

Being-with-staff-in-a-technology-enabled-fashion-store

From Gen Z's interpersonal experiences with staff to integration of human, technology and the store environment

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Nottingham Trent university
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Research Title:

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Abstract

In the digital age the fashion retailing sector has witnessed the transformation of conventional fashion stores into technology-enabled spaces. However, whilst the store environment and technology have been overly-studied, it has tended to neglect the human aspect of the store as an amalgamation of people, technology and store environment. The purpose of this study is to explore consumers' interaction with staff in technology-enabled fashion stores, in a daily life-world context, to seek how people, technology and the store environment can be better integrated. The study uses servicescape theory, which is synthesised through two phases that transform it from a psychological perspective into a phenomenological, individual-centric one. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was employed based on Heidegger's existential philosophy. Phenomenological interviews were conducted to collect data centred on Gen Z consumers' interpersonal experiences with staff within a technology-enabled fashion store environment. The interpretation of data and the presentation of findings use an innovative approach that adheres to Heidegger's philosophy. A four-layers, comprehensive framework emerged from the findings to illustrate the interpersonal experience and its formation by bringing to light the intentional structure that has already been operative in consumers' everyday patronage of fashion stores. In doing so, this study reveals the essence of consumers' in-store interaction, thereby forming an enhanced understanding of consumers' being-in-relation to staff and things in a technologically-enabled servicescape context against the backdrop of individuals' everyday life. Intra-temporally, this approach provides insights into the improved integration of services provided by staff, technology and other environmental components for enhanced in-store experience, while inter-temporally, it reveals the subtleness and elusiveness of consumer-to-staff (human-to-human level) communication as well as the position of a fashion store in Gen Z consumers' everyday life. As an innovatory, non-psychological approach aiming to understand consumer everyday experience, this study integrates Heidegger's philosophy into the field of fashion marketing. As such, it provides an alternative methodological worldview for fashion business studies, with broader implications for practice and theory.

Keywords: Fashion marketing; Omnichannel; Servicescape; Lived experience; Gen Z consumers; Retail staff; Existentialism; Hermeneutic phenomenology

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Chapter 1 Introduction

In this digital age the boundary between physical and digital world is being blurred. Artificial intelligence, cloud computing, Web3.0 as well as the ubiquitous smart devices have rapidly changed the way human-beings' communication and interaction. This also affects the landscapes of fashion including its retailing sector. To the emergence and evolution of e-commerce built upon communication and information technology since the beginning of 21 century, the reaction in the fashion retailing sector is the implementation of omnichannel strategy (Rigby, 2011; Blázquez, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2015; Alexander, 2021; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2022), an idea that is forcedly developed by business researchers before cross-channel strategies were finalised due to the disruptive arrival of the smart device (Bèzes, 2019). This strategy aims to integrate online, offline and mobile channels (Verhoef et al., 2015; Le and Nguyen-Le, 2020) and the traditional fashion store is designated for the presentation of this integration to consumers (Alexander and Blázquez Cano, 2020) via smart retailing (Bèzes, 2019). As an innovatory concept for undertaking the omnichannel strategy (Pantano and Timmermans, 2014), a brick-and-mortar fashion store becomes a technology-enabled space with in-store technologies, smart devices and WIFI available (Pantano and Priporas 2016; Pantano et al. 2017; Hagberg et al., 2017). In such environment, a transformative kind of consumer (in-store) experience becomes possible due to the influence of technology (Bonetti and Perry, 2017; Kim et al., 2020).

The vital position of the concept 'consumer experience' for firms' competitiveness and management has long been acknowledged in marketing and consumer literature (e.g. Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 2011; Carù and Cova, 2003; Homburg, et al. 2015; Dias et al., 2016; Waqas et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2022; Pine, 2023). However, it has caused an uneven growth of consumer-experience-related research in past decades leading to diverse perspectives on this concept (Dube and Helkkula, 2015; Jaakkola et al., 2015; Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023). The fragmentation results from both the complexity of the concept 'experience' per se (Carù and Cova, 2003; Verhoef et al. 2009; Jantzen, 2013) and the divergent definition of consumer experience (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). Apart from those dissonances, another patent issue is that there are multiple terms that are utilised to express this concept in contemporary marketing studies. They are applied interchangeably by many scholars such as 'customer experience'; 'service experience'; 'consumer experience'; 'consumption experience' and 'brand experience'. For example, Klaus and Maklan (2012) and Jaakkola et al. (2015) view 'customer experience' and 'service experience' as synonyms, alongside many review papers in the heading utilise either 'customer', or 'consumer', but the content has covered studies of both (e.g. Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Lipkin, 2016; Arici et al., 2022; Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023; Wadhwani and Jain, 2023).

However, other scholars attempt to clarify the difference. Heinonen and Strandvik (2015) insist on utilising the term 'customer' in their study as they assert that a successful business presupposes that there must be customers of a firm. Becker (2018) points out that these terminologies such as 'customer experience'; 'service experience' and 'brand experience' convey a dyadic standpoint since they chiefly focus on one's response to a specific firm-controlled element, alongside Vargo and Lusch (2008) remind that the term 'customer' is too easy to be considered as the counterpart of a producer role. By comparison, 'consumption experience' or 'consumer experience' imply a broader view through the foci of consumer's activities in their daily life (Becker, 2018). The historical root of the standpoint of consumption-related experience lies in the research stream led

by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and Holbrook (1999). Admittedly, from the perspective of political economy, the application of either ‘customer’ or ‘consumer’ is for distinguishing the commercial relationship between consumers and producers (Warde, 2015). Yet, more recently, the broader view has been spotlighted by service dominant (S-D) logic calling for a non-dichotomous perspective towards business and consumer activities (Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Vargo and Lusch, 2016; Vargo et al., 2020). Furthermore, some researchers accept both and utilise them under different circumstances. For example, Schallehn et al. (2019) adopt the term ‘customer’ when referring to subjects who interact with the firm and brand directly, while adopting the term “consumer” when referring to subjects in a wider range as the ‘potential customer’. In other words, a customer is one who has made a transaction but may not be the one who actually consumes the product and service.

Moreover, Roggeveen and Rosengren (2022) go further by advocating establishing a “*human experience focus*” in marketing and consumer research realms. Indeed, from the broadest angle, as long as human beings exist, they need to consume something to keep alive, namely all human beings are consumers. From a semantic perspective, ‘consumer’ means the subject who wastes, destroys and uses up things, meaning that use, other than possession, is primary (Warde, 2015). For the realm of fashion retailing, people in everyday life patronise a physical fashion store is no longer only for the actual transaction of a specific products, but they use the store environment in their own ways as well such as relaxing, making purchase, doing social interactions with others and so forth (e.g. Johnstone, 2012; Spence et al., 2014; Hanks et al., 2017; Fuentes et al., 2017; Alexander and Cano, 2018; Alexander, 2019; Siregar and Kent, 2019). Thus, this research adopts a broader perspective by applying the term ‘consumer’, while *genuinely* acknowledge the experience of consumers as *human experience*. To mirror this principle, the phrase ‘human (shopping/consumption) experience’ also appears based on the specific context in this thesis. The emphasis being placed on the term ‘genuinely’, alongside the Roggeveen and Rosengren (2022)’s advocacy, imply that there are extant marketing and consumers studies that do not treat consumers as human. Consequently, it is insufficient to simply change the term from ‘consumer/customer’ to ‘human’. The crux of this situation lies in the predominant impact of Cartesianism in literature and this is one of the major tasks this study is going to overcome in its Methodology Chapter.

The context of the studied consumer/human in-store (interpersonal) experience is located in the fashion sector so that the fashion store environment forms the focal context of this study. Fashion has its own philosophy (Craik, 2009) with huge emotional and experiential connotations towards consumers (Barnard, 2013; Kautish and Sharma, 2018). As such, fashion products differ significantly from other consumer products and consumers are keen to inspect fashion items by actually touching them and consulting with others before purchasing. In terms of a fashion store, traditionally speaking, a transactional place and a social place are the two primary features, in which staff have been part of the service offer playing a pivotal role in forming consumer in-store experience (Kim and Kim, 2012; Immonen et al., 2018). Nevertheless, in the current omnichannel climate, enormous attention has been paid to channel preference (Kazancoglu and Aydin, 2018) as well as the technological and environmental facets (e.g. Inman and Nikolova, 2017; Savastano et al., 2019; Siregar and Kent, 2019; Barann et al., 2022), whereas the interpersonal facet (consumer and staff) has been largely overlooked in the digital age (Bolton et al., 2018; Nyrrhinen et al., 2022). Consumers - especially the cohort of Generation Z as a group of consumers being brought up by technology and inseparable from social media - have been more inclined to go online or utilise technologies to solve their problems. Consequently, their in-store shopping seems to have been ‘disrupted’ (Siregar et al., 2023) and, particularly, their interpersonal experience with staff in

fashion stores remain unknown. The circumstance of insufficient studies on the interpersonal facet is accompanied by the friction between the surrounding retail environment, technologies, and human (Roy et al., 2018; Bèzes, 2019; Alexander and Kent, 2022.) since little is known about integration of staff (human-based service), technologies (technology-based service) and consumers within a fashion store environment. Therefore, the interpersonal experience between consumers and staff can be the starting point to investigate how human, technology and store environment can be better integrated under the current climate of transformation on store environment and service taken place in the fashion retailing sector.

Additionally, to study the interpersonal experience in a technology-enabled environment, it requires a revolutionary change in methodology in order to actually capture the experiences of consumer-to-staff intersubjective encounters, because in marketing and consumer disciplines there is an entrenched predisposition that oftentimes consumers are treated by researchers as experimental targets within fashion firms' laboratory (the store). Since this study will treat consumers as human by adopting a consumer-centric perspective, the aim of this research is, from a human(consumer)-centric view, to explore Gen Z's interpersonal experience with staff in a technology-enabled fashion store to seek the interplay between human, technology and environment. Namely, it will be a holistic perspective that simultaneously covers staff, technology, store environment as well as consumers' life world.

1.1 Aim and objectives

To explore Gen Z's interpersonal experience with staff in technology-enabled fashion stores in order to seek the interplay between human, technology and environment

- 1) To gain a well-rounded understanding of the areas associated with the aim of this study including the conception 'consumer experience', 'store environment and technology' as well as 'frontline staff and Gen Z consumers'
- 2) To discern different perspectives and approaches on consumer experience in marketing and consumer disciplines
- 3) To develop explicit knowledge of the technology-enabled store environment by synthesising a smart servicescape framework as the context where the studied interpersonal interaction and experience takes place
- 4) To establish an alternative worldview for this study with the reference to Heidegger's philosophy and have it integrated into the smart servicescape framework as a further synthesis to ensure that the research questions can be solved properly
- 5) To ensure that data collection, interpretation and presentation are in alignment with Heideggerian thinking as coherence
- 6) To explicitly discuss the relation between consumer and staff as well as the relation between consumer and things in a technology-enabled fashion store environment from the Heideggerian perspective in order to comprehend the interplay between human, technology and environment, by which direction of better integration of the three facets can be portrayed
- 7) To discuss a range of implications enlightened by Heidegger's thinking as an alternative worldview for marketing and consumer disciplines in terms of practical, theoretical and methodological aspects

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This study is organized as follows. Chapter 2 presents what have already been discovered in relation to the key areas entailed by this research topic including consumer experience, store environment and technology, frontline staff and Gen Z consumers in marketing and consumer literature. It begins with a review of the conception of consumer experience in section 2.1 where particular consideration is placed on the extant store-related studies and the methods to study consumer in-store experience. Since the fashion store as the context of the studied experience, a holistic understanding of the experiential context is required. Section 2.3 provides a detailed review of servicescape theory and its synthesis. Section 2.4 and 2.5 centre on the target subjects in the store environment: the staff and Gen Z consumers. Since this study carves out its new methodology to capture consumer in-store experience and the interpersonal experience with staff, in Chapter 3 detailed discussions on Heidegger's existential philosophy and phenomenology are presented, by which a new philosophical underpinning of servicescape theory is established, followed by a further synthesis on 'consumer in-store experience'. Also how this study differ from the well-established interpretive phenomenology analysis approach (IPA) will be elaborated, along with the explanation on interpretative technique. Subsequently, in Chapter 4 the findings are elucidated and illustrated diagrammatically. Chapter 5 enlarges further on the findings, followed by managerial, theoretical and methodological implications driven by the innovatory methodology in Chapter 6.

