Communicating sustainability to children: an exploratory study on sharing sustainability through fashion retail third places

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Title: Communicating sustainability to children: an exploratory study on sharing sustainability through fashion retail third places

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ACADEMIC PAPER

Fashion retail, Sustainability awareness, Third places, Education, Children

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How **aware** are children **about sustainability** and specifically **fashion** sustainability?

RQ2: How **suitable** are **retail third places** for educating children about sustainability?

RQ3: How can sustainability **awareness** be **improved** through third places in children's retail settings?

Literature Review

- Sustainability awareness

- Children & Education

- Fashion Retail Third Places

Sustainability awareness

- Fashion industry is clearly one of the industries that has been linked to the exploitation of both resources and people

- Academic literature on sustainability is extensive

    Gupta et al., 2019; Mutum et al., 2019; Prothero et al., 2010; Carter and Rogers, 2008; Seuring and Muller, 2008; Aguilera et al., 2007; Bansal and Roth, 2000; Elgin, 1993; Walton et al., 1988

- An so they are studies that focus on understanding sustainable consumption and consumer's attitudes towards it

    Ritch, 2020; Tey et al., 2018; Aitken et al., 2017; Davies and Gutsche, 2016; Hosseiunpour et al., 2016; Ritch and Brownlie, 2016; Bonini and Oppenheim, 2008; Nicholls and Lee, 2006; Cowe and Williams, 2000; Howard and Nelson, 2000; Taylor and Tilford, 2000; Alfred and Adam, 1980;   Kilbourne et al., 1997; Kim et al., 1998; ; Robins and Roberts, 1998

- Whilst, children as sustainable consumers are starting to gain scholarly attention, it is still a burgeoning area of research

    (Heo and Muralidharan, 2019; Su et al., 2019; Watkins et al., 2019; O'Neil, 2017; Donovan, 2016; Ritch, 2015, 2019.

Of particular interest to this study, is the conundrum of how attitudes towards sustainable products are translated into actual consumption

the ethical purchasing gap

(Nicholls and Lee, 2006; Kim et al., 1998)

which is pronounced in the context of fashion

(Ritch, 2020; Joy et al., 2012; Bray et al., 2011; Niinimaki 2010; Joergens, 2006).

01

Researchers agree that the
confusion around what
sustainable fashion means
favours this **gap**

(Henninger et al., 2016; Reimers et al., 2016).

02

Existing studies suggest that
**information positively drives
consumer behaviours**, and a
lack of knowledge is a restraint

(Rothenberg and Matthews, 2017; Hwang et al., 2015; Hill and
Lee, 2012; Connell, 2010).

03

Therefore, an **increased
knowledge of sustainable** issues
can be fostered by greater
education levels

(Do Paço and Raposo, 2010).

Children & Education

- Education as a powerful tool for achieving sustainable societal change (Huckle, 2016)

- Early childhood is the most suitable stage to learn about sustainability (Davis and Elliot, 2009)

- Early education in sustainability may have a long-lasting effect for life (Unesco, 2008; OECD, 2006)

Importance of communicating sustainability to fashion children consumers in retail stores

01 Scholars assert that the **existence of barriers** often make it difficult for retailers to **convey convincing communication** about **sustainability** to consumers

Harris et al., 2016; Henninger, 2015; Mick et al., 2011; Wilber and Pasricha, 2017

02 No matter how much effort is made upstream in the supply chain, if the **focus** on **price, product and store attributes is lost**, the final consumer will not be motivated to purchase sustainable fashion

(Aitkin et al., 2017; Beard, 2008; Niinimaki, 2010; Ochoa, 2011)

AIM

Suitability of retail third places as **conduits of sustainability communication** and consequently improve children's attitudes towards sustainability.

The conception of third places

Was developed within a sociological context as spaces where *"individuals can freely gather, exchange ideas and socialise"*

(Oldenburg, 1999, p.15)

Third places were perceived as somewhere:

- that is not **home** --> *the first place*
- or **work** --> the *second* place

Comfortable place to relax and meet people

Third place typology (Crick, 2011) beyond the traditional form to include

Commercial (consumption focused, encouraging customers to spend more time and money within a space

Spectacular (experiential centred, fulfilling emotional consumer needs with a space

Hybrid (convergence of traditional and commercial third places accelerated by technology

01
Extant research has focused on exploring different forms of third places

(Laing and Royle, 2013; Crick, 2011; Rosenbaum, 2009)

