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The value of Experiential Retail Environments: insight on the existing context

Servais, Elisa*[a]; Quartier, Katelijn [a]; Vanrie, Jan [a]

[a] Hasselt University, Faculty of Architecture and arts, Hasselt, Belgium
* Corresponding author e-mail address: elisa.servais@uhasselt.be

This paper investigates the value of Experiential Retail Environments (ERE's). Insight from an initial explorative literature review was used to drive a comparative study on the notions of 'value' and 'in-store experience' and how they relate to each other. This integrated a collection of data through sets of interviews conducted with representatives of the three stakeholder groups most concerned with retail design projects: retailers, retail designers and consumers. Results show that the notions of 'value' and 'experience' remain intrinsically person-dependent but that some aspects are generally agreed upon. First, an 'experiential store' is perceived by all stakeholders to be a store that 'does more' (than sell products). It focuses on the customer experience, has a strong link to the brand and is associated with the notion of the 'unexpected'. Second, all groups agree in-store experience is a combination of the service, the environment and the offer but the exact combination of these elements and more particularly the role of the environment varies greatly between stakeholders. Third, the topic of value generated difficulties in discussions and as such remains hard to conceptualize. However, in all cases, a strong link between in-store experience and value perceptions has been identified. Fifth, the three stakeholder groups agree that the physical environment has a key role to play in both of these. Finally, there is currently no systematic approach to experience integration in the retail design process. In most cases, experiential factors are added to a store post concept generation.

Keywords: Experience; Value; Retail Design; Experiential Retail Environments

1 Introduction

Retail designers today face multiple new challenges. First, the retail market is more competitive than ever before. This is partly due to what has been called a 'commoditization' of outlets (Willems, Leroi-Werelds, & Swinnen, 2016), partly due to the growth of online shopping but also to the blurring boundaries between entertainment sectors associated with what is now widely referred to as the 'Experience Economy' (Alexander & Kent, 2017; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Petermans, 2012; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Van Ekris, 2018). Second, the rise of connectivity means customers have become more aware, demanding and value-conscious (Morrell & Goulding, 2017; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Van Tongeren, 2013; Willems et al., 2016). In order to differentiate themselves and retain customer shares, retailers have thus turned their attention to creating brick and mortar environments which trigger 'valuable' customer experiences, or what is now commonly referred to by retail

professionals as ‘experiential stores’ (Grewal, Roggeveen, & Nordfält, 2017; Morrell & Goulding, 2017; Vandooren, 2017; Verhoef et al., 2009).

Although this evolution has led to increased interest in academia on in-store experience (Bäckström & Johansson, 2006, 2017; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Petermans, 2012; Triantafillidou, Siomkos, & Papafilippaki, 2017) and the value of physical retail (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002; Davis & Hodges, 2012; Diep & Sweeney, 2008; Willems et al., 2016), in practice, much uncertainty still surrounds experiential retail environments and their value. Retail professionals still struggle to make decisions related to this in their day to day work. Relevant information on the two topics can already be found in marketing as well as interior design literature, both in academic and practice-based writings. However, to date, little has been done to combine this available knowledge and apply it to the practical considerations of the retail design process.

In this paper, we report on an explorative study conducted to provide a more holistic view on the value of experiential retail environments with the goal of being useful to practicing retail designers. Following an initial literature review, an empirical study with representatives of the three key stakeholder groups concerned with retail design projects (retailers, retail designers and consumers) was conducted to complement the available data and thus provide a more comprehensive view on the topic.

2 Theoretical background

An exploratory literature review was first conducted to gather information on the notions of experiential retailing and value and more particularly as these relate to the physical store.

Literature was collected from the two fields most intrinsically connected with the subject matter: marketing and retail design. The amount of academic literature available in both being significantly different, the selection of sources had to be approached differently. For the marketing literature, the review focused on the most prominent and widely-referenced authors. Retail design being quite new as an academic discipline, much less academic literature is available (Petermans & Kent, 2017; Quartier, 2011), but much of the discipline’s knowledge base can be found in more practice-based sources, which were also included.