1.3 Contribution to knowledge

The contribution of this study is multiple-fold. First, it cultivates a smart servicescape framework as an updated version in marketing and consumer realm as well as rethinks servicescape theory through a human-centric perspective. Second, it explores Gen Z consumers everyday store-related experience with the foci on interpersonal experience with staff within servicescape, by which it fills in an underdeveloped research area, the interpersonal interaction and experience between fashion consumers and frontline staff in a smart servicescape context. Third, the methodological design of this study is innovatory, which adheres to Heidegger's thinking entirely as an alternative worldview in marketing and consumer disciplines. It interprets consumers' in-store interaction through an existential perspective and the Figure of Findings is also capable of being a framework for other research on intersubjective encounters within or beyond a fashion marketing context. Fourth, a wider range of implications brought by the new worldview are discussed in terms of practical, theoretical and methodological aspects in which the friction between technology, environment and people in a fashion store is elaborated.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Perspectives on Consumer Experience

Scholars in the marketing and consumer realms have not reached a consensus on the definition of consumer experience. It has overlapped other marketing concepts, until scholars recognised the need to disentangle it from concepts such as "*shopper satisfaction*" and "*service quality*" (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). There has been confusion over whether consumer experience is the interaction with an object (a product or a firm) or it is the assessment of the interactional process (Becker and Jaakkola, 2020). Earlier consumer-experience-related studies chiefly focused on the

outcomes and managerial implications (e.g. Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 2011; Berry et al., 2006; Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Brakus et al., 2009; Verhoef et al., 2009). Later, in the research stream of value, S-D logic started a movement to replace the entrenched logic of ‘value in goods and transaction’ with ‘value in use and experience’ in various contexts in consumers’ own life. In doing so, S-D logic advocates a phenomenological perspective in the creation of value, albeit in a purely theoretical way (see Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2016; Vargo et al., 2020). Like a collateral influence, S-D logic also accelerates the growth of a phenomenological perspective in the field of consumer experience, whereby the property of consumer experience become individually and socially intersubjective (De Keyser et al., 2015; Jaakkola et al., 2015) being grounded in the consumers’ own life world (Becker, 2018) embedded within service ecosystems (Akaka et al., 2015; Akaka et al., 2019) and being event-specific but dynamic in nature (Bolton et al., 2018; McColl-Kennedy et al., 2020). In addition, Becker and Jaakkola (2020) further disentangle consumer experience from evaluation-based concepts such as “*service quality*” and “*satisfaction*” by defining consumer experience as “*non-deliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions to particular stimuli*” (pp.637). De Keyser et al. (2020) advance this definition by developing three pillars: touchpoints, contexts and qualities, whereby consumer experience is regarded as “*non-deliberate, spontaneous responses and reactions with the qualities of various offering-related touchpoints embedded within a specific context*” (De Keyser et al., 2020 pp.442). To some extent, this “*non-deliberate, spontaneous responses within a context*” indicates consumers’ interaction with brands and the use of products in their life world context. This everyday kind of experience is not gained by ‘spectacular consumption’, nor in a ‘spectacular context’ designed and controlled by firms, but rather it is mainly formed through consumers’ unglamorous and humdrum activities on a daily basis as human beings (Warde, 2015; Roggeveen and Rosengren, 2022) through a consumer-dominant perspective (Heinonen et al., 2010; Heinonen et al., 2013; Heinonen and Strandvik, 2015).

This perspective of mundane experience contrasts sharply with the perspective that firms need to offer novel and unforgettable experiences and monetise them (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 2011; Mossberg, 2008; Cooney et al., 2014; Hoyer et al., 2020; Pine, 2023). In theory, this notion is particularly apt for a store context since the built environment is often seen as the primary influencer on consumers in-store experiences (Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Edvardsson et al., 2010; Nguyen et al., 2022). As such, the extant methods being applied to a store-related study are very much in line with the notion of ‘offering experience’. According to Helkkula, (2011) and Lipkin (2016)’s methodological reviews, the stimuli-based and the interaction-based modes are the two which have been predominantly applied in marketing and consumer research for decades. The stimuli-based mode implies an outcome-like attribute as a relatively simple standpoint of experiences within a (store) environment, for it indicates a causal relationship of the connection between experiences, influencers and results. In this stimulus-based view, in-store experiences are formed by the internal responses to the elements controlled by firms, while consumers tend to play a passive role in the formation of their experiences (Lipkin, 2016). Studies in this stream act as a snapshot of a static timing (Slåtten et al., 2009) by which consumers’ behaviour is examined.

By contrast, the interaction-based approach implies a process-like attribute focusing on an interactive process in a particular period (Toivonen et al., 2007) in which consumers react and gain remarkable memories (Edvardsson et al., 2005; Helkkula, 2011). In this stream, consumer in-store experience is formed by their internal responses and interactions taken place in the built environment (Edvardsson et al., 2005), which can be either passive or active (Pareigis et al., 2012). This mode partially overlaps with the stimulus-based mode, which can be seen as its extension (Lipkin, 2016) with highlighting social and individual interactions processes (Walter et al., 2010).

Studies applying the interaction-based approach tend to cover a linear timeline (Payne et al., 2009) rather than a static snapshot at a given time. Recently, the two mentioned research approaches are still being regularly applied (Fisher et al., 2019), with which “*a strong focus still seems to lie on classic behavioural studies*” (Both and Steinmann, 2023, pp. 457).

Indeed, the two conventional modes on studying in-store experiences represent the dominance of behaviourism and cognitive psychology in past decades. As Thompson et al (1989) already discerned decades ago, behaviourism assumes that “*human beings could be reduced to nothing but behaviour*” (pp.143), which in fact implies a non-human treatment towards human beings in the same way as laboratory animals whose action and reaction of stimuli can be controlled and explained. This angle has left no room for concepts such as thoughts, intentions, beliefs and experiences, which are deemed unscientific (Thompson et al., 1989). In terms of cognitive psychology that can be viewed as an advanced version of behaviourism, although concepts such as ‘decision making’, ‘mental structures’ and ‘information processing’ often appear, cognitivists, again, believe that as long as the cognitive structure is developed and comprehended, those said concepts become unnecessary (Thompson, 1989; Churchill and Fisher-Smith, 2021). In other words, the information-processing angle represents consumer/human experience as a disembodied, rationalised phenomenon (Thompson, 1998).

Whilst those approaches can well investigate the influence of a built environment on consumers’ behaviour at a fixed moment, they do not fit into the strategy to research consumers ordinary in-store experience gained from their everyday visits to fashion stores. As Bèzes (2019) reminds us, the problem is that marketing and consumer researchers have been studying what brands would like consumers to experience, but ignoring what consumers actually experience in a store environment. This could be seen as an echo of S-D logic’s advocacy, mentioned at the beginning of this section. It is not always a memorable and unique experience provided by the brand when consumers visit a fashion store in their everyday life, because sometimes it can also be humdrum as a chore. And it is the simple, mundane, familiar shopping experiences that constitute consumers’ daily life and shopping routines, which represent “*a lived and reflective phenomenon*” as the principal source of consumers’ experience with brands (Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023).

This everyday shopping and consumption experience has recently begun to draw attention in the marketing literature again (De Keyser et al., 2020; Roggeveen and Rosengren, 2022; Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023), albeit mostly at a theoretical level. It converges with the call for a phenomenological approach from decades ago (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Thompson et al., 1989; Helkkula, 2011; Helkkula et al., 2012; Akaka et al., 2015; Becker, 2018). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982)’s early work had a major influence on the awareness of phenomenological perspective in marketing and consumer realms, which views consumption experience as a chiefly subjective conscious state associated with various symbolic meanings. Helkkula (2012) highlights the nature of the phenomenological attribute of consumer experience as subjectively, socially and individually determined, plus S-D logic further spotlights the phenomenological standpoint by placing the emphasis on phenomenologically-determined consumption value (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo 2008) and then being extended to the phenomenologically-formed consumer experience (Helkkula, 2012; Akaka et al., 2015; Jaakkola et al., 2015), with a “*service ecosystem*” viewpoint that expands the scale of consumer experience in traditional views making it not only subjective to an individual in a situation but related to various interactions within multiple contexts as well (Chandler and Vargo, 2011; Akaka et al., 2015; Lipkin, 2016; Akaka et al., 2019; Schallehn et al., 2019). Based on this perspective, consumer experience becomes much more interactively formed, individualised and contextualised in their life world (Dube and Helkkula, 2015, Jaakkola

et al., 2015; Lipkin, 2016; Pecoraro and Uusitalo, 2014; Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Vargo, 2020; Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023).

Nevertheless, in an earlier phase the phenomenological research stream primarily concentrated on the symbolic aspect of consumption, rather than the ordinary aspect (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Warde, 2014; 2015; Scott et al., 2019). A brief historical review on sociology of consumption can help understand the whole picture of consumer research. According to Warde (2015), the concept of consumption had been always researched under “*the guise of poverty*” (needs, wants and satisfaction) until the end of the Second World War. The strong economic growth after the Second World War led to “*mass production*” along with “*mass consumption*”, by which the quality of life improved significantly. For example, people had better meals and bigger houses, owning cars, and having more goods and clothes. During this period, consumption was considered subordinate to production, which was reflected in Goods-Dominant (G-D) Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). In the 1980s, with the influential angle of ‘consumer behaviour’, there was a cultural turn in social sciences and humanities (Warde, 2014), by which consumption became a central topic (Warde, 2015). Since then, cultural theory has exerted a major influence on studies of consumption and consumer behaviour with special interest in social divisions and subcultures in postmodernism in the UK (Santoro, 2011), until later it gained a global interest against the backdrop of globalization (Trentman, 2012). This cultural turn in studies of consumption highlights the enjoyable and constructive process in which consumers use products and services as sociable and personal ends. Consumption acts as everyday communication in terms of identity formation, distinct lifestyles, aesthetic and symbolic expression (e.g. Belk, 1988; Woodward, 2007), which is particularly well reflected in fashion discipline (e.g. Entwistle, 2000; Craik, 2009; Barnard, 2013). Later, by summarising key findings and themes of a group of cultural research of consumption, “*consumer culture theory*” was cultivated (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al., 2023) which will be returned to in section 3.4.4.

However, the consequence the cultural turn actually brings, especially to the disciplines of fashion marketing and consumer is that under its influence the majority of research programmes are directed by postmodernism that alters “*understandings about the nature of culture and the appropriate ways to give accounts and explanations of social and cultural phenomena*” (Warde, 2014, pp. 280). As a result, priority has been given to the communicative, symbolic, conspicuous aspects of consumption, while those inconspicuous, routine, ordinary facets of consumption are obscured since the missing ordinary features as uncovered phenomena which are usually concealed in the emphasis on symbolism and expressionism as Warde (2015)’s review points out. Thus, there has been a call for rebalancing the “*previously predominant emphasis on culture*” by incorporating routine and habitual facets of consumption in a wider sociological point of view (Warde, 2015, pp. 129). Apart from the sociological discipline, this shift of attention from conspicuous consumption to ordinary consumption also manifests itself in the realm of marketing and consumer research, where some scholars in the consumer experience stream have argued that most consumption experiences in fact are not about symbolism (Carù and Cova, 2003; Jung, 2019).

This ordinary perspective on consumer experience also draws attention to the research strategy that is deemed appropriate, which is phenomenology (Helkkula and Kelleher, 2010; Lipkin, 2016; Becker, 2018). Nevertheless, the phenomenological perspective in consumer research stream remains primarily conceptual (e.g. Helkkula et al., 2012; Lipkin, 2016; Becker, 2018). There have been few studies claiming being phenomenological studies, however, they neither obtain a genuine phenomenological worldview, nor apply a suitable interpretative technique, only phenomenological data collection are applied (e.g. Helkkula and Kelleher, 2010; Dube and

Helkkula, 2015; Bustamante and Rubio, 2017). Additionally, Becker (2018) reminds us that although all studies applying a phenomenological approach pay attention to the socially created experiences in the subject's own life, not all interaction-focused studies reach a genuine phenomenological level. Indeed, the interaction-based mode discussed previously is not equivalent to a phenomenological approach. To reiterate, the interaction-based perspective believes that individuals could be passive or active (Pareigis et al., 2012) with the emphasis on external activities, which investigates consumer experience primarily according to a linear timeline. By comparison, using a phenomenological perspective, subjects are active with much control in contextually forming their own experience in their lifeworld without a linear timeline (Helkkula et al., 2012; Becker, 2018).

