DESIGN DYNAMICS

Navigating the new Complex Landscape of Omnichannel Fashion Retail

edited by Valeria M. Iannilli, Alessandra Spagnoli

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Table of Contents

4. Omnichannel Retail in Practice: A Look at Applied Solutions in the Fashion Industry

by Gabriela Fabro Cardoso, Tommaso Elli
Design Department, Politecnico di Milano

4.1 Introduction

The contribution focuses on omnichannel (OC) strategies applied to the fashion system. OC retail is defined as the concurrent adoption of different selling and communication channels to provide a seamless, cohesive, and integrated customer journey across touchpoints of different nature, including physical stores, e-commerce websites, mobile apps, and social media platforms (Berman et al., 2018; Verhoef et al., 2015; Hamouda, 2019; Yeh et al., 2022). The lowering of barriers between selling channels, and in particular between online and physical, may be beneficial for the fashion industry, increase the sales chances, and improve the customer journey (Fares et al., 2023; Ratchford et al., 2023).

We currently observe a scenario in which omnichannel aims to increase options and efficiency of the retail industry, with regards to the impact of physical stores and the augmentation of both online and offline shopping experiences. New formats and retail concepts are encouraged with particular regards to strategic-design experimentations (Iannilli & Linfante, 2022; Ribeiro & Maués, 2023). Such works ought to focus on permeating barriers that separate the paradigm of organizational silos (Cao, 2019), in which every selling channel is organized as a separate entity, operated individually, and evaluated with dedicated key performance indicators (KPIs). Data is also seldomly shared, missing the opportunity of looking at a comprehensive picture of products and customer's journeys. In

changing similar organisational behaviours, companies could create more advanced customer journeys (CJ) and combine the available touchpoints to implement OC in different fashions and with different aims. For example, retailers can use OC to recognize customers and offer them a personalised experience, to render more efficient the shopping experience, to multiply sales opportunities, or event to adjust production.

4.2 Methodology

Our goal is to better understand the nature and the extension of OC practices and the way in which they impact the consumer's journey, be it physical, digital or hybrid. The investigation takes place through six case studies that are organised into three clusters. Every cluster analyses two OC implementations oriented to a similar goal.

The first cluster reports on comprehensive and extended OC implementations that put into the network different selling and communication channels. It describes how different strategies are combined to provide seamless customer journeys that link actions undertaken inside and outside a store. While outside, customers can act only via remote interactions (e.g., app, website, telephone) but, if inside, a well-orchestrated OC augments instore experiences going beyond physical and local interactions and implementing connected tools for improving visitors' experience (e.g., augmenting customer agency, saving time, connecting with other stores). The cluster presents the strategies implemented by two well-established international brands: Zara and Nike.

The second cluster presents strategies that can be adopted by online brands that go physical to improve shopping experience and remove the digital mediation that hampers the selection of garments. Physical stores offer online companies an occasion to demonstrate the qualities of the products they distribute (e.g., inspecting fabrics, colours, textures, and sizes) while interpreting the values and the pillars that are foundational to their brand. Such companies may find themselves advantaged in implementing an OC retail strategy, especially if in the position of leveraging robust logistics and Information Technology (IT) systems. One key aspect of the described cases is the employment

of OC to collect data for recommendation systems and the creation of personalized experiences. The cluster presents the retail implementation of Amazon Style and Farfetch.

The third cluster aims to inquire the impact of social networks on the consumer journey and purchasing process. This debate is relevant as social networks became part of the daily lives of many consumers, especially those belonging to generation Z and Millennials, known for being digital natives (Ferrer, 2018). These individuals are increasingly influenced by the use of social networks, and this practice directly influences their purchasing decisions. More specifically, this cluster seeks to illustrate cases where the presence of social networks becomes relevant not only in purchasing decisions, but also in interaction with the brand thought social platforms. The contamination between the channels in this example remains in the digital sphere, between e-commerce, applications, and social networks. The cluster presents the experimentations of Burberry and YOOX.

The methodology adopted to conduct the research on the presented case studies is an articulation of review of scientific literature, secondary research, and qualitative research conducted on social media.

4.3 Extended OC Networks of Channels and Touchpoints

This section describes the application of omnichannel in the customer experience of two well-established brands among the largest international fashion companies: Zara and Nike. The two brands are studied to inquire the way in which different selling, marketing, and communication channels can be networked to augment physical shopping experiences.

4.3.1 OC for an Interconnected and Efficient CJ: Zara's Implementation

Zara, founded in Spain in 1975, is an international clothing brand part of the Inditex group. The company is among the largest and most successful fast fashion companies in the world and grew more than

twelve times in the timeframe between 1991 and 2003. While competitors can count on customers visiting 4 times a year, for Zara the number grows to 17. The reason appears to be related to a remarkably developed Quick Response (QR) to market that is sensibly faster than its competitors. A typical retailer generally requires six to nine months to design, produce, and deliver garments to stores, while Zara can do the same in less than a month (Bhardwaj & Mohapatra, 2023). In addition, Zara is also capable of providing customer with a much larger and variable product catalogue, creating in 2011, as an example, more than 40'000 new designs (Eric, 2014). Zara embraces the idea that fashion customers demand continuous novelties on a frequent basis (Bruce & Daly, 2006). To accomplish it, the company has one hand on the "factory" and the other on the "customers". According to Eric (2014) the production chain of Zara is designed to be remarkably fast and efficient in leveraging suppliers in Spain, a country concerned about labour cost and ethics. Only the 15% of its earning, which roughly corresponds to 40% of its volume, derives from products made in low-cost manufacturing locations (e.g., Turkey or Asia). Those are the products that have a longer shelf life and are rarely affected by seasonal variations. Seasonal collections of Zara, instead, are produced with the support of local suppliers with which the brand has developed a relationship of trust. The production chain extensively uses automatized pipelines, and it can react to selling data, managing unfinished garments that are completed during the season according to the choices of customers (i.e., roughly half of the clothing items remain undyed to enable the company to promptly adapt to any mid-season fashion changes). Out of the entire seasonal volume of products, they produce around 20% before the beginning of the season, 50% at the beginning of the season, and the rest during the season. The approach results in a reliable forecasting capability that can reach 95% and respond to the "changing teste of its *fashionistas*" (Mattila et al., 2002). When looking at the stores, the company pay a meticulous attention to customers' feedback, that is collected by instore staff and returned to design departments with the goal to improve and renovate the design of garments (Bhardwaj & Mohapatra, 2023). Store managers are playing a key role in the process and are in charge of harvesting the information useful to react to customers desires

(Soloaga & Monjo, 2010). Communication, production, and logistic tasks are supported by a custom Information Technology System, that appears relatively simple and perfectly attuned to the company's requirements. Consequently, it can achieve high level of performance, while costing less than one-fourth of the average ITS in the fashion industry (Sull & Turconi, 2008).

What described above appears to be the basis for the omnichannel experience that Zara built in its shops, starting in 2018 from London and Milan (Vaghef, 2018) and expanding to other areas including other European cities in 2021[1] and India (Bhardwaj & Mohapatra, 2023).

