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Research Article

Customer Experience in Online vs Physical Fashion Retail: A Meta-Analysis of Qualitative Research

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ABSTRACT

This study examines customer experience in online and physical fashion retail through a qualitative meta-analysis of existing research. By synthesising findings from multiple qualitative studies, the research identifies key experiential dimensions, including sensory engagement, convenience, trust, emotional connection, and personalisation. The analysis reveals that physical retail environments excel at delivering immersive, sensory-rich experiences, fostering emotional engagement and reducing perceived risk through direct product interaction. In contrast, online retail offers superior convenience, accessibility, and information richness, supported by advanced personalisation technologies. However, both channels exhibit inherent limitations, particularly regarding product evaluation and experiential depth. The findings highlight the growing importance of omnichannel integration in creating seamless and cohesive customer journeys that leverage the strengths of both environments. The study contributes to theoretical development by integrating experiential and technological perspectives and provides practical insights for fashion retailers seeking to optimise customer experience in a hybrid retail landscape.

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1. Introduction

The fashion retail industry has undergone a profound transformation over the past two decades, driven by the rapid advancement of digital technologies, globalisation, and evolving consumer expectations. The emergence and proliferation of online retail platforms have fundamentally altered how consumers interact with fashion brands, evaluate products, and make purchasing decisions. At the same time, physical retail stores continue to play a critical role in delivering immersive and experiential shopping environments. This coexistence of online and offline channels has given rise to a complex and dynamic retail ecosystem in which customer experience has become a central determinant of competitive advantage.

Customer experience is widely recognised as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and sensory responses to interactions with a brand or retail environment (Verhoef et al., 2009). In the context of fashion retail, customer experience is particularly significant due to the symbolic and experiential nature of fashion products. Clothing and accessories are not merely functional items; they serve as expressions of identity, status, and personal style. Consequently, the evaluation of fashion products often involves both rational and affective processes, making the quality of the customer experience a critical factor influencing purchase behaviour.

The rise of e-commerce has introduced new paradigms of customer engagement characterised by convenience, accessibility, and information abundance. Online retail platforms enable consumers to browse extensive product assortments, compare prices, and access user-generated content such as reviews and ratings. These features contribute to a highly efficient and information-rich shopping experience (Zhang et al., 2022). Furthermore, advancements in data analytics and artificial intelligence have enabled retailers to deliver personalised recommendations, enhancing customer engagement and satisfaction (Riaz et al., 2022).

Despite these advantages, online fashion retail also presents significant challenges. One of the most prominent issues is the inability to physically interact with products, which creates uncertainty regarding fabric quality, fit, and overall appearance. This limitation is particularly problematic in fashion retail, where tactile and visual cues play a crucial role in product evaluation. As a result, online shopping is often associated with higher perceived risk and increased return rates (Nestler et al., 2021). These challenges highlight the limitations of purely digital retail environments in delivering a comprehensive customer experience.

In contrast, physical retail stores offer a sensory-rich environment that allows customers to touch, try, and experience products firsthand. The physical store environment, including elements such as lighting, music, layout, and visual merchandising, plays a significant role in shaping customer perceptions and emotions

(Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Additionally, interactions with sales personnel can enhance trust and provide personalised assistance, further enriching the customer experience. These factors contribute to a more immersive and emotionally engaging shopping experience, which is particularly important in the fashion industry.

However, physical retail is not without its limitations. Factors such as limited inventory, geographical constraints, and time restrictions can reduce convenience and accessibility. Moreover, the operational costs associated with maintaining physical stores can be substantial, prompting many retailers to invest in digital transformation initiatives.

The increasing integration of online and offline channels has led to the emergence of omnichannel retailing, where customers interact with brands across multiple touchpoints. This hybrid approach reflects the evolving nature of consumer behaviour, as customers often move seamlessly between online and physical environments during their shopping journey (Verhoef et al., 2015). For example, consumers may browse products online before visiting a store to make a purchase, or they may inspect products in-store and subsequently complete the purchase online. This interconnected behaviour underscores the importance of understanding customer experience across channels rather than in isolation.

