Title: **Digital Only Retail: Assessing the Necessity of an ASOS Physical Store within Omnichannel Retailing to Drive Brand Equity**

Gemma-Lee Parker and Bethan Alexander

Level: Intermediate
Case Type: Public
Length: 4105

Key Words: *ASOS, Brand Equity, Customer Journey, Digital, Omnichannel, Physical Store, Touchpoint Consistency, UK Fast Fashion*

Abstract

ASOS is a British online-only multi-brand fashion retailer; founded in 2000, who has catapulted itself into the ranks of leading fashion retailers worldwide, despite lacking a physical store. With revenue of £3.26bn in 2020, 2.7bn platform visits in 2020 and 23.4 million active customers that same year, ASOS is an online-only success story. Even the COVID-19 pandemic did not hinder ASOS' growth as half-year profits grew 275% in 2021. However, as the effects of the pandemic dissipate, it may be that the absence of stores makes the heart grow fonder for the young audience that ASOS targets. Although this young audience have the highest presence in the digital realm, the same consumers still find value in physical shopping channels, even more so after COVID-19 restrictions, and want retailers to provide engaging real-life experiences.

ASOS has the power to reinvent retail settings, however, the company have not moved into a physical channel yet, only experimenting with a pop-up store in 2019 through payment company Klarna. Due to the omnichannel shift within the retail environment, where digital and physical channels are expected to merge, ASOS may need to address the lack of physical contact consumers have with the brand through a store to keep consumers engaged, and develop its omnichannel strategy and touchpoint consistency. A benefit to ASOS of developing touchpoint consistency is the strengthening of brand equity for its independent own-brands, which is increasingly important in the highly competitive world of mass-market fashion.

This case study assesses the approach that ASOS could take if it were to open a physical store and discusses the merits of an online-only retailer entering the physical space and the types of considerations that have to be made. Specific features of existing stores will be evaluated on their success, and these features can be used by students to guide ASOS in strategizing a new brand touchpoint that reflects the brand's values and identity. Thereafter, students will debate if an ASOS store is necessary for the retailer.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this case, students should be able to:

- Define omnichannel retailing strategy and explain the concept in relation to fashion retailing.
- Debate the implications for an online-only brand developing a physical touchpoint
- Propose elements of an ASOS physical store, communication campaign and retail strategy, whilst demonstrating an understanding of ASOS' brand values and identity
- Discuss the different approaches towards creating a physical retail experience in the digital era

Introduction

Founded in 2000, ASOS is an online-only multi-brand fashion retailer based in the UK (Sabanoglu, 2020). It was conceived as a fashion brand that mimicked the styles of celebrities through offering cheap fashion, under the brand name As Seen On Screen or ASOS as it later became known (Ibid). While the retailer permanently adopted its acronym as its name, the essence of the company remained the same and attracted young consumers who wanted the glamorous look for less (Robinson, 2019). By 2010, ASOS expanded into the US, EU and Australian markets, offering free shipping and returns as a key USP (Ibid). By 2013, ranges had expanded into more casual womenswear, menswear, jewellery and beauty (Ibid). ASOS paired its impressive product development with a novel social media strategy, favouring influencer and consumer-centric marketing, becoming an early adopter of such an approach (Barnett, n.d.). ASOS understands what its customers want and when to give it to them, e.g. providing a festival edit right before festival season using popular influencers to model and promote it (Ibid; Robinson, 2019). Additionally, through charity and sport sponsorships over the years, ASOS has accelerated its exposure, engagement, and popularity with young consumers (Ibid).

Maintaining this approach, ASOS has grown to be a leading online fashion retailer in the UK and worldwide, stocking over 850 brands (ASOS, n.d., b). The majority of these brands offer trend-forward cheap fashion that targets young consumers now in over 196 countries (Ibid). In 2004, ASOS the company created its first own-label brand which has grown to seven: ASOS Collabs, ASOS Design, ASOS Edition, ASOS Made In, ASOS White, ASOS 4505 Collusion (Ibid; Santamaria, 2018). These brands have a variety of offerings, from sportswear to formal pieces, and most items are positioned at mass-market prices (Ibid). In 2018, ASOS stated that its private brands generated over 40% of overall sales, noting in 2020 that the activewear brand ASOS 4505 grew 89% and the gender-fluid brand Collusion grew 44%, establishing themselves within the top 10 brands sold on ASOS's online store (Bain, 2018; ASOS, n.d., a). In 2020, the retailer incorporated circular garments into its offering, embracing the current circular economy trend that is both intriguing to its younger consumers and flourishing in the fashion industry (Moore, 2020; Moran, 2021).