The app is without doubts the core of the customer experience and it implements multiple new ways to interact with products, both from inside and outside the stores. With the app it is possible to scan, find, try, or collect items.

From inside, customers can scan garments codes to retrieve further information, including the available colours and sizes. They can search for a product in the stock of the visited store, but the research can be extended to other stores of the geographical area, or the entire online Zara e-commerce (for shipping a product to home). Customers can also use the app to get in-store directions for finding an item of their interest, maybe because suggested by a friend or advertised on socials networks. Once garments are identified, customers can use the app to book a fitting room. The solution is meant to save time; however, it might not work as expected in crowded days, with multiple people claiming concurrent reservations.

When outside the store, customers can use the app to place an order that can be collected in store. The order can be made against the real-time store inventory, and, in this case, it is automatically prepared for pick up by an automated service in about thirty minutes and delivered via the scan of a QR code. Finally, the app allows for the convenient preservation of all customer receipts, expediting the checkout process and diminishing the need for paper receipts (Fig. 4.1).

[1] ZARA's OC experience is well described by Insights Hunter at https://medium.com/@insightshunter/zaras-store-mode-the-ultimate-omnichannel-experience-3d3b7c4acfa (accessed 2023-09-29, archived: https://archive.ph/cLfFx)

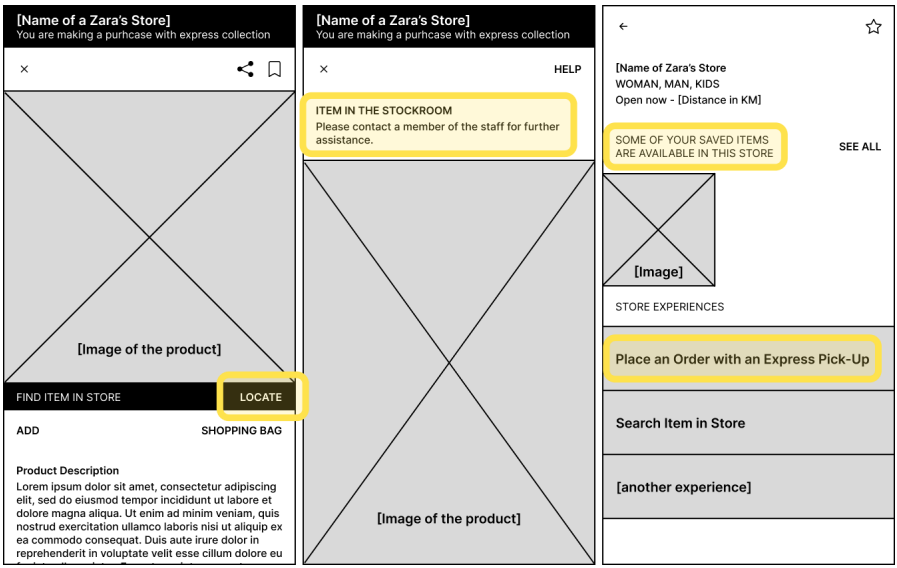

Fig. 4.1 Zara's smartphone app allows customers to locate products in stores, inspect stores inventory from home, and organize in-store pick-ups. The image shows the app wireframe and highlights the UI elements corresponding to OC functionalities.

The features described above potentially benefit customers, who can limit their attendance to crowded places, avoid unfruitful inquiries, save time on shopping, and much more. Customers can use the app to call shop assistants, who can reduce the workload and concentrate more on a quality service. At the same time, the omnichannel strategy enables the company to collect valuable data to be fed into the QR strategies described above.

According to Bhardwaj & Mohapatra (2023), the implementation of Zara's omnichannel strategy required a redesign of part of the organization, and in particular of its KPIs which were previously related to the performance of individual channels. The implementation of an omnichannel strategy requires to go beyond organizational silos and the isolation of channels, by paying particular attention to sharing data between different channels and teams. Judging from results, Zara had to establish cross-functional teams to plan and execute the omnichannel experience. These teams include executives from various departments, such as marketing, customer service, supply chain finance, physical store operations, strategic planning, e-commerce, and IT.

One critical point of Zara omnichannel, at least in India (Bhardwaj & Mohapatra, 2023), is related to the penalization that it brings to franchisees. Frequently, franchisees declined to fulfil online orders because it would occupy their valuable storage and compete with the resources invested into display areas within their stores. Additionally, these online customers were not known for their loyalty to the franchisees, which discouraged them from providing adequate service. Another critical aspect (Bhardwaj & Mohapatra, 2023) is related to logistics: ZARA did not differentiate logistics partners allocated to online services and franchisees. While this approach globally lowered expenses, it extended the waiting time for online customers. Furthermore, returns from direct customers were not processed separately, leading to even prolonged processing times and customer dissatisfaction.

4.3.2 Enhancing Nike's In-Store Experience with the House of Innovation

Nike was founded in 1964 as Blue Ribbon Sports and initially operated as a distributor for the Japanese shoemaker Onitsuka Tiger (now known as Asics). It officially became Nike Inc. in 1971[2]. The American athletic footwear and apparel corporation is known for using strategies such as technological innovation, intelligence, targeting, engagement, and events to keep its community growing strategy. As a smart community targeting strategy, the brand uses dedicated social media pages and community spaces (Nike Running, Nike Women, Nike Basketball); promote events for the community (Air Max day); utilizes User-Generated Content to boost all marketing channels (SNEAKRS app via dedicated hashtag #Kickcheck); uses community feedback to co-create at scale (Nike by you); creates dedicated app for the community (Nike Run Club); and develops new retail concepts to bring local communities together (Nike Unite).

[2] 11 Things Hardly Anyone Knows About Nike. Retrieved from https://www.businessinsider.com/history-of-nike-facts-about-its-50th-anniversary-2014-11?r=US&IR=T. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/7xRoB)

In order to fulfil consumers demands related to digital shopping experiences, Nike had shifted their channel towards their website and mobile applications (Standaert, 2022). This strategy is applied, for example, in the store project called "House of Innovation", where the in-store experience is enhanced with the use of the Nike app, extending some exclusive services to those that belong to the NikePlus community. In New York, the store opened in 2018 and is called House of Innovation 000. Located on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 52nd Street, the flagship store has six floors, including a basement. The House of Innovation replaced Nike Town, which was Nike's innovative store, opened in November 1996 and closed in early 2018[3]. Before closing Nike Town, the company opened a new store model in Soho in 2016, improving the experiences offered and adding new technologies[4]. Currently, the House of Innovation has two other locations besides the one in United States, one is placed in Shanghai, China (House of Innovation 001) and the other one in Paris, located on Champs-Élysées (House of Innovation 002).