While a substantial body of research has examined customer experience in both online and offline contexts, there remains a need for a comprehensive synthesis of qualitative insights that capture the depth and complexity of consumer perceptions.

Qualitative research is particularly valuable in this context, as it provides rich, contextualised insights into consumer experiences, emotions, and motivations. However, individual qualitative studies often focus on specific contexts or populations, limiting their generalizability.

To address this gap, the present study employs a qualitative meta-analysis to synthesise findings from multiple qualitative studies on customer experience in online and physical fashion retail. By integrating insights across diverse contexts, this research aims to identify common themes, highlight key differences, and explore the complementarities between retail channels. The study also seeks to contribute to theoretical development by examining customer experience through established frameworks such as the Experience Economy, the Technology Acceptance Model, and the Stimulus-Organism-Response model.

Ultimately, this research aims to provide both academic and practical contributions. From an academic perspective, it advances the understanding of customer experience as a dynamic and context-dependent construct. From a managerial perspective, it offers actionable insights for fashion retailers seeking to design and deliver superior customer experiences in an increasingly competitive and hybrid retail environment.

2. Literature Review

Customer experience has emerged as a central concept in marketing and retailing literature, reflecting a shift from product-

centric to customer-centric strategies. It encompasses the totality of interactions between customers and a brand across the customer journey, including pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages (Verhoef et al., 2009). These interactions generate cognitive, emotional, sensory, and social responses that collectively shape customer perceptions and behaviours.

Scholars have emphasised the multidimensional nature of customer experience, highlighting the importance of sensory stimulation, emotional engagement, and relational interactions (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). In fashion retail, these dimensions are particularly salient due to the experiential and symbolic nature of the products. Consumers often seek not only functional benefits but also hedonic and expressive value, making customer experience a key determinant of satisfaction and loyalty.

2.1 Online Customer Experience in Fashion Retail

Online customer experience is primarily shaped by digital interfaces and technological features. Key determinants include website usability, navigation, visual design, and information quality. Research indicates that ease of use and perceived usefulness are critical factors influencing online shopping behaviour, as explained by the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989).

One of the primary advantages of online retail is convenience. Consumers can shop anytime and anywhere, eliminating geographical and temporal constraints. Additionally, online platforms offer

extensive product assortments and enable easy price comparisons, enhancing perceived value (Zhang et al., 2022).

Another important aspect of online customer experience is the availability of information. Detailed product descriptions, high-resolution images, and customer reviews provide valuable insights that support decision-making. User-generated content, in particular, plays a significant role in building trust and reducing uncertainty (Ahmad et al., 2022).

Personalisation is also a key feature of online retail. Through data analytics and machine learning, retailers can tailor product recommendations to individual preferences, creating a more engaging and relevant shopping experience (Riaz et al., 2022).

Despite these advantages, online fashion retail faces several challenges. The lack of tactile interaction limits consumers' ability to assess product quality and fit. This issue is particularly critical in fashion, where size and fit variability can significantly impact satisfaction. Studies have shown that uncertainty regarding fit is a major barrier to online fashion purchases and contributes to high return rates (Nestler et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the absence of physical interaction can reduce emotional engagement, making the online shopping experience less immersive compared to physical retail environments. While technological innovations such as virtual fitting rooms and augmented reality aim to address these limitations, their adoption remains uneven.

2.2 Physical Retail Experience in Fashion

Physical retail environments provide a multisensory experience that is difficult to replicate online. Elements such as store layout, lighting, music, and scent contribute to the overall ambience and influence customer perceptions and emotions (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). These sensory stimuli play a crucial role in shaping the shopping experience, particularly in fashion retail, where aesthetics and presentation are highly important.

The ability to physically interact with products is a key advantage of offline retail. Customers can touch fabrics, try on garments, and evaluate fit and comfort, reducing uncertainty and perceived risk. This tactile engagement enhances confidence in purchase decisions and contributes to higher satisfaction levels.

Human interaction is another important component of physical retail experience. Sales associates can provide personalised assistance, offer styling advice, and build relationships with customers. These interactions not only enhance the shopping experience but also foster trust and loyalty.

