

Digital Experience Integration in UK Fashion Retail: Engaging Generation Z Consumers

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Abstract: In the rapidly evolving fashion retail sector, digital technology is rapidly influencing consumer shopping behaviour and the marketing strategies of fashion physical shops. Generation Z, in particular, are considered the natives of the digital age and have higher expectations of the digital experience in physical shops. Gen Z, as a major consumer group of fashion products, have specific needs for the shopping experience, so it is essential to be aware of how digital experiences can be integrated to meet their needs. The objective of this study is to provide insights into how fashion brands can better accommodate digital experiences in British offline stores to facilitate purchases by Gen Z consumers, and to provide recommendations for relevant practices. This study uses secondary research to collect and analyse data extensively. This study has important implications for fashion management practices and market competition, as digital experience has become a key area of innovation in fashion retail.

Keywords: Digital experience, Gen Z, Fashion physical store

1. Introduction

In the modern and dynamic field of fashion retailing, digital technologies are reshaping consumer shopping behavior and the way brands interact with their customers at an accelerated pace than ever before. Younger generation consumers, especially Gen Z, who are mostly around 10 to 25 years old [1], are the natives of the digital age [2], have higher expectations for the presentation and integration of digital experiences in fashion physical stores during the shopping process.

1.1. Background

The fashion retail industry is in a rapidly evolving stage, with increasing competition and changing consumer demands. In its Customer Service Centre report, Conduent noted that brands must promote innovation with the customer experience at the centre in order to achieve greater customer loyalty and satisfaction [3]. In addition, Nicasio emphasised that in these days when it is available to obtain almost everything one needs through online shopping, the physical retail shop is no longer just a place to sell products, but a space where customers can immerse themselves in the image and narrative of the brand [4]. This shift has given retail shops a deeper meaning and enhanced the emotional bond between brands and consumers. In an increasingly competitive retail industry, a memorable retail experience can even add value to a brand and build loyalty [4].

The impact of the rise of digital technology on physical retail shops cannot be ignored. Schaefer pointed out that there is an increasing trend for fashion retailers to integrate digital experiences into the retail environment of their physical shops to satisfy the demands of their target customers [5]. From virtual reality (VR) to augmented reality (AR), from personalisation to interactive displays, various digital experience elements are being introduced into physical shops to better appeal to customers. Nicasio mentioned some success cases in his study, such as Nike's physical experiential shops that help customers to select the appropriate shoes through digital foot scanning technology, Nike Fit, and Farfetch's RFID technology to personalise the customer experience in physical shops by analysing customer browsing history, providing further evidence of the value of digital experiences in physical retail shops [4].

Meanwhile, Gen Z has attracted widespread attention for its traits and demands as an emerging consumer group. According to Ceron, Gen Z has emerged as a major consumer of fashion and is expected to have more than \$30 trillion in global spending power by 2030 [6]. Growing up in a digital technology environment, their thirst for innovation and diversity will also shape future consumer trends [7]. In addition, Gen Z is more in pursuit of a simpler, more innovative lifestyle, and they believe that technology can provide them with better daily experiences [8]. A study by Hodgson et al. also found that Gen Z are pioneers of digital services, and are more attracted to the in-person shopping lifestyle [9].

In terms of practical cases, Angus mentioned that the customised loyalty rewards programme launched by Sephora in the UK in 2022 successfully boosted the desire of consumers to make purchases through emotional marketing and customised experiences [10]. On the other hand, the collaboration between Selfridges and fashion brand Charli Cohen [7], which merged digital environments with physical shops, created a unique space that inspired customers to make purchases through the presentation of a virtual experience with a film theme.

In summary, the fashion retail industry is continuously shifting from a conventional pattern to a digital experience-driven model in order to appeal to the younger Gen Z consumers. Through the introduction of digital experiences, physical shops can better fulfil consumer expectations and build a stronger connection with the brand on an emotional level, which consequently facilitates purchasing behaviours.

1.2. Aims and objectives

The main aim of this research is to furnish a thorough examination of how British fashion brands are integrating digital technology into their physical fashion shops so that they can encourage and stimulate Gen Z to purchase their fashion items. In this context, this study will target the following areas for exploration:

1. Comprehensive literature review and relationship exploration: Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, the study will delve into the connections between Gen Z consumers, digital experiences, and physical fashion offline shops. This step can not only assess the academic literature and market intelligence to establish a firm theoretical basis for subsequent research, but also provide a deeper underpinning of the purposes and concerns of the study.

2. Digital Experience Analysis and Effectiveness Evaluation: Through a combination of case studies and market intelligence, this study will analyze the current adoption of digital experiences in physical stores of UK fashion brands in detail and evaluate the effectiveness of their use. In this section, this study will look at various digital experiences, such as virtual fitting rooms, augmented reality (AR), interactions, etc., to explore how they are being used in physical retail environments and their implications for the purchasing behavior of Gen Z.

3. Exploration of Gen Z Consumer Demands and Traits: By conducting an intensive research, this study will reveal what Gen Z consumers in the UK require from their shopping experience and the

characteristics of their spending. This step will help to better understand what drives Gen Z to shop offline, thus providing a clear rationale for fashion physical stores to integrate digital experiences more effectively.

4.Characterization of Successful Digital Experiences: By thoroughly analysing the characteristics and key factors of proven success of digital experiences in physical shops that have attracted Gen Z consumers. This research will show exactly the digital experiences that appeal to Generation Z and those that are preferred by fashion physical shops. This component will provide a strong guide for decision making in practice.

5.Recommendations for Practice: Based on the findings, this study will propose recommendations for practice on how UK fashion offline shops can integrate digital experiences to engage Gen Z consumers to make purchases. These recommendations will provide direction for fashion brands and retailers to develop practical solutions to fulfill the demands of Gen Z consumers and achieve stronger competitiveness in the marketplace.

In order to achieve this goal, this study will employ a comprehensive secondary research methodology that builds on existing academic literature and market intelligence to provide an insightful discussion of the use of digital experiences in physical fashion retailing, the shopping behavior of Gen Z consumers, and successful digital experience strategies.

1.3. Significance

In present age, technology, self-identity expression and experience are considered to be the major dominating drivers of consumer behaviour [11]. With the dramatic development of digital technologies, the fashion retail industry is facing both unprecedented opportunities and challenges. In this context, exploring how to integrate digital experiences into physical shops to attract and promote younger consumers to purchase products is important for addressing practical business issues as well as meeting market trends.