The high point of the flagship store is the interaction with the consumer, mainly through digital means. Using Nike App, those who visit the store can access various information about the pieces placed there, in addition to booking them or putting together an entire look and buying it automatically, an action that also facilitates another important feature implemented in the House of Innovation 000: the rotation of items according to community demand (Fig. 4.2). Within this context, the space called "The Speed Shop", according to Cathy Sparks[5] (Vice President and General Manager of Global Nike Stores & Services) is designed in such a way that local consumers can also make the most of the store. This space has an outside entrance where locals who live and work nearby can quickly go to pick up an order they've placed online. Additionally, due to the data gathering, they can

[3] Nike left the space occupied by Niketown on East 57th Street. Retrieved from https://www.businessinsider.com/nike-is-leaving-its-iconic-niketown-property-2017-12?r=US&IR=T. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/4PjLp)

[4] Nike opens a Huge Store in the Heart of SoHo in 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/fashion/nike-soho-tiffany-collaboration-new-york-shopping-news.html. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/7M3wL)

[5] Cathy Sparks interviewed by Peter Foreste https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_5C0DP4AcI (Accessed 2023-09-29, Archived: https://archive.ph/TczGe)

also find out what people in the area are buying and are able to speak directly with specialists for suggestions. These specialists can be called “store athletes”, defined by the brand as “footballers, runners, skaters, lifters and dunkers who bring every bit of their passion and expertise to work with them”.

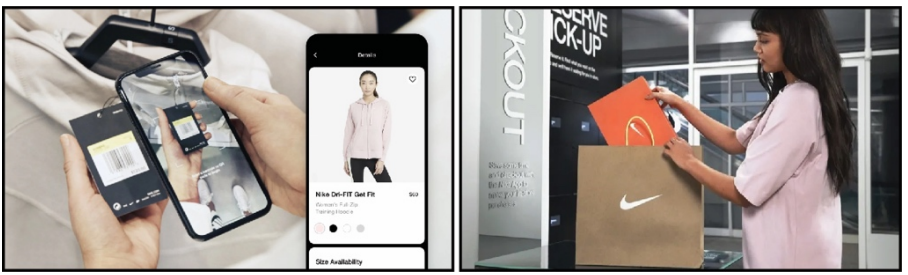

Fig. 4.2 Left: Nike app store mode. Right: “The Speed Shop” where customers buy their favourites styles online and pick them up in store. Photos: nike.com

Based on the first floor, “Nike Arena” welcomes the consumers into the store with towering digital displays and access to core pieces from Nike’s seasonal collections. The Nike Arena is home to the store’s Team Nike Service Desk, where NikePlus members can learn about in-store offerings, check in or book Nike Expert appointments; and where all consumers can make returns, checkout, schedule Courier Service and learn more about the company.

Hosting the largest concentration of seasonally current Nike footwear anywhere in the globe, the service entitled “Nike Sneaker Lab” is a completely reinvented shoe buying experience for the Brand. Designed to imitate the feeling of a Nike product innovation lab, consumers can check the latest Nike innovations and find the freshest versions of performance footwear while visiting that floor. Shopping experience is also elevated with curated seasonal product picks along with service offerings such as “Pick Up Lockers” that allows NikePlus members to reserve items while shopping out of store, and have products held for them at an in-store digital locker. Moreover, the store also has a customization space for personalizing products, called “Nike by You”, where consumers can personalize their product directly in the store. This service is provided online by Nike also outside the store context.

Convenience and personalization are key points in Nike's strategies, gathering customer data is crucial, as it pertains to the idealization of the House of Innovation. The membership-based mobile app, which is heavily used throughout the store, is the main tool implemented by the brand. The "Store Mode" of the Nike App seeks to deliver a seamless shopping experience. "Scan to Try" feature, for instance, allows clients to request an item to be brought to them for a quick fitting. With "Shop the Look" instead, they can scan a code on an in-store mannequin, browse every item that the mannequin is dressed in, check to see if specific sizes are available in-store and then request for a store athlete to send the items to a fitting room. In addition, Nike Instant Checkout feature allows customers to skip the lines and check out from within the Nike App (a payment receipt is received within the app too). Nike Instant checkout stations are positioned throughout the store so customers can bag their purchase and go.

House of Innovation proves that physical stores continue to be an important part of the shopping journey, but the intersection between digital and physical environments is crucial for retailers. When rethinking its omnichannel strategy for store implementation, Nike invested in journey mapping to identify opportunities and improve the consumer experience. In this case, the consumer's journey is mainly characterized by the use of the application within the store, where exclusive functions (such as Pick Up Lockers and Nike by You) are unlocked for members of the Nike community.

4.4 From Online to Physical: Efficiency and Personalized Experiences within OC Retail

The following cases are derived from two digital native brands: Amazon and Farfetch. The section inquiries about the role of OC in the inclusion of physical interactions in strategies previously based on online experiences only. In particular, the two companies present a strong technological drive and leveraged data to introduce personalized experiences and recommendation systems.

4.4.1 Amazon Style: Semi-Automated, Logistic-Driven Fashion Retail

Amazon is American multinational company with a strong technological drive. Founded in 1994 as an online marketplace for books, it is now one of the GAFAM[6] and is famous for having created a remarkable online customer experience with one of the larger product catalogues in the world, ranging "from A to Z" as its logo suggests. The catalogue can be browsed with the aid of a sophisticated recommendation system that act as a cross-selling technique. Suggestions can be personal, namely based on previous purchases, or determined by other customers' behaviours (e.g., products that are often bought together). Beside e-commerce, Amazon funded or acquired several subsidiaries[7], including AWS, leader in cloud computing and holding 32% of the market in Q1 2023[8]. Since at least 2015[9], Amazon is experimenting with bringing its "online touch" (including the display of stars and products reviews) into brick-and-mortar retail shops. Attempts include bookshops, no-cashiers convenience stores, and the "4-star format" for toys, household, and other items. While most of Amazon's brick-and-mortars of USA and UK have been announced to close[10], at the beginning of 2022[11] the

[6] The term GAFAM refers to the 5 largest and most influent information technology American companies: Alphabet (previously Google), Amazon, Meta (Facebook), Apple, and Microsoft.

[7] An overview of Amazon's acquisitions can be explored at https://gafam.theglassroom.org/ (accessed 2023-09-28, archived: https://web.archive.org/web/20230625085906/https://gafam.theglassroom.org/)

[8] Data about the growth of cloud services is discussed by the Synergy Research Group at https://www.srgresearch.com/articles/q1-cloud-spending-grows-by-over-10-billion-from-2022-the-big-three-account-for-65-of-the-total (accessed 2023-09-28, archived: https://archive.ph/skWN2)

[9] Data about the growth of cloud services is discussed by the Synergy Research Group at https://www.srgresearch.com/articles/q1-cloud-spending-grows-by-over-10-billion-from-2022-the-big-three-account-for-65-of-the-total (accessed 2023-09-28, archived: https://archive.ph/skWN2)

[10] Article by Jeffrey Dastin for Reuters (2022-03-22). Read it at https://www.reuters.com/business/retail-consumer/exclusive-amazon-close-all-its-physical-bookstores-4-star-shops-2022-03-02/ (accessed 2023-09-28, archived https://archive.ph/1qNTo)

[11] The goals behind Amazon Style are briefly described by Simoina Vasen (managing director) at https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/retail/amazon-reimagines-in-store-shopping-with-amazon-style (accessed 2023-09-28, archived https://archive.ph/oVhla)

company announced Amazon Style, the concept of a new physical store for apparel, accessories, and other fashion items[12]. Although Amazon is not a typical fashion brand, its new store succeeds in implementing an original OC strategy that revolves around garment and other accessories.