2.1 Experience

2.1.1 Definition of ‘Experiential Retail Environment’

The most referenced marketing sources touching on the subject make little use of either the term ‘experiential store’ or ‘experiential retail environment’. Instead, other terminologies such as ‘experiential consumption’, ‘experiential marketing’, ‘experiential retailing’ or ‘experiential factors’, ‘components’ and ‘features’ are used (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Carù & Cova, 2003; Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Verhoef et al., 2009). However, in recent years, marketing literature has seen an increased use of these two specific terms. The authors using them give some insight as to what they might refer to but do not provide a clear definition as such (Ballantine, Jack, & Parsons, 2010; Bustamante & Rubio, 2017; Foster & McLelland, 2015; Klein, Falk, Esch, & Gloukhovtsev, 2016; Sachdeva & Goel, 2015).

Similarly, in academic retail design literature the two terms are rarely used and tend to be conceptualized rather than defined (Petermans, 2012; Petermans & Kent, 2017). In more practice-based retail design literature, however, ‘experiential store’ and ‘experiential retail

environment' are commonly used expressions. Once again, no set definitions are offered but the authors usually do provide insight through good and bad practice case studies (Arrigo, 2017; Bain, 2017; Brown, 2017; "Les 5 projets de shopping expérientiel qui ont marqué 2017," 2018).

Review of the combined literature, highlights a lack of consensus thus making it difficult to set a clear definition for the term ERE, although an implicit notion of a 'store that does more (than sell products or services)' seems to exist across all sources.

2.1.2 Experience integration in retail environments

Beyond looking to define it, multiple marketing studies have also analysed how experience can be triggered in the physical retail context. These can generally be grouped in two categories: more 'conceptual' studies on the underlying perceptual mechanism of a customer's experience (Fiore & Kim, 2007; Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006; Kim, Cha, Knutson, & Beck, 2011; Klaus & Maklan, 2013; Schreuder, van Erp, Toet, & Kallen, 2016) and studies on specific components of the store environment which can activate this experiential process – typically atmospheric factors (Babin & Attaway, 2000; Ballantine et al., 2010; Turley & Chebat, 2002; Walsh, Shiu, Hassan, Michaelidou, & Beatty, 2011).

In her research on customer experiences in retail environments, Petermans (2012) has contributed considerably to the academic retail design literature on the topic, setting important foundations. One important contribution is her visualization of in-store experience through a number of associated themes. Much has also been written in more practice-based literature to provide insight on how experience should be integrated in brick and mortar stores ("7 Case Studies That Prove Experiential Retail Is The Future," 2017; Bardsley, 2017; Mroz, 2018; Neerman, 2013; Sicola, 2016). Similar to that of marketing, retail design literature also approaches experience integration in the physical store either in broader, more conceptual terms (e.g.: surprise, discovery, immersion) or through the use of specific environmental factors which can trigger customer experience (e.g.: interactive displays, customization stations, scents).

2.2 Value

2.2.1 What exactly is value?

The construct of value has benefited from its own research line in the marketing field and as such there is an extensive body of literature available. This has allowed for a clear conceptualization, also of the more specific notion of 'customer value' (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994; Holbrook, 1999; Jones, Reynolds, & Arnold, 2006; Leroi-Werelds, 2013; Willems et al., 2016).

By comparison, specific research on the notion of value does not currently exist in the retail design discipline. However, some academic literature as well as multiple good practice sources make reference to evaluation criteria for 'good', i.e. valuable, retail design projects which can provide some basic information on the field's view of this notion (Ching & Binggeli, 2012; Knox, 2017; Petermans, 2012; Quartier, 2011).

The differences between the two disciplines create difficulties when trying to compare insights, but some key points can be made. First, whereas marketing research on the value of physical retailing focuses on customer value more specifically, retail design seems to consider value for multiple stakeholders at the same time. Secondly, both fields seem to consider value as a multi-dimensional concept and some consensus can even be found as

regards specific value dimensions or types (Babin et al., 1994; Holbrook, 1999; Knox, 2017; Petermans, 2012; Quartier, 2011; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). However, as illustrated in table 1, which shows a synthesis of these identified value dimensions and their meaning in the two disciplines, this apparent common ground should be considered carefully as each field still has its own specific understanding, considerations and applications to consider (Doucé, Janssens, Leroi-Werelds, & Streukens, 2016; Knox, 2017; Petermans, 2012; Quartier, 2011; Willems et al., 2016).