According to the retailer, its brand values are authenticity, bravery and creativity (ASOS, n.d., b). ASOS aims for its fashion to be a force for good, and the mission of the retail brand is to be "the world's number-one destination for fashion-loving 20-somethings" (Ibid). ASOS describes itself as unique and experimental; it is designed to resonate with the people who interact with it and a source of inspiration for its customers (Ibid). The retailer's customer experience focus, as well as its "investment in the latest online innovations" (Sender, 2020), have caused it to "stand out from all other online-only clothing retailers" (Ibid).

ASOS 'effective brand development strategy is the reason it is a recognized retail brand in and of itself, despite only having an online presence (Sender, 2020). However, retailing has shifted to become more omnichannel, which is defined as an "integrated sales experience" (Rigby, 2011), in which borders between channels disappear (Verhoef et al., 2015; Bèzes, 2018; Beck and Rygl, 2015; Rigby, 2011). If customers can shop anywhere at any time with a retailer, their experience becomes complete and seamless, while thoughts of the retailer become more positive (Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2016).

As retail continues to shift towards omnichannel, customer journeys have become more complex as the channels consumers can shop within develop and merge (Amar et al., 2019). It is now more important than ever for customer touchpoints encountered during the shopping process to be multiple and integrated to form a seamless experience (Ibid; Payne et al., 2017; Juaneda-Ayensa et al., 2016; Rigby, 2011; Bèzes, 2018; Grewal et al., 2017). A touchpoint is where consumers can interact with the brand, and the more consistent and abundant a brand is with its touchpoints, the more visible the brand is to consumers (Verhoef et al., 2015). Physical touchpoints have always been important to consumers (Ibid), as they begin their brand journey through perceived elements; as a consumer, "I only believe what I see and feel" (Kapferer, 2008, pp. 138).

Whilst the significance of physical touchpoints in the digital era has been debated, in-store shopping remains a significant buying channel (Euromonitor, 2018). Especially within ASOS' target market of young adults, shopping within physical stores is not obsolete but instead, their capabilities are changing to become "more experimental" (Ibid). Moreover, experiential is a keyword ASOS use to describe its retail brand identity.

Enhancing ASOS' customer journey through the development of a physical touchpoint may enhance ASOS' brand equity, if done so in a way that reflects the brand's values and identity (Aaker, 1991; Kapferer, 2008). From a managerial perspective, brand equity is "a set of assets […] that are attached to a brand name and add up to the value provided by the brand" (Aaker and Biel, 2013, pp. 2). This case study will outline how ASOS might attain greater brand equity through extending their touchpoints physically, and in doing so embracing omnichannel retailing.

ASOS has experimented with physical retailing previously, when in collaboration with Klara it opened an experiential pop-up store in 2019, providing an opportunity to bring the brand to life in a playful form (Wightman-Stone, 2019). ASOS showed further signs of moving towards omnichannel retailing and opening a physical store with the acquisition of the Topshop brand in 2021 (O'Connor, 2021). This acquisition was a way for ASOS to gain market share by "taking control of a brand that performs well with their consumers" (Ibid). The brand name 'Topshop' "still carries a strong cachet with a whole generation" (Ibid), and as Topshop stores close, ASOS may be in a strong position to use the Topshop brand as a USP for a physical store. In 2021, ASOS made a deal with US department store Nordstrom to sell Topshop clothing in physical stores on US soil once again (Makortoff, 2021). However, this partnership may also lead to ASOS' own-label brands being sold in Nordstrom stores, allowing ASOS to penetrate the US market further than it has before. Attracting American customers may mean an ASOS physical store could find success in the US, but equally acquiring Oxford Street's 90,000 sq ft Topshop flagship store has not been ruled out by ASOS. It appears the brand's view on a future store, wherever that may be, is "never say never" (O'Connor, 2021; Makortoff, 2021).

Business Problem

ASOS' brand touchpoints, and thus brand recognition, are limited to online as they have not developed a physical touchpoint yet (Conti, 2021; Briedis et al., 2021; Sender, 2020). Due to the omnichannel retailing shift, where digital and physical channels are merging, ASOS may need to address the lack of physical contact consumers have with the brand through a store to develop its omnichannel strategy, touchpoint consistency and long term brand equity - a business opportunity ASOS now seem to be considering (O'Connor, 2021; Aaker, 1991; Aaker and Biel, 2013; Verhoef et al., 2015; Bèzes, 2018; Beck and Rygl, 2015; Rigby, 2011).