In the store, customers can explore a curated collection of women's and men's apparel, shoes, and accessories in "a seamless and elevated shopping experience" that employs an extended and well-orchestrated omnichannel approach. In the store, garments are displayed in only one size and customers can use the Amazon Shopping app to scan QR codes and access more information about the products, including stars and reviews from Amazon main marketplace. If interested in trying on the garments, customers can select size, colour, or other variations, and request garments to be delivered to a reserved fitting room. The solution improves CX in different ways: it significantly reduces clutter in the shop and on the racks, also reducing the risk of dropping products on the floor while searching for a fitting size; it lets customers do the shopping without carrying around products; it lets front-of-store employees spend less time in tidying up possibly resulting in having more time and energy to interact with customers.

The app allows customers to send in the fitting room a maximum of twenty products and triggers a notification in the Amazon app with the number of the room once the first garment is ready. Once in front of the door, customers must unlock the room using the app; they have a fixed amount of time to enter the room before it gets re-allocated. The room is equipped with a rack, a mirror, a closet, and an interactive touchscreen. Garments are delivered in the closet using a backdoor, customers can take them out and try them on. The touchscreen allows customers to access further options, provide feedback on items, and request additional sizes or styles, which are promptly delivered to the same room within moments. The screen shows which garments are in the room and which are on their way, and it allows to continue shopping, requesting, and trying on new garment without leaving the comfortable and safe space of the dedicated fitting room. It is

[12] Amazon Style is currently available in two USA locations: in Glendale (CA) at Americana at Brand, and in Columbus (OH) at the Easton Town Center. Both locations are popular retail destinations where to go shopping, dining, relaxing and entertain.

important to mention that the closet automatically locks at delivery time to protect customers' privacy. Products are delivered from back-of-house within minutes by employees that are supported by advanced logistics solutions like the ones used in the Amazon's fulfilment centres. After the customers decided which garments to buy, they can simply put them in a bag and go to the cash register to complete the purchase. The Amazon One option is also available for a complete autonomous payment. Alternatively, customers can try and order the garments online, receiving them at their address, or collect online orders at the store (Fig. 4.3).

Fig. 4.3 Left: the interactive screen available within the fitting rooms. Right: Customers can use the app to send items to fitting rooms. Photos: Amazon's press release archive. Source: press.aboutamazon.com.

Another important feature of Amazon Style is a recommendation system that makes use of machine learning algorithms to suggest products on top of customers' information, including preferences of style, fit, and budget, collected via the app the first time they use it. Once in the room, customers will find some unexpected garments that are flagged as "our pick for you." The delivery of these products, manifestation of Amazon's cross selling strategy, may result in a better experience. For example, with a requested dress, the system may deliver a pair of shoes and it may be the case that they match better than the ones the customer is currently wearing. While scanning an expensive piece of garment the system may suggest cheaper products with a similar texture or colour, matching customer budget, or helping them discovering new brands or designers from the ones present

throughout the store. Other forms of recommendation are provided via the "shop the look" QR codes, positioned in correspondence to certain mannequins, that display a selection of garments by famous stylists or influencers[13] that customers can request and try in the dedicated fitting room.

Amazon Style's employees oversee tasks such as providing customer service, delivering items to fitting room closets, merchandising the store to inspire discovery, helping customers at checkout, managing back-of-house operations, and much more. Until now, Amazon hasn't revealed yet what takes place during back-of-house operations. The shop opened after pandemic times, with people bored of online-only experiences and eager to "feel the fabrics". If on the first hand the CX appears to be easier and less overwhelming, on the other the store seems to be designed to conceal a part of its staff with customers capable of shopping without interacting with any other human being.

4.4.2 Farfetch's Store of the Future and its Connected Retail suite

Farfetch Limited, is a fashion retail company launched in 2008, self-described as «the preeminent global platform within the domain of luxury fashion».[14] The retailer originally operated only as e-commerce and the web traffic collected in 2017 suggests that it is now the leading destination for luxury shopping, outperforming competitors like YOOX Net-a- Porter or Neiman Marcus.[15] It then moved into physical business creating immersive in-store experiences with the employment of impressive digital solutions (Harba, 2019). Its mission is to foster connections among creators, curators, and "discerning consumers." Currently, the Farfetch Marketplace links

[13] The strategy of recommendation resembles the one conducted on Instagram with the "GET THE L👀K" stories, where multiple items are proposed to recreate the look of a model or influencer (@amazonfashion)

[14] https://aboutfarfetch.com/about/farfetch/ accessed 2023-09-28 (Archived: https://archive.ph/a6NEg)

[15] https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/technology/inside-farfetchs-store-of-the-future/ accessed 2023-09-28 (Archived: https://archive.ph/2frJG)

consumers from more than 190 countries with an assortment of offerings originating from over 50 countries and encompassing a portfolio of over 1,400 of the most important brands, boutiques, and department stores worldwide. The retailer offers a distinctive shopping experience and grants access to «to the most extensive selection of luxury on a single platform». In more recent years, Farfetch's acquired additional luxury retailers, such as Browns and Stadium Goods, and New Guards Group, a dedicated platform for nurturing the development of global fashion brands. Possibly because its founder used to work as a programmer, the company features a department dedicated to the development of networked technologies aimed at innovating the customer journey in the world of luxury. According to the founder, high-end fashion retail experience isn't transformed by technology yet. In 2017, luxury brick-and-mortars hold about the 90% of sales and it is forecasted to decrease only to 80% in 2025. This means that the online market is supposed to grow at a high pace, but also that the offline will still hold larger volumes. Farfetch's goal, the funder explains, is to dissolve the barriers between the physical and the digital, working to preserve the interaction «that is unique to a physical store» and augmenting it with the use of digital technologies that Farfetch's uses to capture customer data. Data is invaluable to their business[16] and is used to manage human interactions between shop assistants and shoppers. The company's expectation is to release technology that will ensure greater retail productivity and sales and sell this product to other companies to help them to «dissolve temporal or geographical boundaries, in order to deliver the experience that customers require» (Harba, 2019).

In its *Store of the Future*, the company demonstrates its *Connected Retail* suite, a collection of modules introduced to facilitate the transition to OC and exploit the available touchpoints to elevate the CJ. The concept was firstly presented to the public in autumn 2017 at Browns' (London, UK), then, in March 2018, in the flagship store of Thom Browne (New York, USA). The suite is currently composed by

[16] For more details see the conversation between José Neves (founder, chairman and CEO of Farfetch) and Tom Mackenzie (Bloomberg Technology Summit) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uijh2LRMQSY (accessed 2023-09-28, archived: https://archive.ph/rp2Lr)

the consumer app, the connected retail app, and the connected devices[17].

The consumer app is designed to bring "every stage of the consumer journey into the palm of their hands" and to connect brands, retail staff and consumers. When a consumer enters a store, the app ensures he/she is recognized and triggers a push notification on the smartphone. From this moment, the in-store experience is tailored using data that Farfetch possesses about that person, guiding sales associates in suggesting products for up and cross selling. When inside the store customers can use the app to scan and retrieve information about products, experience virtual AR-powered try-on technology, check the stock, and check-in with style advisors. Additionally, and even from outside the store, the app allows to browse catalogues, compose wishlists, track orders or returns, and stay in contact with sales associates, even by booking virtual sessions.

