

Jun 23rd, 9:00 AM - Jun 28th, 5:00 PM

## Customer-Centric Luxury Fashion Store Experiences: A Case Study Approach

Bethan Alexander  
*London College of Fashion, UAL, United Kingdom*

Holly Rose Thompson  
*London College of Fashion, UAL, United Kingdom*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dl.designresearchsociety.org/drs-conference-papers>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

---

### Citation

Alexander, B., and Rose Thompson, H. (2024) Customer-Centric Luxury Fashion Store Experiences: A Case Study Approach, in Gray, C., Ciliotta Chehade, E., Hekkert, P., Forlano, L., Ciuccarelli, P., Lloyd, P. (eds.), *DRS2024: Boston*, 23–28 June, Boston, USA. <https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2024.237>

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the DRS Conference Proceedings at DRS Digital Library. It has been accepted for inclusion in DRS Biennial Conference Series by an authorized administrator of DRS Digital Library. For more information, please contact [dl@designresearchsociety.org](mailto:dl@designresearchsociety.org).

# Customer-centric luxury fashion store experiences: A case study approach

Bethan Alexander, Holly Rose Thompson

London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, United Kingdom

\*Corresponding e-mail: [b.alexander@fashion.arts.ac.uk](mailto:b.alexander@fashion.arts.ac.uk)

[doi.org/10.21606/drs.2024.237](https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2024.237)

**Abstract:** This paper explores current approaches to customer-centric experiential strategies in a luxury fashion context, through an analysis of two UK luxury retailer case studies: Anya Hindmarch and MatchesFashion. While earlier studies have shown the importance of the physical luxury store, emphasis on customer experience (CX) and aspects related to service interactions that lead to pleasurable experiences remain nascent. Underpinned by interrelated theoretical constructs – customer experience, store atmospherics and retail design – and taking an exploratory, qualitative approach (including documents, expert interviews and store observation), the research promulgates the dimensions comprising customer-centric physical store experiences in luxury fashion in a digital age. In doing so, it is the first known study to offer a conceptual framework to advance scholarly and practitioner luxury customer experience research.

**Keywords:** customer-centric store; experiential retailing; luxury; fashion

## 1. Introduction

Consumer purchasing behaviours are increasingly experience led (Alexander and Blazquez Cano, 2019; Bruce et al., 2023; Shadid et al., 2022). In the *experience economy* where the staging of the experience is arguably more important than the product itself, the physical store in orchestrating the experience plays a critical role in eliciting customer response to the retailer, such as affective, sensory, social, physical and cognitive (Pine and Gilmore, 2019; Verhoef et al., 2009). With the growth of digital channels, physical stores today must be reimaged to provide a differentiated customer experience (CX) (Adhi et al., 2020; Balchandani and Berg, 2021; Bruce et al., 2023; Gauri et al., 2021; Miller, 2022), which necessitates a revisiting of the elements that comprise the luxury customer experience.

Customer-centric experiential strategies are defined as experiences which are fully tailored to customer needs, where the customer is central to every aspect of the experience, across



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence.

all brand touchpoints (Langer, 2020). Though customer experience is a well-developed research domain, academics have not reached definitional consensus (Chevtchouk et al., 2021). This study adheres to Chevtchouk et al.'s (2021:2) definition, whereby customer experience encompasses not only "the experience incident itself but the cognitive, affective, sensorial and social responses to the stimuli".

The luxury industry is renowned for evoking emotions and providing enjoyable experiences (Fionda and Moore, 2009; Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2020; Kestenbaum, 2020; Shadid et al., 2022). Luxury environments are recognized for engendering feelings of awe, uniqueness and admiration (Dion and Arnould, 2011) with a focus on visual cues to augment product purchases (Shadid et al., 2022). While earlier studies have demonstrated the importance of the physical luxury store, emphasis on customer-centric experience, and aspects related to service interactions across the purchase journey that lead to pleasurable experiences remain scarce (Gupta et al., 2023; Shadid et al., 2022), warranting further research.

Our study is underpinned by recent research which argues that, customer experience in a digital age, is situated on a continuum, with convenience and immersive experience at polar ends (Alexander and Blazquez Cano, 2019; Dennis, 2018a; Gauri et al., 2021). That is, experiential creators must harness consumers' oft coeval desire for speed and efficiency and entertainment and pleasure by integrating customer interactions (Klaus, 2021).

Drawing on established scholarly fields of atmospherics (e.g. Helmfalk and Hultén, 2017; Kotler, 1973), store design (e.g. Haug and Münster, 2015; Kent, 2007; Kirby and Kent, 2010) and customer experience (e.g. Brakus et al., 2009; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 2019; Schmitt, 1999; Verhoef et al., 2009), and by taking a case study approach involving two luxury retailers, we seek to elucidate on the customer-centric luxury retail experience. Previous studies have identified the challenges of designing a coherent store environment that unifies a retailers' brand, customers and strategy (Helmfalk and Hultén, 2017; Spence et al., 2014). Our study therefore intends to provide clarity on the creation of customer-centric luxury retail experiences, by addressing the following research questions.

- RQ1: What are the elements comprising the luxury physical store experience?
- RQ2: How do luxury stores align with the experiential continuum conception - convenience and immersion?
- RQ3: What is the prognosis of the luxury physical store and customer experience?

This paper makes three important contributions to customer experience and luxury retail environment literature. First, through drawing on the conceptualization of the experiential continuum it extends the research of Alexander and Blazquez Cano (2019) and Gauri et al. (2021). Second, it offers scholarly novelty and practitioner value, by proposing a luxury customer experience dimensions conceptual framework. Finally, it provides strategic relevance through its luxury context, ensuring that the two cases expound on customer-centric experiential strategies.