Whereas an online-only presence is not necessarily limiting, as ASOS' target market have high online usage, evidence shows that consumers tend to buy more from brands implementing omnichannel strategies (Khoros, 2021; Sopadjieva et al., 2017; Briedis et al., 2019; Euromonitor, 2018; BoF, 2020). Purchases continue to be "heavily digitally influenced" (Euromonitor, 2018) meaning "the role of physical stores will continue to evolve instead of decline" (Ibid) in significance, giving credence to a physical touchpoint that ASOS consumers can engage with. Additionally, as consumers crave going back into stores following COVID-19 restrictions, ASOS may face potential challenges if it does not offer a physical and engaging space to consumers (Moran, 2021).

Considering ASOS 'brand values of creativity and bravery, the development of a physical touchpoint can be both a creative and brave way for ASOS to position itself among its multichannel competitors, such as ZARA, and differentiate ASOS from its online-only counterparts such as Boohoo (Owler, n.d.). However careful consideration is needed, as demonstrated by online competitor Missguided, whose physical store shut down less than three years after it opened. Considering ASOS' brand value of authenticity, developing a permanent physical touchpoint may stray too far from their digital origins, thus the purpose of the store must be strategically significant. Translating an online-only multi-brand retailer into a physical environment will require strategic consideration on brand identity translation, retail format, atmospherics and aesthetics, size and location, offer, technology and unique selling point (USP), and even then success may not be guaranteed.

It is the "online giants" (Conti, 2021) like ASOS who have the potential to reinvent retail environments, but with such a dominant online prominence already, is a physical store necessary for ASOS to continue its success?

Retail Format

Retail formats are in a constant state of change due to omnichannel developments, especially within the fashion industry (Gauri et al., 2020). However, common formats include permanent stand-alone stores, pop-up stores and concept stores (Ibid). Permanent stand-alone stores are standard retail formats; as such they are becoming stagnant in their experiences and excitement for the younger consumer (Gauri et al., 2020; Dennis, 2018). Pop-ups and concept stores can be seen as more dynamic, creative and experimental retail formats - which are qualities reflected in ASOS' brand values (Trotter, 2016; Bardsley, 2017; Rosenbaum et al., 2021; ASOS, n.d., b).

A concept store aims to provide an array of products and experiences curated for a specific audience to enhance their shopping experience (Trotter, 2016). These stores harness the elements of discovery and experience, meaning product offering and styling can be changed regularly (Bardsley, 2017). This style of store allows for ASOS to be dynamic, and gives longer-term freedom to experiment with new ideas and even produce new brand perceptions, however location and logistics may become more restrictive (Ibid; Trotter, 2016).

Pop-ups are temporary retail spaces (Rosenbaum et al., 2021). This retail format has become an important marketing tool for online-based retailers who are looking to increase brand awareness and reach more consumers (Ibid; Spena et al., 2011). Furthermore, using pop-ups as a physical touchpoint is posited as a way to succeed in the contemporary retail environment because pop-ups aid in maintaining brand communities and hype through unique consumer experiences (Ibid). As previously discussed, ASOS has trialed an immersive pop-up store previously. This style of store may allow ASOS to open multiple pop-ups within territories, depending on if the purpose of the store is to consolidate its already strong UK market share, or gain exposure and expand further in newer markets. This style of store may expose more consumers to the tactility of the brand, but the temporary nature of this touchpoint could hinder any long-term benefits to a physical store (Bardsley, 2017).

Atmospherics and aesthetics

A strength of a physical store is the chance to be experimental with atmospherics and aesthetics, but the store should remain aligned with the brand's values to maintain brand associations and stimulate brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Vieira, 2010; Trotter, 2016). The term 'atmospherics' refers to "facility-based environmental cues" (Turley and Milliman, 2000, pp. 193) and the term 'aesthetics' encompasses the holistic visual beauty and harmony of a store environment (Vieira, 2010). In essence, atmospherics connects to how the senses are stimulated in store, and aesthetics connect to the visual attractiveness of the store.

When considering how the store looks, and how the other senses can be stimulated, Turley and Milliman's (2000) categories of atmospheric variables offers a useful framework to work from. The categories and variables within each category are summarized in Table 1. However, these categories and variables are not the only ones to consider, and it may be that other elements come into play.

