Fashion space and place: convergence of consumer experience

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to assess the accessibility of online technologies and interactivity in fashion stores, define how these are applied and their implications for fashion space. Such spaces can be minimal but also boundless, increasingly co-created rather than contested. "Momenting the Memento" calls for an exploration of the relationship between these dimensions as it seeks the boundaries of fashion in time and space, and to find inspirational opportunities to reactivate humans, society and industry. In this, space to be welcomed as a metaphor for the discovery of new territories.

Literature review

The concept of the 'moment' is found in Lefebvre's (1991) spatiology and his explanation of interdependent 'moments' of space as a generative process of social relations. Moments have a certain constancy over time, with elements common to a number of instants, events and situations. Dialectically, space is explained as both a flow and temporarily fixed thing, and the production of space by the mobile material flows of commodities, information, capital and money (Weller 2013). A moment creates a situation although it is more than situated; space needs to be understood in the context of the mode of production of a particular epoch. Lefebvre is concerned with retaining an abstract sense of time alongside examinations of 'live time'. His conceptualisation recognises that Cartesian space is calculable and controllable, consequently enabling social and technological domination. Space is the ultimate locus and medium of struggles, and therefore is political, demonstrating instants of dramatic change and disruption to everyday life (Elden 2004).

Space, in this conceptualization, expresses specific representations of the interaction between the social relations of production and reproduction, which serve to maintain social relations in a state of co-existence and cohesion. This gives rise to a "conceptual triad" of conceived -perceived- lived space, defined as representations of space, representational spaces, and spatial practice (Kerr 1993). Representations of space are official spaces codified by knowledge of experts, conceived by physical spaces and their architecture. Representational space is perceived through signs and images of its users and inhabitants. Spatial practice is the third moment, enacted in the everyday lives of embodied actors. Moreover, as a moment of space, place is wherever everyday life is situated (Merrifield 1993):

> "In Lefebvre's terms, a fashion event is a perceived space where the idea and image of fashion become a unifying ideology that brings garment, cosmetic,

beauty, footwear, personal accessories and personal services sectors into a single frame. The event defines physical and social networks of fashion people—of retailers, wholesalers, importers and manufacturers; designers; intellectual property lawyers, management consultants and accountants; marketing, events and media specialists; logistics organisers and various intermediaries" (Weller 2013).

Conceived, perceived and lived space, as representations, representational and enacted spaces provide a valuable framework in which to examine fashion. Lefebvre's spatiology provides the basis to examine the spatial processes of the physical store itself, codified by the brand, and its representation: its perception by networks of users, suppliers, designers and commentators. Both are implicated in the continuing growth of fashion through online and social media and the opportunities to contest the role of the store as online connectivity, e-commerce and social interaction. The social processes of perceived moments of space are found in fashion brands located in stores and shopping centres. Into these are inserted, or exist in parallel, online places and spaces of the virtual world (Rosenblum and Rowen 2012).

This conceptualisation of space can be extended by the application of the servicescape theory (Bitner 1992), which hypothesises the contribution of the physical setting in customer and employee interaction. Specifically, its environmental stimuli have three dimensions: ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, and signs, symbols, and artefacts (Hightower et al. 2002; Kotler 1973). Moreover, the store environment accounts for consumers "being in the marketplace", and their involvement in the production of products and services. This approach recognises the symbol dominated and media-cultural environment of the late twentieth century (Gottdiener 1998) in which service designed environments define consumption processes and meanings (Peñaloza 1998). From this perspective, a servicescape can be understood as "a material and symbolic environment that consumers build with marketplace products, images and messages" (Sherry 1998 p.112).

The symbolic environment with its visual, and non-physical dimensions is expanded through the conceptualisation of the brandscape (Kent 2003; Klingmann 2007; Ponsonby-McCabe 2006; von Borries 2003; Sherry, 1998). The brandscape transforms the brand into a location (Riewoldt 2002) in which experimentation with creative ideas and innovative spatial concepts is crucial to adequately counter prevailing notions of place in the context of globalisation (Klingman 2007).