The connected retail app is dedicated to retail teams and is devised to "deliver best-in-class experiences before, during, and after in-store visits." To support cross and upsell, it provides qualitative (i.e., in-depth notes about the customer) and quantitative data (i.e., search history, preferences about designers, bookmarked items). The app also provides retail teams with clients' contacts, that can be used to keep them informed about new items in the catalogue. According to Farfetch, these kinds of personal touches nurture brand loyalty into their customers.

The connected devices can assume different forms (e.g., screens, touchscreens, mirrors, holograms, etc.) and are aimed at integrating digital capabilities into physical stores. They invite customers to self-guided explorations and can inform about new arrivals, bookmark products, make purchases, request items for try on, or require the intervention of a sale assistant. Interactive displays can be encountered on the shop floor and are used to create situations a strong inspirational nature. These experiences are particularly useful when displaying special, expensive, and rare items that aren't available in large quantities, such as luxury jewellery. Interactive mirrors are usually

[17] Farfetch promotes its Connected Retail Suite on the page https://www.farfetchplatformsolutions.com/insights/farfetch-connected-retail (accessed 2023-09-28, archived: https://archive.ph/TQRFq)

placed in fitting rooms, they give shoppers confidence in their purchases by exhibiting each item with impactful images. Customers can use them to find answers about in-stock size availability and colour variations, creating informative experiences without leaving the fitting room, from which they can request additional items to try on. Mirrors implement the so called "head-to-toe styling" or "wear it with" cross sell strategy, namely the recommendation of outfit pairings and matching accessories. This technology also helps store employees give personalized fashion advice by showing them new brands, collections, and products on a screen. Another type of connected device is the "smart" rack, that recognizes which products are inspected by which customer with the use of Wi-Fi and ultrasound technologies.

4.5 Roles of Social Media Platforms in OC Customer Journey

The following cases reflects on the roles that social networks may cover in customer journeys and during the shopping experience. On the one hand, there is Burberry, which, by presenting a new social retail concept, seeks to engage the consumer inside the physical store through social networks, and on the other hand, YOOX, a pioneering brand in digital strategies that seeks to do the same, but through an application based on artificial intelligence. In the first case, that of Burberry and its Social Retail Store, the consumers, through their smart device, are involved in a series of experiences within the store that can be immediately shared through social. In this example it is possible to see the integration of the physical and digital channels. In the second case, using the digital mirror created by the brand YOOX with Artificial Intelligence technology, the consumer has the possibility of becoming his/her own avatar when trying on outfits through the application provided by the brand, where it is also possible to interact on social networks by sharing the content promptly.

4.5.1 Integrating In-Store Experience and Social Media: Burberry's Social Retail Store

Burberry, the British brand recognized for its famous beige, white, black, and red checkered print, was found in 1856 by the 21-year-old former draper's apprentice Thomas Burberry. Over the years, it has become an international reference in luxury perfumes, clothing, and accessories. The company designs, sources, and markets luxury men's, women's and children's clothing and non-apparel accessories globally through a diversified network of retail, wholesale, franchise, and digital commerce channels worldwide. It also licenses third parties to manufacture and distribute products using the Burberry trademarks. The company operates through its two channels to market, which include Retail/Wholesale and Licensing[18].

Burberry is an exemplary case of understanding the power of digital transformation – including social usage – and experience from the point of view of communication, of the cost of branding and retail imaging. This fact is largely due to Angela Ahrendts, who was the CEO of Burberry from 2006 to 2014 and embraced the rising digital networks, directing her attention to the luxury consumers of the future: the Millennials. At the time, Burberry found itself as a brand without the necessary consistency of image (and quality) at a global level: if in the United States it was recognizable in the classic trench coat, in Korea it was for whiskey and in Switzerland for watches; a chaotic brand portfolio and an unclear image unable to cope with the new global showcase allowed by digital networks.

In response to this situation, in parallel to the redesign and refocusing of products' architecture through a clearer definition of stylistic codes, the company has been designing a brand scenario able to include dreams, desires and daily habits of new and young audiences. This was mainly achieved through digital and social channels, the website *in primis*, and then Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, increasingly supporting the design of *ad hoc* and original contents such as news, videos, photos. A first example of branded

[18] Burberry Group Profile by Forbes. Retrieved from: https://www.forbes.com/companies/burberry-group/?sh=491762a14e14 (accessed 2023-09-28, archived: https://archive.ph/VO2AX)

content able to involve new smart communities focusing, as explained in the previous section, on symbolic and cultural values of products. This approach ended up in the first social platform called Art of the Trench, where ordinary people, real customers, are involved to showcase Burberry's heritage British coat, posting their photographic images that portray them wearing the legendary garment.

Starting from this pioneering experience a few years later, in 2011, the company launched the Burberry Bespoke platform, allowing the customization of its trench coat directly online. The new platform becomes the space of brand engagement, where the public can experience the creative and unique context of designing with the brand. In 2012 the digitally enhanced new Burberry flagship store is launched in London. The store includes a series of full screens spread throughout the store that can be easily swapped out to function as mirrors when necessary and a giant screen in the centre of the atrium surrounding the which a stage can host shows in stores, a concept called by the brand "Burberry World Live".

Nevertheless, Burberry's history with social media began when it was one of the first fashion brands to use Facebook in 2009[19]. In the following years, the company became active on all social platforms – Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Google+, Pinterest, Tumblr, Polyvore, Vine, Weibo, YouKu, WeChat and others (Phan et al., 2011). In 2014, Burberry earmarked 60% of its marketing budget to social media[20]. Currently the company has more than 17 million followers on Facebook and more than 20 million on Instagram. With popular social networks like Instagram unavailable in China, Burberry decided to partner up with Tencent – China's largest social media and video game company – aiming to create an innovative space, designed to inspire and entertain luxury Chinese clients. The key part of this partnership is the WeChat platform, which is unlike any platform used

[19] How Burberry Does Digital by Sophie Doran. Retrieved from: https://www.luxurysociety.com/en/articles/2014/01/how-burberry-does-digital. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived:https://archive.ph/op6LF)

[20] The digital evolution of Burberry by Mandelli, Piancatelli and Arbore. Retrieved from:https://www.sdabocconi.it/en/sda-bocconi-insight/management-cases/strategy-entrepreneurship--governance-marketing--sales-digital-transformation--innovation/from-london-to-social-media-the-digital-evolution-of-burberry. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/Tpd17)

in the United States or Europe. So, in 2020, Burberry announced a new retail concept, its first Social Retail Store. Located in the Chinese technology hub, the city of Shenzhen, the space blends the physical and online dimensions into an immersive digital retail experience, intending to bring social media interactions into the physical retail environment.

Mark Morris, VP of Burberry's digital commerce affirms that the initiative started from the fact that although most customer journeys start on social media (especially in China), digital natives from Generation Z and Millennials still wanted an in-store experience that they could share online. Besides that, 80 percent of its customers have used a digital touchpoint before they purchased. Furthermore, according to Marco Gobbetti, the CEO of Burberry at the time, the social store marked a shift in how Burberry engage with their customers[21].