The article is organized as follows: the next section presents an overview of the literature. The subsequent section focuses on the research design, followed by the presentation and discussion of the case studies. The final section details the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and concludes with avenues for future research.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 UK luxury and luxury stores

The global personal luxury goods market<sup>1</sup> was valued at USD 409,521 million in 2023 to which the UK contributed USD 22,677 million; 5.5% of global luxury value sales. The UK luxury goods market is forecast to grow by 2.5% between 2023-2028, encountering tough, competitive trading conditions and reinforcing the need for innovation, agility and prioritizing customer experiences (Euromonitor, 2023). Luxury stores serve as the first point of contact between the brand and consumer in a physical space (Lunardo and Mounque, 2019) and the creation of customer experience is associated with positive emotions like enjoyment and excitement and positive responses concerning brand image, exclusivity, status, satisfaction and brand strength (Brakus et al., 2009; Dion and Arnould, 2011; Kim et al., 2016; Wiedmann et al., 2018). While past studies have shown the importance of luxury stores and their impact, research on holistic customer experience creation and response remains limited, particularly in the digital age (Alexander and Blazquez Cano, 2019; Bruce et al., 2023) warranting further research.

### 2.2 Customer experience theorization

An experiential view of consumption was first acknowledged in the 1980's whereby consumer behaviour was linked to hedonic (playfulness, fun, emotions) as well as utilitarian (rational, task based) value (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2013). Experience was defined as "when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as the props to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event" (Pine and Gilmore, 1998: 98). Multiple scholarly definitions of customer experience have been expounded since, broadly categorized by common experiential dimensions: cognitive, social, sensory, behavioural and affective (e.g. Babin et al., 1994; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999; Verhoef et al., 2009) that give credence to hedonic value creation. However, in the current phygital retail landscape where offline and online channels intersect, convenience has resurged as important to experiential retail creation. Recent experiential scholars and practitioners (e.g. Alexander and Blazquez Cano, 2019; Dennis, 2018b; Gauri et al, 2021) conceive a broader view of retail customer experience that recognizes both the contrasting and coalescence of convenience with immersive experience dimensions. This study draws on three theories which support these dual experiential concepts: Babin et al.'s

---

<sup>1</sup> Luxury personal goods includes apparel, footwear, eyewear, jewellery, leather goods, wearable electronics, timepieces, writing instruments and stationery and beauty and personal care

(1994) hedonic and utilitarian value, Alexander and Blazquez Cano's (2019) fast and slow retail model, and Gauri et al's (2021) customer-centric framework, encompassing a spectrum of experiential values - from convenience to immersive.

### 2.3 Convenience and experience, fast and slow: The new dimensions of the physical retail experience

The diverging strategies of convenience and experience have been put forward by scholars and practitioners (Alexander and Blazquez Cano, 2019; Bomber, 2021). Alexander and Blazquez Cano's (2019:8) Fast v Slow Physical Retail Store Model (see Figure 1) depicts retail spatial experience polarity, based on convenience (fast) or experience (slow).

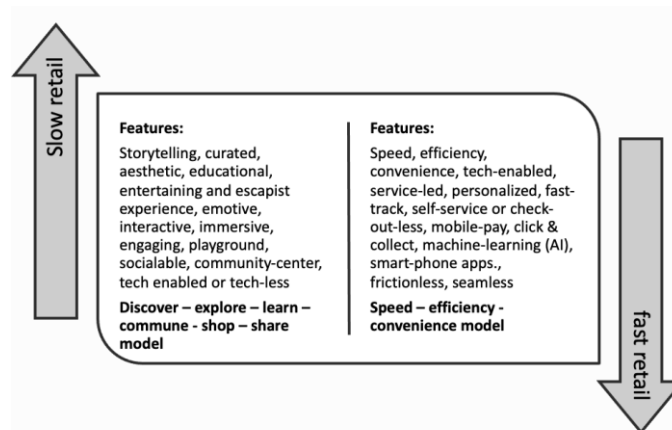


Figure 1 Fast v Slow Physical Retail Store Model (Alexander and Blazquez Cano, 2019)

In continuum, Gauri et al's (2021) study also reflects experiential duality, in their conception of a Customer-centric framework (see Figure 2). They suggest that retailers take one of two paths: 1) reduce friction in the consumer's shopping process or 2) enhance the shopping experience. The authors place retailer strategies on a spectrum from experience enhancement to friction reduction (Gauri et al, 2021: 52). Our study draws on the elements of each of the aforementioned models to assess the dynamics of the luxury physical store experience, to better understand how retailers create, use and blend their experiential strategies to optimize customer-centricity.

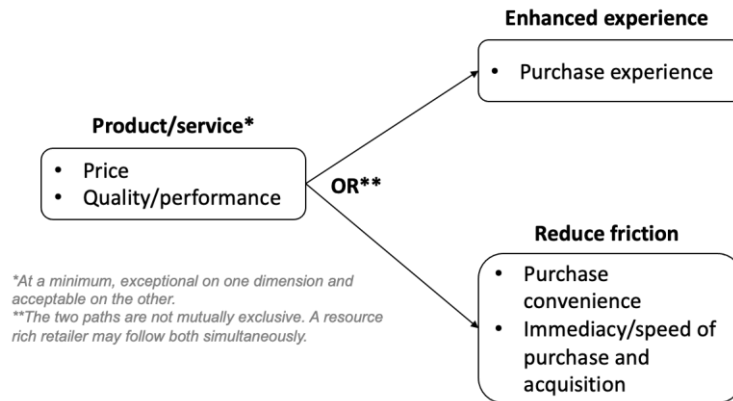


Figure 2 Customer-centric conceptual framework (Gauri et al. 2021)

#### 2.4 In-store experience: Store design and atmospherics

Store design literature tends to take an industry perspective, focused on the process (Haug and Münster, 2015; Kirby and Kent, 2010), while store atmospherics takes the consumer perspective (Bitner, 1992; Kotler, 1973; Spence et al., 2014) thus both are important in framing retail experience. Kent (2007) and Kirby and Kent (2010) showed the physical store to be a key component of a retailer's branding strategy and visual identity creation. The design of the physical store must provide memorable experiences, interaction and socialization, with retailers incorporating third places (Oldenburg, 1989) like galleries or cafes, atmospherics, storytelling and using location or urban setting to convey retail experience (Haug and Münster, 2015; Kent, 2007).

