees that speak all different languages give clients more confidence in their shopping journey. Premium and luxury brands invest in personal and personalised services; staff members are social, knowledgeable and helpful. Customers feel welcome and comfortable when not viewed with contempt.

**Delayed attendance:** When an individual needs personal follow-up and there are more customers than the luxury brand's staff can handle, attendance may be delayed. Some brands do not allow customers to walk freely through the store; waiting will be inevitable before being attended to. This does not make the service less professional, but the experience will not be very pleasurable. Late presence is also noticeable when customers are in the luxury brand's online boutique. A "contact us" button is available for all pages of the online shop. Links to a phone number and a link to chat on social media are available. Clicking on the social media link does not instantly open a chat because sales reps are not necessarily available. Shall a customer require same-day or urgent information, he might not be able to have it, or the response time could be slower.

**Lack of attendance:** A feeling of entering a deserted store does not encourage customers to stay. The lack of customer service (or lack of attendance) considerably lowers the legitimacy of the prices of these products.

**Oppressing attendance:** feeling watched, unwelcome and without any reply to potential questions.

**Absence of advisor attendance:** negatively affecting the brand's image and the perception of its product prices.

**Knowledge:** Being present and knowledgeable is the key to improving customers' positive perceptions of a luxury brand. Friendly, helpful and customer-focused, the knowledge and expertise of the luxury brand representatives are important variables that could affect the overall customer experience. This knowledge is highly valued when it comes to jewellery, watches, perfume, or handbags. Apart from "product" knowledge, sales assistants transfer their love and dedication to brand knowledge.



Customers feel followed and feel like they share the brand values as they are transferred by the brand representatives and the store variables.

**Sociability:** The store provides a sociable environment, particularly with the inclusion of a café and restaurant. More spaces are integrated for socialization, waiting areas, fitting rooms, rest areas and so on. Social spaces are finding their place in the luxury brand physical store conception and are playing an important, if not a major role, in the customer's experience.

*The brand retail format's experiential outlet*

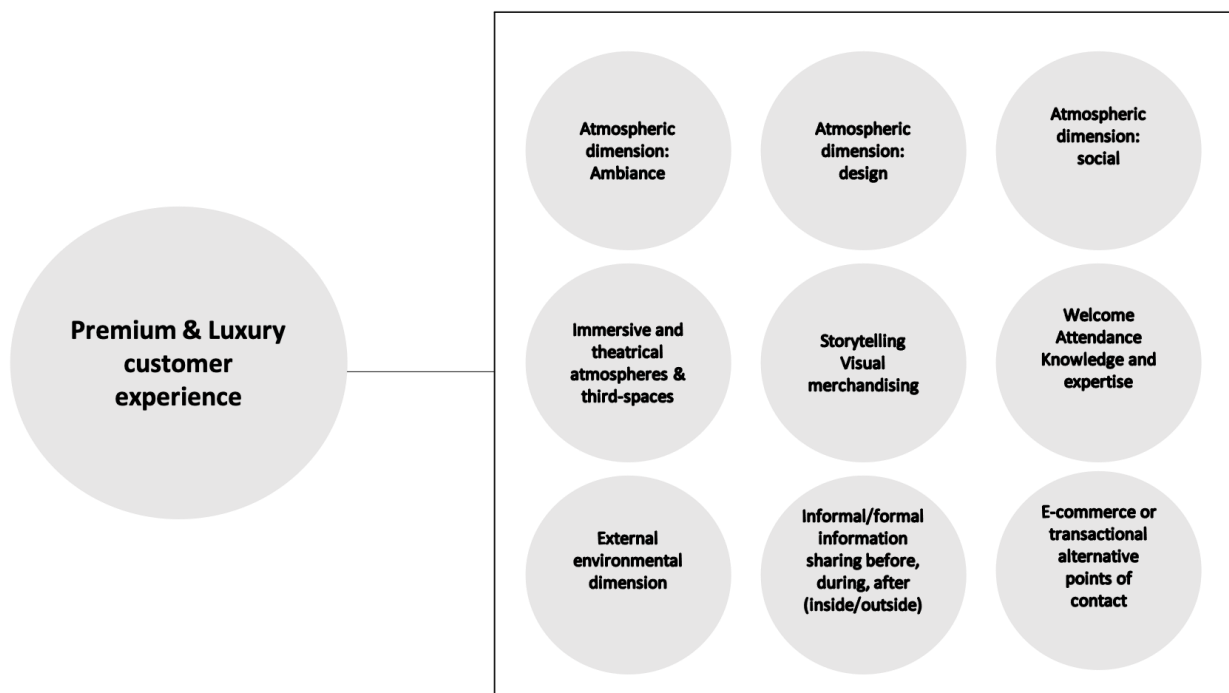
**The absence of experience:** The lack of atmospheric elements that give customers an opportunity to get in touch with the brand does not encourage the customer to stay. Therefore, he will not stay any longer and discover the products of the collection.