02
it has only recently been applied in a fashion context

(Alexander, 2016, 2019; Nobbs, 2014; Manlow and Nobbs, 2013)

03
There is no known scholarly research on third places within children's retail environments

Forms (5):
traditional,
commercial,
spectacular,
virtual
hybrid

**3rd place
dimensions**

Functions (10)
Rest, relaxation, increase
dwell time, increase
consumption experience,
increase social interaction,
provide extra services, increase
pleasure, try before buy,
entertainment, increase spend,
make customer feel better

Features (5)
Private vs. public places;
intimate vs. social;
contemplative vs.
conversational; spectate vs.
interact; passive
(entertainment, aesthetic,
exp.) vs. passive (escapist,
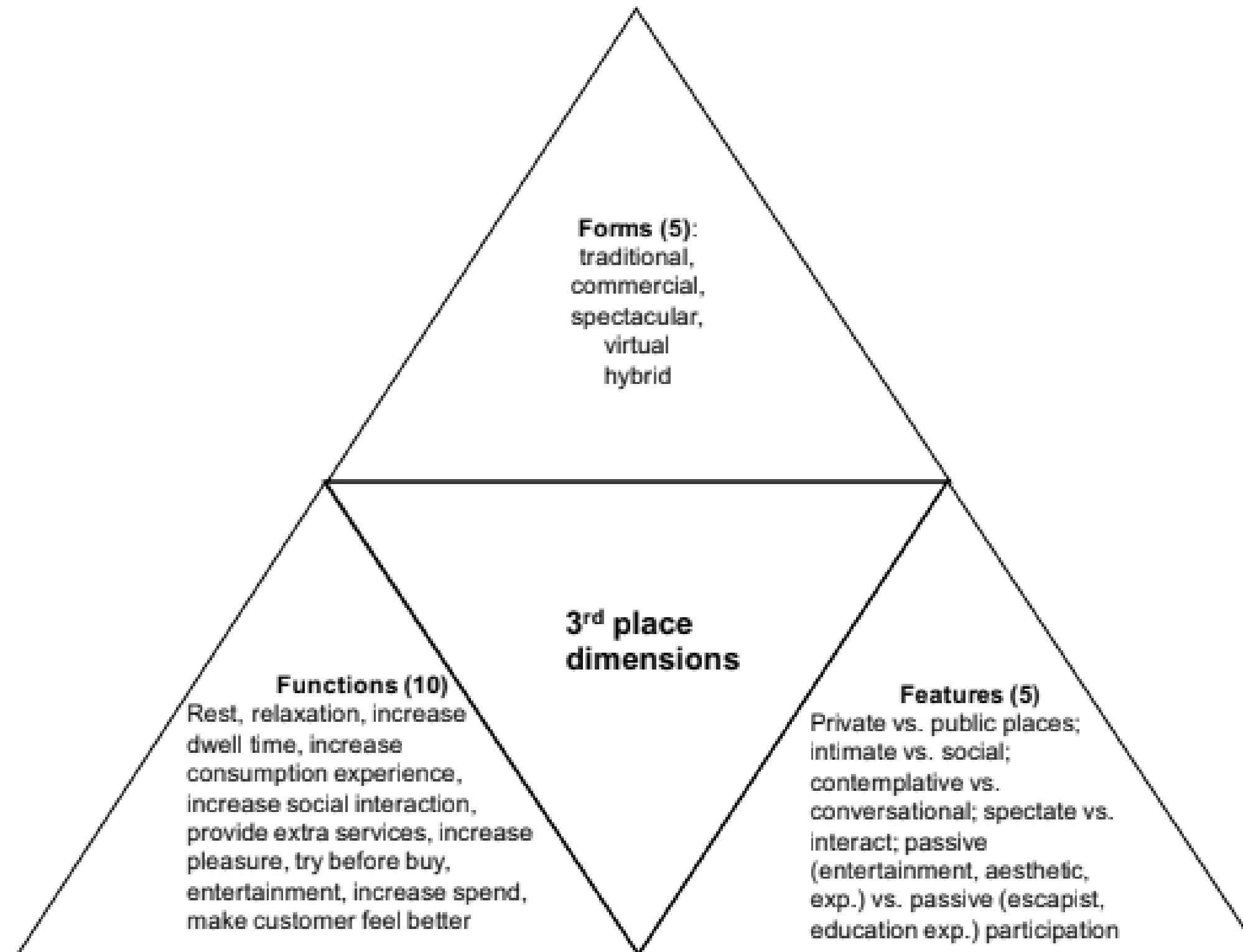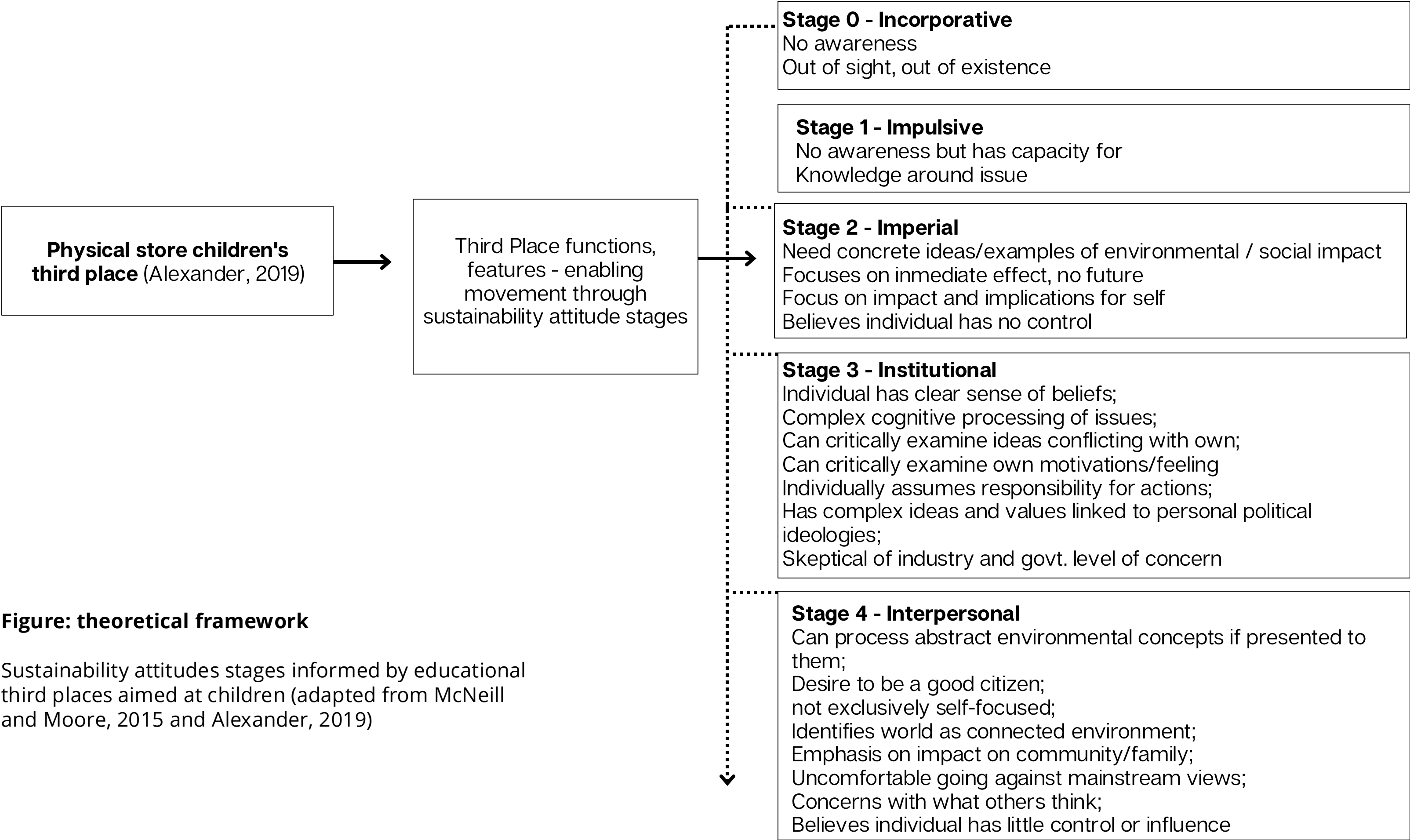education exp.) participation

Figure: Third Place Dimensions (Alexander, 2016)

This paper responds to the scholarly **call** for **further research** into **sustainability** and **children** through the conjoint lens of **sustainability awareness** and third places to foster **sustainable education**

Physical store children's third place (Alexander, 2019)

Third Place functions, features - enabling movement through sustainability attitude stages