Category	Variables in the Category
External	• Buildings entrance • Size of building • Colour of building • Location • Surroundings
General Interior	• Colours • Lighting • Music • Scents • Merchandising • Compositions • Temperature
Layout and Design	• Space design • Merchandise placement • Waiting areas • Traffic flow • Furniture
Point of Purchase and Decoration	• Wall decorations • Artwork • Product displays
Human	• Employee and customer characteristics • Amount of employees • Purpose of employees

Table 1. *Turley and Milliman's Categories of Atmospheric Variables*

Source: Turley and Milliman (2000), author's own diagram

Considering external variables, it is clear that the outside of an ASOS store must be visually captivating to attract consumers, but how this is approached is open for interpretation (Lagman, 2020). An example may be that due to' Instagrammability 'being a key element of ASOSs' brand identity, visual spaces that translate well to an Instagram post could be an external factor to consider (Barnett, n.d.; Lagman, 2020).

Considering general interior variables, it could be important to consider how different colours invoke different emotions and affect consumer shopping choices (Vieira, 2010). Research has shown that consumers are more attracted to warmer colours, but cooler colours have more pleasant connotations to consumers overall (Lee and Rao, 2010). For ASOS, the existing brand colours of black and white can harmonise well with multitudes of colours, lighting and composition choices, allowing for an array of potential interior choices in-store (ASOS, n.d.).

From these examples, reflecting on and playing with the atmospherics and aesthetics of a store in different ways can be a controlled way to change perceptions of ASOS, or reinforce existing brand values (Turley and Milliman, 2000; Vieira, 2010). Careful planning and thought of these cues could make the difference between ASOS' success or failure in a physical channel (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

Size and Location

Both pop-up and concept stores usually adopt small-scale spaces (Trotter, 2016). This is because smaller spaces are usually cheaper and easier to adapt and curate within, however, Klarna's pop-up with ASOS utilized a two-story building to allow for more play-area (Ibid; Wightman-Stone, 2019). ASOS needs to consider the benefits and challenges of store size and the location the brand will fit best within.

In making this decision, assessing the failure of UK online competitor Missguided's London physical store, which was attributed to store size, would be prudent (Geoghegan, 2019). In 2017, Missguided opened a store in Westfield Shopping Centre, Stratford, London, but the store closed six months later due to its floor space being "significantly too large" for its location, rendering it unprofitable (BBC, 2019; Geoghegan, 2019). Although Missguided closed this location, the retailer has had success with a store of similar size in Bluewater Shopping Centre, Greater London (Jahshan, 2019). This emphasizes the importance of the relationship between size and location for the success of a store.

ASOS could open its store in a non-central shopping centre or, as young shoppers continue to encourage brands to explore local formats, ASOS may join the trend of 'Micro-mmunity' shopping, and develop a street-facing store (Bishop, 2021). These decisions should stem from ASOS' unique consumer insights, and a contemporary understanding of where young consumers want to shop (Bouraoui et al., 2019).

It is also important to consider the country or countries ASOS could open a physical store within. While ASOS has customer bases all over the world (including UK, EU, Australia, and the US), the company's 2013 venture into the Chinese market failed to be a success due to high competition and preference for home brands (Davis, 2016). Therefore, due consideration of if the UK retailer should open a physical store within its home market or experiment in foreign regions for greater exposure is necessary.

Store offering

When considering the offering of its store, ASOS could choose to only offer clothing and could take inspiration from the concept store TFG London. In 2020, TFG London, (owning retail brands Hobbs, Whistles, and Phase Eight), opened one store with a mix of clothing from these brands (Fish, 2020). ASOS could assess its brand bestsellers to incorporate into its offering or may choose to provide exposure to niche brands in its store. Considering that a third of ASOS' assortment is own-label brands, ASOS may choose to highlight these brands to provide visibility to products that have never before been available in-store (Smith, 2017). However, this may not match consumers associations with ASOS, as it is known to be a multi-brand retailer (Sabanoglu, 2020). ASOS must consider its offering carefully to increase brand awareness whilst maintaining brand associations.