Table 1. Value dimensions in marketing and retail design

Marketing perspective	VALUE DIMENSIONS	Retail design perspective
"Excellence" involves the perceived **quality** of the products as well as the service (e.g., interactions with employees)	**FUNCTIONAL**	Functional **performance** of the retail space: how well it meets its purpose
"Efficiency" refers to the perceived **price**, but also the perceived **effort** needed during the consumption experience. The latter relates to the convenience of the store.	**COST-RELATED**	Financial performance of the store: **costs** (of implementation and maintenance) **vs. benefits** (commerciability of the brand)
"**Playfulness**" refers to the perceived enjoyment of the store visit. "**Aesthetics**" refers to the perceived beauty of the store.	**EMOTIONAL**	**Aesthetic** dimension (tangible and intangible) of the physical store: the experience it creates through the senses
"Social value" emerges when a customer's own consumption behaviour serves as a means to influence the **responses of other people**. Often this relates to **status** and the brand of the store.	**SOCIAL**	The retail environment as a **public space**: its role in public interactions
"Altruistic value" refers to customers' perceptions of **ethical behaviour** of the store (e.g., how the store treats employees or suppliers).	**ALTRUISTIC**	The **impact** of the retail space **on the environment, the locality and community** (incl. the regulatory aspects of design)

Source: (Servais, Leroi-Werelds, Quartier, & Vanrie, 2018)

2.2.2 Design for customer value creation

Although designing for customer value creation is a key concern for retail designers, field specific research looking into this does not yet exist. The extensive marketing literature on customer value can however provide some insight. Multiple studies seem to point to two ways in which value can be triggered in the customer's perception: either through a coherence with the brand (i.e. the customer's expectations of the brand as regards the store or consumption experience are met or exceeded) (Foster & McLelland, 2015; Gentile et al., 2007; Keng, Tran, & Le Thi, 2013; Rintamäki & Kirves, 2017; Willems et al., 2016) or through a coherence with the consumer's own self-image (i.e. when they feel the brand, store or

consumption experience matches their personality) (Bagdare & Jain, 2013; Cachero-Martínez & Vázquez-Casielles, 2017; Ottar Olsen & Skallerud, 2011; Sands, Oppewal, & Beverland, 2015; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010).

2.3 Research aim

Review of existing literature has provided some insight on the value of experiential retail environments but has also highlighted some gaps in knowledge. First, significant variations between fields as well as between academic and practice-based literature were identified. Second, no clear definition of the term 'experiential retail environment' (or store) currently exists. Third, experience integration in the physical store is approached in different ways. It can at times be addressed in broad terms and at others in quite specific terms. Fourth, due to the differences between marketing and retail design literature, a holistic view on the value construct and more particularly as it relates to in-store experience and the physical environment remains somewhat unclear. Finally, some common ground can be found between the two fields' perspectives on the value construct through its formalization in multiple similar dimensions. However, domain specific approaches and focuses would tend to point towards necessary further investigation on this. Beyond a need to create a more solid academic base for retail design by addressing these identified gaps, it is also important to consider the issues they can generate in retail design practice. How can retail designers create valuable experiential store concepts when the current context seems so unclear?

To address this issue and the gaps in knowledge, an exploratory empirical study was conducted in which the three key stakeholder groups' viewpoints on the value of experiential retail environments were solicited: retailers, retail designers and consumers. Two main objectives were set for this study: first, to compare stakeholder perspectives on the notions of experiential retail environments and value; second, to compare the 'in the field' data with the insight gained through the literature review in order to strengthen it and address remaining uncertainties but also to bring it closer to the viewpoint of practice.

Key research question: *'In practice, what do the three 'key' stakeholder groups (consumers, retailers and retail designers) consider as 'Experiential Retail Environments' (EREs) and how do they approach value when talking about them?'*

This question was subsequently broken up into the following six questions:

1. What is an 'Experiential Retail Environment'?
2. What are the different ways to design in-store experience?
3. What role does the environment play in experience creation?
4. What is value in the shopping context? (And as it relates to ERE's?)
5. What are the different forms value can take? And their priorities?
6. What is the role of the environment in triggering value creation?