The two resemble very closely but bears distinct philosophical assumptions. At one time, he adoption of a phenomenological worldview was strongly advocated by Thompson (e.g. Thompson et al., 1989, Thompson 1990, 1997, 1998) but somehow was 'evaded' by marketing and consumer scholars. It may result from two facts: first, according to Thompson et al (1989), modern empiricism - which entails a broader set of assumptions that are placed "*under the more global philosophical rubrics of Cartesianism*" - is the leading paradigm in marketing and consumer research (pp. 134) so that the concept of consumer experience has been distorted as anticipation and consequence or even disregarded (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Thompson et al., 1998). Whilst Thompson highlighted the need of an alternative worldview in consumer research realm decades ago, the situation has not changed much due to the firmly entrenched mentalities found in rationalism, positivism, empiricism, behaviourism and cognitive psychology that are all under the umbrella of Cartesianism (Thompson et al., 1989). Second, the main challenge is to make phenomenology "*accessible and doable by researchers who are not themselves professional philosophers*" (Van Manen, 2014, pp.18), namely phenomenological research requires the researcher to comprehend the philosophy of phenomenology and the related interpretative technique, which is a daunting task (Neubauer et al., 2019).

In respect of consumers' in-store experiences, to the author's best knowledge, there is no phenomenological study for the time being investigating this area. The store environment as the objective surroundings whose influence on consumer in-store interaction and experience has drawn enormous attention in the research academy (see the following sections) under the predominant Cartesian worldview through empiricism (or logical positivism). However, under phenomenology, the objective surroundings are merely one aspect of the construction of human experience that is inseparable from individual's own life world. It means that the boundary, within which consumer in-store experience is interpreted, is no longer confined to the store environment with the influence from the objective surroundings on consumers who are in the store. Rather, the boundary needs to be enlarged to (or zoom out to) the consumers' own life world, namely, from the consumers' own life world, to interpret consumers' in-store interaction and experience. The implication is that, as reviewed previously, merely a change from the stimuli-based perspective to the interaction-based perspective in studying consumer in-store experience is insufficient, because even the interaction-based perspective is to examine how the store environment influences consumers' interaction (passive) and how consumers interact with the store environment (active) within a period of time in a store as the research context, rather than from the perspective of consumers own life world to interpret their in-store interaction and experience.

Thus, it is clear that the first task of this study is to systematically deal with the philosophical position on studying consumer in-store experience. As preparation, the next section will seek phenomenological-related viewpoints on consumer in-store interaction and experience from the

extant literature.

2.2 The interactively formed Consumer Experience

From a phenomenological perspective, interactions, especially social interactions, weigh heavily in human experience. Marketing scholars too have recognised the importance of interpersonal and collaborative aspect of consumer experience (e.g. Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Gentile et al., 2007; Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Carù and Cova, 2015; Jaakkola et al., 2015; Schallenh et al., 2019). As a result, the ‘co-creation’ concept has become ubiquitous with various variants such as “*value co-creation*” (Vargo and Lusch, 2008), “*co-design*” (Sanders and Stappers, 2008), “*co-production*” (Chathoth et al., 2013), “*co-innovation*” (Lee et al., 2012; Saragih and Tan, 2018) and “*experience co-creation*” (Jaakkola et al., 2015). It was Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000) who initiated the concept “*co-creation*” by advocating reconsideration of the positions of firms and consumers in market. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) observe that the growth in services and products leads to a degree of similarity so that it has become a paradox for marketers in value creation. The authors suggest that consumers need to get involved more in the process of creating value together with firms, which could transcend the traditional price level (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2003) due to the shift from their passiveness to activeness as a co-actor. This unveils a viewpoint that the notion of “*co-creation*” contains shared experiences, along with value, as the co-constructed outcomes (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004).

Furthermore, S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Vargo 2008) highlights this concept and renders it topical, which shakes the traditional, well-accepted business logic, G-D logic. It has received a number of responses, where besides supportive ones, some of them are cautious and more critical (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). It underscores the singular ‘service’ other than ‘goods’, where service is a process in which various parts apply their skills and knowledge as intangible resources to benefit every marketing participants (see. Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2006, 2008). The marketing participants are therefore renamed as “*actors*” aiming to remove the fixed dyadic view on marketing exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2016). This expansion allows some pre-added labels to be unarmed such as “*seller*”, “*buyer*”, “*customer*”, “*producer*”, “*middlemen*” (Vargo et al., 2020. pp. 9). Those specific roles are avoided by S-D logic in order to convey a higher-level principle that through the process of integration of resources (operand resources) and individuals’ own competences (operant resources), all actors act equally in a “*service-for-service exchange*” (Vargo et al., 2020) and create contextual experience and value for themselves (Akaka et al., 2015). Accordingly, it is always the active actor(s) who experiences the interacting process of resource integration where their special operant resources are always required to be directly or indirectly integrated (Lusch and Vargo, 2006; Vargo et al., 2008). As such, experiences and value are “*always uniquely and phenomenologically determined*” (Vargo et al., 2020. pp.17).

Following this principle, some marketing scholars set up the concept ‘experience co-creation’ to deliberately emphasise the interpersonal interactions in or beyond a shared service space (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Schallenh et al., 2019). However, it can potentially cause confusion when being placed in the phenomenological worldview wherein human experience in fact is always co-constructed through the subject’s awareness of the otherness in a context (Pollio et al., 1997). The deliberate application of the prefix ‘co’ combining with the term ‘creation’ to emphasis the formation of human shopping/consumption experience is hence redundant. To keep the philosophical and theoretical consistency, this research does not apply the phrase “experience co-creation” since all experiences are actually interactively formed involving a subject and an object as the default formation of human experience.

The interactively formed consumer experience is particularly relatable to a shared context, for

example, a store environment (Grönroos and Gummerus, 2014; Kent et al., 2015; Alexander and Kent, 2022). Studies have revealed that consumers' personal factors (Verleye, 2015; Ellway and Dean, 2016) and the context where interpersonal interactions occur can be very influential (Bitner, 1992; Kent et al., 2015; Pizam and Tasci, 2019). In De Keyser et al. (2015)'s 'three-stage' of consumer experience, the realisation phase in which the direct interactions occur in a shared space takes the central stage and the shared space itself plays a pivotal part (Grönroos and Voima, 2013; De Keyser et al., 2020). Verleye (2015) presents two key environmental characteristics affecting in-store experiences: technologization and connectivity. Technologization represents the capability to access the digital world, which enables consumers have an expanded network and more tools to reach others outside the physical store (Pantano and Viassone, 2014; Grewal et al., 2018). Online tools enable consumers to act more creatively and the connected online platforms allows more opportunities of sharing information which could potentially enriches socially formed experiences (Grewal, et al., 2020). Yet, Verleye (2015) particularly takes heed of the environmental influence of a digitalised store towards interpersonal interactions. The author highlights the concept "*connectivity*" dependent upon "*the level of social interaction*" amongst individuals with an emphasis that in-store technology per se has little influence in facilitating help with others. In other words, although store digitisation links the traditional offline brick-and-mortar link to the online digital platform as the extension of interactivity, it barely assists in forming interpersonal experiences (Bèzes, 2019).

It should be borne in mind that the higher-level of connectivity of the physical environment merely means more opportunities for interactions provided by the firm for consumers, rather than the actual occurrence of the interpersonal interactions, even though it is believed that different design styles of store environment represent levels of purposed interpersonal interaction and the environment somewhat affects consumers and their "*performing actions*" (Bitner, 1992). Moreover, Ramaswamy and Ozcanb (2018) cultivate the concept of '*interactive platform*' wherein digitalisation and interactivity are highlighted and in-store (interpersonal) interactions are supported, due to multiple mediated communicative channels provided by interactive technology (Forlizzi and Battarbee, 2004). To better understand consumer in-store interactions and experiences in the digital age, an in-depth understanding of the store environment is required, which will be elaborated in detail in the next section.

2.3 Servicescape as the context of Consumer In-store Experience

The evolution of technology, typically communication and information, has changed the workings of the retailing sector, where, before and after the arrival of personal smart devices, the evolution of the strategy has been witnessed from single channel to "*multi-channel*", to "*cross-channel*", and eventually, to "*omni-channel*" (Bèzes, 2019). This influences the fashion retailing sector too. Although e-commerce once led to a decline in offline sales, previous studies have shown that consumers do patronise physical fashion stores for various reasons (or experiences) such as browsing, leisure, social interaction, direct brand interaction, inspiration and so forth (e.g. Blázquez, 2014; McCormick et al., 2014; Alexander and Blázquez, 2018; Siregar and Kent, 2019; Alexander and Kent, 2022; Siregar et al., 2023), alongside the difference between fashion and other consumer products that consumers intend to inspect fashion items before transaction, mentioned previously. Thus, the physical fashion store has always been needed and hence been one of the pivotal elements in forming consumer shopping experience in their everyday life. In this digital and omnichannel age, a physical fashion store environment has become the ultimate presentation of the brand's integration.

2.3.1 Servicescape Theory

In marketing discipline, the environmental factors in consumer in-store interaction and experience have been well-acknowledged, for a retail environment is where direct interactions between consumers and the brand occur, during which services and the store environment are often merged and consumed simultaneously (Bitner, 1992). Whilst Kotler (1973)'s concept "atmospherics" opens an avenue for investigations on the impact of commercial settings on consumer behaviour, Bitner (1992) argues that a commercial place should be viewed as 'a landscape of services'. Bitner coins the term "*servicescape*" as a holistic perspective to portray how in-store interactions are influenced by physical surroundings (especially the interactions between consumers and staff in the initial paper). According to Bitner (1992), servicescape theory reveals that store environment influences consumers and staff's behaviour through psychological and environmental factors involving three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and physiological. Those environmental factors belonging to multiple dimensions hence hinders or facilitates interpersonal interactions.

There are three environmental categories in Bitner (1992)'s initial study. First, "*ambient conditions*" includes air quality, temperature, music, noise, light, which are relatable to aesthetics. These environmental cues affect human senses which in turn influence the state of well-being or ill-being indirectly and directly (Kotler, 1973; De Looze et al., 2003). Second, "*space/function*" include layout, shape, size, furnishings, which weigh the spatial aspect of a place and the relationship between human and space (Edvardsson et al., 2010). It also indicates the effectiveness of services' operation in a commercial place (Han and Ryu, 2009). Third, "*signs/symbols/artifacts*" involve various things in relation to interior decoration, which function as instructions of users' communications with a physical environment such as guidance and directions (Bitner, 1992). These environmental cues together represent the quality of a built commercial environment that influences social interactions within that place. Notably, except for the framework centring on environmental factors that influence the in-store interactional process, Bitner (1992) also presents a typology of service as a guide for the usage of servicescape, which stresses the importance of environment for different types of services such as interpersonal services, self-services, and remote services.

The theoretical basis of Bitner's Servicescape theory stems from the "*stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model*" (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974, cited by Vieira, 2013) in behaviourism. The behavioural model demonstrates an "*avoidance and approach*" paradigm that is triggered by the design of a physical place. Under this perspective, consumers are viewed as passive receivers and by measuring those controllable environmental elements, firms are viewed as the main providers of consumers in-store experiences (Meyer and Schwager, 2007) who can monetise the provided experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1999, 2011). At this stage, many early studies in servicescape stream are dependent upon quantitative and static measurement to discover the formation of in-store experience via a stimuli-based approach to examine the outcomes (Lipkin, 2016). Later, several concepts as variants of servicescape branch out such as 'social servicescape', 'experiencescape' and 'E-servicescape'. What is more, the concept of 'third place' from the field of sociological research informs an updated version of servicescape framework thereafter (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011) as well as an earlier environmental theory 'atmospherics' that resembles servicescape closely. The aforementioned each specific research area will be reviewed subsequently.