Atmospherics encompass the physical design and décor elements of a retail environment (Bitner, 1992). Kotler (1973) argued that the atmosphere surrounding where a product is bought or consumed positively influences purchase decisions. Moreover, Turley and Milliman (2000) categorized atmospheric cues into five areas: external, general interior, layout and design, decoration and human variables. Within this, the sensory dimensions – sight, sound, taste, touch, smell - of customer experience are important in creating a memorable retail experience (Ballantine et al., 2015; Helmefalk and Hultén, 2017; Spence et al., 2014). More recently, Alexander and Alvarado (2017) and Roggeveen et al. (2020) revised Turley and Milliman's store atmospheric cues to reflect the modern store.

Our study coheres customer experience, store design and atmospheric literature with recent theorizations of fast / slow retail store models to reflect the fullness of the in-store experience in its conceptualization of in-store elements. The aforementioned experiential elements contribute to the rethinking of luxury in-store experience in a digital age.

#### 2.5 Prior framework: Customer-centric designed retail environment elements

The literature review (e.g. Alexander and Blazquez Cano, 2019; Bomber, 2021; Gauri et al, 2021; Petermans et al., 2013; PWC, 2021; Turley and Milliman, 2000), presents 12 elements of the customer-centric designed retail environment (see Table 1). We categorize the experiential elements according to convenience, immersion and blended (a combination of both)

in line with Alexander and Blazquez Cano (2019) and Gauri's (2021) frameworks. Four as immersive: customization, storytelling, sensory cues and theatrics. Three as convenient: service interactions, phygitality and easy navigation. A further five applies to either category: modularity, personalization, third place, IST (in-store technology) and social cues. The priori framework compiles the elements of the luxury customer-centric store experience and is used to guide the empirical research, explained next.

Table 1: Piori framework: Elements of the luxury customer-centric designed retail environment (Author's own)

<b>Category</b>	<b>Element</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Theoretical view</b>	<b>Practitioner view</b>
<i>Immersive</i>	Customization	Product / experience	Gauri et al., 2020	
	Storytelling	Visual and architectural, conveying brand values and history	Kent, 2007; Kirby and Kent, 2010; Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2019	Schroer, 2019; Avery, 2021
	Sensory cues	Multisensory: sight, sound, taste, touch, smell	Turley & Milliman, 2000; Spence et al., 2014; Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2019; Gauri et al., 2020; Roggeveen et al., 2020	Ralph, 2020
	Theatrics	Props, spatial theming	Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 2019	
<i>Convenience</i>	Service interactions	Including BOPIS and BORIS	Gauri et al., 2020	Bomber, 2021; PWC, 2021
	Phygitality	Integrating customer interactions on and offline	Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2019; Klaus, 2021	Bomber, 2021
	Easy navigation	Clear signage and customer flow ensuring easy, efficient product access		PWC, 2021
<i>Blended</i>	Modularity	Moveable fixtures / spaces. Regular reinvention.	Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2019	Bouraoui, 2019; Dalziel, 2021
	Personalization	Data driven, CRM, tailoring customer recommendations	Grewal et al., 2017; Gauri et al., 2020	Malleveys, 2021
	Third Place	Dwell spaces including cafes, bars, work spaces, galleries etc.	Oldenburg, 1989; Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2019; Alexander, 2019	
	In-store technology (IST)	Magic mirrors, apps, QR codes, AR, VR, MR	Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2019; Gauri et al., 2020	Mallveys, 2021



Social cues

C2C and consumer-FLS interactions, relationship

Verhoef et al., 2009

### 3. Research design and case selection

An interpretivist, qualitative stance is suitable for case study strategies as it prioritizes richly detailed and nuanced descriptions (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009). Data triangulation was used to address the research questions, thereby strengthening the overall results by drawing on documents, in-store observations and industry interviews (Silverman, 2014). In keeping with this approach, the study served to elicit an understanding of the physical luxury store experience and its future development. In relation to RQ1, the priori framework (Table 1) was used to identify UK luxury stores considered as best practices of customer-centric experiential stores, from which two cases were selected for onward interrogation; thus purposive sampling was utilized.

Trade articles featuring these stores were examined for mention of the elements of the customer-centric designed retail environment (Payne and Payne, 2004). MatchesFashion and Anya Hindmarch were selected to address the 'how' question associated with RQ2 by providing thick descriptions and increased understanding, as well as offering new meanings in relation to RQ3 (Merriam, 1998; Parker, 2014; Yin, 2009).

MatchesFashion 5 Carlos Place opened in September 2018, in Mayfair, London. It was heralded as a "breathtaking new space" and as a representation of the luxury store of the future by conceiving a space that could be inhabited physically and digitally (Holgate, 2018). Anya Hindmarch's The Village concept, opened during the global pandemic in May 2021 in Belgravia, London. Considered to be one of the most ambitious UK retail developments, it comprises six unique stores, offering a destination hub for brand experiences, collaborations, exhibitions and collections, all amplified digitally (O'Connor, 2021). Both cases represent innovation in luxury store design, concept and atmospherics and are therefore deemed appropriate for inclusion.