To link the research to the considerations of practicing retail professionals, additional insight was also looked for as regards both experience integration and value creation in day to day design practice. To assist in this task, Claes et al.'s 2016 work on defining a 'holistic retail design process' was used as a reference framework. The below model developed through their research illustrates the different phases an 'ideal' retail design project follows.

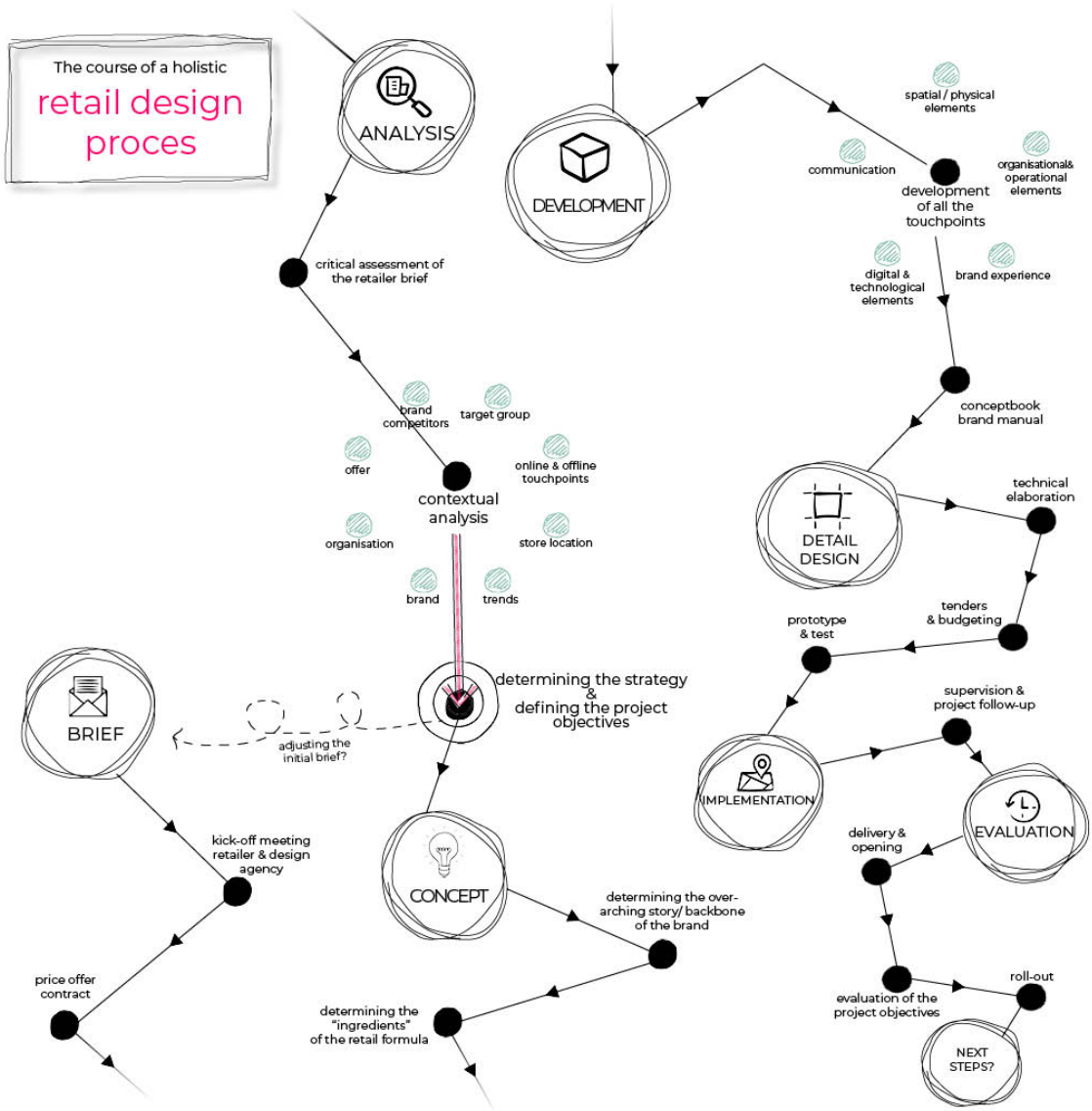

Figure 1. The Retail Design Process Model. Based on: (Claes, Quartier, & Vanrie, 2016)