This research question is significant for the following aspects. Younger consumers today, especially Gen Z, have become a major force in fashion spending. According to Passport, young people in the 15-29 age group in the UK value fashion accessories, home groceries and beauty and wellness products the most when making purchases, and they are more focused on real-world experiences and the chance to explore different cultures [8]. Meanwhile, Moriarty et al. stated that consumers seek high-value shopping experiences and wish to get more value for spending less [11]. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of how to create a unique and valuable shopping experience for Gen Z in physical shops through digital experiences will not only help to meet their expectations, but will also enable fashion brands to gain a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Furthermore, globally, 37 per cent of consumers expect a stronger connection with brands, however, in the UK this figure is relatively low at 27 per cent [12]. This suggests that the level of interaction between brands and consumers in the UK market is relatively weak and could be further improved. Therefore, investigating how to create deeper brand interactions in physical retail shops through digital experiences can fulfil consumer demand for fashion brand interactions and increase brand loyalty and market share in the UK. This study is also inextricably linked to fashion management practices. Fashion management practices need to constantly innovate and adapt to cater for their target consumers. According to a study by Tett, Gen Z has a higher concern for customised products and digital experiences, which further highlights the importance of digital experiences in engaging this consumer group [13]. Considering that Gen Z represents 15% of the total UK population, listening to them and developing targeted shopping experiences for them is of strategic significance for fashion brands [14].

Digital experience has become a key field of innovation in fashion management practices. By integrating digital technologies into physical fashion shops, brands can offer customers a distinctive

shopping experience and, at the same time, enhance the emotional connection with consumers. This not only helps to increase sales, but also builds long-term brand loyalty. Therefore, this study will explore how digital experiences can be seamlessly integrated into fashion physical shops to meet the expectations of Gen Z in the UK, as well as provide fashion brands with practical strategic guidance and the application suggestions for fashion management practice that can help brands to distinguish themselves in the highly competitive marketplace.

2. Literature review

In the age of digitalisation, fashion brands are introducing in-store technology to develop digital experience to engage and promote the younger consumers to purchase, especially the Gen Z. This innovative initiative not only helps to enhance the shopping experience for customers, but also creates new opportunities for branding, interaction and sales growth. The aim of the literature review is to explore how fashion brands in the UK are incorporating digital experiences in their physical retail shops in order to engage and encourage Generation Z to purchase products. The main text will be structured around three key theories: customer experience and experiential marketing, omnichannel retailing and technology acceptance models.

The first part focuses on the relationship between fashion physical shops and Gen Z. Gen Z consumers value the offline shopping experience and physical shops need to offer them a new experience that is distinct from online shopping. This section will also explore the expectations of Gen Z in terms of customer experience and their role in the global fashion industry.

The second part will focus on physical fashion shops and digital experiences. As technology advances, the integration between physical fashion shops and online shopping is becoming more pronounced. Research has shown that fashion brands are introducing technologies such as VR and AR to optimise the digital experience and help consumers with their shopping behaviour. This part will address how creating a consistent brand experience through digital experiences can attract more consumers and highlight some successful brand examples such as Burberry and Nike.

The third section will explore the importance of technology acceptance models in addressing the acceptance of digital experiences by Gen Z. This section will point to technology acceptance models that emphasise the impact of perceived usefulness and usability on attitudes to and willingness to use technology in the context of the growing demand of Gen Z for digital shopping experiences. It will also indicate how the usefulness and usability of digital experiences can be combined with the consumption habits and expectations of Gen Z to stimulate purchase intent.

2.1. Customer experience (CX) and experiential marketing

Peters and Waterman emphasized that successful business patterns tend to be closely tied to direct to customer interactions through the creation of customer-oriented services and experiences [15]. In the modern age of the Internet, Burns suggested that physical stores can enhance their attractiveness by customizing special experiences for their customers, such as vivid brand narratives and pleasurable customer experiences [16]. He also proposed that especially for young Gen Z consumers, they value the offline shopping experience more as it provides them with the opportunity to acquire new experiences and options to purchase items already online.

Multiple surveys have shown that offering a positive customer experience is a key factor for brand success in fashion physical stores. Abdul also highlighted that enhancing the customer experience contributes to deepening the interaction between the brand and the customer [17]. In addition, a well-organized customer experience has a significant effect on shaping a positive brand image.

Gen Z as a segment of consumers have distinctive expectations of the customer experience. Studies such as the findings of Bulovic et al. pointed out that they have increasing ability to make more

purchases [18]. Wang emphasized that Gen Z play an essential part in the global fashion industry, their unique consumer attitudes and shopping habits, as well as their pursuit of personalization and customization, make them enjoy showcasing distinctive fashion products [19]. Furthermore, Elan also showed that young consumers were more eager to buy products that reflected their unique fashion tastes rather than traditional mass-market products [19]. Wang also emphasized that Gen Z's purchasing power and proportion of consumption were growing compared to other generations, thus it was necessary for fashion brands to adapt to their consumption habits and shopping preferences to avoid being marginalized in business competition [19].

There are a number of options available to fashion physical stores in terms of exploring how to provide a quality customer experience. For example, Burns mentioned that Indochino is constantly upgrading its suiting showroom to provide customers with a personalized experience, for instance, style guides and fabric choices to suit their requirements [16]. While Batat mentioned the Bicester Shopping Village, as a UK luxury products direct sales location, which constantly created comfortable and luxurious shopping environments in order to save costs for customers and develop a positive reputation [20].

Although there have been studies, such as Burns, which emphasized that fashion physical stores can be made more attractive to Gen Z through digital experiences, the current literature has not yet delved into the specific expectations and demands of Gen Z for digital experiences [16]. While Wang noted that Gen Z differs from other generations in terms of consumer attitudes and shopping habits, the details of what they expect from digital experiences and how these experiences can be integrated with fashion brands to achieve purchase incentives have not been fully explored [19].

In addition, experiential marketing has gained wide attention and application in the business world. Schmitt clearly emphasized the importance of experiential marketing in his work [21]. He argued that creating successful experiential marketing is significant for physical stores since it can contribute towards the attractiveness and success of a brand effectively by designing an outstanding customer-oriented shopping experiences for them. This approach stressed the importance of satisfying the consumption experience of customers and emphasized that to create a distinctive shopping experience, brands should pay attention to the demands and expectations of their customers.