Offerings do not have to just be products. Klarna's 2019 pop-up event teased party spaces, gym classes, celebrity meet-and-greets, with ASOS specifically hosting "styling masterclasses" (Wightman-Stone, 2019). Following this existing offer of community interactivity, ASOS could consider introducing cafes or art installations into its store. Gentle Monster's Seoul pop-up offers cafes full of "instagrammable" treats (Sim, 2019); this focus on ‘instagrammability’ is a key element of ASOS’ brand identity (Barnett, n.d.). Additionally, art installations can be used to showcase contemporary social and environmental issues, something close to the hearts of ASOS young consumers (Amed et al., 2020).

If the focus of the store is more technological than community-based, which would match ASOS’ brand identity as an “online giant” (Conti, 2021), the offering may switch to satiate the “growing appetite for AI” (Amed et al., 2020, pp. 39). VR fashion experiences such as virtual try-on, live-streaming hauls, and smart mirrors could be offered, or the store may connect the ASOS app to various store areas in playful ways (Ibid). The use of technology may prove successful in developing the most excitement for the store (Ibid; Briedis et al., 2020; Bardsley, 2017).

When considering the store’s offer, it is important to remember that both concept and pop-up stores allow brands to be experimental - the very purpose of these formats is dynamism and reactivity (Hawkins and Scott, 2020). If certain products do not work, the offering can be easily adapted and continually innovated as demands of consumers change (Ibid).

Technology

A key feature of modern physical stores is enhancing the consumer experience and this can be done through innovative technology, especially if a brand is digital-focused or targets digital-savvy consumers like ASOS (Smith, 2017; Bardsley, 2017). Utilizing in-store technology is essential for a store’s success in the digital era to achieve omnichannel retailing (Briedis et al., 2020).

ASOS could choose to utilize technology in its store to create utilitarian or/and hedonic value for its consumer (Batra and Ahtola, 1990; Alexander and Kent, 2020). Utilitarian technologies provide instrumental value; they are useful and efficient, such as ZARA or UNIQLO who have self-service checkouts (Xu et al., 2012; Diner, 2017; Soo-ah, 2017). Hedonic technologies provide experimental value; evoking excitement, such as interactive touchscreens and product personalization (Xu et al., 2012; Zhu and Meyer, 2015; Tyrväinen et al., 2020).
In remembering the importance of omnichannel retailing, ASOS may break down the barrier to physical and digital, and completely immerse the consumer within its digital world (Verhoef et al., 2015). If ASOS choose to focus on consumer-facing technology, this could aid in increasing the “aesthetics appeal” (Alexander and Kent, 2020, pp. 2) of its store, and positively impact buying behaviour (Ibid; Lee and Leonas, 2018; Savastano et al., 2019). Additionally, if the focus is on customer experience rather than purchase, the use of innovative technology can have a “transformational effect on customer experience” (Alexander and Kent, 2020, pp. 2), which could lead to higher brand equity through increased positive brand awareness and connotations (Ibid; Bolton et al., 2018; Lemon, 2016; McCarthy and Wright, 2004; Aaker and Biel, 2013).

The ASOS app could integrate with the physical store playfully; gamification could be used, so that consumers can become connected to the physical space through their digital phone (Swanson, 2020). An appointment system could be introduced where consumer data is utilized to materialize individual wish lists, enhancing consumers hedonic value through tactility or offering personalization services (Shannon, 2019; Tyrväinen et al., 2020). ASOS may choose to fill the entire store with touch screens to immerse the consumer in the brand essence of ‘as seen on screen’ (Sabanoglu, 2020).

It is the retailers who "experiment with technologies" (Alexander and Kent, 2020) that are more likely to find success in their omnichannel endeavours (Ibid; Blázquez, 2014; Foroudi et al., 2018). ASOS' brand identity connects to this idea of experimentation, so the usage of technology is abundant in its direction.

Marketing and USPs

Once the aforementioned features of the store have been established, ASOS must consider how to effectively market this space to its consumers, and what USPs the store will offer. These elements will be critical for advancing brand awareness in a new physical channel (Aaker and Biel, 2013; Kapferer, 2008).

The store must have a USP to keep consumers engaged (Tsaltas, 2019). The failure of ASOS' online-only fashion counterpart Missguided shows that if consumers if offered the same experience online and offline, there is little reason to visit a physical store (Bouraoui et al., 2019). ASOS must consider that although it has existing consumer loyalty and effective marketing strategies, this may not be able to sustain an offline store's success and must be upheld with specific store USPs (Ibid).