The store is made up of 10 separate spaces, each one with its own concept and personality that offers a unique interactive experience. Building on Burberry's rich heritage, the store celebrates house codes reinterpreted by Italian designer Riccardo Tisci, who took over the creative direction of the brand from 2018 to 2022, including the Trench Coat, Thomas Burberry Monogram, Nature, and Burberry Animal Kingdom. An important detail is that there are exclusive pieces only available to buy in the Shenzhen store.

The collaboration between Burberry and Tencent resulted in the develop of a custom WeChat Mini Program that is used within the store boundaries. This mini program provides exclusive content and personalized experiences, unlocking exclusive product content, audio guides, one-to-one appointments, table reservations and upcoming events. In addition, based on a gamification strategy, each customer receives a playful digital animal character that evolves the more they interact with the space.

With an area of more than 500 square meters, the first interactive feature of the store is a window at the entrance that responds to body

[21] The Shenzhen store uses WeChat to link together online and offline lives and reward customers for engaging with the brand. Retrieved from: https://www.voguebusiness.com/consumers/burberry-tests-social-retail-in-chinas-tech-capital. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/UAmQr)

movement to create a unique and immersive moment, it is a living sculpture reflecting the mirrored runway from the Burberry AW20 show. Once captured, this moment can be shared with friends. The window evolves through the seasons to reflect the latest collections and house codes.

The store also provides three immersive fitting rooms, where the customers can find a library of playlists and its own distinctive design featuring a Riccardo Tisci signature – from an infinite mirrored world to a vibrant interpretation of Thomas Burberry Monogram and a floor-to-ceiling fawn print. Additionally, the store applies QR codes to all products, which are then connected to digital screens: scanning the code unlocks additional content and storytelling, contributing to the creation of additional social currency[22]. Each time the customer interacts with the store they are rewarded with social currency that can be used for things such as unlocking new outfits for their avatars or being able to order new menu items at the café. If the user saves up enough social currency, it is possible to unlock a new world. It regards the "Trench Experience"[23], a secret and exclusive space that honours the famous trench coat of the luxury brand and offers interactive digital experiences.

The store includes a café, named "Thomas", remembering Thomas Burberry, the founder of the brand, where events such as talks, workshops, exhibitions and live performances are held. The café menu, a celebration of Chinese and English culture, also encourages the consumer to engage with the WeChat mini program and their social currency advances, unlocking new menu items[24].

Betting on a hybrid consumer journey, the new location takes social media interactions and brings them to a physical retail environment,

[22] Social Retail Store review by Roberta Maddalena, Forbes. Retrieved from: https://forbes.it/2020/07/31/burberry-apre-il-primo-luxury-social-store-in-cina-a-shenzhen/. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/B5qfd)

[23] Burberry's Social Retail Store: Combining Luxury Retail with social media. Retrieved from: https://alahausse.medium.com/burberrys-social-retail-store-combining-luxury-retail-with-social-media-e2634e952dbf#:~:text=Each%20time%20the%20customer%20interacts,menu%20items%20at%20the%20cafe. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/3WytA)

[24] Inside Burberry's trailblazing "social retail" store. Retrieved from: https://www.theindustry.fashion/inside-burberrys-trailblazing-social-retail-store/. Accessed on 28 Sep 2023. (Archived: https://archive.ph/dagi6).

including the dedicated WeChat mini program to offer extra features and personalization. Additionally, using QR Codes, customers can find the latest collections and seasonal products and discover exclusive store items. The collaboration with Tencent was fundamental in providing Burberry with the typical social retail tools and placing customer interaction on WeChat.

4.5.2 YOOXMIRROR by YOOX: Enriching Shopping Experiences Through Artificial Intelligence

YOOX, along with NET-A-PORTER, was born in 2000 as a pioneering platform to encourage leading luxury houses to take their first steps online. In 2009 was listed on the Milan Stock Exchange and today remains Italy's sole "unicorn"[25]. Now, joined together under one group called YOOX Net-a-Porter Group, they continue to explore innovative strategies within the fashion system. Since always, YOOX founder Federico Marchetti's explored the frontier between Human and Machine, today the group combines the latest artificial intelligence with the human spirit of the team of designers. In that sense, YOOX created its first private label brand, called 8 by YOOX, the collections were designed using the help of AI tools that survey vast swathes of the online fashion market and social media platforms, the data collected by these artificial intelligence tools was use to influence and the development of each collection[26].

YOOX has completely reconfigured the selling activity for the fashion sector (Resca & D'atri, 2012) entering the US in 2003, Japan in 2004 and, in 2006, signing a deal with Marni to launch the first online flagship store. Numerous mono-brand online stores for leading luxury brands, including a long-term partnership with the Kering Group to power e-commerce for many flagship brands such as Bottega

[25] Federico Marchetti Bio. Retrieved from: https://www.federicomarchetti.com/bio?lang=it. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/aaK4E)

[26] How Yoox is using artificial intelligence to assist design in its private label brand. Retrieved from: https://www.glossy.co/fashion/how-yoox-is-using-artificial-intelligence-to-assist-design-in-its-private-label-brand/. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/hUA1u)

Veneta and Saint Laurent, followed in the years after. In 2010, YOOX unprecedentedly combined RFID technology and automation in its global techno-logistics platform in Interporto Bologna. From YOOX's inception, Marchetti's ability to seamlessly bring together the worlds of technology and luxury fashion with a data-driven approach and a constant eye on innovation set it apart from any potential competitors[27].

In 2018, YOOX, was a pioneer in proposing a solution that could help reduce costs for online shops by using Augmented Reality, avoiding returns of products that did not fit as expected (Casini & Roccetti, 2020), the leading online lifestyle store has announced the launch of YOOXMIRROR – a AI-powered virtual styling suite designed to entertain customers while they express their personality, exploring the YOOX fashion offering in an interactive and engaging way. Conceived and designed by the YOOX Research & Development team, the immersive styling suite displays products in a "stories" format[28].

In its first version, a chic and fashion-conscious avatar called Daisy was the one who welcomed users to the YOOXMIRROR interface, not only wearing the outfits but at first also taking care of YOOX's Instagram. In 2019, the year after the launch of the service, YOOXMIRROR Reloaded was released, where costumers are able to create their own personalized digital, 3D avatar. Once the avatar is created, users can virtually try on outfits, as well as share their favourite outfits instantly on social media. Powered by an innovative combination of Artificial Intelligence and Augmented Reality technology, through which the selected portrait is digitalized to generate a personalized 3D avatar, this feature allows the customer to see him/herself wearing a potentially endless array of clothing and accessories (Vaccani et al., 2020). Within the application, users can instantly see how the outfits suit them, sharing their looks with friends and gaining immediate feedback before purchase or saving their

[27] Analyses of YOOX & NET-A-PORTER 20th anniversary. Retrieved from: https://www.net-a-porter.com/en-us/porter/article-a504607b1a27ed35/reporter/news/yoox-net-a-porter-20th-anniversary. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/twlWK)

[28] YOOX unveils YOOXMIRROR. Retrieved from: https://www.ynap.com/news/yoox-unveils-yooxmirror/. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/sKExj).

favourite items directly into their DreamBox (the Wishlist feature on YOOX)[29].