Also, Abdul emphasized that fashion brands should focus on the way customers and brands communicate with each other [17]. In the omnichannel shopping environment today, where consumers may make purchases through multiple channels, physical stores are required to provide a brand-specific immersive shopping experience that allows customers to perceive the essence of the product and the brand through a variety of sensory experiences. Smilansky further pointed out that as the similarity in product positioning increased in the marketplace, brands would need to provide consumers with a higher level of value-added services to differentiate themselves [22].

In this context, the positive response of Generation Z to experiential marketing is particularly remarkable. Smilansky pointed out that with the advancement of technology and creativity, Generation Z has become a consumer group with purchasing power and influence, which makes experiential marketing one of the most effective ways to attract this group [22]. He also emphasized that experiential marketing helps to build a deep bidirectional interactive relationship between brands and customers, which enhances customer reliability and brand reputation.

Some cases provide useful insights on how fashion physical stores can use experiential marketing to attract and retain Gen Z consumers. For example, Batat referred to the concept of "LuxDisneyfication", emphasizing that the consumption trend of luxury goods is increasingly moving towards idealized and immersive experiences [20]. He pointed out that aspects such as brand narratives, store design can be used to strengthen the emotional experience and thus enhance the added value of the brand. In addition, Smilansky mentioned that the fashion brand ,Missguided, has launched an 'On Air' physical store concept in the UK, which enhances the shopping experience by

providing an immersive social interaction experience for Gen Z customers through digital devices [22].

Therefore, there is a research gap in this literature review on how digital technology can be combined with the expectations of Generation Z to create a more engaging shopping environment and promote actual purchasing behavior in UK fashion physical stores. Future research could fill this research gap by exploring the application of digital technology in physical shops and how it can be personalized to meet the aspirations of Generation Z. There is still a gap in current studies that focuses on the association between experiential marketing and Generation Z. Most of the research focuses on the customer experience and brand interaction aspects, however, how digital experiences can be integrated into physical fashion stores to meet the personalized and varied demands of Gen Z and transform these expectations into actual purchasing behaviors has not yet been explored in depth. Therefore, future studies could fill this gap through investigating how digital technologies can be applied in physical stores to create a more innovative and personalized shopping experience.

2.2. Omichannel retailing

In the context of the current digitalization era, the distinctive value between physical fashion stores and online stores has gradually emerged. Bulovic et al. pointed out that the digital experience of physical fashion stores is no inferior to that of e-commerce in terms of significance, as the fashion products in physical stores focus more on the feeling of the skin feel of the fabric of the customer, the aesthetics in the light, etc., and these factors play a vital factor in the shopping experience [18]. According to the new Concepts in Retail Report, with rising customer expectations of physical fashion stores, fashion brands are progressively introducing virtual technologies such as VR and AR to enhance the digital experience and assist consumers in their shopping and purchasing behavior [23]. Research has shown that fashion brands are not only upgrading their physical stores as part of the digital transformation, but also adopting consumer-centric digital experience marketing strategies in the process [18]. Choubey pointed out that the digital experience in fashion physical stores continues to rise [17]. Quality digital experiences not only enhance brand exposure, but also win more loyal consumers [17]. Collectively, these studies reveal the importance of integrating digital experiences with physical stores for the consumer experience, branding, and emotional connection with customers for fashion brands.

Past research has emphasized the positive impact of digital experiences on fashion physical stores. Verhoef et al. argued that the integration of digital experiences such as virtual fitting, in-store navigation, digital interactive displays, etc. with physical stores helps to provide customers with a consistent and convenient shopping environment [24]. Batat, on the other hand, mentioned that some stores have started to design point of sale with a digital experience, which such as equipped with electronic touchpads that allow browsing of the website of the brand [20]. While achieving a smoother shopping experience will require fashion physical stores to continue to innovate in omnichannel marketing and ensure consistency across channels [16]. Digital technologies are also having a positive impact on the communication between customers and fashion retailers, as fashion companies such as Nike and Zara have begun to acquire technology companies specializing in digital technologies such as AR and VR with the aim of strengthening the customer experience in physical stores [18].

There is increasing information that the application of omnichannel marketing realizes the seamless integration of online and offline channels. Take Burberry for example, they have attracted a wider group of potential consumers through their omnichannel marketing strategy. The consistency between online and offline allows customers to easily switch channels and even pre-order products that are not yet on the shelves [20].

Integrating digital experiences with physical stores to create a consistent brand experience for customers has become one of the goals of modern fashion brands. Many brands have enriched the

consumer shopping experience through digital experiences, for instance, Gucci's highly interactive physical stores [20], Fragrance Outlet's use of Bluetooth technology, iBeacons, to boost customer loyalty, as well as personalization by Adidas and seamless technological innovations by Lululemon. The use of Internet of Things (IoT) technology has also created greater possibilities for product personalization [22]. In this digital era, the organic combination of physical stores and digital experiences not only enhances the shopping experience of consumers, but also creates more opportunities for branding and the strengthening of emotional links with consumers.

In the fashion industry, digital experience in physical stores is of significant importance to fashion brands. These studies indicated that the inclusion of digital experience can provide a rich and personalised shopping experience, strengthen brand promotion and emotional connection with consumers. However, while the literature highlighted the positive impact of digital technologies on consumer experience and branding, there are research gaps in the areas of practical application and evaluation of effectiveness, consumer engagement and response, and future technological innovation and sustainability. An in-depth study of these aspects could help to better understand how digital experience can be combined with physical shops to engage and encourage the Gen Z to purchase fashion products, while achieving sustained brand growth.

2.3. TAM

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is a model explaining user acceptance of technology, emphasising the effect of perceived usefulness and usability on perceptions of technology attitudes and willingness to use. Some studies showed that for Gen Z, a younger consumer group, the demand for digital shopping experiences has grown stronger. For example, noted that Gen Z sought a more intelligent, digitised shopping experience. Davis et al. argued that users found the use of technology to be helpful and easy to navigate, matching Gen Z's pursuit of a digitised shopping experience [25].