In addition to sensory and social dimensions, physical retail offers immediate gratification. Customers can purchase and take home products instantly, eliminating the waiting time associated with online orders. This immediacy is particularly valued in fashion retail, where trends and consumer preferences can change rapidly.

However, physical retail also has limitations. Limited inventory, store location constraints,

and time requirements can reduce convenience. Additionally, the operational costs associated with maintaining physical stores can be significant, influencing pricing strategies and profitability.

2.3 Comparative Perspectives: Online vs Physical Retail

Comparative research highlights the complementary nature of online and offline retail channels. While online retail excels in convenience, information availability, and personalisation, physical retail offers superior sensory engagement and emotional connection (Zhang et al., 2022).

Consumer preferences often depend on the type of purchase and individual shopping goals. Functional purchases, such as basic apparel items, are more likely to be made online, while experiential purchases, such as high-value or fashion-forward items, tend to favour physical stores (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Perceived risk is another important factor influencing channel choice. Online shopping is associated with higher levels of perceived risk due to uncertainties regarding product quality and fit. Physical retail reduces these risks through direct product interaction.

2.4 Omnichannel Retail and Integrated Customer Experience

The growing integration of online and offline channels has led to the development of omnichannel retail strategies. Omnichannel retailing aims to provide a seamless and consistent customer experience across multiple touchpoints, allowing customers to

move freely between channels (Verhoef et al., 2015).

Research indicates that omnichannel strategies enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty by combining the strengths of both online and offline environments. For example, services such as click-and-collect and in-store returns for online purchases bridge the gap between channels and improve convenience.

Moreover, omnichannel retail enables retailers to gather comprehensive data on customer behaviour, facilitating more effective personalisation and targeting. This integration also supports a more holistic understanding of the customer journey.

2.5 Theoretical Integration

The literature on customer experience in fashion retail can be understood through several theoretical frameworks. The Experience Economy theory emphasises the importance of creating memorable experiences, particularly in physical retail environments (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The Technology Acceptance Model explains the adoption of online retail platforms based on perceived usefulness and ease of use (Davis, 1989). The Stimulus-Organism-Response model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how environmental stimuli influence consumer emotions and behaviours.

Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for analysing customer experience across online and physical retail channels.

3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding customer experience in online and physical fashion retail requires a robust theoretical foundation that captures both experiential and technological dimensions of consumer behaviour. This study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives: the Experience Economy Theory, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for analysing how consumers perceive, evaluate, and respond to retail environments across channels.

3.1 Experience Economy Theory

The Experience Economy Theory, introduced by Pine and Gilmore (1999), posits that economic value has evolved from commodities and goods to services and, ultimately, to experiences. In this paradigm, organisations create value by staging memorable and engaging experiences that resonate with consumers on emotional, sensory, and psychological levels.

In the context of fashion retail, this theory is particularly relevant because fashion consumption is inherently experiential. Physical retail environments are designed to immerse customers through visual merchandising, store layout, lighting, music, and even scent. These elements collectively contribute to a holistic experience that goes beyond functional product acquisition. The experiential nature of fashion retail aligns closely with the four experiential realms proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999):

entertainment, education, escapism, and esthetics.

Physical stores, for instance, often emphasize esthetic and escapist experiences by creating visually appealing environments that allow customers to engage with brands in a more immersive way. This sensory richness enhances emotional engagement and contributes to stronger brand attachment. In contrast, online retail platforms attempt to replicate experiential elements through digital interfaces, such as high-quality visuals, interactive features, and storytelling content. However, the absence of physical sensory stimulation limits the extent to which online environments can fully deliver experiential value.

The Experience Economy framework thus highlights a fundamental distinction between online and offline retail: while physical stores excel in delivering immersive experiences, online platforms must rely on technological innovation to approximate these experiences. This distinction is central to understanding differences in customer experience across channels.

3.2 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Davis (1989), provides a theoretical basis for understanding consumer adoption of online retail platforms. TAM posits that two primary factors—perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use—determine an individual's intention to use a technology.

