The growing permanence of pop-up outlets within the international location strategies of fashion retailers

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is threefold: first, to establish the role of the pop-up store within the international location strategy of fashion retailers, second, to identify the factors influencing pop-up store location choice and the importance retailers ascribe to it and third, to assess how pop-up locations are sourced and selected.
Design/methodology/approach – A multiple case study was adopted. Research was conducted using secondary data sources, observation and semi-structured interviews with senior executives with strategic responsibility for store/brand development internationally. Manual content analysis was conducted.
Findings – Key findings cover the role of Pop-up stores within international retail location strategy, notably features, forms and function, with the latter highlighting the importance of opportunistic market testing and trial, reduced risk, regeneration, ROI- and CRM-driven decisions; the factors impacting location choice and selection, specifically the trade-offs between reactive and proactive approaches and the importance of networks and intuition, and future pop-up directions.
Research limitations/implications – Due to the chosen research approach, the results may lack generalization outside of the given sector and marketplaces. Several avenues for future research are elucidated including exploration of pop-up transformations including pop-up rebrand, technology enabled, experiential and third place.
Originality/value – The study contributes to the nascent field of research by providing new insight into the role of pop-ups within international location strategy, the factors influencing location choice and selection and offers a pop-up location taxonomy.
Keywords Retail, Fashion, Internationalization, Pop-up store, Location strategy
Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Pop-up stores are not a new phenomenon (Niehm *et al.*, 2007; Taube and Warnaby, 2017), yet their role within the domestic and international fashion retail location strategies has yet to be systematically analyzed even though internal and external factors suggest that the temporary store can play a significant part in both planned and emergent international retail strategies. Academic and trade literature concur in the view that the pop-up store can be part of an omni-channel retail marketing strategy, with brand communication and experiential enhancement being dominant themes (Scarpi, 2006; Kim *et al.*, 2010; Spena *et al.*, 2011; Surchi, 2011; Jackson, 2013; Morrell, 2014; Chen and Fiore, 2017; Taube and Warnaby, 2017). As an element of international retail strategy, however, the temporary store is perceived rather as an opportunistic, low cost route to market. The Retail Internationalization Report published by Retail Expert Group Ebeltoft (Ebeltoft.com, 2014) puts "location" and "suitable retail concept" within the top 5 success factors for retail market development. Moreover, the availability of temporary retail space in uncertain economic situations in established markets, continues. This paper contends, therefore, that the temporary store can play an important role not only in the testing and researching stage of market evaluation and selection, but also in informing future adaptations to fashion brand positioning strategy for specific customer markets and that location choice is critical within this.

The aim of this paper is to conduct an exploratory study of pop-up retailing within the domestic and international retail location strategy of fashion companies, an unexplored domain of research on temporary retail thus far. This aim is achieved through the following three objectives: first, to establish the role of the pop-up outlet within internationalization location strategy; second, to identify the factors influencing pop-up store location choice and the importance retailers give to it and third, to analyze how pop-up locations are sourced and selected. The first section presents an overview of the literature on the pop-up retail format phenomenon and international location strategy. This is followed by an analysis of empirical exploratory research leading to a discussion of the qualitative findings and their implication for the management of international expansion in the fashion retail sector.

Literature review

Pop-up stores

Given the volatility of the fashion industry, the growth of digital retail formats and consumers' increasing desire for novel experiences, retailers need to continuously evolve their store environments if physical retail is to remain a part of overall retail strategy (Pedroni, 2011; Clarke et al. 2012; Rumsey, 2015; Saunter, 2015a, b). Whilst the temporary store has received significant industry attention since it first appeared over a decade ago, academic coverage of the topic is still scarce (Surchi, 2011; Alexander and Bain, 2016) and the context of studies has been predominantly domestic (Picot-Coupey, 2014). Originally grounded in the marketing discipline, the pop-up concept was applied to temporary physical selling environments creating engaging experiential retail space (Scarpi, 2006; Niehm et al., 2007; Cochrane, 2010; Lee, 2013; Soloaga and Guerrero, 2014; Chen and Fiore, 2017; Taube and Warnaby, 2017). Alternative terms, such as pop-up shops, temporary stores and flash retailing have been used to describe a phenomenon that plays on the notion of limited time, specificity of product and desirability of location. The phenomenon is not new to the fashion industry; Niehm et al. (2007) and Hopkins (2012) cite US generalist retailer target as an early adopter of pop-up retail, while temporary retail is often associated with the fashion brand Comme Des Garcons, who created a series of "guerilla stores" in 2004, located in raw urban areas (Niehm et al., 2007). By then the pop-up tipping point appeared to have been reached and a leading trend agency has since identified pop-ups as a global movement seen at all market levels (Trendwatching.com, 2013). Indeed, in 2011, the launch of the World's first pop-up mall, Boxpark in Shoreditch London, demonstrates the growing innovation, scale and popularity of the phenomenon. Offering 60 "Boxshops" of 300 sqft (28 sqm), made from ship containers was perceived a retail "game-changer," since expanding with Boxpark Croydon (UK) in 2015 and with further plans for European expansion (Bearnes and Lovett, 2011; Geoghegan, 2015). In spite of this, only one academic study to date has focused on pop-up stores within an international context (Picot-Coupey, 2014) and a specific evaluation of the location of temporary outlets within an international retail positioning strategy remains unfulfilled.