Several studies have shown that digital experience has a positive impact on perceived usefulness and usability for Gen Z consumers, which leads to stimulation of purchase intention. Son et al. stated that providing smooth service through the application of digital experience in omnichannel marketing can create an excellent shopping experience for Gen Z, which can stimulate the desire to make a purchase [26]. For example, Charles stated that offering valuable information and excellent service to target consumers can increase shopping satisfaction and strengthen brand loyalty [26]. Xue et al. argued that consumers in physical retail shops have high expectations of service quality, and that digital experiences such as product interaction, AR, VR and virtual assistants can enhance the shopping experience [27]. In this area, digital experiences are designed to not only enhance the shopping experience, but also to reduce the amount of wasted effort in the shopping process [27]. However, digital experiences need to have user-friendly and interactive interfaces to provide valuable content, otherwise they may trigger negative impressions [26]. Xue et al. further noted that time-saving and customised digital experiences inspire strong interest from Gen Z [27].

Research showed that digital experiences within fashion retail shops can increase the satisfaction of Generation Z consumers and create a customised shopping experience for them. For example, Bulovic et al. argued that the digital experience can begin before the customer enters a fashion physical shop, making the service customer-centric and providing a well-considered digital experience [18]. Similarly, Xue et al. highlighted that engaging with the digital experience in physical shops can result in increased customer satisfaction with the brand by provide a higher quality shopping experience [27]. The use of digital technologies enables brands to analyse market changes more acutely in response to consumer expectations, while flexibly adapting the way they interact with consumers [26]. Furthermore, consumer demand for customisation is becoming increasingly popular in fashion [18]. If fashion brands are unable to fulfil the demand for digital experiences and provide

innovative services to meet the needs of Gen Z consumers, they may be abandoned by Gen Z consumers who are accustomed to digital experiences [26].

The physical fashion store environment has changed the way fashion is retailed through the introduction of digital experiences, which influences the shopping behaviour of consumers [18]. For instance, Xue et al. argued that through in-store digital experiences in physical shops, consumers are better equipped to interact with products and learn more about them, which deepens their connection with the brand [27]. These studies highlighted how in-store digital experiences can meet the needs of Gen Z for digital experiences while strengthening their loyalty and identification with brands.

Furthermore, active participation in in-store digital experience activities enhances customer satisfaction with the product as well as loyalty to the brand, which reinforces the positive influence of the digital experience on purchase intentions [17]. Moreover, Generation Z prefers brands that offer personalised experiences [19]. To summarize, digital experience in fashion retail physical shops has a profound influence on the attraction and purchase behaviour of Gen Z consumers, and it has become a key strategy for fashion brands to enhance satisfaction, loyalty, and inspire purchase intention through digital experience.

Yet a research gap remains from the current studies. Specifically, while the literature mentions the positive impact of digital experiences in meeting the needs of Gen Z for a personalised shopping experience and enhancing shopping satisfaction, there is less in-depth exploration of how to ensure that digital experiences are aligned with the preferences and cultural values of Gen Z, as well as how to effectively build an emotional connection in digital shopping environments that can inspire longer-lasting purchasing behaviours and brand loyalty. Therefore, future research should be done to fill this research gap by exploring how to integrate digital experiences with the values, cultural identities, and emotional needs of the Gen Z in the UK to better drive the digital transformation of fashion physical stores and enable a deeper shopping experience.

2.4. Conclusion

This literature review examines how UK fashion brands are introducing digital technology into their physical retail shops as a strategy to engage and motivate Gen Z to purchase products. By analysing key theories such as customer experience and experiential marketing, omnichannel retailing and technology acceptance models, the positive impact of digital experiences on meeting the needs of Gen Z for a personalised shopping experience, increased shopping satisfaction and brand loyalty is revealed. However, despite the literature emphasising the benefits of digital experiences, there are still some important research questions that deserve to be explored further.

In future research, the following aspects can be focused on: Firstly, the personalisation and cultural factors of digital experiences. While studies have shown the appeal of digital experiences to Gen Z, more in-depth research is required to ensure that digital experiences are compatible with their cultural values, lifestyles and personalisation demands. Given the diversity and cross-cultural differences of Gen Z in the UK, how to incorporate different cultural elements into digital experiences to cater for different groups needs to be explored. Secondly, emotional connection and brand loyalty. Whilst digital experiences can help improve branding and emotional connections, how to create more lasting and deeper emotional connections to promote long-term brand loyalty needs to be discussed further. Third, the evaluation of the effect of digital experience. While digital experiences have a significant effect on enhancing the shopping experience and brand image, this effect should be evaluated. Fourth, technological innovation and sustainability. Future research can not only focus on the innovation of digital experience technology and its application. At the same time, brands need to consider the sustainability of the digital experience and how to ensure that these technologies not only attract consumers but also have a meaningful impact on the environment and society.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research objectives and rationale

The objective of this study is to investigate how combining digital experiences with the expectations of Gen Z in the UK can create more engaging shopping environments, promote actual purchase behavior in physical fashion stores, and create an emotional connection that aligns with the preferences and cultural values of Gen Z, resulting in a deeper shopping experience and brand loyalty.

There are several critical research gaps in the current literature review, for which this study has the following motivations and rationale:

First, there is a gap in the integration of digital experiences with Gen Z: While existing literature mentions the connection between digital experiences and the individualized shopping expectations of Gen Z, it has yet to delve into how these digital experiences can be integrated with the preferences and cultural values of Gen Z to achieve a shopping environment that is more aligned with their expectations. The aim of this study is to fill this gap by exploring ways in which digital experiences can be integrated with the values, cultural identities, and emotional needs of Gen Z. The study also explores the ways in which digital experiences can be integrated with cultural identities, cultural identities, and emotional needs of Gen Z. The study is intended to explore the ways in which digital experiences can be integrated with the values, cultural identities, and emotional needs of Gen Z. The study is intended to explore the ways in which digital experiences can be integrated with the values, cultural identities, and emotional needs of Gen Z.

Second, the application of digital technology in physical fashion stores: Existing research is less concerned with the actual application and evaluation of the effects of digital technology in physical fashion stores, and how digital experiences can satisfy the diverse and specialized requirements of Gen Z. This study will explore innovative applications of digital technologies in physical fashion stores to enhance the shopping experience and promote actual purchasing behavior.