In online fashion retail, perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which consumers

believe that digital platforms enhance their shopping efficiency and decision-making. Features such as search functionality, product filtering, price comparison tools, and customer reviews contribute to this perception. Perceived ease of use, on the other hand, relates to the simplicity and intuitiveness of the online interface, including navigation, checkout processes, and overall usability.

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that these factors significantly influence online shopping behaviour (Davis, 1989; Zhang et al., 2022). In fashion retail, where consumers often seek variety and convenience, the importance of TAM becomes particularly pronounced. Online platforms that offer seamless navigation and personalised recommendations are more likely to attract and retain customers.

Moreover, TAM can be extended to incorporate additional constructs such as trust and perceived risk, which are critical in online retail contexts. Trust is especially important in fashion e-commerce due to uncertainties related to product quality, fit, and delivery. High levels of perceived risk can negatively impact perceived usefulness, thereby reducing adoption intentions.

While TAM effectively explains the functional and cognitive aspects of online customer experience, it does not fully capture emotional and sensory dimensions. Therefore, it must be integrated with other frameworks, such as the Experience Economy and S-O-R models, to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

3.3 Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Model

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, originally proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), provides a foundational framework for analysing how environmental stimuli influence consumer behaviour. According to this model:

- **Stimulus (S):** External environmental factors (e.g., store design, website layout)
- **Organism (O):** Internal cognitive and emotional states (e.g., satisfaction, arousal, trust)
- **Response (R):** Behavioural outcomes (e.g., purchase intention, loyalty)

In fashion retail, both online and offline environments function as stimuli that shape consumer experiences. In physical stores, stimuli include sensory elements such as lighting, music, and product displays. These stimuli evoke emotional responses, such as pleasure and excitement, which influence purchasing behaviour.

In online environments, stimuli are primarily digital and include website design, interface usability, visual content, and interactive features. Although these stimuli lack physical sensory components, they still influence cognitive and emotional responses. For example, a visually appealing and user-friendly website can enhance perceived enjoyment and trust, leading to increased purchase intention.

The S-O-R model is particularly valuable for understanding the interplay between environmental factors and consumer

responses across retail channels. It emphasises that customer experience is not solely determined by external stimuli but also by how these stimuli are interpreted and internalised by consumers.

3.4 Integrated Theoretical Perspective

By integrating these three frameworks, this study develops a holistic understanding of customer experience in fashion retail. The Experience Economy Theory emphasises the importance of immersive and emotional engagement, particularly in physical retail. TAM explains the adoption and usability of online platforms, highlighting functional and cognitive dimensions. The S-O-R model bridges these perspectives by linking environmental stimuli to internal responses and behavioural outcomes.

This integrated framework enables a comprehensive analysis of customer experience across online and offline channels, capturing both experiential and technological aspects. It also provides a foundation for interpreting the findings of the qualitative meta-analysis and identifying key drivers of customer satisfaction and loyalty.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative meta-analysis approach to synthesise findings from existing qualitative research on customer experience in online and physical fashion retail. Qualitative meta-analysis is a systematic method of integrating and interpreting results from multiple qualitative studies to generate new insights and theoretical understanding (Noblit & Hare, 1988).

Unlike quantitative meta-analysis, which focuses on statistical aggregation, qualitative meta-analysis emphasises the interpretation of meanings, themes, and patterns across studies. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring complex and context-dependent phenomena such as customer experience, where subjective perceptions and emotions play a significant role.

4.1 Data Sources and Search Strategy

Data for this study were collected from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, and academic publications. Major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were used to identify relevant studies.

The search strategy involved the use of keywords such as:

- “customer experience”
- “fashion retail”
- “online shopping”
- “physical retail”
- “qualitative research”
- “consumer behaviour.”

Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine search results. The search was limited to studies published in English to ensure consistency and accessibility.

4.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

- Studies focusing on customer experience in fashion retail

- Research comparing online and/or physical retail environments
- Use of qualitative methodologies (e.g., interviews, focus groups, case studies, ethnography)
- Publication in peer-reviewed academic journals
- Studies published within the last 15 years, with some seminal works included

Exclusion criteria included:

- Studies focusing solely on quantitative analysis
- Research unrelated to fashion retail
- Non-peer-reviewed sources

4.3 Data Extraction and Coding

Selected studies were systematically reviewed, and relevant data were extracted, including:

- Research objectives
- Methodology
- Key findings
- Identified themes

A thematic coding process was employed to analyse the data. Initial codes were generated based on recurring concepts, such as convenience, sensory experience, trust, and personalisation. These codes were then grouped into broader themes through an iterative process.