3 Methodology

This study's approach is exploratory and qualitative in nature, involving data collection via interviews with retailers, retail designers and one focus group of consumers. The decision to make use of a focus group specifically for consumers is linked to the research topic's specificity as well as complexity. As such a more collaborative approach to the discussion was favoured in their case as opposed to one-on-one interviews with the retail professionals who should be more conscious and aware of the researched notions.

3.1 Context

As the study's rather abstract focus could potentially prove difficult to talk about for participants, we decided to provide a context for discussion through a set of physical stores. Therefore, we first selected five retailers with physical environments representing different levels of in-store experiences (low, mid and high experiential), as recommended by local retail professionals.

These five mid-level fashion (and lifestyle) stores were all located in Antwerp, Belgium as it offered high potential for cases that would suit the research (Van De Poel, 2017; Vandooren, 2017). Second, the choice of limiting the stores to one specific retail category was made because, as the research's interest is on the physical retail environment, this would avoid potential deviations in the discussions. In this way, we would limit the risk of people only discussing the product offering instead of the physical environment. Third, the number of stores was set at five in order to offer a wide enough but not unmanageable range of experiences to respondents.

The final store set included three local boutiques (high and mid experiential), one international chain (mid experiential) and one Belgian chain (low experiential). To ensure consistency between groups, the physical environments of the participating retailers were used as a context for all interviews.

3.2 Respondents

Data was collected through interviews with representatives of each stakeholder group. First, face to face interviews were conducted with members of the selected retailers' structures directly involved in the store design process. This included three owners, one head of sales and marketing and one creative director. The interviews lasted between thirty and sixty minutes and took place in their offices (for three, this was within the store context) and a café.

Similar face to face interviews were organized with five retail designers. Two were involved in the design of three of the retail environments in the selected store set. An additional three interior designers known for their work on retail design concepts were asked to participate. These had no prior involvement with the selected retailers but were asked to familiarize themselves with the five stores prior to the interviews. The discussions lasted between forty and one hundred minutes and were conducted in the designers' studios (for four) and at a café.

Finally, for consumers, a focus group with eight respondents was organized. These were recruited using an online registration form (shared via social media and a call-out mail) to ensure they represented (1) the selected retailers' target group (e.g. respondents needed to have visited at least one of the retailers' outlet in the previous year); (2) a good demographic mix; (3) a range of shopping orientations (selection criteria based on: Babin et al., 1994.) The discussion lasted one hundred and ten minutes and was conducted at our university campus. All respondents were asked to have visited the store set in the month prior to the focus group.

The questionnaires for the two sets of interviews as well as the focus group were designed to address the six aforementioned research questions. The selected retailers were asked the questions in the context of their own stores only. The designers who had worked on specific stores were asked to answer in the context of these. The other designers as well as the focus group respondents were asked to answer using the complete store set as context. Data was collected through audio recordings as well as field notes taken both during and post discussions.

3.3 Analysis

The six key research questions were used to guide the analysis process. First, all interview notes, transcripts of the audio recordings and additional material (photos from the focus

group discussion, forms completed during the interviews, etc.) were reviewed to separate the insight per key question. The next step in the analysis process was the reading and multiple re-reading of all the available data to create lists of terms related to each key question. This was done both per stakeholder group and for all groups together. The lists were then analysed in depth to find recurring themes first within individual groups and then between groups.

4 Findings

4.1 Within each group

4.1.1 Retailers

Results show that all participating retailers knew the term ‘experiential store’ but only one actively uses it. When asked to provide a definition, respondents said it is not a ‘traditional’ store, implicitly meaning one focusing only on product sales, but rather ‘a store that does more’. The actual nature of this ‘more’ varied quite a bit between respondents but novelty appeared as a key theme. For the respondents, these stores focus on customer experience which can prove difficult due to the high variability of customer expectations. They also agreed, that irrespective of the approach taken to design it, in-store experience should always be linked to the brand identity and can be achieved by working on a combination of the offer (1), the staff (2) and the environment (3). The environment itself has potential roles to play in experience creation either as a branding tool and/or as a way to please customers. One additional aspect of this topic discussed by retailers is the need to find the right balance between function and experience.