Pop-up motivations

Whilst a number of academic studies propose retailer motivations for using pop-ups, few use empirical research to validate assertions. Thus, the reasons retailers choose temporary stores are mainly assumed from trade rather than academic literature and can be synthesized into seven categories: building brand awareness and exposure, augmenting brand image and promoting the retail brand by generating buzz and word of mouth communication around the pop-up store (Ryu, 2011; Picot-Coupey, 2014; Soloaga and Guerrero, 2014; Chen and Fiore, 2017); driving novelty by providing surprising, exciting retail experiences (Scarpi, 2006; Spena et al., 2011; Pomodoro, 2013; Picot-Coupey, 2014; Taube and Warnaby, 2017); testing, adapting, positioning and disseminating a retailer in a new foreign market with minimal economic exposure (Surchi, 2011; Pomodoro, 2013;

Picot-Coupey, 2014); testing new merchandise and launching limited edition collections (Pomodoro, 2013; Warnaby *et al.*, 2015); building community and relationships with customers and other stakeholders (Picot-Coupey 2014; Alexander and Bain, 2016); responding to volatile economic conditions (Picot-Coupey, 2014); and transactional (Warnaby *et al.*, 2015; Alexander and Bain, 2016). Overall, the aim of the pop-up is to drive demand rather than generate sales (Ryu 2011; Alexander and Bain, 2016). As the store has a fleeting existence, it can be conceived as an event, rooted in the "now" (Pomodoro, 2013) and their ability to foster an exciting and immediate form of communication, means pop-up stores can capture the attention of a global audience and position a retail brand in a geographically new target market (Forney *et al.*, 2007; Marciniak and Budnarowska, 2010; Picot-Coupey, 2014; Warnaby *et al.*, 2015).

Pop-up forms
Due to the iterative nature of the retail pop-up, categorizing it into distinct typologies is challenging. Both Surchi (2011) and Pomodoro (2013) attempt to do so, and collectively include guerrilla store (unconventional location), nomad store (mobile), temporary online store, temporary outdoor site, concept brand store, community store, test store and sustainable store, summarized and extrapolated by Alexander and Kent (2016) (see Table I). Additional forms such as the "collaborative pop-up store" (a pop-up store joint venture with another brand, offering complimentary merchandise) "shop-sharing" (a permanent retail space, hosting revolving pop-up stores for a temporary time) and "digital pop-up" have been more recently conceived (Alexander and Bain, 2016).

Alexander and Kent (2016) distill the key forms, functions and features of the pop-up store from extant literature in their pop-up dimensions model (Figure 1).
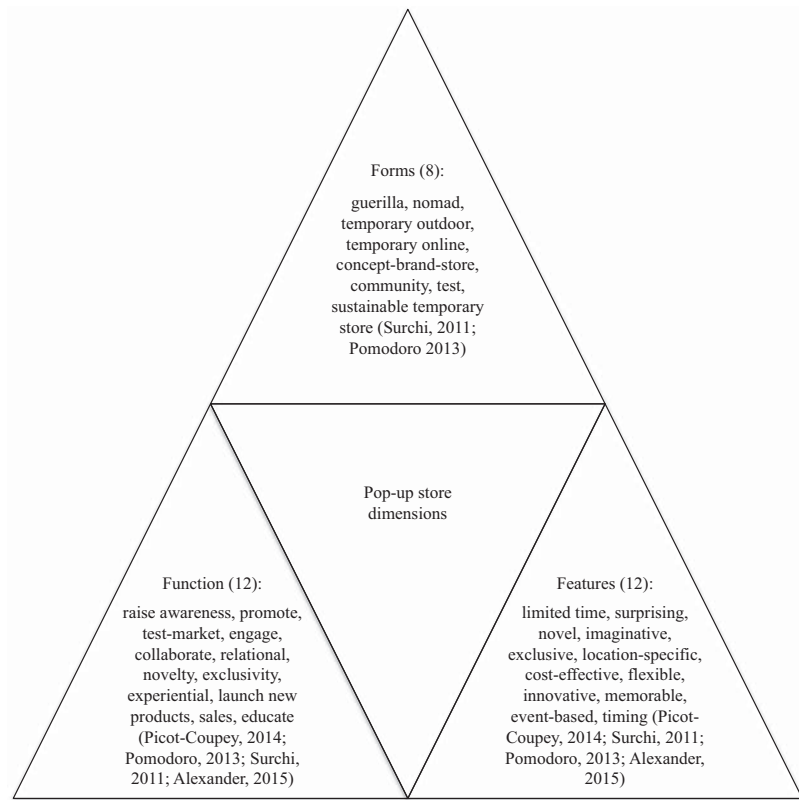
Within the model, location is acknowledged as a key feature dimension. Surchi (2011, p. 27) further extracts the importance of location within a retailer's marketing strategy by stating that "the location is part of the packaging and the store itself becomes the product," reinforcing the contribution of location to the overall identity, experience and positioning of the retailer. Whilst strategically important, opinions diverge about the "best" location as summarized in Table II.

A shift has occurred in the emphasis given to location, coinciding with a changed attitude toward the strategic importance of pop-ups generally, from a creator of marketing

Pop up form	Common functions/features	Example
Guerilla store	Raise brand awareness, novelty, surprise, promote, exclusivity	Comme Des Garçon "guerilla stores" globally
Nomad store	Mobile store – van, truck, test market, go to market	Uniqlo "truck shop," NYC
Temporary online store	Pop-out online, limited time, collaborative	Chanel fine jewelry popped out on Net-A-Porter
Temporary outdoor site	Reach target market; stationary location, exclusivity	Target outdoor pop up, Bryant Park, NY; Puma's 24 shipping containers, world tour
Concept brand store	Raise brand awareness/image, experiential	Louis Vuitton and Yayoi Kusama collaboration, popped out at Selfridges, London
Community store	Reinforce customer relationships, community building, host social events	Paul Frank, NYC, Oakley "bike" community store, London
Test store	Test new market, test brand concept	Zalando popped out in Italy
Sustainable temporary store	Promote eco-friendly/sustainability, well-being	Monocle popped out, Siam Centre, Thailand

Source: Alexander and Kent (2016)

Figure 1.
Pop up store
dimensions model

Source: Revised from Alexander and Kent (2016)