- *Social Servicescape*

The initial servicescape theory is expanded due to the increasing attention to social and cultural facets at the beginning of twenty-first century. Tombs and McColl-Kennedy's studies make a major contribution to this evolution. [Tombs and McColl-Kennedy \(2003\)](#) explore the social aspect and employ the term "*social servicescape*". The authors find two factors: displayed emotions and social density which can have significant impact on consumer experience, especially for some certain contexts and groups of people (e.g. people who are marginalized). [Tombs and McColl-Kennedy \(2013\)](#) particularly investigate how the presence of consumers influence other consumers. The result reveals that one's acceptance or tolerance of others' behaviours in a commercial environment impacts his/her attitude and behaviour in the setting such as purchasing willingness and the duration of staying. What is more, the number of other consumers can also cause significant influences on consumer's avoiding and approaching decisions ([Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2013](#)) as well as perceptions of some certain contexts ([Hanks et al., 2017](#)). For instance, consumers probably prefer hustle and bustle in a big department store or watching a football match in a pub, while an intimate setting is more apt for a romantic dinner.

Moreover, displayed emotions indicate that not only can staff's attributes affect consumers' experiences, but also the expressions of other consumers as an uncontrollable factor for firms ([Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011](#)). Receiving support from others can help counterbalance negative experiences in the setting ([Nicholls, 2010](#)). Indeed, [Solomon \(1983\)](#) believes that consumption is a kind of social behaviour and the consumption experience is enhanced by consumers social activities, cited by [Johnstone \(2012\)](#) who goes further to examine consumer's non-commercial connection of a marketplace by applying a multidisciplinary approach. Findings reveal that for some consumers, social connection in a servicescape offers more value than the commercial purpose of patronising a store ([Johnstone, 2012](#)). In addition, studies on consumer-to-consumer interaction also cover consumer communities which act as a long-term measure to maintain loyalty and engagement ([McGinnis et al., 2008](#)). It indicates that beside those controllable elements, the quality of the environment can be created and maintained by all consumers within that setting. Accordingly, in-store experiences are also socially created and both consumer and employee are viewed as part of indoor stimulus, although when consumers patronise a place or use in-store technologies in a group, the effects of others' expressions are weakened ([Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2003](#)).

However, Tombs and McColl-Kennedy's studies had been undertaken before smartphones (personal smart devices) were introduced or became prevalent. In the current digital or omnichannel age, little research on the social facet in servicescape exists. [Nyrhinen et al. \(2022\)](#)'s study can be seen as an updated version of [Johnstone \(2012\)](#), whose foci centres on how customers' social interaction and connection are formed across digital and physical servicescape and corresponding outcomes. Although the context of [Nyrhinen et al. \(2022\)](#)'s study is demarcated by a "*digital-physical servicescape*", the data and findings are still collected and presented online-offline-separately. Namely, the research context of that study is not located in a technology-enabled servicescape (store environment).

- *Third Place*

The conception of third place ([Oldenburg, 1989](#)) is what leads to the expansion of the original framework by [Rosenbaum \(2011\)](#), which incorporates and emphasises the social and cultural aspect of servicescape. Third place means a public place beyond one's home and workplace representing "*the role of commercial establishments*" in individuals' life ([Lofland, 1998](#)). Rosenbaum

makes a major contribution to the integration of servicescape theory and the ideation of third place. [Rosenbaum \(2005\)](#) initially applies the term “symbolic servicescape” to emphasise that the interpretation of a built environment can vary according to cultural differences. As such, servicescape is potentially able to transcend physical and sensory elements. [Rosenbaum \(2006\)](#) then discovers the social supportive role for the older people in servicescape, alongside [Rosenbaum and Montoya \(2007\)](#) highlight associated identity between consumers themselves and a consumption environment. In addition, [Rosenbaum \(2009\)](#) targets younger-aged consumers to explore the restorative aspect in a commercial setting. The findings show that not only do commercial places offer products and services, but consumers can receive strong psychological and social support from a network of people having the same needs as well. With this great focus on the cultural and social aspects, [Rosenbaum and Massiah \(2011\)](#) cultivate a four-dimensional paradigm as an expanded servicescape framework including physical, social, symbolic and natural dimensions. Importantly, this expanded framework has managed to incorporate some kind of phenomenological elements into servicescape theory as an extension to a world beyond the store environment itself. More recently, [Alexander \(2019\)](#) observes the prevalent and increasing third place in fashion industry as well as its influences on consumers experiences and engagement. Additionally, the concept ‘third place’ has also drawn attention to the design of ‘new workplaces’ and ‘co-working places’, especially under the tendency of digitalisation ([Akhavan, 2021](#)).

- *Atmospherics*

Some scholars apply servicescape and atmospherics interchangeably (e.g. [Ezeh & Harris, 2007](#)), however, this is problematic because it overlooks the distinction between the two environmental-related theories. This sub-section will start off by reviewing atmospherics theory, comparing it with servicescape theory in detail to show the nuance. As briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, [Kotler \(1973\)](#) coins the term *atmospherics* as a token of a carefully designed place capable of causing particular emotional influences on consumers. The author suggests that marketers should take heed of “*spatial aesthetics*” in commercial places and utilise it as a new form of marketing tool to increase purchase rate, especially where products do not differ significantly ([Kotler, 1973](#)). The spatial aesthetics is reflected by atmosphere being technically defined as “*the air hanging in a place*” ([Kotler, 1973](#)). It helps form the quality of a place through four main sensory aspects: sight/visual, sound/aural, scent/olfactory, touch/tactile. Kotler also points out that the firm’s intended atmosphere may differ from what consumers perceive due to the diversity of their backgrounds.

As though the air hanging in a space could be measured, later atmospherics theory is integrated into S-O-R model for the understanding and management on a set of in-store stimuli that influences shoppers’ behaviour and experience ([Hoffman and Turley, 2002](#); [Biehl-Missal and Saren, 2012](#)) such as music ([Turley and Milliman, 2000](#)), cleanliness ([Barber et al., 2011](#)), temperature ([Ballantine et al., 2015](#)), scent and lighting ([Turley and Milliman, 2000](#)). Therefore, atmospherics is expanded to three clusters of cues: design, ambient and social. According to previous studies ([Baker and Cameron, 1996](#); [Turley and Milliman 2000](#); [Baker et al. 2002](#); [Puccinelli et al., 2009](#)), design cues include equipment, layout, signage, furnishings and the style of décor, which can trigger consumers’ reactions (avoiding or approaching). Ambient cues involve the original four sensory dimensions which adds value to the consumption place and cast emotional effects towards consumers such as re-patronising. Social cues centre around the quality of the interactions between consumers and staff. The atmospherics dimensions resemble the original servicescape framework ([Bitner, 1992](#)) closely since the dimension of ambient conditions in servicescape is parallel to sensory factors in atmospherics ([Mari and Poggesi, 2013](#)), plus ‘spatial

layout and functionality' and 'signs, symbols and artifacts' in servicescape are also similar to 'design cues' in the expanded atmospherics. In the age of e-commerce, atmospherics theory has been applied to online atmospheric cues such as graphics, colours, links and animation (e.g. Koo and Ju, 2010; Kim and Lennon, 2010; Muzdalifah, 2023) on both websites (Ramezani Nia and Shokouhyar, 2020) and mobile Apps (Rayburn et al., 2022) to investigate their effect on consumers' emotions and satisfaction, alongside the combination of digital atmosphere and physical fashion stores (Blázquez, 2014; Kent et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the crux of the distinction between the two environmental theories lies in the different perspectives to view a built environment. The focus of atmospherics is principally on the provider's part since in the original study of atmospherics, Kotler (1973) underlines that atmospherics is "*a marketing tool*" and "*the effort to design buying environment to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability*" (pp.50). Accordingly, its purpose is to use the controlled factors to facilitate purchase. While the social element is one of the dimensional components belonging to both theories, they hold different emphasis on the subjects. The atmospherics research stream investigates the social dimension heavily based on the interactions between consumers and staff such as the attributes, the quality of interaction and the relationship between staff and consumers (Menon and Dube, 2000; Baker et al., 2002; Verhoef et al., 2009). Even though crowding (Turley and Milliman, 2000) is viewed as a factor under social dimension, it only refers to the number of staff and the impact on buyers (Puccinelli et al., 2009).

In contrast to atmospherics, whilst the initial servicescape conveys a similar sense of utilising controlled elements in man-made surroundings to achieve firms' goals, Bitner (1992) did convey a sense of "environment-user" as a clue of a more consumer-and-provider-balanced as well as consumer-centric perspectives for future studies. For the social dimension, servicescape holds a broader view involving three aspects. The first is the consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-staff interactions, namely the interaction amongst consumers is just as important as the interaction between consumers and staff. The second is the use of *social density* to replace *crowding* in atmospherics. Social density entails both staff and consumers within a place rather than only focusing on the number of staff (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). The third is *displayed emotions*. Although the attributes of employees has been underlined in atmospherics, the social dimension in servicescape extends it by including consumers' attributes as well.

The comparison of the social dimension in both atmospherics and servicescape demonstrates that atmospherics places emphasis only on the interaction between staff and consumers, whereas servicescape covers both consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-staff interactions. Furthermore, besides social and physical dimensions, servicescape also involves "*social-/group-influenced symbolic*" aspects (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). It is associated with personal factors that influence personal responses. For instance, individuals' various backgrounds such as ethnicity and culture, gender, age can affect their response to some certain décor in a setting.

Thus, it can be argued that servicescape obtains a more holistic viewpoint including physical, social and socially symbolic dimensions, plus natural dimension as "natural encounters" to man-made environment conveying the sense of escape and relaxing (Rosenbaum et al., 2009; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). It therefore allows for integrating knowledge from other fields to examine the role of a commercial place in consumers' daily life through various viewpoints such as sociology, natural psychology, religion, humanistic geography, architecture and public health (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Pizam and Tasci, 2019; Kandampully et al., 2022), rather than sticking with those highly controllable stimuli as atmospherics does. This holistic view has attracted attention not only in a retail setting but also other communal, commercial settings such

as hospitality, sport and university or even larger settings such as wilderness and city planning as Pizam and Tasci (2019) further expand servicescape through a multi-stakeholder viewpoint.

By investigating the conceptual trait of the two environmental theories, it can be inferred that studies applying atmospherics normally hold a provider-centric angle by using the controllable factors to facilitate purchase or to provide experiences as an outcome-based angle (e.g. Clarke, 2012; Singh et al., 2014; Muhammad et al., 2014; Kent et al., 2015; Barros et al., 2019; Choi and Kandampully, 2019), which is in alignment with a goods-dominant logic view. By comparison, studies applying servicescape tend to acquire balanced or more consumer-centric perspectives with interaction-based angle investigating how people actively use the environment (e.g. Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008; Johnstone, 2012; Pareigis et al., 2012; Alexander, 2019; Tran et al., 2020). Based on the elaboration, it becomes clear that servicescape is more inclusive than atmospherics as Bitner (1992)'s initial purpose shows that

"[...] to take a first step toward integrating theories and empirical findings from diverse disciplines into a framework [...] affects both consumers and employees in service organizations" (pp.58).

- *Experiencescape*

The theoretical ideation of this branch of servicescape research roots in the long-lasting influential work: *The Experience Economy* (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; 2011) which suggests creating and customising experiences as the chief source of firm's competitive advantage. Drawing upon this principle, Edvardsson et al. (2005) cultivate the concept "*experience room*" to portray a place to gain the simulated experiences as an experiential angle for the traditional servicescape theory. In tourism realm, the concept 'experiential servicescape' is also widely applied. O'Dell and Billing (2005) invent the term "*experiencescapes*" highlighting that personal agency and consumers' resonance of a place are crucial in enhancing experiences because "*landscapes of experience [...] that are not only organized by producers (from place marketers and city planners to local private enterprises), but are also actively sought after by consumers*" (O'Dell and Billing, 2005, pp.16). Mossberg (2007) underscores the holistic nature of an experiential servicescape wherein personally engaged activities are performed. It can be seen as a departure from a "simulated experience" in which experiencers (consumers) are passive. In addition, Ardley et al. (2012) apply the term "*experiential servicescape*" to depict the environment of exhibition and visitors' experiences. Thusly, experiencescape-related studies tend to be more consumer-centric centring on either how firm-created experiences are consumed, or how consumers create their own experience by interactions within the experiencecape (e.g. Edvardsson et al., 2005; Mossberg, 2007; Ardley et al., 2012; Mody et al., 2019; Baker and Kim, 2020).