Documentary evidence was augmented with industry semi-structured interviews, including senior executives from the two retail cases: MatchesFashion (1 & 2), Anya Hindmarch (3), and a luxury retail creative agency (4) (denoted as R1-R4). Participants were selected purposively based on their strategic influence in the conception of physical store experiences. A research framework, based on Table 1 was used to guide the data collection, with questions including retail landscape changes, customer-centricity, elements comprising the designed retail environment, the experiential spectrum and luxury retail experience prognosis. Interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes (Jamshed, 2014), were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews were followed by in-store observations, providing the opportunity to visit the physical stores and to observe the experiential elements used by luxury fashion retailers, to validate the priori framework as well as the textual interview data (Grove and Fisk, 1992;

Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Data was collected using observer as participant observation, allowing the researchers to act as shoppers, whilst interacting with front line staff to enquire about the elements within the priori framework. Textual and visual data were collected using an observation framework to record element frequency, descriptions and photographic evidence and field notes taken. Each in-store observation lasted around 60-minutes.

Data across the corpus was analyzed thematically, categorized and key quotes added in order to gain interpretative understanding (Silverman, 2014). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis were adopted including familiarization, code generation, code collation into themes, review of themes against the priori framework and literature and finally write up. Given the naturalistic approach of the study, Guba and Lincoln's (1994) criteria for assessing qualitative research credibility were adhered to in the research procedures. Research instruments were informed from literature themes with a framework devised to guide the onward data collection, rich descriptions were sought and probing used to verify and extend understanding. Data triangulation was used to increase credibility, member checking was deployed to determine dataset accuracy and during the research process, records and databases were kept to ensure procedure transparency (Cope, 2014).

## 4. Results and discussion

This section first presents the two cases and the extent to which they feature elements of the luxury customer-centric designed retail environment (see Tables 2 and 4). It then follows with a cross-case discussion of the extent to which experiential stores align with conceptions of convenience and immersion and finishes by offering a prediction of the future of physical luxury experiential stores.

### 4.1 Case study: Anya Hindmarch The Village, London

Table 2 Anya Hindmarch (Author's own)

FORMAT	NO. EMPLOYEES	No. STORES GLOBALLY	CHANNELS	CX ELEMENTS
Specialist concept store / village	>50	<10	Online Physical	Customization Storytelling Sensory cues Third place Theatrics Modular spaces Personalization IST Service interactions Social cues

Anya Hindmarch founded her eponymous luxury accessories label in 1987, which has grown into a global brand (Anya Hindmarch, n.d.). The London-based brand has a history of experiential retail, starting in 2018, with the Chubby Hearts campaign, followed by ‘Chubby Cloud’ and ‘The Weave Project’ (Anya Hindmarch, n.d). The Village that launched amidst the global pandemic, is the pinnacle of the brand’s customer experience proposition (Dirvanauskas, 2021; Johnson, 2021) (see table 3).

Table 3 Stores within The Village, London (Author’s own)

STORE	DESCRIPTION
THE PLASTIC SHOP	Centred around the sustainable ‘I am a plastic bag’ collection
THE LABELLED SHOP	Centred around the ‘Labelled’ collection, focused on organization and personalisation
THE BESPOKE SHOP	Site of the first <i>Anya Hindmarch</i> store which opened in 1996. Now holds the bespoke collections and incorporates a workshop where bespoke items are made
THE VILLAGE HALL	A rotating concept, regularly reinvented to embody different creative concepts
THE WORLD’S SMALLEST DEPARTMENT STORE	Centred on service, curated and collaborative products, in partnership with premium British brands.
THE CAFE	Serves branded delicacies. Inspired by retro British cafes.

#### 4.3 Case study: MatchesFashion 5 Carlos Place, London

Table 4 MatchesFashion (Author’s own)

FORMAT	NO.EMPLOYEES	NO. STORES GLOBALLY	CHANNELS	CX ELEMENTS
Multi-brand specialist concept store	>200	3	Online Physical	Third place Storytelling Sensory cues Theatrics Modular spaces Personalization IST Service interactions Phygitality Social cues

Opening in 1987 with a brick-and-mortar store in Wimbledon, London, MatchesFashion transformed into a global multi-brand retailer, stocking over 650 designers. Their experiential offering evolved from personal shoppers, private events held in luxury hotel suites, pop-up experiments in major cities, to their flagship home, 5 Carlos Place (Edelson, 2018; Phelps, 2017).

#### *4.4 Elements of the post-pandemic luxury physical store experience*

The presence of in-store elements within Anya Hindmarch's The Village and MatchesFashion are presented in Tables 2 and 4 respectively, according to the literature and observations. Next, these elements are categorized according to immersive, convenient, blended (Table 1) or new.

##### **Immersive elements**

*Customization, storytelling, sensory cues and theatrics* elements were found to be immersive. These elements related to hedonic aspects of the experience, in accordance with the literature (e.g. Alexander and Blazquez Cano, 2019; Babin et al., 1994; Gauri et al., 2021; Pine and Gilmore, 1998). They serve to peak customer's interest by providing a fun "fascinating" experience (R3).

Both cases used thematic spaces to tell brand stories. MatchesFashion store takes the form of a townhouse with interior installations using product in unusual ways to contribute to the homely themes and narratives (see Figure 3). Similarly, Anya Hindmarch's Village is thematically differentiated to tell the story of the brand and its collections. Both retailers focus on the visual, touch and taste sense to create aesthetic appeal and provide a stimulating and enjoyable experience. Immersive elements are key in conveying brand values. Anya Hindmarch's theatrics took the form of a workshop, with craftspeople making in-situ, encompassing the product personalization element, which encouraged customer interaction while offering exclusivity (see Figure 4).