ASOS' store USP could be products only available to buy in-store, such as limited-editions, drops, or collaborations. This style of business model is viable and popular with ASOS' younger target consumers, who view individuality as a key element of their identity (Elven, 2018; Muret, 2019; Bobb, 2019; Murphy, 2007; Francis and Hoefel, 2018). The exclusive nature of these products may drive consumers to the store, as "if they can't get it online or elsewhere" they have to come to the store (Murphy, 2007). While ASOS does stock a lot of online-exclusive products, the brand has had limited collaborations to date (ASOS, n.d.; Huber, 2019; Turk, 2019). Considering ASOS has connections to the 850+ brands they stock, another interesting and relevant collaboration may flourish here or ASOS may look to the fast-fashion and technology-focused brand UNIQLO for inspiration. UNIQLO consistently collaborate with far-reaching and, at times, niche entities such as popular game franchises, luxury designers, artists and institutions like museums (Grobe, 2018). These collaborations are a key driver of consistent consumer hype for UNIQLO (Ibid). ASOS need to be creative and brave in establishing their store USP to stimulate hype and online buzz that drives consumers to the store.

In conclusion, as streets start to have an increase in experiential stores, it is the "online giants" (Conti, 2021) like ASOS who have the potential to reinvent physical retail environments. However, this opportunity may not translate into success, so a physical touchpoint must be carefully considered to integrate with ASOS' brand values and identity. As fashion retail continues to shift towards omnichannel and evolve, does a brand like ASOS with such a dominant online prominence already, need a physical store for continued and long term success?

Business Questions

1. Brand touchpoint consistency is key for brand awareness and brand equity, as the more touchpoints a brand has, the more access consumers have to the brand. Taking the role of members of the ASOS senior management team, analyze and discuss:

    - What touchpoints do we effectively use currently to engage with consumers?

- What would be the advantages and disadvantages associated with extending into physical retailing?
- What is the forecast for fashion retailing, having conducted a channels and touchpoints analysis, how important will omnichannel channel retailing be to success?
- Is a physical retail store necessary for ASOS? Why?

2. The ASOS board have decided to invest in physical retail. As the creative direction team, you are tasked with interpreting ASOS's brand identity into a physical space. Your actions are to:

   - Apply Kapferer's brand identity prism to ASOS to reveal the facets of the brand
   - Taking these facets, together with macro trend research (visual merchandising, formats, colours etc), translate them into a concept board for the ASOS physical store project. Consider specifically Turley and Milliman's (2000) categories of atmospheric variables as well as format type, general aesthetics, size and location, offering, technology, the customer experience and USPs
   - Present your insight and concept board to ASOS's board to achieve "sign-off"

3. Given the emphasis on retail experience in physical stores to drive differentiation from the online store, which experiential strategy should ASOS adopt in its physical store of the future? Some stores use technology to drive a convenience experience, whilst others focus on immersion, promoting dwell, socialization, and community. Discuss the different approaches towards physical retail experience and pitch which strategy ASOS should adopt and why. Ensure you relate this to their brand values and intended aim of increasing brand equity.

4. Finally, how should ASOS leverage its existing channels and touchpoints to promote the physical store? Devise an integrated marketing communication campaign aimed at launching the physical store, that includes a strap-line, content and media channel strategy.

Teaching notes

This case study is designed for students in intermediate courses to apply and integrate concepts related to fashion management, retail strategy and branding. To successfully complete the case study, students should have a basic understanding of fashion retailing, brand management and omnichannel retailing.

In class activities:

One or more of the business questions can be used to:

- Initiate independent research and advance knowledge of omnichannel retailing, touchpoint consistency and brand management
- Prompt group or class discussion and debates
- Students take an ASOS senior management role throughout the activities to identify implications of their decisions on the ASOS brand

BQ 1:

- Out of class, students could undertake some research on ASOS, its touchpoints and respond to sub-question 1 on a digital Padlet board.
- In class, 30-mins small group research and discussion to brainstorm sub-questions 1-4, to formulate an argument for and against an ASOS physical store
- Whole class discussion, students to share their own experience with physical vs online channels, and their experiences with the ASOS brand specifically. Could any negatives experiences be improved through a physical touchpoint? Can positive experiences be replicated in a store? How?
- The class could then be split into two groups. Both groups are within the 'ASOS senior management team', but one side is for the introduction of an ASOS store and the other against. A debate could be initiated, with the moderator deciding on the most convincing argument.