The implications for the fashion store are the recognition that boundaries between images and material forms are obscure; and that they define the process of merger between building and sign, decoration and architecture (Klingmann 2007). This approach foregrounds the significance of spaces and surfaces, which tend to be marginalised by their very intangibility in other definitions of the physical environment. In brandscape environments, experiences become identical with the message of a given brand (von Borries 2003). They take the form of events as well as environments, and include exteriors or interiors, and which communicate a brand through its environment and create strong associations with a brand by experience (Bonn et al. 2007; Ursprung 2006).

These three perspectives form the basis of the research, and the proposition that the physical environments of fashion space can be re-conceptualised through social, interactive and intangible experience of online media and technologies.

Methodology

The research was undertaken in three phases, an initial review of literature including technology reports and surveys, an ethnographic study of fashion stores in the West End of London, and thirdly twenty-six in-depth interviews undertaken with consumers to explore their use and experience of mobile and store-bound technologies in fashion shopping.

First, the researchers carried out an extensive review of media reports on innovations in physical fashion stores using trade and academic databases and journals. They create an initial categorisation of different ways of integrate the 'physical' and the 'digital' that served as a guide to the non-participant observation.

Observations were undertaken in selected mid-market fashion retailers in three central London locations. 106 fashion stores were visited in London (see Appendix). Fashion stores form an important and yet relatively underexplored retail sector, by comparison with grocery retailing and other sectors. Moreover they are characterized by design-led differentiation strategies in which the environment contributes to the brand. Flagship and other prestigious stores act as beacons or showcases for fashion brands in particular (Kent and Brown, 2009). Consequently these retailers might be expected to lead in the development of new technologies to engage, or entertain their customers. Interviews took place with a purposive sample of male and female consumers aged 20-34. The transcripts were coded and analysed with NVIVO.

In servicescapes research Bitner (1992) records that a variety of methods will be appropriate. Direct observation of environmental conditions may be most appropriate in some cases, for example, in researching the effect of facility layout options on customer interaction patterns. The application of direct observation methods has gained acceptance among Consumer Culture theorists (Belk Wallendorf and Sherry 1989) and applied to consumption environments. Interviews are held to be an important element of ethnographic research, extending the approach to 'how things work' in field settings (Watson 2011) and as a basis of contextual ethnography (Healy et al. 2007).

Findings

The rapid adoption of touchscreen smartphones and tablets by consumers suggests that retailers might develop ways to interact with consumers through these devices and that 'screens' or surfaces in general, have an increasing level of acceptance as an interface.

The illusion of space is created by instore screens and interactive mirrors combined with the feeling derived from many different items and products. The most evident form of consumer-facing communication technology was found in the use of

conventional videoscreens and light boxes with illuminated images. The impact of these forms was dependent on the size of screen, the use of moving image and their location in the store layout.

The opportunity for consumers to directly interact and engage with the retailer was through touchscreen terminals, less often ipads, and smartphones, primarily as a look-up facility for merchandise availability. Free in-store wifi was provided as a valued service in a number of instances. The provision of click and collect facilities was not as pervasive as expected, and tended to be a very functional operation. In general, it was found that department stores are distinctive in the way they use technology to create social space. In part this is due to their size, typically spread over a number of floors, with large spaces on each that provide marginal areas, surfaces and viewing points in which to locate interactive devices and screens.

Interaction

The research demonstrated the extension of social networks through online connectivity to build relationships, supplement or replace human service and assist in overcoming consumer anxiety of shopping. The use of technologies can facilitate human closeness. Online social interaction extended into the storespace, mostly through photo exchanges primarily with instagram, but also twitter, blogs, and email , connecting the social network to friends and family. In some cases interactivity is invited by the store to create memorable, engaging experiences, for example through the use of quizzes.

A particular example of innovative technology for social interaction is the "Selfridge Denim Studio and Jeanious Bar", an interactive table designed to entertain and educate consumers about all things denim. The bar has horizontal and vertical dimensions, the horizontal table is interactive, enabling consumers to browse different jeans through its touchscreen, while the vertical one shows the chosen styles. Moreover, the table connects with social networks in real time, so consumers can share photos with friends, chat and ask their opinions.