Figure 3,4 MatchesFashion 5 Carlos Place dining room concept (left). Anya Hindmarch The Village's bespoke store and workshop (right) (Authors own)

### Convenient elements

*Service interactions and phygitality* were the most prominent convenience elements, prioritizing efficiency in the purchase journey. Rapid delivery was offered by MatchesFashion, while in store pick up was available at both retailers. At Anya Hindmarch, a range of service interactions were available depending on customer needs, from bespoke products to rapid personalization. MatchesFashion considered themselves to offer “the best acquisition experience possible” (R2), leveraging digital capabilities to offer 90-minute deliver to store or home. Anya Hindmarch conversely, used a more human-centred approach, with front line staff (FLS) taking ownership of their client’s service experience, offering to personally deliver purchases to their home. *Phygital* experiences were apparent at MatchesFashion with technologies like QR codes and the app used to integrate the online and offline customer experience. Anya Hindmarch did not offer a phygital experience. The *easy navigation* element was not evidenced at either retailer, as both focused on encouraging customer dwell time.

### Blended elements

Five elements were found to drive both convenience and immersion; *third place, ISTs, modularity, social cues and personalization*. MatchesFashion described a “magic and a logic” (R1) to blended elements; providing an immersive experience that people feel excited by, while having a convenience experience proposition based on speed and efficiency, delivered through a robust service proposition.

*Third places* were expressed through the in-store cafes at both cases; perceived as offering convenience, community and enhanced social interaction, concurring with extant literature (Alexander, 2019) (see Figures 5 and 6).



Figures 5,6 Third places – the courtyard bar at 5 Carlos Place (left) and Anya Hindmarch Village café (right) (Author's own)

ISTs were seen to be less significant in the in-store experience. Anya Hindmarch stated, “we just haven’t felt that we needed it [IST] yet” (R3), while MatchesFashion showed a preference for a “down tech.... people first” approach (R1). As previously stated, they offered a phygital experience by leveraging technology to connect the on and offline channels, but in an integrated and intuitive way that made the technology almost invisible.

Regarding *modularity*, both retailers regularly adapted their spatial environment according to themes. Anya Hindmarch’s The Village is premised on spatial reinvention, designed to rotate on a regularly basis. The village hall changes monthly to ensure the experience stays “fresh” and offers customers an “incentive to return” (R3) (see Figure 7). Likewise MatchesFashion renews its room sets often to add vitality and to encourage repatronage.





Figure 7.8 Anya Hindmarch Village Hall, conceived as a greengrocer (left); MatchesFashion private shopping suite (right) (Author's own)

In terms of the *social* element, FLS were seen as integral in customer experience delivery in-store, by conveying their “passion” (R1) “providing recommendations” (R3) and acting as “brand ambassadors” (R2). The importance of FLS was particularly noticeable within *personalization*; with both retailers referring to using memory rather than data analytics to shape a personalized experience, contrary to extant literature (e.g. Gauri et al., 2021; Malleveys, 2021). Social and service interactions elements combined in customer experience optimization across the spectrum ranging from convenience to immersion, from offering rapid delivery to private shopping suites and styling advice (see Figure 8).

### **New elements**

New in-store elements, not included in the priori framework, were revealed, including *exclusive in-store events, products and services, VIP experiences, education and glocal-to-local strategies*.

Both retailers cited the importance of offering exclusive in-store services, products and events. MatchesFashion's in-store experiences were considered “incomparably special” (R2), including cooking classes, café events, visual merchandising and personal stylists, aimed at incentivizing customers to come to store. Related to this was the need to provide an elevated experience for VIP customers, including access to private shopping suites and free gifts.

*Education* was seen as a significant aspect of the in-store experience, not only about the brand and product, but also on social and environmental issues. Anya Hindmarch, for example, utilized wall decals to educate their customer on plastic waste (see Figure 9).



Figure 9 Plastic waste education at The Village (Author's own)

*Localized strategies* were seen to be in ascendance, providing authenticity, neighbourhood resonance, and building relationships and partnerships with local customers and businesses were deemed important to both cases.

#### ***4.5 Experiential store alignment with conceptions of convenience and immersion***

The categorization of in-store elements extends the work of Babin et al. (1994), Alexander and Blazquez Cano (2019) and Gauri et al. (2021), updating them for the digital age. Moreover, five facets of customer-centricity were elucidated: 1) offering customizable options 2) enabling experience journey personalization 3) FLS facilitated experiences 4) CX renewal and 5) curated experiences. Optimal customer-centric in-store experiences were seen to blend both immersive and convenience elements, with both retailers evidencing that a range of experiences are necessary. The notion of “immersive immediacy” (R4) summarizes the interplay between these two dimensions that luxury retailers must exhibit.

#### ***4.6 Prognosis of the physical luxury store and customer experience***

Both luxury retailers pointed towards continuous pursuit of their physical store strategies and the honing of retail experiences. Within this, technology was recognized as a facilitator of customer experience, displacing FLS utilitarian tasks and reducing pain points in the customer journey to enable them to focus on experience elevation.

The priori framework of customer-centric in-store elements was ratified and extended through the two case studies. Customer-centricity was found to rely on a range of elements, creating a multi-faceted experience tailored to the customer's needs. This study offers a re-evaluation of the convenience-immersion experiential spectrum, which is discussed next.