This case study should serve as a prompt for general discussion about the need of physical stores in the digital world

Useful reading / sources:

- ASOS' media page with live news and social media updates ASOS Media Updates
- Euromonitor ,(2018), Best Practices for Omnichannel Retailing. Strategy Briefing Report. Euromonitor International.
- Verhoef, P., Kannan, P., Inman, J., 2015. From Multi-Channel Retailing to Omni-Channel Retailing Introduction to the Special Issue on Multi-Channel Retailing. *Journal of Retailing.* pp. 1 - 4.
- Short video explaining omnichannel retail and touchpoints in a fashion context https://youtu.be/XxeOI1CCNOw
- Retail Touchpoints' Retail Remix Podcast, Episode 64. Retail Design Special - What's Trending in Stores? (This may play out loud as students work on their concept boards) RRP ep 64
- WGSN trend and forecasting reports WGSN.com

BQ 2:

- In class, small group activity for 30-minutes. Students should take the learning from the lecture and apply Kapferer's identity prism to ASOS. An example of a brand identity prism could be described by the teacher, and remain visible as students undertake their own. Each group to share their applied identity prism to articulate ASOS's facets and overall brand identity.
- With clarity on ASOS's brand identity, the student groups, could turn to developing and creating a concept board for the ASOS physical store project. Students should be directed to Turley and Milliman's (2000) categories of atmospheric variables as well as contemporary sources that report on current retail trends such as WGSN. This activity should approximately take 1 hour.
- One group is then selected to be the creative direction team. The class role plays the ASOS creative direction team vs the ASOS board. The creative team should pitch their concept to the board and justify their choices. The board decide whether to sign off or not based on the strength of the pitch.
- Teacher should probe students on their concept board:
    - Have students referred to Turley and Milliman's atmospheric cues? Are all features of a physical store listed in the case addressed effectively? Are the

concepts apt with current retail trends? Is there a clear understanding of touchpoints and omnichannel retail?
  - Have students presented their ideas clearly and cohesively, and justified their choices, with focus on how their macro trend research relates to ASOS brand values e.g. If a pop-up strategy is chosen this allows for ASOS to travel to multiple locations, but a concept store may allow for a larger more playful space.

Useful sources:

- Turley and Milliman (2000), Atmospheric effects on shopping behavior: A review of the experiential evidence, Journal of Business Research, Vol. 49, pp.193-211. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0148296399000107
- Kapferer's brand identity prism model diagram and description of dimensions Kapferer's BIPM Kapferer, J.N. (2004), The new strategic brand management (creating and sustaining brand equity long term) (3rd ed.). Kogan Page, London, U.K.
- How to start a concept board Concept Board

RQ3:

- Students could take the learning from the lecture on experiential retailing and apply it to this question. Students should brainstorm and discuss, in small groups different types of experiences they have personally experienced. Students should attempt to categories these different experiences on a spectrum or table with type of experience and uses. Students should come to some conclusion about the approach to customer experience that ASOS should adopt.
- Each group should pitch their idea in-turn for the other groups to rate and vote on as to the most effective and why. Encourage all class discussion on experiential retailing strategies deployed in fashion retail.

Useful sources:

- Experience economy: https://hbr.org/1998/07/welcome-to-the-experience-economy
- Backstrom and Johannson (2013), An exploration of consumers' experiences in physical stores: comparing consumers' and retailers' perspectives in past and present times, *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, Vol. 27 (3), pp.241-259.

RQ4

- Students could work in small groups to create a marketing communication plan to promote the launch of the ASOS physical store. This requires students taking the learnings from RQ1 on ASOS's existing channels and touchpoints and leveraging this insight to propose a relevant and realistic communications campaign. Students can start this in class and finish in an out of class task as groupwork, which they pitch in the following week's class, especially if the teaching and learning extends across a number of weeks. The case can then be used across different sessions to apply the specificities of that learning to ASOS e.g. omnichannel week 1; brand strategy week 2; experiential retailing week 3; integrated marketing communications week 4.

Definitions

Channel: “A customer contact point or medium through which the company and customer interact” (Beck and Rygl, 2015)

Consumer Insights: An analysis and interpretation of a businesses audience to understand their needs (Frichou, 2020)

Customer Journey: “The process the customer goes through, across all stages and touchpoints with an organization” (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016)

USP: Acronym of Unique Selling Point/Proposition; defined as “a feature or characteristic of a product, service, etc. that distinguishes it from others of a similar nature and makes it more appealing” (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.)

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