4.4 Data Analysis: Thematic Synthesis

The study employs thematic synthesis, a widely used method in qualitative meta-analysis (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This approach involves three stages:

- **Line-by-line coding:** Identifying key concepts in each study
- **Development of descriptive themes:** Grouping similar codes
- **Generation of analytical themes:** Interpreting patterns across studies

Thematic synthesis allows for the integration of findings from diverse contexts while preserving the richness of qualitative data. It also facilitates the identification of higher-order themes that contribute to theoretical development.

4.5 Ensuring Rigour and Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility and reliability of the study, several measures were implemented (Mannan & Farhana, 2026):

- **Triangulation:** Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure consistency
- **Transparency:** The research process, including selection criteria and analysis methods, was clearly documented
- **Reflexivity:** Potential biases were acknowledged and minimised through systematic analysis
- **Peer-reviewed sources:** Only high-quality academic studies were included

These measures align with established criteria for qualitative research rigour, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.6 Limitations of the Methodology

While qualitative meta-analysis provides valuable insights, it also has limitations. The findings are dependent on the quality and scope of the included studies, which may vary. Additionally, the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis introduces the possibility of researcher bias.

Furthermore, the exclusion of non-English studies may limit the diversity of perspectives. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a robust framework for synthesising qualitative insights and generating meaningful conclusions.

5. Findings and Analysis

The qualitative meta-analysis reveals that customer experience in online and physical fashion retail is shaped by a complex interplay of sensory, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. By synthesising findings across multiple qualitative studies, this section identifies and interprets key thematic patterns that distinguish and connect the two retail environments.

5.1 Sensory Engagement versus Functional Efficiency

One of the most salient distinctions between online and physical retail lies in the contrast between sensory engagement and functional efficiency. Physical retail environments provide a multisensory experience that includes tactile interaction, visual immersion, auditory stimulation, and spatial awareness. These elements collectively contribute to what Pine and Gilmore (1999) describe as an experiential economy, where value is derived

from immersive engagement rather than mere product acquisition.

Customers in physical stores can touch fabrics, assess texture, evaluate colour under natural lighting, and try on garments. These sensory inputs reduce uncertainty and enhance confidence in purchase decisions. Moreover, store atmospherics-such as music, lighting, and layout-act as stimuli that influence emotional responses, consistent with the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

In contrast, online retail prioritises efficiency and convenience. Consumers benefit from rapid navigation, search functionalities, and access to extensive product assortments. However, the absence of physical sensory interaction creates a gap in experiential richness. While high-resolution images and videos attempt to compensate for this limitation, they cannot fully replicate the tactile and embodied experience of physical retail (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

This trade-off between sensory engagement and functional efficiency underscores a fundamental tension in customer experience design across retail channels.

5.2 Perceived Risk, Trust, and Uncertainty Reduction

Trust emerges as a central determinant of customer experience, particularly in online environments. The inability to physically inspect products introduces uncertainty regarding quality, fit, and authenticity. This uncertainty contributes to higher perceived risk, which can negatively impact purchase intentions (Nestler et al., 2021).

Online retailers attempt to mitigate these risks through various mechanisms, including customer reviews, ratings, return policies, and detailed product descriptions. User-generated content plays a crucial role in building trust by providing social proof and reducing information asymmetry (Ahmad et al., 2022). However, trust in online environments remains fragile and contingent on the reliability of information sources.

Physical retail, by contrast, inherently reduces perceived risk through direct product interaction. Customers can evaluate products firsthand, which enhances confidence and trust. Additionally, face-to-face interactions with sales personnel contribute to relational trust, further strengthening the customer experience.

The analysis indicates that while online retail relies on informational and institutional trust, physical retail benefits from experiential and interpersonal trust. These differing trust mechanisms highlight the importance of channel-specific strategies for managing customer perceptions.