## 5. Conclusion, implications, limitations, future research

This is the first known study to deduce the elements comprising a customer-centric store experience, in a luxury fashion context. Customer centricity is deemed important because it allows the customer to shape the experience according to their needs. The in-store elements facilitate the delivery of the customer-centric in-store experience through their multi-faceted nature, oscillating between convenience and immersion.

This study extends the works of Alexander and Blazquez Cano (2019), Gauri et al. (2021) and their concepts of fast/convenient and slow/experiential retail. It offers immersive immediacy as a new conceptualization of customer-centric in-store experience, in the coalescence of convenience and immersion. The 14 in-store elements that comprise customer-centric experiences are depicted in the conceptual model (see Figure 10). They are represented as spokes in a wheel, reflecting the fact that different retailers will select a different blend of elements in the creation of their customer-centric in-store experience and according to their customer's needs, market level and geographical location. All elements stem from a central cog, reinforcing that the elements can be used flexibly to drive immediacy (convenience), immersion (experience) or both, and that they are dynamic and subject to change. The outer circle addresses the most important element - found to play a key role within other elements - frontline staff. The store team and their ability to support the other experiential elements shapes the overall experience and drives immersion and immediacy. The framework offers a useful tool for industry stakeholders to assess their in-store experience creation and impact, and extends extant theoretical notions on customer-centric in-store experiences.

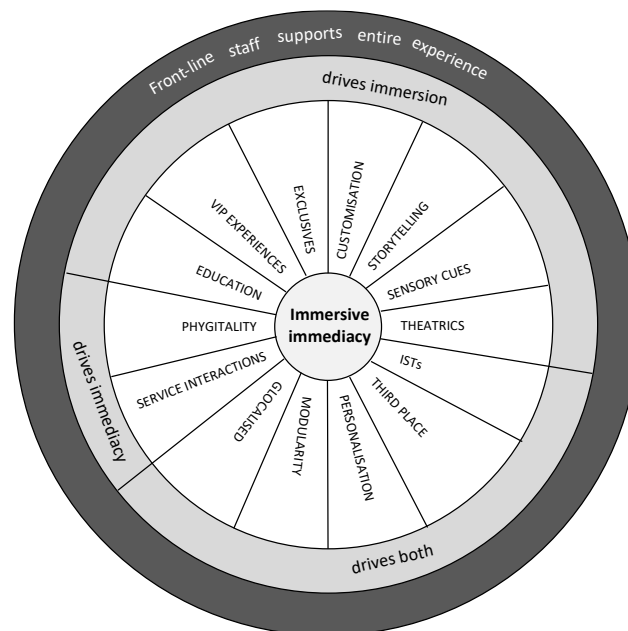


Figure 10 Conceptual model of luxury customer-centric in-store experience (Author's own)

Whilst the study makes a valued contribution to a dynamic field, it is not without limitations. The research is limited by scale, geography and market level. The narrow geographical focus, small sample size and qualitative approach should be considered when drawing conclusions.

The proposed framework is also subject to change, reflecting the rapidly changing marketplace. The strategic importance of customer centric retail experiences remains central to retailer survival in the future. This study offers a useful starting point for future research avenues, including replication with more cases, across differing market levels or in differing geographies.

## 6. References

- Adhi, P., Davis, A., Jayakumar, J. & Touse, S. (2020). *Reimagining Stores for Retail's Next Normal*. McKinsey & Co. [https://moodle.arts.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/1001902/mod\\_resource/content/1/Reimagining%20stores%20for%20retails%20next%20normal.pdf](https://moodle.arts.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/1001902/mod_resource/content/1/Reimagining%20stores%20for%20retails%20next%20normal.pdf)
- Alexander, B. & Alvarado, D.O. (2017). Convergence of physical and virtual retail spaces: The influence of technology on consumer in-store experience. In Vecchi, A. Editor (Ed.), *The Book of Advanced Fashion Technology and Operations Management*, (pp.191-219) IGI Global. Hershey, PA. doi:10.4018/978-1-5225-1865-5.ch008.
- Alexander, B. (2019). Commercial, social and experiential convergence: fashion's third places. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 33(3), 257-272.
- Alexander, B. & Blazquez Cano, M. (2019). Store of the future: Towards a (re)invention and (re)imagination of physical store space in an omnichannel context. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 55, 1-12.
- Anyah Hindmarch (n.d.). *About Anyah*. Anyahindmarch.com. <https://www.anyahindmarch.com/blogs/experience/about-anyah>.
- Avery, M. (2021). *Brand Storytelling – where to start?* Dalziel and Pow. <https://www.dalziel-pow.com/news/brand-storytelling>
- Babin, B., Darden, W.R. & Griffin, M. (1994). Work and/or Fun: Measuring Hedonic and Utilitarian Shopping Value. *Journal of Service Research*, 20(4), 644-656.
- Balchandani, A. & Berg, A. (2021). *The post pandemic state of fashion*. McKinsey & Co. <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/the%20post-pandemic%20state%20of%20fashion/the-postpandemic-state-of-fashion.pdf?shouldIndex=false>
- Ballantine, P.W., Parsons, A. & Comeskey, K. (2015). A conceptual model of the holistic effects of atmospheric cues in fashion retailing. *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 43(6), 503-517.
- Bitner, M. J. (1992). Servicescapes: The Impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 56(2), 57-71.
- Brakus, J.J., Schmitt, B.H. & Zarantonello, L. (2009). Brand experience: what is it? How is it measured? Does it affect loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, 73(3), 52-68.
- Bouraoui, B., Eriksson, M., Mansjö, M. & Thiel, A. (2019). *The ever-changing store: Taking an agile, customer-centric approach to format redesign*. McKinsey and Co. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/the-ever-changing-store-taking-an-agile-customer-centric-approach-to-format-redesign>
- Bomber, K. (2021). *Why the Future of Retail is Frictionless*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/honeywell/2021/01/29/why-the-future-of-retail-is-frictionless/?sh=9099fcf16cdb>
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bruce, H.L., Krolikowska, E. & Rooney, T. (2023). Guest editorial: Investigating the effect of the physical context on customer experience. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 37(6), 689-699.