Little agreement was found on the subject of value in the shopping context. Even initial concerns were not always aligned, some respondents focusing first on customer value versus others on value for themselves. When asked more specifically about customer value, respondents often mentioned the importance of customer experience. This typically led the discussions to the topic of the variability of customer profiles, which is seen as a key challenge in retail design. Respondents were generally unable to identify dimensions of value themselves and when asked to rate their priorities based on the dimensions identified in the literature (e.g.: functional, cost-related, emotional, social and altruistic), no agreement was found. There was however some consensus as regards the roles played by the environment in value creation: first and foremost, to match value perceptions of the product but also to match expectations, to match the brand identity and to enhance the experience.

The following additional insight on the retail design process was found. There appears to be no systematic approach to experience integration in the store design process which generally seems to happen post concept generation. Also, though a variety of good practice tools and academic insight exists (e.g. customer profiling, customer journey mapping, etc.), this is rarely used by the respondents.

4.1.2 Retail designers

All members of this group were also familiar with the term ‘experiential store’ and three actively use it. The notions of a store that does ‘more’, focuses on consumer experience (which is related to expectations) and has a strong link to the brand were again generally present in the discussions. However, this stakeholder group had a higher level of consensus as to the nature of the ‘more’ of ERE’s, with most respondents mentioning discovery/mystery, difference, novelty and stimulation. For this group, in-store experience is

designed through a combination of the environment (1) (including the existing building), the brand (2), the offer (3) and the service (4). This mix is highly influenced by the brand and its target customer but the environment itself is quite crucial. Finding the 'right balance' between brand and architecture as well as between function and experience is a major concern.

The participating designers approached value in the shopping context in somewhat broader terms than the retailers, looking at value for all stakeholders simultaneously. Some focused first on the value of the store environment whilst others talked about customer value more specifically. Though less explicit with this group, a link between customer experience and value again surfaced, with the customer-brand relationship contributing to both. Customer expectations and personality matching were mentioned as key factors in the value proposition, making this one highly variable. Retail designers also struggled to conceptualize value in different dimensions. However, when asked to prioritize the literature identified types of value, this group showed some coherence. The crucial role the environment plays in triggering value creation was also highlighted. For designers, it serves as a brand communication tool, as a way to match expectations/value perceptions and contributes to the customer experience. This can be achieved by finding the 'right mix' of functional, aesthetical and experiential (brand relevant) store design factors.

When discussing their design process, retail designers often made reference to the necessity of a close partnership with the retailer. In most cases, it is this one who drives the process as regards design for experience and value creation. No references were made to either existing good practice or academic insight.

4.1.3 Consumers

The majority of the participants were not familiar with either the term 'experiential store' or 'experiential retail environment'. When asked what these could mean, the notion of experience was mentioned multiple times and made reference to a combination of environment, staff, price, organization and location. Although not specifically mentioned there was again an implicit notion of 'more' throughout the discussion. Interestingly, though they were unfamiliar with the term and struggled to define it, respondents were able to provide examples (both in the store set and beyond) of experiential and non-experiential stores, thus showing they do make a distinction. However, the examples given were not always agreed upon, with shopping motivations seeming to impact the decision process. For the focus group, in-store experience is closely related to expectations, personality, feelings and emotions as well as perceptions of difference (uniqueness). It can be achieved by working on a combination of the service (1), the environment (2) and the offer (3) and is often still linked to rather 'traditional' aspects of retail such as price, service or functionality although data suggests these should be combined with experiential factors. When asked specifically to reflect on the role of the environment in experience creation, respondents struggled to limit their comments to environmental factors but the ones they did mention were again mostly 'traditional' components often linked to visibility and circulation.