Best store location	Opinion	Author, date
Radical	"In radical or little known places"	Doyle and Moore (2004)
Innovative	"Innovative locations"	Niehm *et al.* (2007); Kim *et al.* (2010)
Desirable	"Desirable retail locations"	Marciniak and Budnarowska (2009, p. 5)
High footfall	"Strategically located in high traffic shopping areas"	Surchi (2011, p. 260)
High footfall	"Highly representative location of a large city […] Design and location are fundamental as functional to 'scene' realization"	Spena *et al.* (2011, p. 26)
Innovative	"Retail location must be innovative […] choice of the geographical location becomes strategic […] central districts of the city, as well as cool and fashionable areas, are privileged […] location becomes a trend indicator for a brand"	Pomodoro (2013, pp. 344-345)
Objective based	"Various locations based on the objective – prestigious avenues, pioneering locations and unfamiliar sites"	Picot-Coupey (2014, p. 655)

Table II.
Pop up store location

Source: Authors' own

communication buzz to a strategic positioning device. From "radical, little known places" (Doyle and Moore, 2004), acting as destinations to add to the retailer's allure, to "strategically located" (Surchi, 2011) and then "objective-dependent locations" (Picot-Coupey, 2014), suggesting a transformation to a location choice based on a combination of market targeting and positioning, and the strategic objectives of the temporary retail outlet. Whilst the pop-up store concept has received criticism for its ubiquity more recently, raising questions over its effectiveness as a provider of novelty, temporary retailing is still extensively practiced (Klein *et al.*, 2016; Jiang, 2017; Ryan, 2017) and importantly, presents a viable format for individual retailers and the more complex retail environmental problems found in urban regeneration (Gallagher, 2013; Townsend, 2014).

International location strategy
Academic literature in the fields of location decision making and international retail strategy have tended to diverge, with the former concentrated on systems and approaches used to make decisions regarding store portfolios in a national context (Hernandez and Bennison, 2000; Reynolds and Wood, 2010), and the latter focused on the evaluation of international markets, and the business models used to develop them (Sternquist, 2007; Pederzoli, 2008; Alexander and Doherty, 2009; Moore *et al.*, 2010). Nevertheless, with the increasingly global approach to fashion brand development, particularly at the luxury end of the market, where and how to locate retail outlets in an international context would seem to be simultaneous and entwined decisions, rather than separate.

Market evaluation and selection is acknowledged as the first step in location decision-making processes (McGoldrick, 2002), and in the international retailing literature market evaluation and selection is given its due emphasis; however, as Alexander and Doherty (2009) note, market selection and market entry decisions have tended to be considered as two discrete processes. They go on to model decisions within an international strategy as more interchangeable, interdependent and influenced by the firms' own operating characteristics; determined by their experience of internationalization and their current performance within international markets. Dawson (2001) concurs with the view that models of international retail activity suggest systematic planning, strategic decision taking and planned implementation of strategy whereas in practice flexibility, opportunity and even serendipity can strongly influence international operations. Dawson (2001) also reflects on the increased inclination for retailers to be innovative with retail space in international markets, especially in early stages of expansion while Goldman (2001) emphasizes the need for format adaptations in order to pursue international opportunities.

Focusing on the fashion sector, Doherty (2000) suggests retailers use a mix of opportunism and proactive or strategic approaches to internationalization. In particular, the comparatively small format size of most fashion retailers makes international market entry and exit less risky (Doherty, 2000). A more recent multi-sector study of pop-up stores as a foreign operation mode (Picot-Coupey, 2014) demonstrates the need for short-term retail formats to be considered as a strategic choice in the internationalization process at both entry and expansion stages. In the international retailing literature there is a blurring of the line between retail "format" and "method" in the discussion about what retailers do when entering new markets. Picot-Coupey (2014) develops this idea suggesting that both are important.

Risk and control have traditionally been considered as determinants of choice in retail international operating method (Alexander and Doherty, 2009), however more recent academic and practitioner literature suggests that the choice is more complex with numerous and conflicting determinants including market characteristics, retail marketing strategy (including brand, location, assortment), overall retail strategy and company characteristic (Ebeltoft, 2014; Picot-Coupey, 2014). Whilst the pop-up format suggests low

risk and commitment with high control, it may not always be used as an initial or entry mode. The evidence of combining different operational models points to a more flexible approach in a dynamic context (Picot-Coupey, 2014), where the pop-up store is used in combination with other retail outlets, or as a series of temporary outlets. The aforementioned report on retail internationalization (Ebeltoft, 2014) found that whilst entry model was an important factor in successful international expansion in both developed and emerging retail markets, store location was considered to be the most important factor in both instances. It is perhaps surprising therefore that the level of attention paid to international location decision-making in academic retailing literature remains low.

Although the diversity of retail formats, the drivers of trade, and the range of location type have been acknowledged to be the underpinning characteristics of store portfolios, many studies in the field of location decision-making concentrate on the geodemographic processes and systems used by retailers to make decisions, rather than try to identify factors that influence the quality of a location in a given context. In their multi-sector study Reynolds and Wood (2010) found evidence of clothing retailers being less inclined to use systematic approaches and sophisticated techniques for location analysis because the retailers did not feel confident they had the tools to produce accurate forecasts and were more likely to feel that they had inadequate time to conduct research. As Table II shows, there is little clarity on what constitutes a good location for a pop-up from the literature; rather it suggests the location of a pop-up store can help to position a fashion brand strategically and appropriately in a new market. Drawing on the concept of place marketing, a retail location can grow a realm of meaning for consumers whereby the manner and location in which goods are sold add value and perceptions to brands (Moye and Kincade, 2003; Cresswell and Hoskins 2008; Arrigo, 2015).

International retail strategy is complex and costly, which would suggest the need for strategic thinking and actions (Pederzoli, 2008) however, the nature of a "pop-up" store would suggest this type of retailing would sit with Dawson's (2001) view that international retail strategy requires the flexibility to respond to opportunity. In support, the role of intuition in location analysis is given full credence by Reynolds and Wood (2010), and in the case of fashion retailing is likely to be appropriate. McGoldrick (2002) suggests that checklists are useful in both domestic and international analysis of retail markets "whilst not providing the answers such checklists have helped to provoke the questions that should be asked during a market evaluation" (McGoldrick, 2002, p. 558). Regeneration, emerging markets and relaxing of regulatory frameworks make the retail property market dynamic; (McGoldrick, 2002; Goworek and McGoldrick 2015) therefore an understanding of relevant national planning frameworks and local issues is a crucial part of the international location process.