At this point, the interaction-based approach (Lipkin, 2016) begins to come into focus under the influence of the concept "*co-creation*" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Schallehn et al., 2019). For example, Pareigis et al. (2011) conducted a qualitative study in public transport environment to investigate service experience from the consumer's perspective based on the framework of the experience room (Edvardsson et al., 2005), trying to elicit insights into the consumer's active use of the service environment. Pareigis et al. (2012) specifically focus on the process of consumers' interaction in a service setting through a microethnographic approach and think-aloud protocols to capture the data of the interactional processes. That study discovered three sets activities representing consumers' internal mechanism. Considering the majority of servicescape research was quantitative and provider-centric at that moment, the two said studies represent the shift from the former stimulus/provider-centric perspective to an interaction-based and partially consumer-centric angle (Helkkula, 2011; Lipkin, 2016; Becker & Jaakkola, 2020).

Moreover, [Pizam and Tasci \(2019\)](#) extended experiencescape research by developing a holistic framework covering multi-stakeholders through a multi-disciplinary approach. [Blumenthal and Jensen \(2019\)](#) adhere to *Experience Economy* ([Pine and Gilmore, 1999; 2011](#)) suggesting that the experience provided in the experiencescape should be time-limited, immersive and themed. The authors present nine facets which determine how consumers immerse into an experiencescape. A more recent conceptual study ([Kandampully et al., 2022](#)) attempts to combine servicescape ([Bitner, 1992](#)) and the aforementioned experiencescape ([Pizam and Tasci, 2019](#)) to better understand how to provide memorable experience. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that the notion of 'experience economy' that offers memorable experience, indicates that consumer experience can be designed and sold by firms as an extraordinary kind of experiences, which conflicts with the phenomenological perspective.

- *E-servicescape and Smart Servicescape*

In the digital age, servicescape, in the same way as atmospherics, has also been extended to the virtual shopping environment. The online and offline channels of brands result from a cross-channel strategy aiming to intentionally integrated data and consumers from the earlier multichannel strategy of the firm for additional sales ([Bèzes, 2019](#)). Concurrently, digital marketing has led to growing attention on e-commerce ([Tankovic and Benazic, 2018](#)). The convenience and flexibility of online shopping as well as the 'few-days' delivery period (or sometimes just a few hours) attract consumers. Researchers then recognise that the design of virtual spaces such as website layout, symbolic decoration, sensory stimuli and so forth could also influence consumers in the same way as a physical shopping environment does. It results in consumers' e-satisfaction, purchase intentions, loyalty and value ([Nilsson and Ballantyne, 2014; Ballantyne and Nilsson, 2017; Tankovic and Benazic, 2018](#)). Additionally, financial security as a new dimension specific to e-servicescape has been highlighted and added to the conventional framework including two elements, perceived security and ease of payment ([Van Bavel et al., 2019; Tran and Strutton, 2019](#)).

Whilst e-servicescape covers the online store environment, the popularisation of (smart) mobile devices has pushed the cross-channel strategy further to an omnichannel strategy ([Bèzes, 2019](#)). Armed with smart devices, consumers are able to purchase everywhere and the shopping experience is generated by the fully integration of multiple channels across the stages of their purchasing journey ([Blázquez, 2014](#)). The ubiquity of the smartphone with mobile APPs installed can also be influential in forming consumer intention and experience ([Pantano and Priporas 2016; Pantano et al. 2017; Nikhashemi et al., 2021; Siregar et al., 2023; Patel et al., 2024](#)). This calls for a change in traditional brick-and-mortar stores, for the continuous evolution of technology makes a revolutionary shift to the concept 'smart retailing' ([Pantano and Timmermans, 2014](#)) that is built upon the application and extensive use of technology. Particular to offline stores, store digitalisation transforms a physical store into an information hub with seamless online and offline shopping experience facilitated by interactive and mobile technology with higher level of connectivity ([Verleye, 2015](#)) and interactivity ([Kim, 2021; Alexander and Kent, 2022](#)). As such, theoretically a digitalised physical store can be viewed as a combination of servicescape and e-servicescape being linked by technology dimension as *smart servicescape*.

However, very few studies rigorously consider developing a smart servicescape framework in the marketing and consumer research realms. In tourism realm, studies tend to simply bracket technology into functional dimension in their servicescape framework (e.g. [Pizam and Tasci, 2019; Kandampully et al., 2022](#)). Consequently, smart servicescape is underdeveloped in the retailing area in the smart retailing age, while a more advanced analysis of smart servicescape is located in the health care realm. [Kwon et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Kang et al. \(2019\)](#) cultivate a smart servicescape

framework to portray a smart care home and the 'at-home' experience. One of the major contributions of their conceptual framework lies in distinguishing between the perceptible and imperceptible parts as the extension from the physical world to the digital world. Drawing upon [Kwon et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Kang et al. \(2019\)](#)'s work, this research will upgrade servicescape framework in the retailing area to theoretically break down the technology-enabled store environment (a detailed discussion will be presented in the ensuing section 2.3.4).

Thus, through this interdisciplinary review of the concept of 'servicescape', at the theoretical level, there is a lack of further exploration of smart servicescape in the retailing sector in the digital age, along with the interplay between such a technology-enabled environment and humanity ([Alexander and Kent, 2022](#); [Kandampully et al., 2022](#)). At the methodological level, it can be argued that very few qualitative studies are conducted to explore consumer experience in servicescape ([Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008](#); [Johnstone, 2012](#); [Pareigis et al., 2012](#); [Batra, 2014](#); [Ellway, 2014](#); [Alexander, 2019](#)), apart from a number of conceptual papers and the predominant quantitative approach in servicescape research realm. The implication is that although scholars have acknowledged the importance of consumer experience and are inclined to shift from the provider-centric angle to a more consumer-centric angle, most studies applying servicescape theory in studying consumer experience still bear the entrenched assumption of behaviourism (underpinned by rationalism), which is reflected by S-O-R model in servicescape theory. This tends to be problematic especially in the omni-channel age where consumers can browse, gain product information and make purchase everywhere as long as a smart device is with them. As such, the influence from 'firm-controlled elements' (e.g. elements of a store environment as stimuli) becomes faint in terms of 'consumer omni-channel retail experience' that is, in fact, an extension to consumers' life world context. As reviewed, S-D logic has helped underscores the phenomenological standpoint for the formation of consumer experience, however, a phenomenological perspective in the servicescape research stream is still missing.

As the end of section 2.1 hints, a phenomenological approach on servicescape sees consumer in-store interaction and experience afresh, whose starting point is consumers' own life world. In other words, the life world should be the primary driving force behind consumer in-store interaction and experience, rather than the physical world, a store environment or servicescape. On this point, extant studies heavily adhere to the physical world, thereby taking no genuine account of the personal world. As a consequence, the extant analysis of consumer in-store experience in literature is not much about what consumers actually experience, but more about what retailers would like consumers to experience, recognised by [Bèzes \(2019\)](#). In contrast, not only does a phenomenological approach enable what consumers actually experience to emerge, it also brings the underlying relation between the consumer and things (along with other people) in store environment to light, by which a human-centric understanding on servicescape can be formed. Therefore, a consumer/human-centric perspective requires a transformation not only at the research approach level but also at the level of research philosophy, which will be returned to in section 2.6 and afterwards. Before that, the following section will show what can be borrowed in the marketing and consumer literature as the build-up to a phenomenological perspective on consumer in-store experience.

2.3.2 The Interaction and Experience within and beyond Servicescape

From a phenomenological perspective, experience is contextualised and interactively created ([Becker & Jaakkola, 2020](#)) so that a fashion store can be viewed as the experiential context wherein the experience is influenced not only by elements within the store context, but also by 'factors' beyond the store environment in the experiencer's life world. Therefore, the application

of a phenomenological perspective requires a consumer-centric, broader view on the in-store experience which should not be confined to the scale of the store itself. In other words, the ‘in-store experience’ might be better articulated as ‘store-related experiences’ in consumers daily life. The perspective of “*service ecosystem*” (Akaka et al., 2015; Vargo et al., 2020) can be borrowed here since it is conducive to a further expansion on the scale of the interaction and experience within servicescape. Drawn upon S-D logic, service ecosystem (Figure 1 below) suggests a ‘zoom-out’ mindset wherein dyadic interactions in a specific space do not occur in isolation (Vargo and Lusch, 2015; Akaka et al., 2019), which extends the context of consumer experience to a three-layered system of interaction wherein the position of servicescape is located at the middle meso level. It can be viewed as a specific context in which various dyadic interactions between consumers and firms occur (Akaka and Vargo, 2015; Akaka et al., 2015; De Keyser et al., 2015).

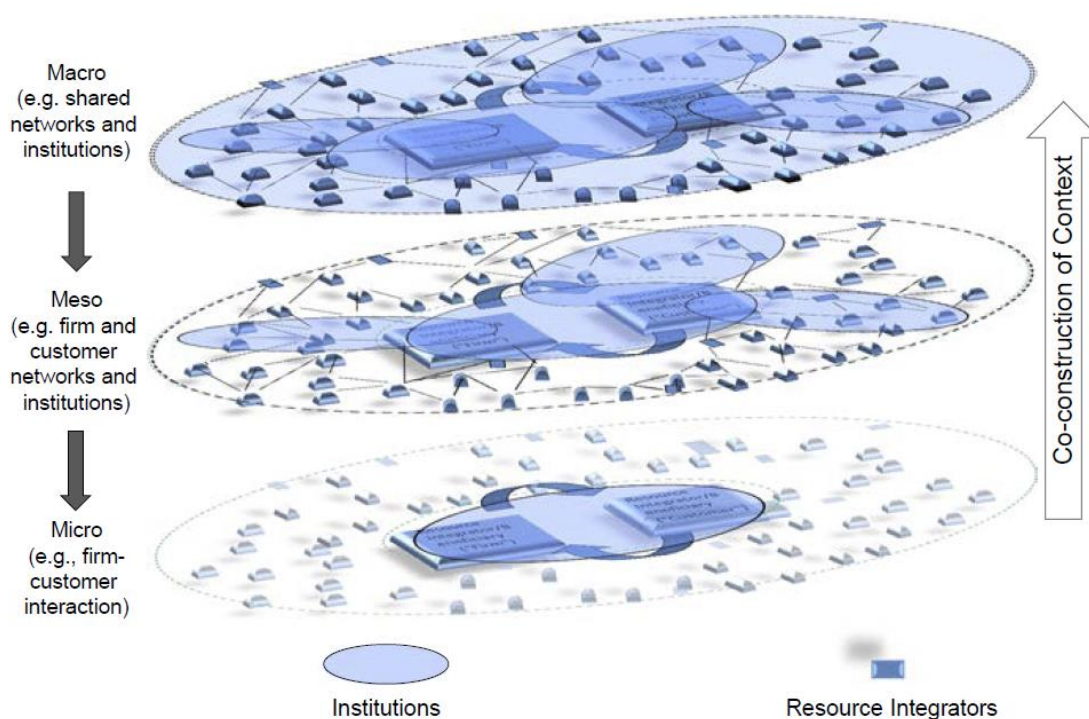


Figure 1. The service ecosystem (Akaka et al., 2015. pp213)

To elaborate, the micro-level represents the conventional focus on in-store experience, which is the provider-to-consumer interaction as the dyadic, direct interactions through service encounters (De Keyser et al., 2015). Experience at this level mainly depends on the core and peripheral service interactions (Akaka and Vargo, 2015). The meso-level is formed by multiple servicescapes in which various types of services coexist such as remote, self and interpersonal services (Akaka and Vargo, 2015). Multiple servicescapes mean that a fashion store, a bookshop, a restaurant, a tube station and so forth are viewed as various types of servicescapes that coexists. Moreover, the rapid evolution of communication and information technology has resulted in a revolution of interaction. Through smart devices, consumers can easily have access to various online platforms as e-servicescapes (Nikhashemi et al., 2021; Horakova et al., 2022), while for a conventional store environment, evolved interfaces, embedded intelligence and connection to internet have had it reconditioned obtaining more potentiality to affect the interactional experiences (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018; Bèzes, 2019; Alexander and Kent, 2022; Both and Steinmann, 2023).