Discussing the value construct proved the hardest for this stakeholder group. Referencing back to the given store set helped to some degree. Responses point again to more 'traditional' elements (e.g. service, price, quality) playing a key role in value creation although an experiential dimension was also quite present in the discussion. When looking for potential types of value, the focus group mentioned rather practical aspects such as product, environment and service versus the more conceptual dimensions identified in the

literature. As with the retailers, no agreement was achieved when asked to prioritize these. There was also quite a lot of variability in responses as regards the role of the environment in value creation, although all respondents agreed it was a key factor and again that traditional elements linked to circulation and product visibility were quite important.

The participating consumers suggested two adjustments to the current approach to store design: first, more in-store digital integration or at least a more omnichannel approach (although some were nervous about this) and second, more opportunities for personalization.

4.2 Between groups

4.2.1 On experience

Retail professionals are all familiar with the term 'experiential store' and some use it actively but consumers are widely unaware of this expression. For all groups, an ERE could be defined as 'a store that does more (than sell products/services)', as opposed to 'traditional' stores and online shopping. It focuses on the customer experience (which is linked to varying customer expectations) and has a strong connection to the brand. The nature of its additional dimension varies greatly from person to person; however, in all cases it is related to experiencing something 'unexpected': difference, novelty or discovery. Although some agreement can surface as to which stores are EREs and which are not, the distinction is not always so clear. Whether a store is experiential or not thus often remains a matter of personal consideration.

All stakeholders seem to agree that in-store experience can be designed through a combination of the service, the environment and the offer. The weights given to each vary from group to group with retail designers clearly focusing on the latter. Interestingly, for this group, the brand was mentioned as an additional element of the mix. In all three groups, it was clear that varying customer profiles impact perceptions of the in-store experience.

Both retail professional groups detailed the environment's role as a way to enhance the brand or offer. Finding the right balance between function and experience was also mentioned by both. Consumers on the other hand struggled to talk specifically about this topic and seemed to focus on more 'traditional' elements of the store design. Their responses would point to the necessity of ensuring the more functional aspects of the store environment are operational before adding the 'more' they may expect from a specific brand.

4.2.2 On value

Although providing a context helped to some extent, discussing the value construct proved difficult for all stakeholders (but more particularly so for consumers). As such, the data collected on this topic is more limited and varied, making conclusions harder to arrive at. Still, some interesting points can be made. First, for retail professionals, customer value is not always the main focus (in value considerations). Second, although some differences do exist between groups and even between individual stakeholders on what customer value is, a clear link with customer experience does seem to exist for all. Indeed, value appears to be created when the in-store experience either matches the consumer and his/her expectations/ value perceptions or the brand identity. As customer experience is highly person-dependent and thus variable, so is customer value.

All stakeholders struggled to conceptualize value in different dimensions. The few responses given rarely linked back to those identified in academic literature with consumers focusing on

more ‘practical’ notions. Priorities in the previously identified value types varied greatly from person to person and there was no real agreement within individual groups except perhaps for retail designers.

Across groups, respondents agreed the environment has a key role to play in value creation, but its level of importance and actual role tended to vary between stakeholders and to some degree also between individual respondents. Two roles were mentioned by all groups: to match varying consumer product value perceptions/expectations and to serve as a brand communication tool. As regards specific elements of the store environment which trigger value, most participants still focused on rather ‘traditional’ aspects of store design.

4.2.3 On the design process

Analysis of the data points to three interesting conclusions on this topic. First, a gap between academia and practice seems to exist as available knowledge (from academia as well as good practice) to help in the retail design process is rarely used in practice. Second, all stakeholders are pushing for ‘more’ experience integration with a clear link between this and value creation. Third, although there is a push for it, no clear approach to experience integration currently exists. It tends to be led by the retailers in an intuitive way and in most cases post-concept development.

5 Discussion

Data collected from the empirical study has not only confirmed but complemented the initial insight gathered through the literature review. First, an ‘experiential retail environment’ is indeed considered to be a store that does ‘more’ (then just sell products, the way ‘traditional’ and online retail operate). The study conducted has further added to this by showing that (1) ERE’s focus on consumer experience (which is tightly related to varying customer expectations), (2) they have a strong link to the brand and (3) although the nature of their additional dimension is person-dependent, the notion of the ‘unexpected’ is generally agreed upon.