Figure 1: Selfridges Jeanious Bar

Burberry and NikeTown demonstrate consistent approaches to the convergence of intangible, interactive and social online experiences in their stores. Burberry's store

design, inspired by their online site, combines digital theatre, magic mirrors, and ipads carried by shop assistants. NikeTown is a point of reference in the use of technology for hedonic and utilitarian purposes. Touchscreens provides technical product information, mobile apps enable interaction with social networks and the runner lab, enables individualised customisation of running shoes. For some respondents, they make life easy and exciting, stimulating the consumer in an environment where it's fun to "play with a device like a kid". Together, they create intimate, personalised spaces, reducing the impersonality of the large store environment.

Sensory environment
Retailers can offer a superior experience in store, using the materiality of store design and multisensorial stimulation in order to create an experience that cannot be replicated online, and this is evident in the case of Anthropologie and Chanel. Hackett has created an immersive store experience that adopts technologies to support brand values and brand heritage that are presented in a carefully designed and predominantly male space. The club-style experience is achieved through the provision of wifi to enjoy the experience from a comfortable Chesterfield sofa or ipads for kids to be entertained while parents are shopping.

Screens contribute to the visual sensory environment and convey a myriad of brand cues by showing the advertising campaigns for the brand, video images of collections on fashion catwalks and for a larger number of retailers single images promote specific pieces (designs) from their current collections. They can show how the products are handmade to convey the luxury element of the brand: respondents were aware of their capacity for story-telling. The hedonistic content can be customised to communicate young and creative brand values. Videos, of which the Pradasphere is a significant example, but more commonly videos of celebrities are perceived to contribute to the glamour of the store. Moving between physical and virtual spaces enables consumers to access the brand's website, and through this merger, to catch their imagination.

Figure 2 Screens: Desigual (left), Niketown (right)

Time

Window displays for example Adidas's, catch the moment with a sense of the dynamic and interactive, to entice the consumer into the store. The lure of technology can contribute to a short visit, a pop-in, and the absorption of a few minutes in time-constrained day. More generally, the fashion shopping journey for some respondents was anxiously rushed, with a need for more time to make better decisions. However, through online interaction before and during the shopping journey, their experiences can become more carefree and timeless. Connectivity of consumers, fashion media and the brand becomes faster and easier through online media and personal interactive devices. Access to online media compacts time by providing immediacy in the shopping experience: searching online can provide real-time information. Other respondents reflected the moment in the need for instant gratification through customised services.

Wayfinding and navigating a store is a second, more utilitarian aspect of temporality. Wayfinding around complex spaces in a large store can be literally worrying but also frustratingly time consuming. Personalised information through online connectivity and instore devices can overcome these problems. The research consistently points to the importance of finding the right product, size and colour and minimising the time it takes to access it by shop staff.

Conclusion

These findings suggest that there are two main dimensions in which the 'real' and 'virtual' merge in the store. Firstly, an Experiential Dimension in which the creation of a superior shopping experience is the most important element that define the stores' space. In this way retailers offer a physical experience that cannot be replicated online, through a shopping environment that enables consumers to feel they are engaged with the brand, which presents the brand as "premium" experience.

Secondly, a Virtual Dimension defines the digital experience which comes to the store and where consumers can find a similar environment to the virtual channel. These retailers strive towards an integration of the physical and digital channels with the objective of offering a totally integrated experience of the brand; they make an extensive use of technology in the store to facilitate space as a social process.

A mediated brand dimension integrates the experience of spaces in the building, the building itself in its location and the non-physical environment: the flows of people and virtual worlds that envelope and permeate the store. Through these dimensions, retail stores demonstrate the use of technologies to implement brand experience and engagement in-store and point to the ways in which the physical experience is changing.