The critical nature of the location will determine the accuracy of the information gathered; a badly chosen location may not demonstrate the true potential of a brand internationally; in contrast, the opportunity to trade in an area that would not normally be accessible may give over-favorable results that are difficult to replicate. In the study of international retail operations, the benefits of international partners are often stressed and while the owned store route to internationalization may seem attractive in terms of control, the complexities of operating in international markets should never be underestimated (Doherty, 2000). Similarly, the opportunity to work with property development organizations as partners for temporary retail developments may reduce the risk of unrealistic assessments based on pop-ups.

Given that "above all, finding the right neighborhood or store location is critical to ensuring the success of a pop-up operation" (Picot-Coupey, 2014, p. 665) further research into location as a critical success factor for pop-up stores in both domestic and overseas contexts,

the importance fashion retailers attach to it, and how they research, evaluate and select locations for pop-up stores are research questions that are still unanswered.

The current study therefore aims to address this gap by applying a qualitative research methodology to explore four research questions (RQs) as follows:

RQ1. How do fashion retailers operationalize pop-up stores within their international location strategies?

RQ2. What factors influence pop-up store location decisions?

RQ3. How do retailers use pop-up store location to successfully position brands in new markets?

RQ4. How do retailers research, evaluate and select locations for pop-up stores?

Methodology

Given the scarcity of studies on pop-up stores within international location strategy decision making, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted, in the form of a multiple case study. The research sought the how (the form and features) and why (function and relative importance) of pop-up store operations within domestic and international location strategy decision making using case study method to compensate for a lack of extant theory and established principles (Yin, 2014). This methodology is recommended for examining contemporary phenomena within a real-life setting, drawing on secondary data, direct observation of the event and on interviews with people involved (Gummesson, 2000). The research strategy was informed by the theoretical concepts presented in the literature review, specifically, directing sample choice and the interview guide, relevant constructs and structured observations.

Case study companies

A multiple case study approach was selected because it allows for the observation of patterns and replication across cases and more cogent results are likely to be attained (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2014). Contextually, the research design is based upon a systematic review of documentary evidence over a one-year period (2015-2016), derived from newspapers, trade magazines, social media and blog content and retailer websites. This, combined with initial observational visits to pop-up stores (in London, Sydney and Melbourne) informed the case selection using purposeful sampling according to three criteria: retail format – pop-up mall (world's first); department stores; multiple specialists; independents; market level – mid to premium/luxury brands and facilitators (pop-up service providers); and pop-up usage/ experience. In total, 15 retail brands (two department stores, five multiple specialists, eight independents) one pop-up mall and two facilitators were studied. Experts were contacted via e-mail, phone or by visiting the store and all accepted to be interviewed. Table III provides key characteristics of the case-study companies. For confidentiality purposes, all companies under investigation remain anonymous (referred to as interview A, B, etc.).

Data collection and analysis

Data collection for each case was based on several methods including: analysis of secondary sources, direct retail observations and expert interviews. Combining multiple methods enabled triangulation, thereby strengthening the validity of the study (Patton, 2002; Golafshani, 2003). Semi-structured face to face interviews were conducted with open questions concerning the form and features of pop-up store; their role within location strategy decision making and their ability to position brands; the factors influencing pop-up location choice and the consideration given to site research, evaluation and selection. A discussion guide was used during the interviews

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Company	Role	Country of origin	Retail format	Market level	Date of pop up experience	Pop up form	Location of 1st pop up
A	Founder	UK	Pop up mall	NA	Launched 2011	Outdoor site	Shoreditch, London, UK
B	General manager (GM)	USA	Department store	Premium	Many over past few years	Shop-in-shop	Department store, various locations, USA
C	Digital marketing manager	UK	Department store	Premium	2013	Shop-in-shop	Department store, Knightsbridge, London, UK
D	International marketing director	Brazil	Specialist (footwear)	Mid	2006	Test/ guerilla	Covent Garden, London, UK
E	General manager (GM)	USA	Specialist (footwear)	Mid	July 2015	Outdoor site	CPD, Melbourne central mall, Australia
F	Head of retail operations	Italy	Specialist (denim)	Mid	2011, 2012	Concept brand	Regent St, London, UK
G	Head of retail design and operations	Australia	Specialist (beauty)	Premium	unknown	Concept brand	Flinders Lane, Melbourne, Australia
H	Global head of VM	UK	Specialist (clothing and accessories)	Premium	2012	Concept brand store	Tokyo, Japan
I	Brand director	UK	Independent (footwear)	Premium	1996	Test/ guerilla store	Soho, London, UK
J	CEO	UK	Independent (footwear)	Premium	2016	Shop-in-shop	Department store, Knightsbridge, London
K	Founder	UK	Independent (clothing and accessories)	Premium	2014	Test/ guerilla	Covent Garden, London, UK
L	Creative director	UK	Independent (clothing)	Premium	2015	Test/ guerilla	Only pop-ups. Broadgate Circle, London, UK
M	Managing director (MD)	UK	Independent (eyewear)	Premium	2013	Shop-in-shop, online, test/ guerilla	Only pop-ups. Miami, Florida, USA
N	Owner	Australia	Independent (clothing)	Mid	2015	Test/ guerilla	CPD, Melbourne central mall, Australia
O	Store staff	Australia	Independent (clothing)	Premium	2015	Test/ guerilla/ community	Fitzroy, CPD, Melbourne, Australia
P	Store staff	Australia	Independent (clothing)	Premium	2015	Test/ guerilla/ community	QV, Melbourne, Australia
Q	Founder, owner	Australia	Facilitator	NA	Since 2013	NA	Sydney, Australia
R	Founder, owner	UK	Facilitator	NA	Since 2013	NA	London, UK