Third, Emotional Connection and Brand Loyalty: Existing literature mentions the positive impact of digital experiences on brand promotion and emotional connection, but has not yet delved into how to effectively build emotional connections in digital shopping environments to stimulate more enduring purchasing behaviors and brand loyalty. This study will focus on the establishment of emotional connections, exploring how digital experiences can trigger emotional resonance in Gen Z during the shopping process, thereby enhancing brand loyalty.

3.2. Reasoning and considerations for secondary research

In fashion management, primary research has both value and limitations. Different researchers have discussed the features of primary research. Easterby-Smith et al. noted that, given the overly extensive and massive amount of secondary data available, primary research often employs well-designed interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups to address issues in either a qualitative or quantitative approach [28]. Qualitative interview sessions allow researchers to gain direct access to the insights and detailed information of interviewees about the research questions, however, they may face problems with interviewees being unwilling or unable to answer the questions accurately, which limits the depth of knowledge [28]. Nevertheless, they argued that the flexibility of primary research allows researchers to design a program to collect a specific range of data for their own research purposes. The absence of mutual trust between the investigator and the respondent can affect the results of the study [28].

Also, quantitative data collection needs to be analyzed and processed to be able to answer the research questions usefully [29]. Observations in qualitative research can increase the richness of the data, and questionnaires are one of the most commonly used approaches to primary data collection

[29]. Bell and Waters argued that quantitative research is very objective and interprets the data through statistical techniques, but the direction of the research is more difficult to change, and it may fail [30]. In contrast, qualitative research can deal with data that is difficult to quantify and allows for adjustments in emphasis according to the research process, but it can also yield results that contradict hypotheses and has a complex research procedure that is difficult to validate through statistical approaches and may even be influenced by researcher prejudices [30].

Krippendorff stated that content analysis of primary research can process extensive amounts of data by inferring associations between contexts [31]. However, this may require a large group of collaborators or even machines to process the primary textual data. Brennen argued that quantitative research expressed data more authentically and reliably by figures, while qualitative research is more applicable to interdisciplinary and issues that require interpretation of meanings [32]. The use of mixed methods, as exemplified by Kaiser and Green, where qualitative data is interpreted before quantitative research, involves the intersection of multiple disciplines but also demands a large financial investment [33].

Ethical issues are also important considerations in primary research. Iphofen and Tolich suggested that ethical issues are often difficult to predetermine, but with the principle of no harm, the investigator needs to consider aspects such as the respondent's right to participate, the right to be informed, research privacy, and societal significance [34].

The use of primary and secondary data in research has attracted a great amount of attention and discussion over the past few years. Saunders et al. pointed out that more and more research organizations and researchers are making primary data available and that these data are easily accessible for secondary research [29]. They argued that conducting secondary research is more efficient and does not waste much time and money than primary research when there is already a large amount and variety of types of primary data that can be organized and made available. In addition, since many researchers, as well as governments, organizations and institutions, lack the means to collect large amounts of data, the use of readily available primary data can facilitate their research.

However, as public expectations for research transparency have progressively increased, many institutions have begun to collect and publicly release primary data, which means that reputable research published by high-quality institutions can be easily accessed by the public [28]. In addition, a large amount of easily accessible secondary data can answer the questions of researchers to some or all extent [29].

In summary, while primary data still has its unique value, in the current context of highly transparent information, a large number of organizations and researchers have begun to organize and publicly release raw data, making it more convenient for academic research. In the research field, it has become more common to study the topic of digital experience. Taking the research topic as an instance, which explores how British fashion brands are incorporating digital experiences in their physical retail stores to attract and encourage Gen Z to purchase products, the existing secondary research as well as publicly available data sources have provided extremely valuable support. For example, the case study of New Concepts in Retail revealed the use of digital technology in the physical stores of fashion brands [23]. Meanwhile, Abdu provided an in-depth analysis of the impact of digital experience on Malaysian Gen Z consumers through SEM data analytics, and Xue et al. investigated the impact of digital technology on the shopping experience of fashion consumers from the perspective of augmented reality (AR) [17]. These secondary studies have enriched researchers with a deeper understanding of the role of digital experience in fashion retailing and provide a firm foundation for the research.

In conducting this research, the researcher will make full use of these readily available data resources to answer the research questions. This is also not only an efficient choice in terms of time

and resources, but also contributes to an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of digital experiences in engaging and encouraging Generation Z to purchase fashion products from multiple dimensions [35]. Of course, researchers also need to be fully aware of the source, quality, and scope of application of the data in using such secondary data to ensure that the conclusions drawn from the study are accurate and reliable. In summary, the choice of whether to use primary or secondary data should be balanced against the particular context, questions, and resources available to ensure the scientific validity and credibility of the study.

3.3. Identification and analysis of secondary research sources

In order to develop a deeper knowledge of how British fashion brands integrate digital experiences into their offline shops to attract and motivate Gen Z to buy products, this study adopted a systematic literature search approach to identify and analyze secondary research sources. First, the search used the keywords "digital experience", "retail stores", "fashion brands" and "Gen Z" to find relevant academic databases and market intelligence. We selected LSGN, Mintel, Euromonitor International, and reports and journals associated with the fashion industry. Also, this study conducted a search for relevant academic articles and books through the school library. Through these steps, we obtained a range of secondary research sources related to the research topic.

At the stage of selecting the available sources, the following criteria were established for this study: publication date within the last five years, relating to the UK market, and a reasonably reliable research methodology. Due to the rapid development of digital technology in recent years, this study has excluded studies that are not relevant to the topic and published too early to ensure that the secondary sources examined are highly relevant and credible.

Multiple factors are also considered when identifying and analyzing secondary research sources, such as whether the journals and institutions are authoritative, the fields of study by the authors, the research methodologies used, and the sample sizes and sources employed in the study. In addition to considering the secondary research sources, the research also examines the research questions from a combination of dimensions from diverse subject areas, such as the development of digital technology and the lifestyles of the UK population(see Figure 1).