In Lefebvre's terms, representational fashion space is perceived through the convergence of physical and online signs and images of its users. Spatial practice enacted in the everyday lives of embodied actors is evident in new ways, as it merges in present time the lived physical and virtual world of consumers. It demonstrates the evolution of fashion stores as converged experiential spaces and moves the focus of fashion to engagement and co-creation. Thus, the places and spaces of consumption create bridges from the past and present to the future, across which fashion and its consumers travel.

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Appendix

Table of stores and technological facilities

Store	Click and Collect	Wifi	Interactive media	Other
All Saints	No – very clear about that.	No	Interactive projection onto a wall maybe to do with checkout, works, with Bluetooth (see photo) A large screen with staff look-up function	
And Other stories	No, do have online function	No	No	Card at till provided, with connectivity details. Store is part of H&M.
Anthropologie	No. Assistant suggests ringing up store, pay for	Yes, free. Links straight through to	No	Store design includes "living wall' of green plants.

	it and they put it to one side	webpage. Popup invites you to subscribe		
Austin Reed	Yes. Available on first floor	No	No	Store used to be Aquascutum's site – now a small section in the men's formal section on first floor
Banana Republic	No. Systems are quite separate. Can deal with returns in store	No	No	Personal shopping service offered with interactive online details
Barbour	Yes, small sign that it's available in the window	No	No	
Benetton	No. A different set up online	Free wifi with intro screen but not to Benetton site	No	
Brooks	No	No		In last 2 months organised online ordering service. Before it came from US with duty problems
Calvin Klein		No	No	
Hawes and Curtis	Yes. Orderer only has to come in with ID and card that paid for goods. Many people order from their office and that's successful. General discussion about the range of shirts	Not asked	No	V small shop selling shirts
Clarks	Yes, pick it up from till instore	No	No	
Coach	No, but available in US. Online ordering through Mail Order to BondSt. Look it up online, order it through to Bond St and pick it up there	Not asked	No	2 floors, mostly leather goods but jackets and outer jackets too.
Cos	No. 2 systems are quite separate. If you order online you have to return it online, not to store	No	No	
Desigual	No online range is different to store range and managed separately	No	Video screen inside front door.	
Esprit	No. You can order online and have it delivered to home	No	No	
Folie Folie	Not asked	Not asked	Video screen at back of store	
French Connection	Yes. You have to clearly specify the store when you order online as there is another FC in Oxford St. Pick up from the till	No	No	

Furla	Not asked	Not asked	2 video screens behind main counter opp front door	
Gant	Yes. Available 2-4 days, bring in email receipt and card you paid with. Stock is kept downstairs you collect at till on ground floor	No	2 very small video screens above tills on either side of ground floor	
Gap	No. Assistant said that they weren't John Lewis and did not have the resources to offer the service	No	No	Person in front of me at till used phone for something….
Guess	No. It does offer opportunity to buy online and get delivered to home. If you cant find product in right size they can order from store from warehouse to home. The store stock and online stock aren't the same so they cant swop them over	No	Little screen	
H&M	No	No	No	
Hackett	No, online and store don't match up, sometime in the future	Yes - free	One large video screen on stairs	
Hilfiger	No	No	No	
Hobbs	Yes, but not at Regent St as they don't have enough stock room. You order from a store from a drop down menu of available stores. 3-4 days for delivery. Go to store and till with ID and payment card			
Hugo Boss	No. Range is quite separate online: Stock is managed from and comes in from Germany. Quite distinct. Assistant suggested looking up online and seeing if it was available instore and they would look up and see if it was available or at another store	No	No	
J. Crew	Not asked	No but you can pick up Anthropologie from over the road	No	Brochure indicates plenty of ways of getting in touch with them
Jaeger	Yes. For menswear you pick it up at the till on lower ground floor. Can	No	No	