Table III.
Case characteristics

to direct discussion of relevant topics. Interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, were audio recorded, from which full annotated transcripts were developed, totaling 116 pages. From this data set, key themes were identified and analyzed manually, using word tables to display the data from each case according to the common categories identified in the literature. Qualitative analysis of these multiple word tables enabled the study to draw cross case conclusions and enhance the generalizability of the findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2014). Excerpts from verbatim text were used to illustrate specific themes (Stake, 2005). Interview data (collected 2015-2017) was supplemented with a systematic review of secondary sources (newspapers, trade magazines), social media, blog content and company websites to elicit a pop-up location taxonomy (see Table IV), extending beyond the sample cases to include 69 pop-ups in total, giving a broader perspective of the locational phenomenon. This provided a construct of pop-up locations based on key dimensions and helped appraise location choice, which could be cross-examined – to ascertain "why" in the interviews.

Given its naturalistic perspective, this study applies Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for demonstrating qualitative research rigor and trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in the operationalization of the study. A summary of how this was achieved is outlined below:

(1) Appropriate operational measures adopted. For example line of questioning pursued in data collection was informed from theory offered in the literature review and was consistently applied across all cases (Shenton, 2004).

(2) Early familiarity established with participating companies before interviews took place (via documentary evidence, online and offline).

(3) Triangulation employed using different methods (documentary evidence, observations, interviews), different types of informants and different locations/ sites until data saturation was reached.

(4) Tactics to help ensure informant honesty. For example informant participation consent signed ensuring involvement of only those prepared to offer data freely.

(5) Iterative questioning deployed to validate opinions during data collection.

(6) Decision trail (reflective log) kept regarding research design, sampling, data collection and data analysis, contributing to "progressive subjectivity" (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

Location type	Academic classification	Type prevalence	Footfall	Relative cost (per sqm)	Accessibility
Shop in shop (multi-brand department)	Pop Up in Shop (PUIS)	13	High	Medium	High
Primary location on street, city center	Primary on Street	16	High	High	High
Shopping center, city center	Primary in Center	9	High	High	High
Secondary location on street (1-5 miles from center)	Secondary on Street	16	Medium	Medium	High
Shopping Center (edge/out of town)	Secondary in center (OOT)	3	Medium/ high	Medium/high	High
Tertiary/unused/random location	Guerilla	4	Low	Low	Low
Transport hub (airport, underground, bus)	Temporary outdoor	3	High	Medium	High
Event based (music festival)	Nomad	3	High	Medium	Low
Website, social media platform	Digital	2	High	Medium	High

Table IV.
Pop-up location
taxonomy

(7) Member checks of data collected, and interpretations formed e.g. audio recording of each interview conducted from which full transcripts were developed then verified by the informant for accuracy (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

(8) Examination of results against extant research to assess degree of congruence (Silverman, 2000).

(9) Contextual information – provision of "thick description" of the pop-up location phenomenon under scrutiny

(10) Triangulation employed to reduce researcher bias (adapted from Shenton, 2004).

Findings and discussion

General experience with pop-ups

When asked to define pop-ups, there were three main areas of clear consensus. The first was that those in the industry dislike the term pop-up, suggesting it is the "most overused word in retail"; "overhyped"; and also confused, pointed out by the VM Manager of a UK luxury brand who stated, "many people say they want a pop-up but they don't know what they mean, sometimes they refer to a small display, but really it must be transactional." This tension is also evident within recent trade literature (Jiang, 2017; Ryan, 2017) which questions the continued longevity of this format. The second important defining characteristic was that all pop-ups should be temporary and third was that pop-ups are about creating physical experiences. For example, the UK Brand Director of a Footwear company suggests, "they are about physical interaction with product and speaking to people (brand representatives) and getting to experience the brand within a differentiated environment." Most of the international specialist retailers viewed pop-ups as an extension of brand marketing communication, whilst the independent retailers stated that they were predominately about selling, which concurs with extant literature (Kim *et al.*, 2010; Surchi, 2011; Jackson, 2013; Morrell, 2014; Alexander and Bain, 2016).

Of all the retailers interviewed, the most operated type of pop-up was a traditional standalone store followed by a shop-in-shop concept, as evidenced in existing literature (Alexander and Bain, 2016). This is not surprising as the latter offers the least financial risk and outlay. There was only one co-operative pop-up interviewed as part of this sample. The least common, but the type most brands indicated they wanted to experiment with more, were the nomadic and the digital pop-up. The pop-up location taxonomy further supports yet extends this phenomenon, conceived from a systematic analysis of pop-up locations based on dimensions of location classification, type prevalence, footfall, relative cost and accessibility, as shown in Table IV. The three most prevalent forms were primary on street, centrally located, secondary location on street (both traditional standalone outlets) and shop in shop (pop-ups in store (PUIS)). For all types, accessibility is high, footfall and relative cost medium to high. The emerging pattern is that "primary on street" tends to be the dominant location choice for larger multiple specialist retailers for whom maximizing footfall is a priority, whereas "secondary locations on street" appear to dominate for more niche specialists and independents where specific retailer adjacencies and consumer types influence location choice.

The strategic role of raising brand awareness and/or brand profile and positioning was always mentioned before the commercial selling motivation. The VM Manager of a luxury brand states, "it's mainly about brand visibility, but it is also about education." Furthermore, another luxury Lifestyle brand stated, "We don't do them for selling purposes, we respond to an external opportunity." Most of the other brands agreed that often the reason to undertake a pop-up store was opportunistic. This echoes the empirical work of Ebeltoft (2014). The final key role of a pop-up, that all brands mentioned irrespective of size is that of

market research and experimentation. Pop-ups are about "test" and "trial," "trialing new and expected things and products" and this has previously been highlighted by Ryu (2011), Warnaby *et al.* (2015) and Alexander and Bain (2016).