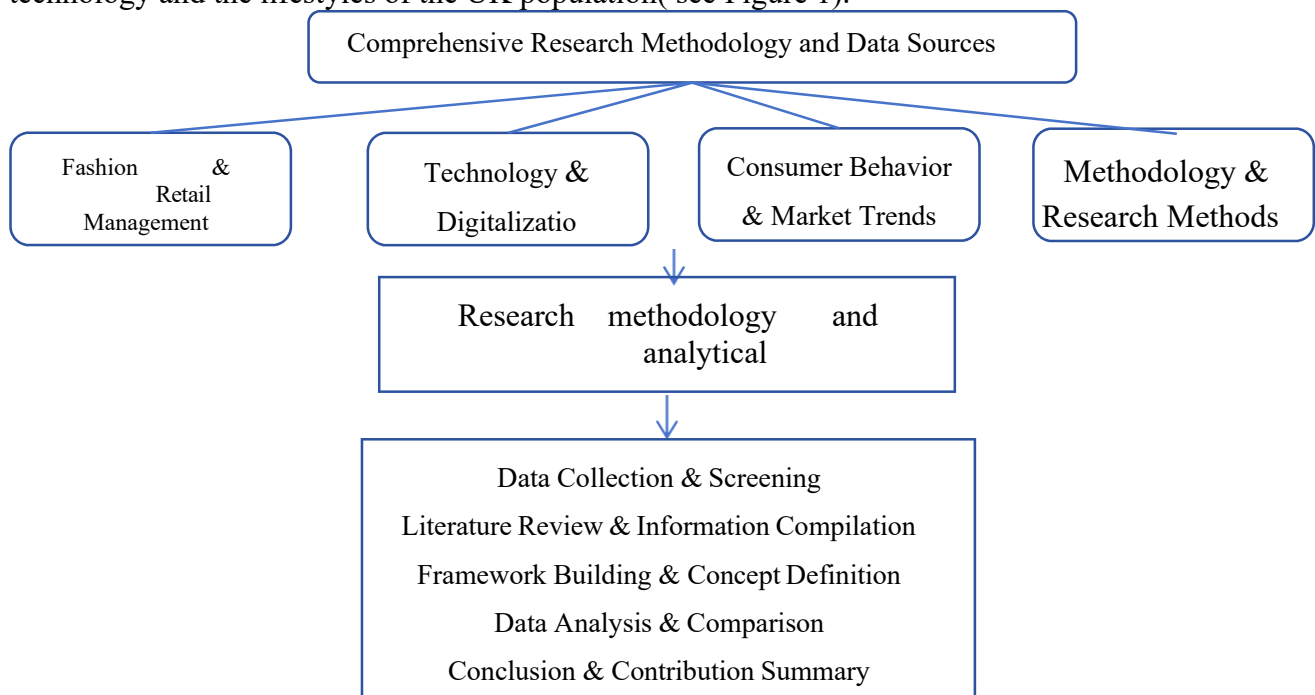


Figure 1: Comprehensive research methodology and data sources in diverse fields

For these secondary sources, this study has conducted an intensive analysis. We used a content analysis approach to summarize the key findings of each research article, the particulars of the digital experience, the characteristics of Gen Z shopping behaviors in the UK, and the marketing strategies that can appeal to Gen z. In addition, this study focuses on the use of digital technologies in retail, such as Augmented Reality, virtual fitting rooms, and customization. By analyzing these secondary sources, this study is able to acquire insights into how fashion brands are incorporating digital experiences in offline shops in the UK and how these strategies relate to the purchasing behaviors of Gen z consumers.

3.4. Empirical research by other researchers

In recent years, fashion brands have been actively exploring the use of digital technologies to inject more energy into the offline shopping experience. Among previous studies in related fields, an empirical study by Kim has attracted significant attention, which explored how the appeal of physical fashion stores can be enhanced by improving the digital experience through the use of mobile technology [36]. The study used a quantitative approach and recruited 302 female fashion consumers aged between 20 and 30 years old in metropolitan areas of South Korea in 2019. Kim collected data through an online questionnaire and analysed the data using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modelling [36]. And the findings showed that perceived advantage and interactivity had a significant effects on enhancing consumer satisfaction. He also emphasised the importance of digital experience in physical fashion stores by examining how the perceived quality and perceived risk of the digital experience affects consumer satisfaction. This research provides a useful reference for this project, illustrating the critical role of the digital experience in engaging younger consumers, particularly Gen Z. The study also suggests that the digital experience has a significant impact on consumer satisfaction in physical fashion stores.

Colombi et al. addressed how interactive digital technologies can be used to enhance customer engagement in fashion physical shops in an insightful way [37]. Using case studies of several fashion retailers, their study used field interviews and observations to clarify the potential of interactive digital technologies to enhance fashion customer engagement in physical shops. The researchers used qualitative analysis to explore and explain the strategies, digital technologies and customer experiences involved in the cases. Different retailers have adopted different approaches to the physical in-store digital experience, such as introducing virtual collaborations to create opportunities, designing digital spaces to incorporate interactive technologies, and enabling seamless shopping journeys through technological tools. Their research highlighted the potential of interactive digital technologies in hybrid retail environments, in clear contrast to the past view of online and offline retail as separate spheres. This theoretical breakthrough allows fashion brands to consider the use of digital experiences in physical shops more comprehensively. In addition, the study argued that fashion brands should integrate online and offline channels in omnichannel retailing, taking full advantage of the digital experience to create an integrated shopping experience for millennial consumers. Such integration can help improve engagement, satisfaction and brand image consistency, thereby contributing to the successful implementation of omnichannel retail strategies. This not only provides a solution for engaging and encouraging younger generations to purchase products, but also provides guidelines for brands to maintain a competitive edge in the digital age.

Lee et al. focused on the shopping tendencies of young fashion luxury consumers in a multichannel shopping environment [38]. Firstly, the empirical study validates the crucial role of the digital experience in shopping decisions, especially with the importance placed on channel properties such as price, human-assisted services and virtual fitting rooms. This provides practical guidance for fashion brands, encouraging them to introduce digital technologies such as virtual fitting rooms in their physical shops to enhance the shopping experience and appeal to Gen Z. The study combined

product and channel attributes to assess the willingness of consumers to purchase. Secondly, sample subjects covered young consumers in their 20s and 30s, which is the main Gen Z consumer demographic. The data was collected through an online survey and processed through several analytical methods such as polynomial logit modelling to derive the significance of the key attributes. The results of the study fit with TAM's core concepts. The positive attitude of consumers towards digital experience and their acceptance of digital elements such as virtual fitting rooms and human-assisted services reflect the positive impact of digital technology in fulfilling consumer needs and enhancing the shopping experience. Therefore, from the perspective of TAM, the findings provide empirical support for the application of digital experiences by UK fashion brands to engage and encourage Gen Z to purchase products.