Accordingly, in-store interpersonal experience can be gained not only through interactions with those physically presenting individuals, but also through individuals beyond the actual store environment (Fuentes et al., 2017; Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018). As a result, when a consumer is in a fashion store as a servicescape at the middle meso level, his/her experience is not confined to the store servicescape but actually is being influenced by multiple servicescapes. Imagine that the consumer had a brunch at a restaurant before going to a fashion store, his/her experience in the fashion store is not only influenced by in-store things and people, but also being influenced by his/her experience earlier in the restaurant as another servicescape, plus the consumer might be using a smart phone to communicate with friends who are not physically in the same fashion store. Thus, a servicescape does not act as a parameter of consumer experience. In terms of the macro-level, it represents broader structures that involve politics, law, institutions, social norms, national economies and so forth (Vargo and Lusch, 2016), which mediate the formation of experience in meso- and micro-levels since consumers (human beings) are channelled by the overlapping and intersecting institutions (Akaka and Vargo, 2015; De Keyser et al., 2015; Vargo et al., 2020).

2.3.3 The enriched Interactivity in technology-enabled store environment

Having ‘zoomed-out’ and expanded the scale of in-store interaction and experience, this section ‘zooms in’ to in-store interactivity in the digital age. Various research streams in marketing and consumer disciplines have reached a consensus that interactions are essential for the formation of experience (e.g. Holbrook, 1999; Jantzen, 2013; Jaakkola et al., 2015; Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018; Schallenh et al., 2019; Both and Steinmann, 2023). Thus, the interactivity of servicescape determines the richness of experiences consumers can potentially have. In recent years, store digitalisation tends to be a preferred way by retailers aiming to enhance in-store interactivity and fulfil twenty-first century’s digital citizens (Pantano and Timmermans, 2014; Mosquera et al., 2018; Alexander and Kent, 2022; Barann et al., 2022), whose life is occupied by digitalised things such as pictures, video, audio and text. A smart store aims to be connected and interactive, thereby offering the effective management of multiple interfaces to personalise experiencers’ experiences with an optimised performance (Roy et al., 2019). In such an interactive system, smart devices are somewhat autonomous and alive because of the embedded intelligence and connectivity with internet, which advance the form of in-store services that become “smart services” (Kwon et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2019). Many scholars have already underlined that shopping experiences are formed by a set of interactions between consumers and various objects within the service environment such as staff, products, ambient conditions, space, in-store technology, other consumers and so forth (e.g. Binter, 1992; Gentile et al., 2007; Antéblian et al., 2013; Mosquera et al., 2018; Siregar and Kent, 2019; Siregar et al., 2023).

Furthermore, omnichannel-related studies reveal that technology extends the scope of conventional in-store set of interactions to a much more inclusive degree (Ailawadi and Farris, 2017; Wagner et al., 2020; Nguyen and Nguyen 2022). Consumers now are able to reach all distribution and communication channels of a brand as well as all connections of the consumer such as online friends on social media or personal relationships offline (Bèzes, 2019; Lee et al. 2019; Le and Nguyen-Le 2020). All these remote interactions influence the consumer’s in-store experience as a “networked experience” (Pantano and Gandini, 2018). Thus, the technological elements which transform the way people interact also transform the structure of traditional servicescape into “a multiplicity of interactive system-environments” (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018). Referring to Ramaswamy and Ozcanb (2018)’s instance: on the one hand, in the digital world a small Like button on any social media can be viewed as linkage of platform components because it involves both visible and invisible parts. The visible part is the interface, while the invisible part is algorithms and protocols. Based on it, consumers’ approval of certain items

expressed by clicking the Like button on multiple social media platforms is automatically shared as “*an accepted practice in the online universe*” (pp. 198). On the other hand, in a physical store environment when a consumer is using either an in-store smart terminal or a personal smart device, multi-interactive platforms as multi-system-environments coexist within the smart servicescape. By digitalization, a smart servicescape acts as a hub of interfaces and interactive processes combining real-world interactions such as consumer-to-staff and consumer-to-consumer as well as digital-world interactions such as pictures and videos sharing on other social media platforms with real time data collection within one shared space (Kwon et al., 2017; Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018), where services become smart due to intelligent objects (Roy et al., 2019).

Additionally, since consumers’ experiences are, in part, influenced by a specific context (Akaka et al., 2015; Akaka and Vargo, 2015; De Keyser et al., 2020), an experience in such a technology-enabled environment is no longer limited to the experience in the physical place. The related experiences gained by the interactions in digital-world (such as using a brand app before, during, after one’s visiting a store) can be viewed as the extension of in-store shopping experience, for consumers actively construct their experiences across a multi-layered interactive platform (Fuentes et al., 2017; Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018; Pantano and Gandini, 2018; Schallehn et al., 2019).

Notwithstanding the technological elements that have drawn attention of a few servicescape studies, as mentioned in the previous section, technology is simply categorised into functional component of servicescape (Pizam and Tasci, 2019) or being viewed as one of atmospheric stimuli or experiential cues (Kent et al., 2015). For instance: the extant marketing studies have explored technological elements being used in the retail environment such as digital display (Burke, 2009; Newman et al., 2010; Roggeveen et al., 2016); smart mirrors and game terminals (Poncin and Ben Mimoun, 2014); as well as other more interactive technology such as order hub (Siregar and Kent, 2019) and in-store usage of smart phone (Fuentes et al., 2017; Pantano and Gandini, 2018). Yet, little attention is paid to smart servicescape itself as a whole through a holistic perspective. Therefore, drawing upon Ramaswamy and Ozcanb (2018)’s conceptualisation, this study sees smart servicescape as an assemblage consisting of four components: “*artifacts, processes, interfaces, and persons*” (pp.198) and the property of the servicescape depends on the synergy emerged from the combination. To elaborate:

Artefacts represent the objects such as products or elements belonging to physical and symbolic dimensions of servicescape (Bitner, 1992; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). Processes involve the process of interaction (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018), the process of resource integration (Kleinaltenkamp et al, 2012), the process of experiencing (Jaakkola et al., 2015; Becker, 2018) taken place within or beyond the physical boundary of servicescape. Interfaces entail various service encounters within a servicescape such as interpersonal services, self-services and remote services (Akaka and Vargo, 2015). Persons include the roles in conventional marketing studies such as employees, consumers and other stakeholders as actors (Vargo et al., 2020). What is more, Fuentes et al. (2017)’s view of servicescape as an assemblage can be reconciled with Ramaswamy and Ozcanb (2018)’s work. In this assemblage view, the whole servicescape as an interactive platform is not a close-off type but each part of an assemblage can also simultaneously be another assemblage at lower level containing its own components. An assemblage can become a part of a higher-level assemblage derived by agency (Fuentes et al., 2017) as the experiencing moment’ (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018). Note that the component of artefacts refers not only to physical things such as products and brochures, but also refers to the internal and external databases

(Kwon et al., 2017) involving various forms of data such as “*numbers, text, pictures, audio, and video*” (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018, pp198). This enables the digitalised store environment to be extended to the digital world as the critical element for a smart context as well as smart services being provided in that environment (Kwon et al., 2017).

2.3.4 The Smart Servicescape Framework as an interactive platform

In this sub-section, a smart servicescape framework is developed by integrating the conventional servicescape framework with key concepts discussed in the preceding passages. This research defines smart servicescape as a technology-enabled context incorporating omni-touchpoints and interfaces as a platform with enriched interactivity of both physical and digital worlds. To reflect its interactivity and holistness, several servicescape-related studies are referred. They are Pizam and Tasci (2019)’s experiencescape framework in the hospitality realm, acting as a reference for the development of the traditional servicescape dimensions as well as Kwon et al. (2017) and Kang et al. (2019)’s studies in the health care realm which distinguish the invisible part and the visible part of a smart setting, alongside Ramaswamy and Ozcanb (2018)’s advanced conceptualisation of the interactive platform. Based on these earlier studies, this research positions technology as a separate dimension leading to the visible and invisible parts of the smart servicescape.

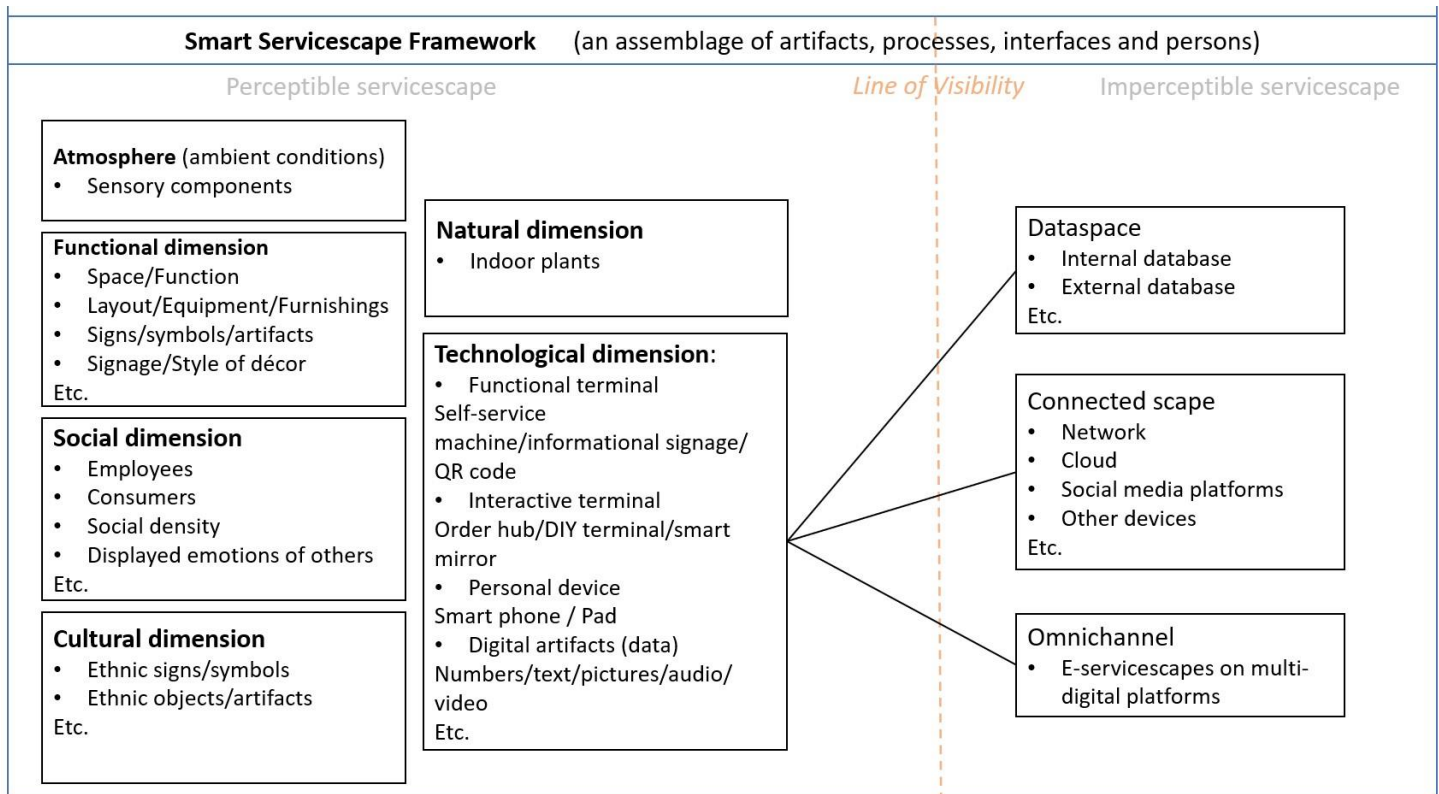


Figure 2. The smart servicescape framework

In this refined framework, all components has been elaborated in previous sections except for natural dimension which is deemed to be less relatable to smart servicescape. Yet, it is not eliminated from the whole. As previous studies have proven that natural element can significantly help human unwind (Rosenbaum, 2009; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Demattè et al., 2018) and hence this research retains its position in smart servicescape as a dimension. To briefly recap each component, the atmosphere dimension involves Bitner (1992)’s original ambient conditions and Kotloer (1973)’s sensory conditions reflected by the four of the total five sensory channels: visual,

aural, tactile and olfactory; for instance: lighting, ambient music, temperature, air quality are potentially affected both consumers and staff's actions and well-being (De Looze et al., 2003). The functional dimension represents overall functionality of the smart setting. This is reflected by functional design including layout, shape, size, signage (Bitner, 1992), which can also be affected by the technological element that is able to change store layout and appearance (Pantano & Naccarato, 2010; Kent et al., 2015; Siregar and Kent, 2019). The social dimension involves consumers, employees, social density and displayed emotions (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2003; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Johnstone, 2012; Hanks et al., 2017), alongside interactions (Schallehn et al., 2019). The cultural dimension involves cultural and ethnic symbolic objects and artefacts covering marginalised and sub-cultural groups (Pecoraro et al., 2021). The sociocultural, symbolic dimension of servicescape can form a narrative design to convey shared meanings which, together with the products, are conducive to the formation of consumer identity (Verhoef et al., 2009; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). It can affect consumers relationship and interactions with others, which in turn influences their experiences (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Arnould et al., 2023).