	order things for you in the store.			
Lacoste	No	No	No	
Levi's	No	No	No	
Lewin	Yes. Order online and pick up instore. Or somehow order online in the store itself.	No	No	All their trousers are unfinished so they need to be tailored
Liberty	Yes. 3rd floor collection point.	Yes, register and then it starts on their webpage	No	
Longchamp	No "they have too many things" they say	No	Yes, 4 video screens by staircase	
Mango	Yes, allow 4 days to pick up and collect from cash desk on ground floor	No	Yes, screen at back of store opposite front door	
Massimo Dutti	Yes. 3-5 days collect instore	No	No	Long and narrow store. Interesting Art Deco features upstairs
Michael Kors	No	No	Yes, large video screen on back wall	
Moss Bros	Yes, order online and pick up at store	No	No	Small store, menswear
Reiss	Yes, return to store if it does not fit you. Advantage over buying online	Yes, screen asks for details before you log in, name, email, gender and tick additional information to be sent to you and then you can log in	No	
The Style	No	Not asked	2 screen in basement, 2 on ground floor. Window	Dutch brand
Superdry	Yes. From till in store, simply specify store online	No but picks up Burberry next door	Large video screen behind till at back of store	
Ted Baker	Yes	No	No	'Stay connected' card can be picked up at till
Timberland	No. You can order instore for delivery at home	No	No	
Uniqlo	No. 80-90% of the range is the same in store and online. 2 stockholdings. But they are not fully integrated so what you order online may not be available instore	Yes, and can be picked up outside Gilly Hicks over the road.	Yes. Screen on staircase to do with their social commitment but id not scroll into anything else though.	

			Staircase changes colour	
Zara	Yes. Specify the store online and pick up from till, for example on the ground floor	No	No	
Oxford St				
Adidas	No	Yes, input user name and password and sign in	One screen showing football video on ground floor	No video screens on first floor for running and tennis (takes up selling space?)
Debenhams	Yes. Clearly signposted by the escalator on each floor, to third floor	No	One on ground floor, and another large screen by furniture (see photo). Each floor has an interactive screen where you can look up stock	Newly made over. 5 floors. Very bright ground floor. You walk around the central well and brands are arranged around the edge of the floor. Works well with womenswear, with branded concession clearly identified, not so distinctive with childrens. Glass roof in the style of John Lewis, which has more stock range and depth
Disney	No. assistant offered click and reserve. You ring up and they can hold it for 24 hours	No	Quite a lot going on. On the ground floor there's a cyclindrical vivid screen. On the left hand side, a magical ice kingdom to advertise "Frozen" film. There's a small screen in the corner. Downstairs there's an interactive device, where you put your on top of it and pass it across to havea ninteractive game. In the corner, a Toy Story area with a very large screen running the film	Music is from Disney films – some going back to Chitty Chitty Bangbang. Overall effect is escape and the magic kingdom
Forever 21	No. Online ordering and delivery to home	No	No	Low cost fashion and limited store design

French Collection	Yes	No	Large video screen and one other smaller one above the cash till which features the current ad. Ground floor has moving cameos in a serie of 6 or so small screens	More design features in store than in Regent St.
Gap	Not asked – see Regent st.	No	Video screen on right of front door advertising Gap foundation for musical talent	More designed than Regent St NB GAP London (sub0brand) and overriding sense of navy, denim and grey going back to casualwear roots). The mannequins are marked with different shapes of jeans (slim, easy, skinny etc.)
H&M	No	No	Large light box behind the counter in menswear in lower ground floor	
John Lewis	Yes. At the collection point on the ground floor. Delivery by 2.00 the next day and exceptionally 1 day later.	Yes	Yes but limited	
M&S	Yes.	There is instore wifi, with variable reception (I couldn't log in)	Catwalk video in window. Interactive ordering points on each floor. Sales assistant has ipad which kept losing connection	
Reiss	Yes, could be as quick as one day , and maximum of three days and they'll hold the goods for 2 weeks and they'll sned you an email before sending it back to stack again. Pick it up at any till	No	One video screen on a column next to staircase	
Selfridges	Yes, ground floor near car park exit and very clearly signposted	No although there did appear to be concessions' wifi connections which were password protected	A limited range of technologies mens formal wear small video screens with different brands; not consistently used. Mens footwear had a moving list of	