Second, the study has confirmed that experience integration formalizes itself in discussions either in broad (e.g. difference, novelty, discovery) or specific terms (e.g. references to specific environmental factors) and that this can generate difficulties for concept development. As a result, in most cases it is integrated post-concept generation. Interestingly, the study has brought to light that currently it is the retailer who leads this aspect of the process.

Third, value remains difficult to conceptualize and did not formalize itself in dimensions as clearly in the empirical study as in the academic literature. Fourth, the interviews have shown that value creation in the physical store is highly dependent on personal perceptions. However, this variability based on individual profiles as well as the many references made to the necessity of matching either expectations or personality tend to confirm and complement previous conclusions. Based on this insight, value of the in-store experience can thus be visualized as:

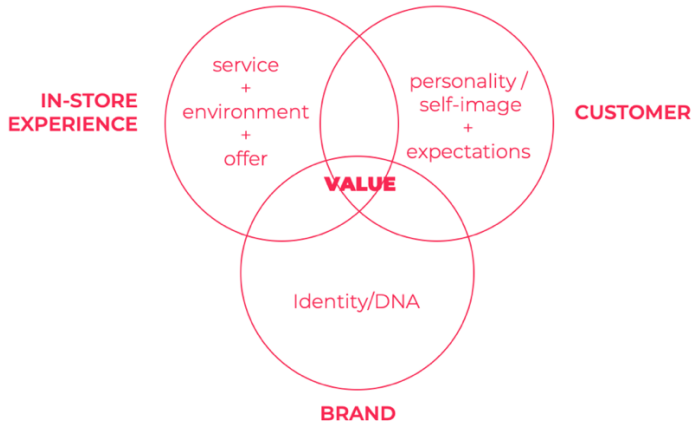

Figure 2. Visualization of the value of in-store experience

Lastly, the study has highlighted that although value is individually perceived, customers still seem to focus on the 'traditional' elements of the store before looking for an additional facet to their experience. This would point to the need for the operational aspect of the store to be considered first before adding its experiential dimension. The exact balance between the two as well as the level or type of experience is however customer and also brand dependent.

6 Contributions, limitations and future research

This research contributes to existing knowledge in three ways. First, it aids in grasping a more holistic and comprehensive overview on the value of experiential retail environments and more particularly so as this relates to the considerations of practicing retail designers. To date, the two notions of 'value' and 'in-store experience' have been widely researched separately and almost never with a view to apply it to design practice specifically. Secondly, this article contributes to the academic literature by adding to the still rather limited retail design theory base and also starts to create more links between this field and that of marketing. Third, it contributes to practice by highlighting not only gaps between stakeholder perspectives but also issues in the current ways of working and provides initial insight on how to potentially address these.

A number of limitations to this study can be found. First, the study was conducted using a specific context: five mid-level fashion brand stores in Antwerp, Belgium. To generalize results, similar studies should be conducted in additional and more varied locations as well as on different store categories. Secondly, for practical reasons, the number of respondents for each stakeholder group had to be limited to a manageable amount. As a result, further research would be required to strengthen results within each group as well as in-between groups.

Additionally to the above two proposals for further investigation, we would also propose the following research agenda:

- More in-depth research on terminologies, as the empirical study has only partially clarified the terms 'experiential store' and 'value'.
- Retail design specific research and particularly as regards the value construct since it is apparent that it is a key concern for all stakeholders but that much uncertainty and differences in perspectives still exist.
- Further research regarding the retail design process and how both experience integration and value creation fit into it.

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About the Authors:

Servais, Elisa: Building on ten years of working experience as a retail designer, Elisa is now conducting a PhD research project on 'the (added) value of Experiential Retail Environments' with a view of finding practical support for retail professionals and especially designers.

Quartier, Katelijn: Katelijn is assistant Professor in retail design at the faculty of Architecture and arts at Hasselt University, where she is also the academic director of the Retail Design Lab knowledge center. She and the Lab are researching what tomorrow's store should look like.

Vanrie, Jan: Jan is associate professor of human sciences & research methodology and coordinates research group ArcK at the faculty of Architecture and arts at Hasselt University. His research is at the intersection of environmental psychology, (interior) architecture, design and education.

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