Stage 0 - Incorporative
No awareness
Out of sight, out of existence

Stage 1 - Impulsive
No awareness but has capacity for
Knowledge around issue

Stage 2 - Imperial
Need concrete ideas/examples of environmental / social impact
Focuses on inmediate effect, no future
Focus on impact and implications for self
Believes individual has no control

Stage 3 - Institutional
Individual has clear sense of beliefs;
Complex cognitive processing of issues;
Can critically examine ideas conflicting with own;
Can critically examine own motivations/feeling
Individually assumes responsibility for actions;
Has complex ideas and values linked to personal political ideologies;
Skeptical of industry and govt. level of concern

Stage 4 - Interpersonal
Can process abstract environmental concepts if presented to them;
Desire to be a good citizen;
not exclusively self-focused;
Identifies world as connected environment;
Emphasis on impact on community/family;
Uncomfortable going against mainstream views;
Concerns with what others think;
Believes individual has little control or influence

Figure: theoretical framework

Sustainability attitudes stages informed by educational third places aimed at children (adapted from McNeill and Moore, 2015 and Alexander, 2019)

A qualitative research design was applied, normally associated with interpretivist studies

- 4 Focus Groups ("FG")
  - Profile: 12 to 16 years old
  - 60% girls; 40% boys
- Secondary sources were used to identify examples of child-centred third places and to inform FG's protocol

Topics	Topic 1 Sustainability awareness/knowledge /attitudes	Topic 2 Fashion Sustainability	Topic 3 Child-centred Third Places: Forms/ functions/features	Topic 4 Children's Retail Third Places
RQs	How aware are children about sustainability?	How aware are children about sustainability in the fashion industry?	How suitable are retail third places for educating children about sustainability?	How can sustainability awareness be improved through third places in children's retail settings?

- The uncertainty around the meaning of sustainability was evidenced. It concurs with extant studies that states that confusion around sustainability is affecting consumer attitudes (Henninger et al., 2016; Reimers et al., 2016) and might potentially affect children's attitudes as well.

- Interviewees provided a variety of issues along the fashion value chain, that offers new empirical insight concerning children's awareness of sustainability within fashion, suggesting that not only is sustainability awareness within the fashion industry increasing amongst the general public but also amongst children (Elgin, 1993; Prothero et al., 2010)
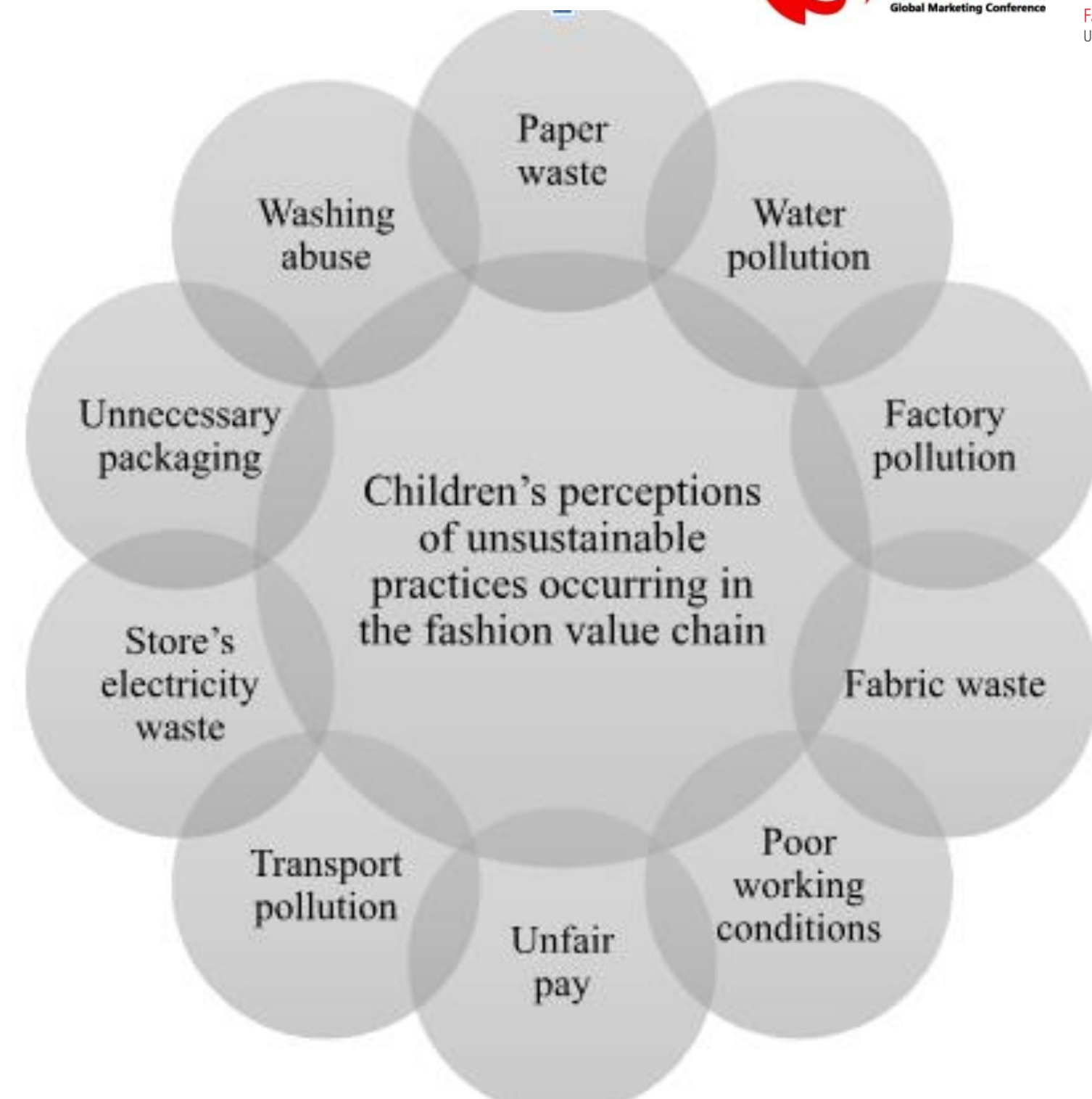
Table 5. McNeill and Moore's (2015) stages revised

Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
• <u>Need concrete ideas/examples of environmental impact</u> – **adults and children have different judgement and discernment capacity** – **Should be included in stage 3** • Focuses on immediate effect, not future – **NO** • Focus on impact and implications for self - **NO** • Believes individual has no control - **NO**	• <u>Can process abstract environmental concepts if presented to them</u> - **YES** • <u>Desire to be a good citizen</u> -**YES** • <u>Not exclusively self-focused</u> -**YES** • <u>Identifies the world as connected environment</u> -**YES** • <u>Emphasis on impact on community and family</u> -**YES** • Uncomfortable going against mainstream views – **Not assessed** • Concern with what others think – **Not assessed** • Believes individual has little control or influence – **NEUTRAL**	• Individual has clear sense of beliefs - **NO** • Complex cognitive processing of issues - **NO** • Can critically examine ideas conflicting with own views - **NO** • Can critically examine own motivations and feelings - **Sometimes** • Individually assumes responsibility for actions – **Not individual assumption** • Has complex ideas and values linked to personal political ideologies - **NO** • Sceptical of industry and government level of concern - **NO**

- Most children perceived educational experiences less attractive than entertaining and fun experiences
- Whilst the notion of third places itself was low, after explaining and showing examples, children overall showed positive attitudes towards the forms, functions and features of them, with the majority suggesting that they would be interested in educational third places
- Younger children especially, resonated with immersive, playful, fun workshops, whilst the older children, more passively prefer to be informed and entertained in-store through technology.

Re-fitted Theoretical Framework:
Children's sustainability awareness stages infused by educational third places

```
┌─────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────┐
│ Children's Third│   │ Third Place     │   │ Children's level│
│ Place           │   │ functions,      │   │ of              │
│ in-store        │──▶│ features to     │──▶│ sustainability  │──▶
│ Function: Increase│  │ move throughout │   │ awareness (stages│
│ consumption     │   │ sustainability  │   │ model)          │
│ experience      │   │ awareness stages│   │                 │
└─────────────────┘   └─────────────────┘   └─────────────────┘
```

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- Children's awareness was based on their own knowledge, which could be influenced by other participants' opinions – the 'follow the leader' effect (Morgan, 1988) – and so results could differ from their actual awareness

- This study is also bound by age, geography, sector and scale

- Similar studies could be expanded to draw on a larger sample size and undertaken across countries

- Future research design could include participant observation to see children's interaction with retail third places in-situ

- Moreover, a quantitative approach to test the effectiveness of the proposed Theoretical framework with a larger sample of children to quantify their sustainability awareness would be valuable

- In addition, greater exploration of the attitude behaviour gap in children, to attempt to close it, would be worthy of consideration

Thank you!

감사합니다