The technology behind the YOOX application was built upon the work of the YOOX merchandising team. Sophisticated algorithms detect visual elements (colour, pattern, and shape) within a product image, while Deep Learning networks extract product attributes to select alternative items, which work best with each other. Virtual Reality technology fits the selected items on a 3D model, bringing them to life against evocative immersive backdrops. The last version of the application was released in 2020, offering 50,000 fully digitized products. In addition, the entire 8 by YOOX collection has for the first time been fully digitized and made available for customers. The final addition was the share function, which allows all users to share their favourite looks on their social-media channels[30].

In this case, YOOX seeks to revolutionize the customer journey through artificial intelligence and augmented reality. The purchasing journey begins within the fashion company's application, where the consumer is able to try on outfits with their own avatar, in addition to being able to share immediately on social networks, collecting feedback before deciding to finalize the purchase.

4.6 Conclusions

This chapter analysed, through six case studies categorised into three clusters, relevant strategies applied to the fashion system regarding omnichannel practices.

The analysis conducted reveals the centrality of a series of elements in the analysed omnichannel strategies. The diagram in Fig. 4.4 shows the touchpoints, tools and actions that emerged from the presented research. Instead of separating the different cases and their

[29] Relaunch YOOXMIRROR in 2018. Retrieved from: https://www.ynap.com/news/be-your-own-avatar-yooxmirror-reloaded/ (accessed on 2023-09-28, archived: https://archive.ph/w3MnI)

[30] YOOXMIRROR feature expands its catalog to 50,000 pieces. Retrieved from: https://www.ynap.com/news/yooxmirror-yoox-unique-virtual-styling-feature-expands-its-catalog-to-50000-pieces-to-choose-from/. (Accessed 2023-09-28, Archived: https://archive.ph/KDQVC)

components, the chart merges them all together with the goal of providing an overview of possible OC strategies and techniques that goes beyond individual applications.

Among the various digital touchpoints previously described the smartphone application appears as the central element through which customer experience is supported, both inside and outside the store. The two paths can be pursued independently based on customer preferences but can later merge through the overcoming of the organizational silos model. The shopping experience is also enhanced thanks to time savings, shopping convenience, privacy in the use of fitting rooms, and overall shopping comfort.

Logistics is an invisible support that enables the efficient functioning of omnichannel mechanisms. We are talking about cutting-edge systems that operate automatically or semi-automatically within retail spaces to assist consumers, but traditional logistic systems continue to support the management of returns, pickups, and online orders. One of the most visible aspects of the paradigm shift related to organizational silos is the ability to check store inventory in relation to a selected store or geographic area. Thanks to this approach, the customer can determine which store to visit to inspect the merchandise of interest. Lastly, data, collected primarily through applications and customer interactions, permeates all touch points, allowing brands to adjust production, in-store display, and design new experiences or products.

Moreover, social media can be used to extend the shopping experience beyond sales channels, engaging a wider audience and leveraging consumer relationships. They act as a promotional tool for the brand while providing consumers with a validation opportunity.

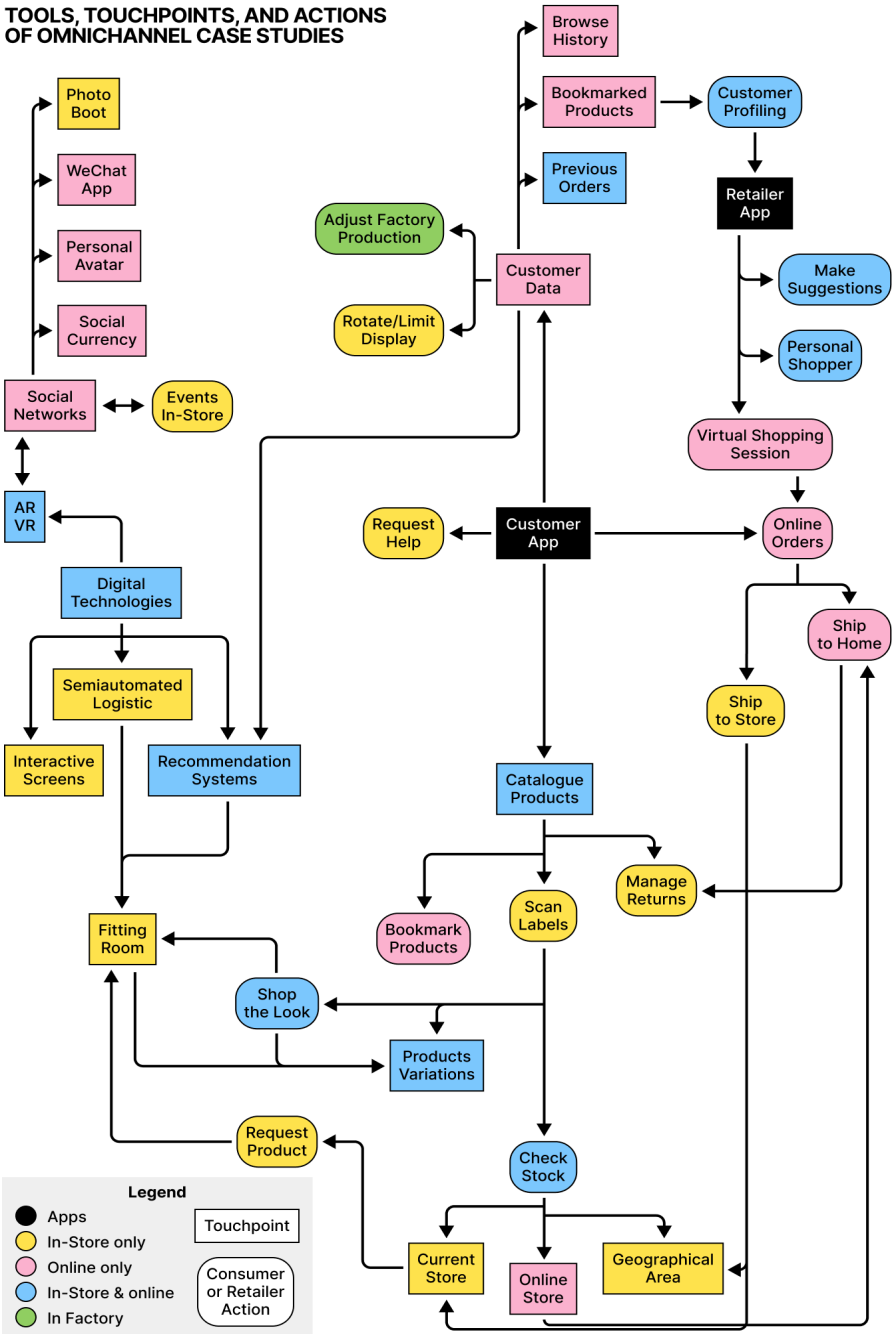

Fig. 4.4 Tools, touchpoints, and actions of omnichannel case studies (authors' elaboration).