The newly added technological dimension involves functional terminals, hedonic terminals, personal devices and digital artefacts (pictures, text, numbers, video and audio). The functional terminals are mainly for utilitarian purposes such as self-check machine and digital signage, by which consumers can take the advantages such as saving time and secure more information and vouchers (Fernandes and Pedroso, 2017; Bèzes, 2019). The interactive terminals are both utilitarian- and hedonic-oriented such as order hubs and virtual reality which offer consumers the combined experiences between digital and physical worlds (Siregar and Kent, 2019; Jang et al., 2019; Guan, 2022). The emergence of AI digital human as a kind of interactive conversational interface can provide even more paradoxical experience (Van Doorn et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2022; Westphal et al., 2023). Personal and portable devices such as smart phones, iPad and smart watches act as the equipment owned by individuals (both consumers and staff), which have profoundly changed the routine of in-store commerce (Bèzes, 2019) such as finding promotions, comparing products' prices with other retailers, online payment, checking locations and opening hours of the store and so forth. The increasing non-commercial in-store usage of smart phones indicates that it helps consumers escape the over-promoted information and prolong their dwelling time by the possibility to connect with their friends and family members outside the store (Fuentes et al., 2017), which, in turn, forms a more positive mood (Spaid and Flint, 2014). Digital artifices constitute data in forms of "*numbers, text, pictures, audio, and video*" (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018, pp198). These components consist of the perceptible part of smart servicescape.

Moreover, the technological dimension can be further separated into the invisible part of a smart servicescape. It includes dataspace, connected space and omnichannel platforms. Dataspace is where the data locates and acts as a critical element for smart servicescape, because data is collected in a real-time manner in internal database and continuously exchanged, accumulated and communicated amongst intelligent embedded objects and other external databases (Kwon et al., 2017; Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018). Connected space represents the extensibility of smart servicescape in terms of the digital world where digital networks are built through cloud computing and multiple social media platforms as well as other smart devices being linked (Kang et al., 2019). Data therefore are processed across the network in connected space (Kwon et al., 2017). Omnichannel as a separate sub-division stresses the multiple platforms owned by the brand such as the online store, exclusive apps and social media. By integrating them into the brand's physical store, consumers can interact seamlessly and take advantage (Rigby, 2011; Herhausen et al. 2015; Lee et al. 2019; Le and Nguyen-Le 2020) with enriched co-constructed consumption

experiences (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018; Bèzes, 2019). These components form the imperceptible part of smart servicescape.

The invisible part is what distinguishes the smart servicescape from the conventional framework. Based on artificial intelligence which comprises connecting, cloud computing, data collecting and exchanging, the combination of imperceptible and perceptible parts of smart servicescape demonstrate how interactivity in the digital world is connected to interactivity in the physical world in an interactive service platform. Furthermore, dissimilar to a pure consumer-controlled, self-services context (e.g. cashier-free convenience stores, self-check-in hotels) or a heavily provider-controlled, super-services context (e.g. car services or luxury hotel services) (Akaka et al., 2019; Bèzes, 2019), smart fashion store requires interpersonal interactions between consumers and staff to provide interactive services (Bolton and Saxena-Iyer, 2009). Thus the smart servicescape framework comprises three types of interactions. First, technology-enabled object-to-object communications include data collecting and exchanging in a real-time manner across internal and external databases (Kwon et al., 2017). Second, consumer-to-object communications include interacting with technology-enabled objects (Siregar and Kent, 2019). Third, consumer-to-staff communications include interpersonal interactions supported by technology-enabled objects (Wunderlich et al. 2013). These three kind of communications as part of service processes together constitute smart service (Wunderlich et al., 2015; Roy et al., 2019). For the smart service process, consumers' interactions with the physical and digital artefacts can be viewed as resource integrating process wherein consumers act upon resources, while database and cloud computing simultaneously create new resources based upon actors' input for further integration of resources. Therefore, this smart servicescape framework acts as an updated version of configuration (Maglio & Spohrer, 2008) incorporating human; organisations; technology and shared information linking to internal and external service systems.

2.3.5 The role of technology and emerged intelligence in Smart Servicescape

For the smart servicescape framework (SSF), the dimension of technology requires further exploration. The extant servicescape-related studies in marketing realm brackets technology with functional component (e.g. Pizam and Tasci, 2019). Yet, it is somewhat fettered by the consideration of "*material artifacts*" (Akaka and Vargo, 2012) that ignores the autonomy of technology at some certain levels (Barile et al., 2024). Earlier, Orlikowski's (1992) explicates the role of technology as "*both a medium and an outcome of human action*", which is reflected in "*the design mode and the use mode*" (p. 408). Akaka and Vargo (2012) argue that a perspective which views technology as "*an outcome*", or "*ends*" (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018), of human action falls into G-D logic, because it overlooks technology's capability to influence solutions or form new resources as "*means*" for new offering (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018). In Rafaeli et al. (2017), the technologies capable of new solutions and resources are counted as "*thinking and feeling technology*", as well as the traditional, productivity-aimed technologies named "*automated technology*". Later, Huang and Rust (2018) further the aforementioned typology by comprising four types of intelligence. First, mechanical intelligence represents a minimum ability to learn and adapt. Second, analytical intelligence represents systematically-learning and adapting based on data. Third, intuitive intelligence means intuitively-learning and adapting based on understanding. Forth, empathetic intelligence means emphatically-learning and adapting based on experience. Drawing on S-D logic's definition of resources (Vargo et al., 2008; Vargo et al., 2020), assisted and automated intelligence, alongside its mechanical and analytical intelligence, as tools - that need actions acted upon them for valuable uses - can be viewed as operand resources. Autonomous and augmented intelligence, alongside its intuitive and empathetic intelligence - which are able to be active roles with specialised competence - can be counted as operant resources. Barile et al.

(2024) point out that “*not all technologies are operant resources*” and only when a technology is applied at “*a certain level of analysis (consumer or organisational level)*”, it “*could be considered operant, while it could also be considered operand at another level*” (pp.1134).

According to this holistic consideration, in SSF automated technology and thinking technology coexist. In terms of automated technology like pure functional terminals, they are operand resources, the products of human. In terms of thinking technology, they can be operand resources when not being activated. For example, in-store technological terminals can be viewed as decoration in the background when there are no actors (consumers or staff) operating them, whereby no resource integration processes occur. However, thinking technology can also be an operant resource (a “*process*” or “*means*”) when being activated. In this case, the in-store technological terminal is partaking in the interactive process where resources of digital artefacts including “*numbers, text, pictures, audio, and video*” (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018) are provided by cloud computing and data exchanging as *means*. Through this process, new types of resources might be generated which heighten the actors’ understanding (or decision-making) as their intelligence is augmented making them secure more wisdom (Huang and Rust, 2018; Barile et al., 2021). In addition, Akaka and Vargo (2014) point out that the view on a specific technology stems not only from the personal, situational factors of an actor but also from the context in which the technology is applied. Namely, user experience is evaluated phenomenologically. Accordingly, for the investigation on technology, some scholars particularly advocate a human-centred angle (Battarbee, 2003; Forlizzi and Battarbee, 2004; Maglio and Lim, 2016; Barile et al., 2021) because eventually technology is for human beings’ purposes and benefit, who must be better off using it.

Thus far, the traditional servicescape theory has been furthered in terms of its extensibility and interactivity. The new SSF framework with the perceptible and imperceptible parts together compose smart servicescape ensuring a multi-layered interactive system environment. The agential assemblage perspective, alongside the meso-level aggregation within its service ecosystem that broadens the scale of in-store interactions, make servicescape theory possible to be reconciled with a phenomenological perspective that the formation of consumers’ in-store interaction and experience is consumer/human-centric beyond the boundary of the physical servicescape being extended to individual life world. After theoretically update the conventional servicescape framework, the foci of the following 2 sections will move to the specific subjects of this study (consumers and staff) whose interaction and the interactional experience in the servicescape as the experiential context are under investigation.

2.4 The Interaction between consumers and frontline staff

2.4.1 Frontline staff in the analogue era

Marketing studies had acknowledged the significance of frontline staff long before, especially in terms of establishing interpersonal relationship, word of mouth and maintaining the relationship between consumers and brands (Cannon and Perreault, 1999; Gentile et al., 2007; McCabe et al., 2007; Kim and Kim, 2012; Rafaeli et al., 2017) as well as influencing consumers’ in-store experiences (Verhoef et al., 2009; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Immonen et al., 2018). Various factors exist to affect consumers’ interaction and experience with staff. On the one hand, as discussed in preceding sections, environmental factors could facilitate or hinder the interactions between consumers and staff such as store layout, ambient conditions and other consumers (Bitner, 1992; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). On the other hand, extant studies also show staff-related factors that influence consumers’ responses. To instantiate, Sharma and Stafford (2000)

reveal the availability of staff somewhat influences consumers' purchase intentions, especially in discount stores. Also, staff's attributes (Darian et al., 2001), interaction style (Clopton et al., 2006), dress style (Lee and Dubinsky, 2003), displayed emotions (Menon and Dube, 2000; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Ashtar et al., 2021), demographic variables such as ethnicity and their language (Kang and Hillery, 1998; Fowler et al., 2007; Roozen and Katidis, 2019) somewhat affect consumers' responses (Kim et al., 2010), experiences (Roozen and Katidis, 2019) and perceptions on the services they receive (Baker et al., 2002; Nickson et al., 2005; Soëderlund and Julander, 2009).

Shortly before the tendency of store digitalisation, Kim and Kim (2012)'s comprehensive review on the human factors in retail reveals well-studied outcomes of consumers-to-staff interactions, which are divided into three main aspects: 1) cognitive response such as loyalty and satisfaction, 2) emotional response such as positive and negative emotions, 3) behavioural response such as purchase, time spent and store patronage (Kim and Kim, 2012). The warmly and friendly communications can also offer consumers social and escapism value (Carpenter et al., 2005; Rosenbaum and Montoya 2007; Brocato et al., 2012; Albayrak et al., 2016). Since experience is created through interactive and collaborative processes, consumer-to-staff interactions should be seen as the very moment of experience formation in which actors actively participate in a collaborative, dialogical process (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Jaakkola et al., 2015; Schallehn et al., 2019; De Keyser et al., 2020).

2.4.2 Frontline staff in the digital age

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, there has been a significant investment of technology in business, for marketers and retailers hold expectations for the technological development to further retailing sector through 'multiple channel' (Rangaswamy and Van Bruggen, 2005) and 'cross-channel' (Kumar et al., 2006) strategies. In the early stage, the function of in-store technology is mainly utilitarian such as information display and consumer self-service aiming to advance the transactional process (Meuter et al., 2000; Zielke, 2011). As such, consumers obtain maximum level of control being able to carry out services with minimum interaction with staff (Gelderman et al., 2011). Later, because of the continuation of technological development, the function of in-store technology tends to be more interactive and immersive aiming to enhance consumer in-store shopping experiences (Rese et al., 2017). At the same time, the growing popularity of smartphone with the faster internet and ubiquitous WIFI have imposed a transformation of the form of retailing (Kim, 2021), through integrating all channels' experiences and processes into 'omnichannel' (Herhausen et al. 2015; Bascur and Rusu 2020; Le and Nguyen-Le 2020; Alexander and Cano 2020). This leads to a tendency of store digitalisation aiming to provide seamless, connected and personalised in-store consumption experiences (Bèzes, 2019).