5.3 Product Evaluation and Fit Complexity

Fashion products present unique challenges in evaluation due to their dependence on fit, comfort, and aesthetic alignment with individual preferences. The meta-analysis confirms that product evaluation is significantly more complex in online environments.

Consumers frequently report dissatisfaction with size inconsistency, inaccurate product representation, and difficulty visualising how garments will appear when worn. These

issues contribute to high return rates and diminished satisfaction (Nestler et al., 2021). Even with size guides and virtual fitting technologies, uncertainty persists.

In physical retail, the ability to try on garments eliminates much of this uncertainty. Customers can assess fit, comfort, and appearance in real time, leading to more informed and confident decisions. This immediacy enhances both cognitive and emotional satisfaction.

However, it is important to note that physical retail is not entirely free from limitations. Factors such as limited stock availability and time constraints can restrict product evaluation. Nevertheless, the comparative advantage of physical retail in this domain remains significant.

5.4 Emotional Engagement and Experiential Value

Emotional engagement is a critical component of customer experience, particularly in fashion retail, where consumption is closely tied to identity and self-expression. The findings suggest that physical retail environments are more effective in fostering emotional connections.

The immersive nature of physical stores allows customers to experience brands in a holistic manner. Visual merchandising, store design, and sensory cues create an environment that evokes emotions such as excitement, pleasure, and inspiration. These emotional responses contribute to a more memorable and satisfying shopping experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Online retail, while efficient, often lacks this depth of emotional engagement. Although digital storytelling and personalised recommendations can enhance emotional appeal, they are generally less immersive than physical experiences. This limitation may affect long-term brand attachment and loyalty.

5.5 Information Richness and Cognitive Processing

Online retail excels in providing information richness, which enhances cognitive aspects of decision-making. Consumers have access to detailed product descriptions, specifications, customer reviews, and comparison tools. This abundance of information supports rational evaluation and reduces search costs (Zhang et al., 2022).

In contrast, physical retail relies more on experiential and sensory information. While sales personnel can provide guidance, the availability of detailed product information may be limited compared to online platforms.

The findings suggest that online and offline channels cater to different modes of information processing. Online environments support analytical and deliberative decision-making, whereas physical environments facilitate intuitive and experiential evaluation.

5.6 Social Interaction and Co-Creation of Experience

Social interaction is another distinguishing feature of physical retail. Interactions with sales associates and other customers contribute to a sense of community and shared experience. These interactions can

enhance satisfaction and influence purchasing behaviour.

Online retail, although less socially interactive, incorporates elements of social engagement through reviews, ratings, and social media integration. These features enable a form of virtual co-creation of experience, where customers contribute to and influence each other's perceptions (Ahmad et al., 2022).

5.7 Customer Journey Integration and Channel Fluidity

The analysis reveals that customer journeys are increasingly non-linear and channel-agnostic. Consumers frequently switch between online and offline channels during different stages of the purchasing process. For example, they may search for products online and purchase them in-store, or vice versa.

This behaviour reflects the growing importance of omnichannel integration, where seamless transitions between channels enhance overall customer experience (Verhoef et al., 2015). The boundaries between online and physical retail are becoming increasingly blurred, necessitating a holistic approach to experience design.

5.8 Personalisation and Technological Mediation

Online retail leverages advanced technologies to deliver personalised experiences. Algorithms analyse customer data to provide tailored recommendations, enhancing relevance and engagement (Riaz et al., 2022). This level of personalisation is

difficult to achieve consistently in physical retail.

However, personalisation in physical retail can be facilitated through human interaction, where sales associates provide customised recommendations based on direct engagement. This form of personalisation is often perceived as more authentic and relational.

5.9 Limitations and Complementarities

The findings underscore that neither channel is inherently superior; rather, each offers distinct advantages and limitations. Online retail excels in convenience, information, and personalisation, while physical retail provides sensory richness, emotional engagement, and trust.

These complementary strengths highlight the importance of integrating channels to create a cohesive and enhanced customer experience.