**Immersive experience:** The retail store's theatrical atmosphere, along with all integrated design elements, social dimensions and experiential spaces are valued holistically by customers. At this point, customers are more inclined to spend much more time visiting the brand's café or restaurant, which creates a stronger connection with the brand's environment and community.

### Discussion of the findings

There is ample evidence concerning the retail environment customer immersion, the service experience (Petermans et al., 2013, Harris et al., 2010 and Fiore & Kim, 2007) and investments in bricks-and-mortar retailing. This is a promise to delivering a unique and intense customer experience (Grewal, Levy, & Kumar 2009; Verhoef et. al, 2009). Retail atmospherics (Kotler, 1973) play an important role in influencing customer experiences within theatrical, engaging, and immersive spaces.

The social dimension, whether in a retail environment or a service environment (Grayson and McNeill, 2009), has an important effect on the customer's emotions (positive or negative) and intentions to stay (or leave) on the premises. Even though a retail store's atmosphere plays a greater role in influencing and constructing the customer experience, other variables, such as the retail store's location (or exterior architecture) are not to be neglected (Grayson and McNeill, 2009). Furthermore, consumer experiences are shaped by diverse contexts, by environmental, societal, and individual factors (Grewal and Roggeveen 2020).



As customers get in touch with premium and luxury brand physical retail touchpoints, their previous expectations/experiences are either altered or confirmed; this could also shape their future or upcoming experiences. It was (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) who raised this question. It is equally important to determine how luxury retailers strategically use atmospheric (Roggeveen, Grewal, and Schweiger 2020), social (Argo and Dahl 2020; Thomas, Epp, and Price 2020), cultural (Shavitt and Barnes 2020), numeric/technological (Santana, Thomas, and Morwitz 2020), social media-related (Appel et al. 2020), or knowledge/expertise cues to inspire, facilitate or guide consumer decision processes and ultimately influence (and shape) their journeys. It is suggested that a customer's journey and experience are the results of constant, pre, during and post-evaluations. Even if emotions seem to have a great effect on consumer experiences, cognitive and affective customer evaluations (Grewal & Roggeveen 2020) are not to be neglected. There are no pre-defined premium and luxury brand guidelines to follow when it comes to inducing a customer experience; it is personal, and holistic and forms perceptions of the brand's quality/price and offers.

### **Research implications**

The resulting framework is a comprehensive structure that explains the customer experience in a high-end and luxury brand context. This suggestion may be beneficial for academic and retail professionals. It could steer academics towards a diverse body of existing research about shopping experiences and help academics develop empirical studies. As the boundaries between hedonistic and utilitarian consumer experiences are blurred, this research could help understand the new developing retail realities. Professionals are asked to understand the nature of the changes and their impact on the individual customer experiences.

Premium and luxury brand retail managers are invited to pay closer attention to their physical retail outlet, whether a stand-alone, flagship or concept store. The brand may want to preserve its dedicated physical retail experience and concentrate on customer/brand interaction through the space, and the represented brand. The phygitalization of the store might need to be rethought. Either, thinking of the moment of contact between customers and digital tools, or knowing where to implant digital/technological tools in the retail space.

The social dimension of a store's ambience is a pivotal point in the customer experience. The degree to which brand representatives are seen as welcoming, attentive, and associated with expertise influences some of the client's experience. This experiment is completed insofar as the client can find a social and sociable space. The brand must not only train its representatives to respond to the customer's needs, but also enable them to express themselves before the brand, and with other customers. This highlights the sense of community development and strengthening one another's relations.

### **Conclusion**

There are four axes to luxury brand retail environments. The first highlights luxury stores as lifestyle destinations. A multi-faceted retail offering may offer an experience that can't be replicated online and may present a desirable and new experience for consumers. Physical environments become media, communications vessels. Our research findings highlighted a second axis, the store as a storytelling place. The luxury store's physical store is the place where brands can confirm and strengthen their digital storytelling that has initiated the offline customer journey. In the case of luxury brands, "communications" are a place and a platform. Along with digital points of contact (such as social media sites), brand representatives also reinforce the brand's communications and communicated messages. This elevates the role of the luxury store to becoming a communications tool. The fourth axis is the luxury store and its specialized services. Luxury brands constantly review their tailored or personalized services and the way they could be of relevance to customers. In addition to alterations, repairs and concierge services, today's luxury brands are presenting customers with the possibility of selling/buying second-hand products, recycling and so on.

### **Research limitations and future avenues**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore a particular market and context to understand the nature of the customer experience. However, it would be important to invest more time to observe a more premium and luxury brand and gain a better understanding of consumer experiences. Given the limited external validity of qualitative research, it would be important to provide empirical testing for the aforementioned relationships. In addition, guidelines, including an empirical examination of a possible framework, and its structural relations, for future research. As physical stores are fundamental to delivering experiences, looking for new store functions would be important. Future research would focus: the “restorative store”, the “store as a stage” and the “store as an escape”. In these anxious times, people seek more soothing spaces. Other research could suggest focusing on the role of immersive audio content and relaxing scents in physical, premium and luxury stores. Physical stores also serve as a “stage”. The second line of inquiry suggests understanding the complex nature of “backstage” and their ability to offer a serene “front stage”. More than ever, the physical commercial area is portrayed as an “escape”. Our final research avenue suggests looking at how the premium and luxury store can serve as an artistic getaway in the brand's ethos.