By benefiting from these research methodology and findings, this project can explore in more depth how UK fashion brands can incorporate digital experiences in their physical retail shops in order to attract and encourage Gen Z consumers to purchase products.

3.5. Research ethics

Ethical considerations regarding this research cover a range of aspects. Firstly, the data sources used by the researcher are all publicly available and therefore no details that could result in the exposure of a specific identity of a particular individual will be revealed in the process of the study. Even when the use of secondary sources is involved, the researcher insist on the accuracy of the citations when quoting the sources in order to prevent plagiarism from occurring. The research is always objective and cautious when processing data to ensure that the results of the study are not affected in any way by the process.

When writing the research report, the researcher will clearly define the purpose and scope of the study in order to avoid inappropriate use of the data. On this basis, the study is considered to be appropriate and acceptable at both the ethical and legal levels. The rights and privileges of the research subjects were fully respected, and previous academic studies were fully respected and cited.

4. Findings and discussion

Targeting Generation Z, the integration of digital experiences by fashion brands in UK physical fashion shops has become a highly regarded strategy in retail. Using secondary research methods, combined with case studies and market intelligence, firstly, this study will provide an insight into the application of different types of digital experiences, such as virtual fitting rooms, augmented reality (AR), and interactivity, in the physical shops of UK fashion brands. Further, this study will deeply explore the needs and characteristics of Gen Z consumers to better understand their expectations of the shopping experience. Finally, it will provide strong support for practical decision-making by analysing the characteristics and success factors of the digital experiences in physical shops that have successfully attracted Gen Z consumers.

4.1. Digital experience analysis and impact assessment

Siregar and Kent gathered data in an engagement study of interactive technology in fashion physical shops using a user experience design (UXD) approach [39]. Their fieldwork on interactive technology in Nike shops in London, found that consumers concentrate on digital and physical elements when using interactive technology, and they want to be able to choose and manage what they want to experience. Moreover, consumers are concerned about their unfamiliarity being noticed by others when using new technology. In addition to this, consumers like to make the effort to overcome these unacquainted technologies to gain satisfaction.

Alexander and Kent used direct observation to investigate changes in 71 fashion shops in London over a five-year period and qualitatively analysed data from 142 fashion shops, using both manual and NVivo software [40]. They found that fashion retailers are more interested in digital technologies related to customer information and convenience that are beneficial to fashion retailers, but less interested in technologies that improve the customer experience, such as AR and VR. Besides, the extent of in-store technological innovation varies across market segments, with premium brands such as Tommy Hilfiger experimenting with in-store technology, medium brands such as Nike, spread technology which is validated as useful, and mass-market stores are slower to adopt new technology. And they believed that it is essential to utilise digital technology for omnichannel retailing to enhance the customer shopping experience.

Ogunjimi et al. conducted a qualitative study using Soft System Methodology to investigate the impact of smart mirrors on enhancing the customer experience by interviewing, observing and documenting fieldwork in the top five physical fashion shops in the UK by market value [41]. They found that fitting room conditions have a significant impact on consumer purchasing decisions and innovations such as the introduction of smart mirrors can increase customer satisfaction as well as promote purchases. They noted that half of the respondents in the survey preferred to shop online, but some expressed a preference for a hybrid shopping style, in which they learned about an item in a physical shop before placing an order online. Moreover, they concluded that the use of digital technology in fashion physical shops can optimise the service process and improve the quality of service for customers.

4.2. Exploring the needs and characteristics of Gen Z consumers

Moriarty et al. illustrated the significance of personalised experiences in a report of quantitative research by Mintel [11]. Consumers are now placing more emphasis on personalisation and are looking for brands to provide customised products and services based on their demands and feedback to satisfy their psychology of experiencing something different, therefore the direction of brands needs to be inspired by consumer feedback for innovation [11].

In terms of social social interaction, 62% of British Gen Z consumers value social interaction in the shopping process, and they choose to meet their friends offline on weekends [42]. In purchasing decisions, 48% of Gen Z consumers in the UK are influenced by their friends, especially in fashion [43].

And Gen Z in the UK values instant feedback and digital experiences. Passport found through quantitative research that the majority of Gen Z consumers in the UK enjoy using digital technology [44]. They are used to socialising online or offline, are more inclined to visit shopping malls, want to see or try products before they buy, and seek instant satisfaction, while they are also willing to pay for digital experiences and new products [45]. In terms of brand engagement, Gen Z consumers in the UK expect brands to increase engagement and involve them in the design creativity and sustainable approach of the brand [46]. They have lower rates of interaction with brands, but there are higher rates of interaction among younger age groups [47].

Regarding brand loyalty and price sensitivity: Gen Z consumers in the UK are less brand loyal and are more willing to try new items and services [47]. Also, Only one in five Gen z regularly look for low cost products, compared to around one in four for every other generation in the UK [23]. They are the less price-sensitive of the generations towards products, and they value quality and personalised experiences more [45].

In terms of shopping behaviours: Gen Z consumers in the UK spend more on special days, but they are also conscious of saving [43]. Smith, with data from a quantitative study by Mintel, stated that nearly half of Gen Z's perceptions of fashion are influenced by their friends, and they require the recognition of their friends [21]. McDonald reported through quantitative research on footwear

purchases that Gen Z are the main buyers of trainers, with half of Gen Z having purchased trainers in the past year [48].

In addition, Gen Z in the UK are discerning consumers. Hodgson et al. found in a quantitative study at Euromonitor International that they are more selective about the products they buy, they lack capital but expect high quality from brands and products [9]. As shown in Figure 2, the following values are valued for shopping in fashion physical shops in Gen Z: valuing personalised products and services, valuing social interaction in shopping, enjoying innovative digital technology, expecting to interact with brands, focusing on the quality of products and services, referring to the opinions of friends, and being critical of the product.