- Chevtchouk, Y. Veloutsou, C. & Paton, R.A. (2021). The Experience-economy revisited: an interdisciplinary perspective and research agenda. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 30(8), 1288-1324.
- Cope, D. G. (2014). Methods and meanings: credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. In *Oncology nursing forum*, Vol. 41(1).
- Dennis, S. (2018a). *Physical Stores: Assets or Liabilities?*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevendennis/2018/09/07/physical-stores-assets-or-liabilities/?sh=4c9598a213fc>
- Dennis, S. (2018b). *Physical Retail Isn't Dead. Boring Retail Is*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevendennis/2018/03/19/physical-retail-is-not-dead-boring-retail-is-understanding-retails-great-bifurcation/?sh=7c0213af1981>
- Dion, D., & Arnould, E. (2011). Retail luxury strategy: Assembling charisma through art and magic. *Journal of Retailing*, 87, 502–520
- Dirvanauskas, G. (2021). *First look: Anya Hindmarch's new shopping village*. Drapers. <https://www.drapersonline.com/product-and-trends/in-pictures-anya-hindmarchs-new-shopping-village>
- Edelson, S. (2018). *Machesfashion.com's Experiential Home Pays Off*. WWD. <https://wwd.com.arts.idm.oclc.org/business-news/business-features/matchesfashion-coms-experiential-home-pays-off-1202896972/>
- Eisenhardt, K.E. & Graebner, M.E. (2007). Theory Building from Cases: Opportunities and Challenges. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25-32.
- Euromonitor (2023) *Personal luxury goods, global and UK dashboards*. Portal.euromonitor.com. <https://www.portal.euromonitor.com/portal/Dashboard/DashboardDetails?id=7d32fa07-2c1d-40ae-94ca-68de0b493d6a>.
- Fionda, A. M. & Moore, C. M. (2009). The anatomy of the luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, 16, 347–363.
- Gauri, D.K., Jindal, R.P., Ratchford, B., Fox, E., Bhatnagar, A., Pandey, A., Navallo, J.R, Fogarty, J., Carr, S. & Howerton, E. (2021). Evolution of retail formats: past, present, and future. *Journal of Retailing*, 97(1), 42-61.
- Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1994). *Competing paradigms in qualitative research*. In: Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.), *Handbook Of Qualitative Research* (105–117). Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Grewal, D., Roggeveen, A.L. & Nordfalt, J. (2017). The Future of Retailing. *Journal of Retailing*, 93(1), 1-6.
- Grove, S.J. and Fisk, R.P. (1992). Observational data collection methods for service marketing: an overview. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 20(3), 217-224.
- Gupta, D.G., Shin, H. & Jain, V. (2023). Luxury experience and consumer behavior: a literature review. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 41(2), 199-213.
- Haug, A. & Münster, M.B. (2015). Design Variables and Constraints in fashion store design processes. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 43(9), 831-848.
- Helmefalk, M. & Hultén, B. (2017). Multi-sensory congruent cues in designing retail store atmosphere: Effects on shopper's emotions and purchase behaviour. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 38, 1-11.
- Holbrook, M.B. & Hirschman, E.C. (1982). The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings and Fun. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(2), 132-140.

- Holgate, M. (2018). MatchesFashion.com is opening a breathtaking new space, 5 Carlos Place, in London. Just don't call it the store of the future. *Vogue.com* <https://www.vogue.com/article/matches-fashion-com-5-carlos-place>
- Jamshed, S. (2014). Qualitative Research Method-Interviewing and Observation. *Journal of Basic and Clinical Pharmacy*, 5(4) 87.
- Johnson, E. (2021). *Anya Hindmarch unveils "The Village", a new retail concept*. Retail Gazette. <https://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog/2021/04/anya-hindmarch-unveils-the-village-a-new-retail-concept/>.
- Kauppinen-Räsänen, H., Mühlbacher, H., & Taishoff, M. (2020). Exploring consumers' subjective shopping experiences in directly operated luxury brand stores. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 57, 102251
- Kestenbaum, R. (2020). *The Future of Luxury, Post-Coronavirus*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/richardkestenbaum/2020/11/02/the-future-of-luxury-post-coronavirus/?sh=3e867f0b33ef>
- Kent, T. (2007). Creative Space: Design and the Retail Environment. *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*, 35(9), 734-745.
- Kim, S., Park, G., Lee, Y., & Choi, S. (2016). Customer emotions and their triggers in luxury retail: Understanding the effects of customer emotions before and after entering a luxury shop. *Journal of Business Research*, 69, 5809–5818.
- Kirby, A.E. & Kent, A.M. (2010). Architecture as brand: store design and brand identity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 19(6), 432-439.
- Klaus, P. (2021). Viewpoint: Phygital – the emperor's new clothes? *Journal of Strategic Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2021.1976252>
- Kotler, P (1973). Atmospheric as a Marketing Tool. *Journal of Retailing*, 47(4), 48-64.
- Langer, D. (2020). *Radical customer-centricity will be critical for luxury brands in 2021*. Jing Daily. <https://jingdaily.com/customer-centricity-luxury-brands-2021/>
- Lemon, K.N. & Verhoef, P.C. (2016). Understanding the Customer Experience throughout the Customer Journey. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(6), 69-96.
- Lunardo, R., & Mouangue, E. (2019). Getting over discomfort in luxury brand stores: How pop-up stores affect perceptions of luxury, embarrassment, and store evaluations. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 49, 77–85.
- Malleveys, P. (2021) *Is Luxury Finally Embracing Technology?* Business of Fashion. [https://www.businessoffashion.com/opinions/finance/is-luxury-finally-embracing-technology?utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=social&fbclid=IwAR3Wbh\\_RrvRmwa1o6z9tgBdHO-JZat9gDSTkE5vN4\\_6q2O7Eq7Awne1gO8kU](https://www.businessoffashion.com/opinions/finance/is-luxury-finally-embracing-technology?utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social&fbclid=IwAR3Wbh_RrvRmwa1o6z9tgBdHO-JZat9gDSTkE5vN4_6q2O7Eq7Awne1gO8kU)
- Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B. (1995). *Designing Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed., Sage, Thousand Oaks, California.
- Merriam, S.B. (1998) *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.
- Miller, D-Y. (2022). How to open a store in 2022. Business of Fashion. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/retail/how-to-open-a-store-in-2022/>
- O'Connor, T. (2021). *MatchesFashion hit by £6 Million loss in 2019 ahead of Pandemic*. Business of Fashion. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/news/retail/matches-fashion-hit-by-6-million-loss-in-2019-ahead-of-pandemic>
- Parker, L. (2014). Qualitative perspective: through a methodological lens. *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management*, 11(1), 13-28.