Both the UK and Australian pop-up service providers suggested that a wider contribution of the pop-up phenomenon is their ability to revitalize areas and generate employment. This aspect is a new and key empirical finding, which is worthy of further investigation. From this study the Australian founder said, "pop-up stores bring about rejuvenation through bringing the community together and that also encourages employment and entrepreneurship amongst millennials"; demonstrating that pop-ups are not just an opportunity for retailers but can make a significant economic contribution to a specific location.

With respect to the ideal size and duration of a pop-up, this varied significantly between all the brands, although there was a consensus that they were typically smaller than regular stores, supporting Alexander and Bain (2016). Amongst the independent brands' they were an average size of 30 m^2. The larger international brands stated that they had worked with many varieties and sizes of pop-up. Most brands suggested 4-6 weeks was an ideal duration and around a third had experimented with pop-ups of less than one week. The CEO of a London Footwear brand stated, "if you do it in less than four weeks it is really crazy, it's very disruptive and by the time you are in you are out, it's hard to do something meaningful and you are relying a lot on luck."

There were three main features of a pop-up that were mentioned by the majority of retailers. The first was the look and feel of the store, the second was its experiential nature and the third was its location. In relation to the visual appearance brands outlined the tension between a pop-up having to offer something, "new" and "unique" but still communicating a consistent brand identity. The MD of an Independent brand in London stated, "it is essential to convey a specific design concept." The UK Footwear Brand Director stated this as being driven by the consumer, "you have to give people a reason to talk about what you are doing [...] consumers are savvy now and they expect more." The UK Department Store Digital Manager agreed, adding that exclusive product in addition to different store environments is necessary, "just having a pop-up with your regular pieces and fixtures is not enough." Another tension related to the brand identity was raised by the need to keep costs low. The GM of a global footwear brand in Melbourne stated, "design is important but we can't invest too much as it's only a pop-up." Most brands considered the pop-up should be flexible and interior materials re-used and re-purposed.

Literature (Klein *et al.*, 2016; Alexander and Kent, 2016; Ryan, 2017; Jiang, 2017; Chen and Fiore, 2017) suggests that as a retail concept in its maturity stage the pop-up must offer something experiential and interactive and this emerged as the second key theme within the interviews. Most brands stated this was something they needed to improve. Examples included creating a program of events; an Italian denim specialist stated "it is crucial to hold parties in order to give consumers a reason to come"; a UK Brand Director of Footwear label mentioned customization, "we try to create theatre [...] it's about giving someone something they have created themselves that they cannot get anywhere else"; only two retailers talked about technology offering interactivity in store, with one UK independent Founder stating, "our use of technology to showcase the new product is key."

The third important feature of the pop-up store was the location, Head of Design for Lifestyle brand stated, "location for us is critical and we will take the time to get it right." As the focus of this study, the next section will incorporate an extended discussion of this feature and will address each of the research questions.

Role of pop-up stores within international location strategy (where and why)
With regards to *RQ1* which explored the operationalization approach, all retailers interviewed had operated one or more pop-up stores, the majority of the retailers had less

than five years' experience running pop-ups, a quarter of the sample had between five and ten and only three had more than ten years' experience. For most retailers interviewed the first pop-up was in a domestic location; this is consistent with the work of Picot-Coupey (2014). Interestingly however, there did not appear to be a direct link between the length of experience and the number of countries where pop-ups were opened; some brands with longer experience had only experimented in one or two countries, whereas some with less experience had experimented in multiple countries. As expected, the single store independent retailer pop-ups in London and Melbourne had only undertaken pop-ups in their respective domestic countries but did trade internationally via ecommerce. The larger retailers also had experience in multiple international territories (typically more than four, and including UK, EU and Far East). The decisions and pattern of internationalization of the retailers in this study adhere to Dawson (2001) and Doherty's (2000) assertions of flexibility, opportunity and often serendipity influencing international activities.

It was the larger brands who had undertaken international pop-up stores who stated that they did so strategically to test new markets and reduce risk when entering a new territory. To illustrate US Department Store GM explains, "new locations for pop-ups have to be strategically selected and be aligned with the target customer." This opposes Reynolds and Wood (2010) who infer that fashion brands are typically less strategic.

The importance of strategic partnerships was highlighted by all the retailers as being significant in driving location decisions (Doherty, 2000), this is explained by the Brazilian Shoe Brand GM, "We always do them in collaboration with a local partner […] we need the experience and we do a lot of checks before committing." Generally, the retailers stated that ecommerce was the first mode of entry, wholesale was the second entry point and pop-ups were the third stage before opening a store or a concession. However, the combining of different modes for market entry and expansion was evidenced, emphasizing a more flexible approach toward mode and format within the multiple specialist retailers. These more fluid patterns of internationalization are mentioned in the work of Picot-Coupey (2014) and warrant further investigation.

This notion of using pop-ups to "test the water" internationally (Luxury Brand VM Manager) was a clear function of the pop-up although one shoe brand CEO stated that they are, "hesitant to undertake them and that sometimes we are dictated to use this approach by the retailer to prove ourselves." This is also a new empirical finding and one which relates to the impact of the balance of power in the retail supply chain which is an interesting future area for research. Another notable point was that the UK Department Store Digital Manager stated that their CRM database was a key strategic tool for planning pop-up store activity at key times that tourists would be in London, for example, "there were certain brands that really did well with our Middle Eastern customer and we used our data to ensure there was synergy between the brand and the customer in order to drive revenue, this was part of our international approach." This could be described as reverse or pull internationalization and be termed strategic, in the context of Pederzoli (2008) as the brand is relying on data to make its growth decisions.

Factors influencing pop-up location choice
When evaluating responses to *RQ2* concerning the choice of pop-up location and its implications on the success of brand positioning *RQ3*, most brands first referred to the space that was available at the time, and that conceiving a pop-up strategy and marketing approach would revolve directly around the limitation or otherwise of that space. An illustrative example of this is where the Department Store Digital Manager stated, "it would be limited to where there would be physical space and that dictated the type of pop-up." This is an example of reactive internationalization, which the fashion sector is characterized as using (Reynolds and Wood, 2010).