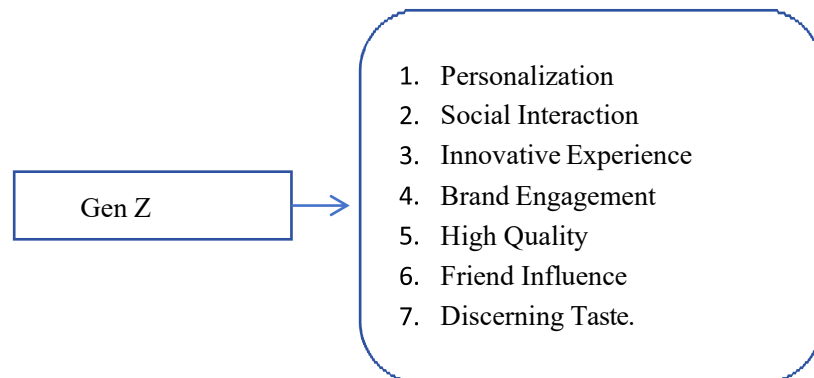


Figure 2: Gen Z values in fashion physical store

4.3. Discuss the characteristics of a successful digital experience

Gen Z consumers in the UK have distinctive demands and preferences in terms of the digital experience within the fashion physical shop, which can be explained and satisfied with the theories of omnichannel retailing, TAM, and CX. Firstly, the omnichannel retail model is crucial in satisfying the needs of Gen Z because of its ability to integrate physical shops and online channels. According to Alexander and Kent, fashion retailers are more interested in digital technologies associated with customer profiles and accessibility, including the use of data analytics and personalised recommendations to provide a personalised shopping experience [40]. Secondly, according to TAM theory, the attitudes and adoption behaviours of consumers towards digital technologies are influenced by their familiarity and ease of use. Therefore, fashion brands are required to ensure that digital technologies are user-friendly, and provide training and support to reduce anxiety in consumers, thereby increasing their acceptance of digital experiences within physical shops. Thirdly, the theory of CX emphasises the criticality of the customer experience, with research by Ogunjimi et al. suggesting that innovations such as smart mirrors can increase customer satisfaction and drive purchases [41]. This digital experience can be achieved by increasing interactivity, providing instant feedback and personalised suggestions to meet the needs of Gen Z consumers. Furthermore, according to Moriarty et al, personalised experience is significant for modern consumers, therefore brands should provide customised products and services based on consumer needs and feedback to set the direction of brand development [11]. Social interaction is highly valued among Gen Z consumers, who choose to gather with friends offline and be influenced by their friends during the shopping process. This can be satisfied by social interaction experiences in physical shops, such as providing digital screens to display products recommended by friends. Finally, Gen Z is less brand loyal and more willing to try new items and services. Brands need to constantly innovate and provide engaging digital experiences, while they are less sensitive to product prices and value quality and personalised experiences more. Therefore, brands can appeal to them by offering high-quality digital experiences and personalised services, rather than just competing on price. In conclusion, meeting

the digital experience needs of Gen Z consumers in the UK requires a combination of theories such as omnichannel retailing, TAM, and CX in order to provide a personalised, social, and enjoyable shopping experience, while remaining innovative to appeal to this group.

5. Conclusion, limitations and recommendations

In this study, we delve into the expectations and preferences of British Gen Z consumers for digital experiences within fashion offline shops, and explain and address these requirements through omnichannel retailing, TAM and CX theories. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and references to the latest research, we come up with the following key findings and results: Firstly, the omnichannel retail model is a valuable tool for meeting the customer's preferences for digital experiences in fashion physical stores. The study found that Gen Z consumers want to integrate physical stores and online channels for a more comprehensive, personalised and convenient shopping experience. Besides, UK fashion physical shops are deficient in technological references for digital experience, which means that there is a need to UK fashion physical shops to adopt digital technologies actively, including data analytics and personalised recommendations, in order to fulfill customers' needs.

Thirdly, this study emphasises the significance of the customer experience for Gen Z. Through secondary research, this study found that the introduction of a digital experience in a fashion physical shop can increase customer satisfaction and consequently promote purchasing behaviour. This digital experience can be in the aspects of improving interactivity, providing instant feedback or giving personalised recommendations to meet the demands of Gen Z consumers. In addition, this study mentions the importance of personalised experiences for the modern consumer and that brands should offer customised products and services based on consumer needs and feedback. In addition, this study highlights the significance of offline social interactions for Gen Z, who enjoy shopping with friends and will always be influenced by them. Finally, the study point to Gen Z's low brand loyalty and high value on innovation, quality and personalised experiences. Brands need to continue to innovate and offer high-quality digital experiences and personalised services, rather than just competing on price, to attract this group of consumers.

However, there are some limitations to this study. As most of the research was focussed on the London or UK market, this may lead to geographical limitations in the findings. Since consumers from different cultures may have different shopping habits and preferences, the results may not be applicable to Gen Z consumers in other countries or regions. Different research methods and data sources were used for this study, including qualitative and quantitative research, observations, and interviews, which may lead to inconsistencies between the results and may have an impact on the synthesis of the analyses. Also, due to the rapid development of digital technology, the latest technologies and trends may not have been fully captured.

Therefore, this study has the following recommendations for fashion physical shops in the UK market. Firstly, provide a personalised experience for Gen Z, especially for sports footwear products. Fashion brands should offer personalised products to Gen Z. Physical shops can use historical data analysis and customer feedback to know their preferences and then offer personalised products and services. There are also methods to personalise the experience such as, product customisation, packaging customisation, special offers for members, exclusive fashion events, etc. Secondly, because Gen Z has a demand for social interaction, fashion stores can introduce social interaction elements in their physical shops. For example, organising social events offline, providing social media sharing opportunities, using in-store AR treasure hunts to engage customers to explore the shop, and providing AI shopping assistants. Thirdly, fashion physical shops can explore innovative digital technologies. Gen z in the UK is keen for new experiences, and brands should continue to explore innovative digital technologies to keep offering unique digital experiences to boost

consumption. For example, consider methods such as introducing smart mirrors in fitting rooms, offering 3D printed clothing in-store and opening a digital experience pop-up shop.

Besides, use an omnichannel retail strategy to give Gen Z a seamless shopping process. Moreover, to increase brand engagement, brands should actively interact with Gen Z. For example, encourage Gen Z to participate in offline activities such as design ideas and sustainability to increase the interaction rate between brands and consumers. Finally, brands should place more emphasis on product quality and put effort on offer a high-quality customer experience.

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