## References

- Appel, Gill, Lauren S. Grewal, Rhonda Hadi, and Andrew T. Stephen (2020), “The Future of Social Media in Marketing,” *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48 (1), 79–95.
- Babin, B. J., Darden, W. R., & Griffin, M. (1994). Work and/or fun: measuring hedonic and utilitarian shopping value. *Journal of consumer research*, 20(4), 644-656.
- Bagdare, S., & Jain, R. (2013). Measuring retail customer experience. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*.
- Bilgihan, A. (2016). Gen Y customer loyalty in online shopping: An integrated model of trust, user experience and branding. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 61, 103-113.
- Bonetti, F., Pantano, E., Warnaby, G., & Quinn, L. (2019). Augmenting reality: Fusing consumers' experiences and interactions with immersive technologies in physical retail settings. *International Journal of Technology Marketing*, 13(3/4), 260. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijtmkt.2019.104592>
- economy and designed customer experience (Doctoral dissertation, Purdue University) [Online]: google scholar
- Fiore, A.M & Kim, J (2007), “An integrative framework capturing experiential and utilitarian shopping experience”, *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management* Vol. 35 No. 6, pp. 421-442
- Gao, L. (2012). An exploratory study of the boutique hotel experience: Research on experience
- Grayson, R. and McNeill, L. (2009), “Using atmospheric elements in service retailing”, *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 23, No. 7, pp. 517-527
- Grewal, D & Roggeveen, A.L. (2020). “Understanding Retail Experiences and Customer Journey Management”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 96, No. 7, pp. 3-8
- Guercini, S., & Runfola, A. (2015). Internationalization through e-commerce. The case of multibrand luxury retailers in the fashion industry. In *International marketing in the fast-changing world*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Gupta, S. (2012). Interdependence between experience marketing and business strategy. *Journal of Indian Business Research*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1108/17554191211252680>
- Holbrook, M. B., & Hirschman, E. C. (1982). “The experiential aspects of consumption: Consumer fantasies, feelings, and fun”. *Journal of consumer research*, 9(2), 132-140.
- Kapferer, J. (2017). *Advances in Luxury Brand Management*. *Journal of Brand Management*. [Online]: Research gate.
- Kapferer, Jean-Noël & Bastien, Vincent. (2009). *The Luxury Strategy: Break the Rules of Marketing to Build Luxury Brands*.
- Kim, H. S. (2006). “Using hedonic and utilitarian shopping motivations to profile inner city consumers”. *Journal of Shopping Center Research*, 13(1), 57-79.
- Kotler, P. (1973), “Atmospherics as a marketing tool”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 49 No. 4, pp. 48-64.
- Lemon, K. N., & Verhoef, P. C. (2016). “Understanding customer experience throughout the customer journey”. *Journal of marketing*, 80(6), 69-96.
- Lemon, Katherine N., and Peter C. Verhoef (2016), “Understanding Customer Experience Throughout the Customer Journey,” *Journal of Marketing*, 80 (6), 69-96.
- Mcintosh, A. J., & Siggs, A. (2005). “An exploration of the experiential nature of boutique accommodation”. *Journal of travel research*, 44(1), 74-81. An Exploration of the Experiential Nature of Boutique Accommodation. (2005). [Online]: PDF

- 
- McLean, G., Osei-Frimpong, K., Al-Nabhani, K., & Marriott, H. (2020). "Examining consumer attitudes towards retailers' m-commerce mobile applications - An initial adoption vs. continuous use perspective". *Journal of Business Research*, 106, 139-157.
- Nagasawa, S. (2008). "Creating customer experience in luxury brands-Comparison of Hermes, Louis Vuitton and Coach". *Waseda Business & Economic Studies*, 44, 25-39.
- Petermans, A., Van Cleempoel, K., & Janssens, W. (2013). "A Holistic Framework for Conceptualizing Customer Experiences in Retail Environments" [Online] : Research gate
- Rosenbaum, M. S., Otolara, M. L., & Ramirez, G. C. (2017). "How to create a realistic customer journey map". *Business horizons*, 60(1), 143-150.
- Santana, Shelle, Manoj Thomas, and Vicki G. Morwitz (2020), "The Role of Numbers in the Customer Journey," *Journal of Retailing*, 96 (1), 138-54.
- Savitt, Sharon and Aaron J. Barnes (2020), "Culture and the Consumer Journey," *Journal of Retailing*, 96 (1), 40-54.
- Schmitt, B. (1999). "Experiential marketing". *Journal of marketing management*, 15(1-3), 53-67.
-