The cluster "Extended OC Networks of Channels and Touchpoints", led by the brands Zara and Nike, focused on analysing the use of smart devices, more specifically through their applications within the physical store. From the point of view of the consumer's shopping experience, the use of the application inside the store, such as Zara and Nike's "In-store Mode", can transform the integration of different physical and digital channels into a more seamless process. Using the application inside the store allows, for example, the consumer to independently check information about the items through QR codes, as well as request assistance from an employee with one click. Furthermore, consumers also have services such as "Click&Collect", where they can buy online and collect in store and also "Self-checkout", where they can independently complete the payment for their purchases. On the other hand, when using the application, the consumer provides the brand their data, which can later also be used to adjust the production and improve the shopping experience, such as the space reserved for local Nike customers in the store in New York, where the brand, by analysing the data, designs services exclusively for that public. The availability of several interconnected touchpoints, within and outside the store, offer clients uncountable CJ, featuring multiple entry-points and personalization occasions.

The second cluster, "From Online to Physical: Efficiency and Personalized Experiences within OC Retail" concerns two cases of brands that are born digital, Amazon and Farfetch. This section seeks to illustrate how a digital brand can migrate to the physical space. In the case of Amazon, the physical store experience is entirely based on the store's app and QR Codes spread throughout the retail space. The strategy behind all this is to optimize the customer's time, as they will not waste time looking for what they want among so many products on display as in a conventional store. Technology wants to speed up this process by delivering what the customer is looking for quickly and accurately and, at the same time, collecting data for recommendations (i.e., cross sell). The case of Farfetch is somewhat similar because entirely based on digital technologies and data. However, it aims at providing a curated and memorable experience for shoppers and at demonstrating its proprietary technology that can be sold to third parties.

The third cluster, called "Roles of Social Media Platforms in OC Customer Journey" seeks to understand how the use of social networks can impact the consumer journey. Here two different cases were presented, yet, in both of them we witness the engagement strategy, guided mainly by the brand's interaction with the consumers through digital platforms. In the case of Burberry, the concept of Social Retail allows consumers to share the experience of being in a physical store on social media. The main objective in this case is to engage with generations Z and Millennials, who especially in China demonstrate that are influenced by social networks in stages prior to purchase. The second case presented in this session concerns the "YOOXMIRROR" feature within the YOOX application. In this case, there is no interaction with a physical space, the interaction of channels is limited to e-commerce and the brand's application. Users can virtually try on clothes and share them on social networks, helping them make the purchase decision. This practice also allows, in online purchases, the number of returns to be possibly reduced, since in most online purchases the consumer only tries on the item when it arrives at home.

As technology becomes increasingly part of consumers' daily lives, especially those from new consumer generations, brands seek to integrate the use of digital touchpoints and social networks within the consumer's journey, rendering the shopping experience more fluid and engaged with consumers. In this context, the case study analysis presented in this chapter sought to illustrate a selection of relevant cases regarding the application of omnichannel practices within the consumer journey. Such analysis paves the way for future discussions, such as the socio-environmental impact of these practices, as well as the effectiveness of long-term results, given that the cases presented are relatively recent.

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Authors

Valeria M. Iannilli (editor). Architect and Full Professor at Politecnico di Milano, Design Department. She is co-founder of the Fip – Fashion in Process Research Lab. She is a Faculty Member of the School of Design, where she is President of the Fashion Design Programs (Bachelor and MSc) and teaches Fashion Retail Experience (MSc) and Transmedia Storytelling in the Fashion industry (BS). She is expert of management of narrative processes as place of cultural exchange in "culture intensive" industries.
Her research interests concern retail design processes as the expression of the identity of a company to promote the construction of an active dialogue with users' communities. Her current research investigates the impact of digital transformation on the retailing experience by focusing her attention on omnichannel customer experience and the new Phygital concept and format.

Alessandra Spagnoli (editor). PhD in Design and Technologies for the Enhancement of Cultural Heritage, Assistant Professor at Politecnico di Milano, Design Department. She is member of the Fip – Fashion in Process Research Lab. She is Faculty Member of the School of Design, Politecnico di Milano, where she is Secretary of the Fashion Design Programs (BA and MSc) and teaches Visual Design Elements (BA) and Fashion Retail Experience (MSc). She is member of the PhD Faculty of the PhD Design School at Politecnico di Milano.
Her research interests concern managing design-driven processes for developing and enhancing Cultural Heritage and CCIs, exploring new paradigms and narrative structures in retail and exhibit design,

studying technological impact on retail omnichannel customer experience, and developing servitisation processes in fashion retail.

Francesca Bonfim Bandeira. Fashion Designer, she graduated from Politecnico di Milano and ventured into design, research, and technology. Collaborating with Politecnico di Milano's design department, she began her career at M-Cube. In her role as Omnichannel Product Specialist, she shaped the platform's strategic direction, evolution, and internalization. Francesca also shared her expertise through lectures on retail evolution and customer experience design. She later explored the creative sphere by joining Milan's Collettivo D'ORA, contributing to events, immersive installations, and supporting local art galleries.
Today, she is Research fellow at Politecnico di Milano in PNRR project MUSA investigating on technology and sustainability in the retail sector while consulting for an Italian sustainable brand, advocating for innovation in fashion, technology, and retail.

Mariagiovanna Di Iorio. PhD student in Design at Politecnico di Milano, Design Department, studying design approaches and tools to foster innovation in fashion retail customer experience. She is collaborating in teaching activities in the Msc Design for the Fashion System at Politecnico di Milano and Poli.Design - Master in Furniture Design. She is part of FiP – Fashion in Process Research Lab.
In the past she led Communication Design and Graphic Design courses at Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, IED Milan and NABA Milan. As a designer, she collaborated with i3Lab – Politecnico di Milano, Corraini Publishing, Pietro Corraini and Matteo Ragni Design Studio. She received honorable mention at the Compasso d'Oro Award for the workshop "STAMPATELLE: good-to-eat messages".

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 Abilítiamo Autismo.

Gabriela Fabro Cardoso. MSc in Design for the Fashion System, she is a Fashion Designer post graduated in UX/Experience Design and is currently a PhD Candidate at Politecnico di Milano, Design Department. She is part of Fip –Fashion in Process Research Lab, where she previously worked as a Research Fellow investigating how design can intervene in the development of phygital experiences and retail processes.
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.

Gabriele Ragusa. Research fellow at Politecnico di Milano in PNRR project MUSA on innovation drivers in the fashion retail industry, new sustainable and integrated fashion retail experiences. He is part of FIP – Fashion in Process Reasearch Lab. He was for three years in a row a teaching assistant at Politecnico di Milano. He has a master's degree in Interior and Spatial Design at Politecnico di Milano and a master's degree in Environmental Art Design at Tsinghua University.
He worked for Scivola, a project of Fondazione Cariplo in collaboration with Politecnico di Milano, that was selected for the publication ADI design Index 2020. He designed and realized a group project 'UNTITLED' at Linz Ars Electronica Festival 2020. He worked as communication and marketing consultant at Oneshot Real Estate Solutions.

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