6. Discussion

The findings of this meta-analysis provide a nuanced understanding of customer experience in fashion retail, emphasising the coexistence of contrasting yet complementary dimensions across online and physical channels. This section interprets these findings through theoretical and practical lenses, offering deeper insights into their implications.

6.1 Reconciling Experience and Efficiency

A central insight from the analysis is the inherent trade-off between experiential richness and functional efficiency. Physical retail aligns with the Experience Economy framework, delivering immersive and emotionally engaging environments (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Online retail, in contrast, aligns with the Technology Acceptance Model, emphasising usability and efficiency (Davis, 1989).

This dichotomy suggests that customer experience is not a unidimensional construct but rather a balance between hedonic and utilitarian values. Retailers must therefore consider how to optimise both dimensions rather than prioritising one over the other.

6.2 The Role of Trust in Channel Selection

Trust emerges as a critical factor influencing channel choice and customer experience. The distinction between experiential trust in physical retail and informational trust in online retail highlights the need for differentiated strategies.

Online retailers must invest in mechanisms that enhance transparency and reliability, such as accurate product representations and robust return policies. Physical retailers, on the other hand, can leverage interpersonal interactions to build deeper relational trust.

6.3 Hybrid Consumer Behaviour and Omnichannel Imperatives

The increasing prevalence of hybrid shopping behaviours underscores the

limitations of viewing online and offline retail as separate entities. Consumers navigate seamlessly between channels, integrating the strengths of each to optimise their experience (Verhoef et al., 2015).

This shift necessitates the adoption of omnichannel strategies that provide consistency and continuity across touchpoints. Retailers must ensure that information, pricing, and branding are aligned across channels to avoid fragmentation of the customer experience.

6.4 Emotional Engagement as a Competitive Differentiator

While efficiency is essential, emotional engagement remains a key driver of long-term customer loyalty. Physical retail's ability to create memorable experiences provides a competitive advantage that cannot be easily replicated online.

However, advancements in digital technologies offer opportunities to enhance emotional engagement in online environments. Features such as immersive visuals, storytelling, and interactive content can partially bridge the experiential gap.

6.5 Implications for Theoretical Development

The integration of the Experience Economy, TAM, and S-O-R models provides a comprehensive framework for understanding customer experience. The findings suggest that these theories are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary.

Future research should explore how these frameworks can be further integrated to capture the dynamic and evolving nature of

retail experiences, particularly in the context of emerging technologies such as augmented reality.

6.6 Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight several key strategies:

- Invest in omnichannel integration
- Enhance trust through transparency and reliability
- Leverage data analytics for personalisation
- Create immersive physical retail environments
- Incorporate experiential elements into online platforms

These strategies can help retailers deliver a balanced and comprehensive customer experience.

7. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive qualitative meta-analysis of customer experience in online and physical fashion retail, offering a nuanced understanding of how different retail environments shape consumer perceptions and behaviours. The findings demonstrate that customer experience is inherently multidimensional, encompassing sensory, cognitive, emotional, and social components that vary significantly across channels.

Physical retail continues to play a vital role in delivering immersive and emotionally engaging experiences. The ability to physically interact with products, combined with sensory-rich environments and interpersonal interactions, enhances trust and

reduces perceived risk. These factors are particularly important in fashion retail, where product evaluation is closely tied to tactile and visual cues.

Conversely, online retail excels in providing convenience, accessibility, and information richness. The integration of advanced technologies enables personalised and efficient shopping experiences, catering to the functional needs of consumers. However, the absence of physical interaction limits the depth of experiential engagement and introduces challenges related to product evaluation.

The study highlights the increasing importance of omnichannel strategies in bridging these gaps. By integrating online and offline touchpoints, retailers can create a seamless and cohesive customer journey that combines experiential richness with functional efficiency. This hybrid approach not only enhances customer satisfaction but also strengthens brand loyalty.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the integration of experiential and technological frameworks, offering a holistic understanding of customer experience. From a practical standpoint, it provides actionable insights for retailers seeking to navigate the complexities of a rapidly evolving retail landscape.

Future research should explore the role of emerging technologies in enhancing online experiential capabilities and further investigate the dynamics of hybrid customer journeys.

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