- Payne, G. and Payne, J. (2004). *Key Concepts in Social Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Petermans, A., Janssens, W. & Van Cleempoel, K. (2013). A holistic framework for conceptualising customer experiences in retail environments. *International Journal of Design*, 7(2), 1-18.
- Phelps, N. (2017). *30 Years Old in 2017, MatchesFashion.com Keeps Rewriting the Retail Rule Book*. Vogue. <https://www.vogue.com/article/matchesfashion-new-york-residency-30-anniversary>
- Pine, J.B. & Gilmore, J.H. (1998). *Welcome to the Experience Economy*. Harvard Business Review. <http://enlillebid.dk/mmd/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Welcome-to-the-Experience-Economy-Pine-and-Gilmore.pdf>
- Pine, J.B. & Gilmore, J.H. (2019). *The Experience Economy: Competing for customer time, attention, and money*. Updated ed. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- PWC (2021). *Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey*. PWC.com <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/consumer-markets/consumer-insights-survey/2021/gcis-2021.pdf>
- Ralph, L. (2020). *The smell of success: scent as the future of engagement*. LS:N Global. [https://moodle.arts.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/1086455/mod\\_resource/content/0/the-smell-of-success-scent-as-the-future-of-engagement.pdf](https://moodle.arts.ac.uk/pluginfile.php/1086455/mod_resource/content/0/the-smell-of-success-scent-as-the-future-of-engagement.pdf)
- Roggeveen, A.L., Grewal, D. & Schweiger, E.B. (2020). The DAST Framework for Retail Atmospherics: The Impact of In- and Out-of-Store Retail Journey Touchpoints on the Customer experience. *Journal of Retailing*, 96(1), 128-137.
- Schmitt, B. (1999). Experiential Marketing. *Journal of Experiential Marketing*, 15(1-3), pp.53-67.
- Schmitt, B., & Zarantonello, L. (2013). Consumer experience and experiential marketing: a critical review. In N. K. Malhotra (Ed.), *Review of Marketing Research* (10, pp. 25-61). Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1548-6435%282013%290000010006>
- Schroer, J. (2019). *Retailer Insight: Visual merchandising must tell shoppers a story*. Drapers. <https://www.drapersonline.com/news/retailer-insight-visual-merchandising-must-tell-shoppers-a-story>
- Schweiger, E., Grewal, D., Roggeveen, A. L., & Beitelspacher, L. S. (2020). Managing the luxury shopping experience: implications for retail channels. *Research handbook on luxury branding*, 150-169. Elgar Publishing.
- Shahid, S., Paul, J., Gilal, F-G. & Ansari, S. (2022). The role of sensory marketing and brand experience in building emotional attachment and brand loyalty in luxury retail stores. *Psychology & Marketing*, 39, 1398-1412.
- Silverman, D. (2014). *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 5th ed., Sage, London.
- Spence, C., Puccinelli, N.M., Grewal, D. & Roggeveen, A.L. (2014). Store Atmospherics: A Multisensory Perspective. *Psychology and Marketing*, 31(7), 472-488.
- Turley, L.W. & Milliman, R.E. (2000). Atmospheric affects on shopping behaviour: A review of the experimental evidence. *Journal of Business Research*, 49(2), 193-211.
- Verhoef, P. C., Lemon, K.N., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M. & Schlesinger, L.A. (2009). Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies. *Journal of Retailing*, 85(1), 31-41.
- Wiedmann, K. P., Labenz, F., Haase, J. & Hennigs, N. (2018). The power of experiential marketing: Exploring the causal relationships among multisensory marketing, brand experience, customer perceived value, and brand strength. *Journal of Brand Management*, 25, 101–118.
- Yin, R.K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Applied Social Research Methods Series. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

About the Authors:

**Bethan Alexander** is Reader in Fashion Retailing and Marketing at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London. Bethan's scholarly research interests span Multi-Sensory Fashion Retailing, Customer Experiences Online and Offline, Innovative Retail Formats, Retail technologies and Future Retailing.

**Holly Rose Thompson** is an alumna of MA Global Fashion Retailing at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London. She currently works at Watts & Co. based in London as Head of Sales.