

# DESIGN DYNAMICS

Navigating the new Complex Landscape of Omnichannel Fashion Retail

edited by Valeria M. Iannilli, Alessandra Spagnoli



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# Introduction

*by Valeria M. Iannilli, Alessandra Spagnoli  
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The fashion industry is venturing into the emerging global competitive market by enhancing various stages that prioritise design, creativity, sustainability, and technological advancement as key factors while simultaneously reimagining its business models. The rise of pervasive connectivity, intuitive interfaces, and novel interaction channels have spurred innovation in fashion retail, influencing customer behaviour and expectations.

The conventional retail system has transformed into an interconnected omnichannel system, characterised by the proliferation of physical and virtual channels and touchpoints, ultimately adopting a more fluid and integrated approach. The optimisation of operations, seamless integration, and alignment with customer expectations are strategic objectives driving the sector's evolution, with technology serving as a valuable and indispensable facilitator of improvement measures within the retail system.

In this context, design plays a crucial role as it has the ability to give meaning to the production and distribution system, which comprises mainly intangible elements. Design-driven innovation represents an incremental form of innovation, which introduces an intricate network of meanings into the market, not limited to tangible objects alone but also encompassing discourses, expressions, narratives, visual imagery, symbols, metaphors, and spaces. The design interprets and embraces the representations of a society and its cultural imagery and generates new ones through tangible and intangible innovation processes.



This book is positioned within this context and aims to investigate the multiple facets of the retail experience in fashion read from the perspective of the design discipline. The main objective is to frame the retail evolution in a context of increasing complexification of processes, networks, and interconnections both from a theoretical and applied point of view and to focus on the role of retail design, the new skills required and the valuable tools to apply them in contexts that are highly multidisciplinary by nature.

The volume is divided into two parts. The first part theoretically frames the context within which omnichannel retail is grafted, its roots and evolution trajectories, focusing on the impacts of technological transformation and analysing some exemplary cases. The second part focuses on the discipline of retail design in the omnichannel context, its interdisciplinary and rapidly changing nature, the conceptualisation of design processes in a contemporary omnichannel context, and the tools useful to promote innovation.

Within the first part, the theoretical overview is framed.

The first chapter aims to trace the retail system's evolution within the transformation of the consumption system and define the main milestones of this evolution from retail space as a point of permanence to omnichannel. This evolution is framed within contemporary change's main milestones: from technology pervasiveness to dematerialisation, from apparent antinomy deterritorialisation/new local rootedness, and responsible-driven innovation.

The second chapter explores the fashion industry's omnichannel system, emphasising the customer experience's centrality. The concept of customer experience is systematised, and its evolution is read through the lens of different disciplinary domains. The interaction between the different channels and touchpoints that shape the retail ecosystem are explored and interpreted in light of emerging omnichannel retail models in fashion, such as technology-enhanced and augmented spaces, retail platforms supporting multiple interactions between consumer communities, and the integration of artificial intelligence-based systems.

The third chapter, adopting a technical and performative perspective, focuses on the role and impact of new technologies in omnichannel retail and how they redefine the relationships between

customers, sales assistants, and retail management. Starting from categorising technologies according to the responses they can provide – practical and utilitarian or idealistic and entertaining – an operational and experiential reading is proposed to show how a proper data strategy now influences all these experiences.

The fourth chapter discusses a selection of cases of omnichannel retail in the fashion industry to identify and explore some of the most significant and promising contemporary trajectories. In particular, it will present cases demonstrating the opportunities offered by the hybrid experience, between physical and digital, for digital-born consumption models; the impacts of hyperconnection and the integration of multiple touchpoints within the consumer experience; the role of social platforms and virtual communities in the new customer journey.

Within the second part, the omnichannel retail design process is analysed.

The fifth chapter focuses on the transformation of retail design, highlighting its connection with the other disciplines converging in the sector. The different disciplinary domains have multiplied and hybridised, revealing a necessary demand for the sharing and harmonising of objectives, processes, and tools.

In the sixth chapter, a reflection on the gaps that, in the context of retail design, leave room for constructing a new interdisciplinary omnichannel retail design process is undertaken. In this regard, a map is presented that relates the different phases of the retail design process with the tools and actors involved, specifically highlighting how and when tools are used to favour interdisciplinary work.

Finally, the last chapter presents a Design-led Operational Model for Retail Design within multidisciplinary environments integrating creative, strategic, and technical skills. The chapter also presents the experimentation undertaken within three pilot cases applying the model in educational contexts and the results obtained.

## Authors

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**Tommaso Elli.** Design researcher, information designer, and front-end developer. He owns a PhD in Design with a thesis about visualisation and literary studies, and he is currently a researcher at the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano. Since 2023, he has worked within the MUSA project (PNRR), focusing on fashion retail, sustainability, and circularity.

His interests include data and information visualisation, interaction design, digital humanities, cultural heritage, creative coding, and fashion retail. Since 2016, in collaboration with the research group DensityDesign, he has participated in several research projects and teaching activities for private and public institutions. He is part of the development and design team of RAWGraphs, a free and open-source software for data visualisation, and is one of the founders of the non-profit organisation Associazione Abilitiamo Autismo.

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Her current research interests concern the investigation of how the field of Design can embrace the challenge of stand up as an agent of change, contributing to the transformation of the Fashion System into a more sustainable paradigm. The scope of her research is designing new sustainable Fashion Retail Models related to community-driven consumption dynamics.

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The fashion industry is entering the dynamic global competitive market, promoting various actions prioritising design, creativity, sustainability, and technological advancement as pivotal factors. At the same time, it is re-imagining its business models to adapt to the changing landscape. The rise of pervasive connectivity, intuitive interfaces and innovative interaction channels has triggered a revolution in fashion retail, reshaping customer behaviour and expectations. The traditional retail framework has evolved into a fully interconnected omnichannel system. This transformation is characterised by the proliferation of physical and virtual channels and touch points and by the adoption of a more flexible and integrated approach.

In this dynamic context, design plays a central role, possessing the ability to impart meaning to the production and distribution system. Design-led innovation represents an incremental form of innovation that injects a nuanced range of meaning into the marketplace, extending beyond tangible objects, including discourses, expressions, narratives, visual images, symbols, metaphors, and spaces.

The book analyses the multifaceted nature of the fashion retail experience through the lens of the design discipline, aiming to contextualise the evolution of retail within increasingly complex processes, networks and interconnections, both theoretically and practically. The focus is on retail design, delving into the new skills required and the valuable tools needed to apply them in inherently multidisciplinary contexts. Ultimately, the aim is to navigate the intricate terrain of retail evolution and shed light on the evolving role of design in this multifaceted sector.

**FrancoAngeli**

La passione per le conoscenze