The next most relevant response in terms of location choice was that it revolved around the footfall of the location. The key tradeoff which all retailers referred to was footfall (commercial) vs positioning (marketing). Furthermore, the status and desirability of the retail partner specifically in the shop in shop (PUIS) format is critical to its successful positioning as this acts as a badge of honor/endorsement for the new brand in the new geographical market. This finding is new and is core to the contribution of this paper and is illustrated by UK Footwear CEO who explains:

> There are two matrixes, we either want positioning to say that we are in Colette or Dover Street Market and frankly we don't care how much we sell as it is about being there and working with these stores. Or it is about pure sales so we would choose someone like Selfridges because it is a commercial beast.

There is another tension here, which relates to positioning, in that tertiary or "discovery" locations are perceived as being "brave" or "clever." They are described as such as they need a strong brand with "heat" (demand) and "good viral activity" in order to be successful. UK Pop-Up Service provider asserted, "brands are always asking us to source locations which have never been used before." This is another way the pop-up can be deemed authentic or achieve a unique status in press and social media.

The second and third most referred to location characteristics were "adjacencies" and knowing the "customer type" who would shop in a certain geographical area. In relation to the former, the independent stores talked about the concept of cumulative attraction and the importance of being in neighborhoods which were "hip" and were next to other "likeminded independents." This suggests that pop-up locations are able to be used in PR and promotional storytelling and can positively contribute to brand positioning in new markets. However, the continual quest for newness and novelty brings another tension for all the players in the pop-up system which was demonstrated by the UK Pop-Up Service Provider Founder who stated that they partner up brands with locations based on the demographic profile of the area, and interestingly added that strong brands which drive footfall always "want somewhere that no one else has ever used." Each interviewee agreed that location was a critical success factor of the pop-up and that finding the "right" location was not a straightforward process. The founder of the world's first pop-up Mall illustrated this by offering that, "location is paramount in ensuring constant trade for retailers."

Sourcing and selecting pop-up locations
In terms of how retailers source pop-up stores, this addressed *RQ4*. Word of mouth through personal contacts and serendipity was cited by just under half of the respondents and was mostly evident by the smaller retailers, for example an independent in Melbourne stated, "the landlord came to us and offered us the space, we weren't looking for it." One of the independent founders from London added that searching for a pop-up store location is highly challenging as, "many units are not advertised and there is increasing competition for good locations." This supports Reynolds and Wood's (2010) deduction that the role of intuition and networks is often more appropriate than systematic approaches. It can be inferred that the larger international brands have a more strategic approach to store locations which tend to be a centralized function controlled by the retail operations team, which adheres with McGoldrick's (2002) checklist approach but with added local intuitive flexibility. The luxury brand VM manager states, "we are given the location by the store team and if it doesn't work for what we think it should then we can question it and go back to ask for other locations in that area." The maturity of the pop-up phenomenon is also evident by the notion that pop-up service providers like We are Pop Up, Appear Here and PopUp Brands are now strong businesses in their own right. These companies serve all levels of the marketplace from sole traders to major luxury brands like Chanel and Louis Vuitton and aim to facilitate growth by making the location searching process easier.

Founder of UK service provider states, "We aim to make finding a pop-up store location as easy as booking a hotel room […] it's a win-win for everyone through standardization and transparency." It is interesting and useful to note that there was a consistent observation of responses within both locations, despite the notion that the British pop-up market is more mature (higher frequency and longer history) than the Australian market.

Future intention and ideas

With respect to the evolution of the pop-up format, the interviewees again returned to the earlier point about the need for the format to be rebranded, due to the concept being considered as stale by those within the industry. UK Footwear Brand Director suggests, "it's a bit like the word collaboration – it's overused, when you work in the business you get a bit jaded by it […] we need a new word because its purpose is so incredibly important." Another said sometimes the word pop-up can have a negative association in some international markets as they start out as clearance stores. However, majority of retailers agreed that pop-ups are an accepted part of the retailer tool box and that they are here to stay. US Department Store GM added, "pop-ups are just part of our strategy now, they are used for both marketing and brand awareness, but now they also need to make money by driving footfall." This notion about the pop-up having a more strategic role was echoed by Australian service provider who states that, "pop-ups will get more sophisticated and will be more integrated into a brands' internationalization strategy." All the independent retailers were of the consensus that pop-ups will remain important especially for small brands as a, "low risk" and "low commitment method of growth." The emergence and growth of collaborative and co-operative pop-up stores is another example of this.

In terms of how they will evolve physically, a third of the brands mentioned technology, either with respect to technology instore or creating better links between the online and offline experience. Most brands candidly stated that this was an area of weakness for them and that it was something they wanted to get better at. For example, UK Footwear CEO said "it is all absolutely heading to digital and it is expected by customers." However, only one brand talked specifically about digital pop-up on a web browser or social network. The clearest theme to emerge from this question, that all interviewees talked about, was the importance of experience and entertainment within a pop-up; they referred to the need to have something "special" within the store in order to drive people to it. US Department store GM said, "you need a really good hook to kick it off and drive awareness." Others mentioned the blurring of the retail and leisure sectors and the need to provide consumers with a food or drink offer inside a pop-up, which draws parallels with the notion of third places within pop-ups, another emerging retail phenomenon worthy of further research (Oldenburg, 1999; Alexander and Kent, 2016).

Implications, limitations and future directions

The originality of this study is that it addresses an underdeveloped research field through the analysis of retailers' assessment of the role of pop-up stores within international retail location strategy. It serves to advance knowledge of pop-up stores within an international context by providing new findings into the factors influencing pop-up store location choice, the importance attributed to location within internationalization and the process of selection.