			brands (see video clip)	
JD	No	No	Large video screen in shop window. Tickertape running above shoe display (See Selfridges photo)	
Vision Express	No	No	2 screens, quite small to left and right of main window advertising Tom Ford with a series of images and changing messages	
River Island	Yes. Takes 2-4 days for delivery. They email when its availably and they can also order in store and deliver to home.	No	No	Distinctive store VM being installed 13th Jan.
Zara	Not checked	No	Ground, lower ground and 1st floor. Video screens at top of escalator and on ground floor in the corner	
Uniqlo Oxford St.	Not checked	Yes, sign in and register	Screens at top of escalator. No coloured staircase as in Regent St (escalator rather than stairs)	Jeans cut (slim etc.) displayed on leg shapes on mannequins similar to Gap
Next	Yes. 3-4 day delivery if ordered instore can be picked up next day	No	No	
Bond street				
Tods	No	No	No	
Mc Queen	No	No	No	
Dolce and Gabana	No	No	Music played is globally uploaded from italy	
Gina	No	No	No	
DAKS	No	Yes	Video screen shows fashion show	Ipads being introduced; no online store
Gucci	Yes	No	Video screen shows fashion show, information about craftsmanship etc	Ipads available;A big internal omnichannel project

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YSL	No	No	No	Ipads being introduced
Acne, (Dover street)	No	No	No	2 ipads; store to home order
McQ, (Dover street)	Yes	No	Yes	ipads, network problems at time of visit
Dover street market	No	Yes	No	ipads
Jimmy Choo Mens, (Dover street)	No	No	No	
Wolf and Badger, (Dover street)	No	No	No	
Whistles. (Dover street)	Yes	Yes	Video screen shows fashion show	ipads
Vanessa Bruno, (Dover street)	No	No	Video screen shows fashion show	
Prada	No	No	No	
Aspreys	No	No	No	
Bulgari	No	No	No	
Piaget	No	No	No	
Harry Winston	No	No	No	
Boodles	No	No	No	ipads; They are looking into implanting chips into jewellery
Tiffanys	No	No	No	ipads withdrawn
Chanel Jewellery	No	No	No	
DKNY	No	Yes	Yes, touchscreen with infoand access to content	1 ipad
Dior	No	No	Video screen shows fashion show	ipads
Camper	No	No	Videoscreen showing mood videos	
Akris	No	No	Video screen shows fashion show	
Max Mara	No	No	Video screen shows fashion show	plans to refurbish in 2015
Joseph	No	No	No	
Ralph Lauren	No	No	Video screen shows fashion show, information about craftsmanship etc	1 ipad

Louis Vuitton		Yes	4 Video screens shows fashion show, information about craftsmanship etc, plus 1 touchscreen for customisation of bags	Yes, 1, but all shop assistants have 1 I phone
Ferragamo	No	No	Video screen shows fashion show , but was broken	ipads
Chanel	No	No	Video screen shows fashion show	ipads: one per section
Loro Piana	No	No	No	No
Michael Kors	No	No	Video screen shows fashion show	ipads
Burberry	Yes	Yes	Video screen shows fashion show, simple ones	ipads for every shop assisant. They have a digital advicer in store
Hermes	Yes	No	Video screen shows fashion show	ipads
Isabel Marant	No	No	No	ipads
Jimmy Choo women	No	No	No	
Covent Garden				
American Apparel	No	No	Nothing	
Urban Outfitters	No but online sales returned to store	Yes	No	
Nike	No	No	1 video screen explaining fuel band, 1 video screen for sport swatch, 1 computer to custom build Nike ID, 1 touchscreen table for fuel band, but does not work 100% and nobody is using any of the devices.	
Diesel	Yes	No	3 installed I pads at a bar with the Diesel app on it - connection is very slow	ipads; No online purchases return in store
Fabiano	No	No	No	

Dr. Martens	No	No	2 Video screens showing how to customise your Dr. Marten in a cool fast paced visual style,	
Mango	No	No	2 screens on Pillars not working	
Speedo	No	No	Screen outside and one inside, the screen outside visually promotes the speedo app	