The findings support extant literature in emphasizing the strategic importance given to location and to pop-ups generally as a legitimate mode and format of retailing. They serve to counteract criticisms of pop-up saliency, by asserting the adoption and evaluation of the format. The study does however, raise concerns of pop-up over-use, which may diminish the effectiveness of the format in international retail strategy and the need for a refresh of terminology was posited as a positive action. Pop-up feature iterations highlight the

growing importance of offering experiences and flexibility. The continued dominance of standalone stores as the pop-up form of choice is supported yet the study also highlights the growing importance of PUIS and the credence of co-operative and collaborator retailing and the opportunities to explore other less well tried and tested forms such as nomad and digital, which provides an interesting route for further research. The function of international pop-ups underpins extant studies by asserting its significance for opportunistic market testing and trialing at reduced risk (Ryu, 2011; Ebeltoft, 2014; Picot-Coupey, 2014; Warnaby *et al.*, 2015; Alexander and Bain, 2016) yet offers new insight related to regeneration, positive economic return and impact on local areas and highlights how customer relationship management systems are enabling systematic locational analysis. The study expounds several new tensions and trade-offs in pop-up retail location decision making (see Table V), highlighting both complexity and agility in business approach. Of note is the tension between commercial (footfall-sales) vs positioning and the importance of location in reinforcing retailer position (secondary or tertiary, "discovered" locations), advancing the value of place marketing within the pop-up context. Moreover, the tension concerning balance of power within the retail supply chain when operating pop-ups calls for further research. The study affirms that fashion retailers are simultaneously opportunistic and strategic when choosing pop-up locations, which supports Doherty (2000) and Dawson (2001) but conflicts Reynolds and Wood (2010). It offers factors, dependent on business approach (reactive or strategic) that may impact location choice (see Table V) and proposes

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Role of pop-up store within international retail location strategy

Features	Forms	Function
Over-used word	Standalone store	Opportunistic
Temporary	Shop in shop (PUIS)	Experimental – test and trial
Flexibility	Guerilla	Market research
Experiential		Location regeneration
		Generate employment
		Return on investment
		Reduce risk
		Fluidity – mode and format
		CRM-driven decisions

Factors impacting location choice
Trade-offs/tensions

Reactive (opportunistic)	Proactive (strategic)
Space availability (any)	Space availability (brand fit)
Footfall – primary location	Brand positioning – secondary/tertiary location
	Retailer adjacencies
	Customer typology

Balance of power in retail supply chain (retailer vs brand)

Sourcing and selecting pop-up locations
WoM/networks
Serendipity
Intuition
Opportunistic and systematic

Future pop-up directions/ideas

Ideas	Functions	Forms
"Pop-up" name rebrand	Increasingly strategic	Interactive technology enabled pop-ups
	Permanent mode/format retailer "toolkit"	Elevated experiential pop-ups
	Low risk, low commitment growth mode	Integrated 3rd place pop-ups

Table V.
Summary of
research findings

a pop-up location taxonomy as a new empirical outcome (see Table IV). The importance of networks, intuition, and opportunistic attitudes toward location sourcing and selection is reinforced but as aforementioned, technology is enabling more systematic approaches also, which is an area worthy of future research.

Our research provides important strategic guidelines for retailers when considering pop-up adoption internationally. We propose a matrix to support the pop-up strategic decision-making process (see Figure 2). Based on two-axis, low-to-high market position and low-to-high location footfall, it offers four pop-up options: budget, test, impact and discovery, depending on the retailer's objectives – commercial (selling) vs positioning (marketing). It serves to highlight, as the findings posit, that the biggest trade-off in pop-up location strategy is commercial vs market positioning factors.

Table V summarizes the key outcomes and contribution of the research and offers avenues for further research on the field. It is also suggested that a further contribution of this paper is that the findings will be applicable and of interest to other industries such as food and events marketing. These are sectors who also can be characterized as more reactive due to typically operating on short commercial timeframes and have a collaborative ecosystem which is often based on personal relationships and recommendations (Gilmore *et al.*, 2006). Agndal and Chetty (2007) also conclude that relationships influence the changes in internationalization decisions within SMEs. The transferability of these findings to other sectors is another future area of research.

The findings of the study are not without limitations. Whilst the data were purposely collected from different retail formats, market levels and from those with pop-up experience, it represents one sector only and the emergent findings are limited to two main marketplaces and thus is not generalizable outside of the given sector. Moreover, case-study research is often criticized because of their context-specific nature and thus lack of representativeness (Gerring, 2007; Marshall *et al.*, 2013). However, the aim was to better understand the under-researched phenomenon qualitatively, which as Boddy (2016, p. 432) asserts, "case studies can provide new, deep and nuanced understanding of previously unexplored phenomena (and) reliable indications for the directions in which future research can go." Thus, future research could expand the number of cases, take a mixed-method
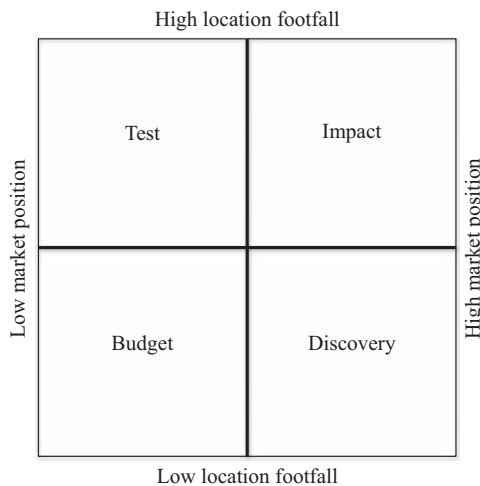

High location footfall

| Test | Impact |
| Budget | Discovery |

Low market position — High market position

Low location footfall

Figure 2.
Pop-up decision-making matrix

Source: Authors own

approach and draw comparison between international market locations. More general future research, other than the aforementioned, could examine pop-up transformations; in name, function and form within an international context, in particular co-operative, technology enabled; experiential and third place pop-ups.

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