Against this backdrop, there have been a small number of studies investigating the influences of high-tech elements on interactions between consumer and staff in retail stores. On the one hand, there are various advantage for both firms and consumers such as economic efficiency, reduction of the cost on time/money, reduction of queues, better information (Bèzes, 2019). On the other hand, the downside of fast technology adoption constitutes disruption for frontline staff who otherwise played a vital role in consumer and brand relationship building before (Pantano and Migliarese, 2014). For firms, economic efficiency of in-store technology is largely reflected by the reduction of in-store staff (Pantano and Viassone, 2014). Despite the necessity of consumer-to-staff interpersonal interaction and the irreplaceable positive outcomes such as consumers' satisfaction, loyalty and the increasing purchasing rate, Boeck and Wamba, (2008) point out that in a technologically-enriched store, it is more difficult for staff to build relationship with consumers due to the less frequency of interpersonal communions. Yet, Giebelhausen et al. (2014) assert that

on some occasions, consumers might prefer interpersonal interactions to technology. For example: a service failure often leads to consumers' frustrations. This kind of emotional change likely brings consumers to staff for expressing their frustrations and a resolution. Due to the lack of emotional competence of most current in-store technology (e.g. self-services terminals), the emotional change normally caused by 'bad results' of technology needs to be overcome by staff's intervention in terms of understanding, reassuring and regulating. Another occasion is when consumers seek professional advice or a "*personal connection*" has already been built with staff who know the consumer very well (Gremier and Gwinner, 2008). Furthermore, Rafaeli et al. (2017) illustrates three generations of technology and its impact on staff: 1) automated technology as standardisation (e.g. self-services terminals) aiming at the replacement of staff; 2) thinking technology as cognition-based personalisation entailing big-data processing aiming at empowering staff; 3) feeling technology as emotion-based personalisation aiming at enriching frontline interactions. Rafaeli et al. (2017) draw an analogy that automated technology is yesterday's technology. Thinking technology is today's technology. Feeling technology is tomorrow's technology. Automated technology has had frontline staff with mechanical tasks replaced (e.g. cashiers), however, thinking and feeling technology need human (staff and consumers) to act upon them for value formation (Akaka and Vargo, 2012, Barile et al., 2021).

Thus, it can be argued that although the rapid technological development has changed the way individuals communicate with others, the importance of consumers-to-staff interactions does not fade away. The current technology being widely applied in retail setting has not yet been able to completely replace the complex of interpersonal interactions (Giebelhausen et al., 2014; Huang and Rust, 2018; Ashtar et al., 2021), especially in fashion sector, for fashion has its own philosophy with multi-dimensional meaning and huge emotional and experiential connotation towards the products and consumers (Holbrook, 1999; Kautish and Sharma, 2018), which therefore differs significantly from other consumer products. In practice, people are keen to touch fashion products and consult with staff before purchasing. What is more, there are other reasons supporting the need of human-based services. First, the potential risk of the leakage of personal data impinges on the selection of technology-based services (Akman and Mishra, 2017). Second, technology failures and uselessness could result in great dissatisfaction (Giebelhausen et al., 2014) and more efforts from staff for service recovery (Bèzes, 2019). Third, consumers' ability influences their choices between human and technological services processes (Immonen et al., 2018).

Whilst in-store staff are still needed in this digital age, the frontline domain remains in a dilemma since the technologies somewhat, if not largely, impede the frontline interpersonal interaction (Pantano and Migliarese, 2014; Bèzes 2019). Huang and Rust (2018) portray several scenarios wherein staff, consumer and technology coexist. It can be encapsulated based on the three standpoints. First, a technology-centric perspective indicates that in the future, technology could be developed to completely replace staff in all forms of intelligence over humans. Second, a dual perspective covers both technology and human provided services simultaneously, in which consumers choose whatever types of interface they prefer. Third, a human-centric perspective emphasises that technology serves human and it is a tool to further human-based services, to undertake the tasks human refuse to do, to be a boots of human's competence and to be integrated or connected with human biologically to improve learning and well-being. As already mentioned in section 2.3.5, some scholars particularly advocate a human-centric perspective for the investigation on technology (Battarbee, 2003; Forlizzi and Battarbee, 2004; Maglio and Lim, 2016; Barile et al., 2021) since eventually technology is for human beings' purposes and benefit, who must be better off using it.

This study is in alignment with the human-centric perspective that leads to the amalgamation of human (staff and consumer), technology and the servicescape, yet to which little is known in marketing and consumer literature. Since the function of in-store technology tends to be more complex, negative side effects of a smart store on the workings of frontline staff have emerged and the situation of staff becomes a paradox (Moore et al., 2022). On the one hand, Bèzes (2019) points out that staff often need to alert consumers on the benefits and give quick tutorials on how to use these smart terminals, which not only takes staff's time but also changes their conventional role as professional advisors to the new role as merely an instructor. If there is no such instructors, consumers likely disregard in-store interactive terminals and then the firm's investment turns out to be a waste. (e.g., the failure of the Nespresso outlet in Lyon, exemplified by Bèzes 2019). Note that this point will be returned to in section 6.1.2 and section 6.2.1 where this study will explicitly present the reason why consumers likely disregard in-store interactive terminals based on an alternative worldview. On the other hand, when interacting with in-store interactive terminals, consumers probably have concerns of being seen by others as they the terminals are public with unfamiliar system (Siregar and Kent, 2019). This implies that for some advanced communal interactive terminals, staff and other consumers standing next to them might become a barrier to the experiencing process. The situation can become more paradoxical if AI digital human as an interactive interface of in-store service coexists with staff (Moore et al., 2022). What is more, whilst Immonen et al., (2017) have proved that consumers are still trust staff more than technology, Vannucci and Pantano (2019) argue that these days, consumers believe in-store technology more effective and trustful than staff. The respondents in the latter study point out that sometimes staff do not pay attention to consumers' real needs but aim to persuade consumers to purchase the product, whereas technology is more objective in terms of recommending substitutes (products) with no impact on their independent judgment.

Despite the factor of staff's communication skills, the reason that consumers' attitude on in-store technology clashes might result from that nowadays people have habituated to the technology and human coexisting world better than they used to be. In an omnichannel age, consumers becomes less controllable as they are empowered by technology with more freedom and knowledge than ever before (Nash, 2019). In-store staff is no longer the main channel for consumers to gain information of a product. The increased consumer-to-consumer interaction through online communities provides rich content too such as sharing reviews and user experiences of a specific product (Nash, 2019). As a result, it is possible for consumer to know almost everything regarding what they intend to buy with some pre-loaded 'experience' (Schallehn et al, 2019) before patronising a fashion store and communicating with staff. Therefore, although interpersonal interactions are still important in theory, in reality staff seem to be marginalised in this omnichannel age. Consequently, based on this potential paradox of the co-existence between staff and technology, marketing scholars have already called for exploration of the optimum blend of the technological facet and human facet in a store context for better consumer in-store experiences (Verhoef et al., 2009; Bèzes 2019; Alexander and Kent, 2022).

2.4.3 The interactional experiences amongst Consumers, Staff and Technology

Regarding the combination of human and technology-based services, Huang and Rust (2018)'s study discloses that not only has technology replaced unskilled labours for mechanical tasks, but is replacing skilled human workers for analytical jobs as well. At this stage, human skills and knowledge can no longer be viewed as having a strong comparative advantage compared to technology, for example, staff's knowledge of garments in fashion store. Yet, what are still the advantage of human beings is *intuition* and *empathy* (Huang and Rust, 2018), especially for frontline staff whose communication and negotiation with consumers are still uneasy to be replaced with

the current development of technology. In line with [Huang and Rust \(2018\)](#)'s thinking, the meaningful amalgamation of human-based service and technology-based service largely lies in the process where individual consumer's personal data is informed to staff (willingly by consumers themselves) and the staff can also access other databases via technology. Then the staff with intuitive and empathetic intelligence understand both consumer's personal data and data from the public to gain insight. Finally, the staff *contextually* synthesise them and provide *better personalised* solutions for consumers as individuals as a "*relationship-based personalisation*" differing from pure "*data-based personalisation*" in which the data are from massive others instead of the focal consumer as an individual ([Huang and Rust, 2018](#), pp. 164). This is also a typical example of the process of smart services in which technology provides huge amount of data, while consumers and staff leverage all information from various sources to make wiser, highly personalised decisions ([Roy et al., 2019](#)). In other words, without human's gaining more wisdom and make a wiser decision through social and technological interactions at the end ([Barile et al., 2021](#)), technology and big data are useless ([Huang and Rust, 2018](#)), namely technology must let human better off in a particular context.

In a technology-enabled fashion store, the smart servicescape *per se* as an interactive platform ([Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018](#)) supports consumers and staff interactions. [Orlikowsky \(1992\)](#) advocated that "*Technology is a product of human action, while it also assumes structural properties. That is, technology is physically constructed by actors working in a given social context, and technology is socially constructed by actors through the different meanings they attach to it and the various features they emphasize and use*" (pp.406).

To better understand the position and influence of technology in different contexts, [Barile et al. \(2021\)](#) argue that *Artificial Intelligence* (AI) includes the aforementioned four types of intelligence: assisted, automated, augmented and autonomous intelligence linking to algorithms as "smartness", while *Intelligence Augmentation* (IA) implies a broader concept as the effect resulted from the combination of human interactions with AI, their context comprehension, cognition and knowledge, which ensures better understanding or decision-making under specific contexts and institutional systems ([Vargo and Lusch, 2017](#)). To follow [Barile et al. \(2021\)](#), AI represents the traditional viewpoint that technologies are considered as the direct contribution, this is, a product of human action as "smartness" ([Orlikowsky, 1992](#)). IA represents "the effect produced by human beings' interaction with technologies", this is, the outcome of the action ([Orlikowsky, 1992](#)) in which human intelligent is advanced by AI as "wisdom" ([Barile et al., 2021](#)). Thus, AI makes a service context smarter, while IA, the integration of human intelligence by cooperating with AI, makes the service context wiser. AI and IA demonstrate the synergy from the interactions between technology and humans. Yet, interactions/experiences between human and technology vary according to the ability of available technologies ([Huang and Rust, 2018](#); [Barile et al., 2021](#)) and individuals in terms of technological and communicate competence, personal goals and institutional influences.

The enhanced actors' experiences by the IA effect in a given social context can be linked to [Battarbee \(2003\)](#)'s conceptualisation of 'user co-experience'. [Battarbee \(2003\)](#) in the product design realm emphasises the unique collaborative experiences generated from the use of technology in social interaction. According to [Battarbee \(2003\)](#), individuals' daily interpersonal experience implies an interactive process in social activities, in which the involved actors act together collaboratively and reciprocally in order to create shared emotion or accomplish tasks, thereby forming a shared experience. It is driven by human beings' "*social needs of communication*" and it is personal and contextualised including actors' own interpretations and social practices

(Forlizzi and Battarbee, 2004), through which relationships are maintained and aims become easier to achieve (Battarbee, 2003). This is applicable to the interpersonal experience between consumer and staff in a SSF context wherein human-based and technology-based services are integrated to assist consumers to achieve the goals in their everyday life.

2.5 Generation Z

Having reviewed in detail the interaction between consumers and staff that has previously taken place in brick-and-mortar stores and nowadays in a technology-enabled store environment, this section continues to narrow the focus of this research down to the specific group of consumers, Gen Z, with explanations of their characteristics and why this generation are chosen as the target group of participants in this study.

From a psychological perspective, one's current experience is affected by memories of the past events and the anticipation of future (Jantzen, 2013; Zajchowski et al., 2017), while under a phenomenological perspective, one's experience is bound up with his/her life world. Events happened in one's life are ineluctable influenced by the broader environment such as political, social, historical, thereby often affecting one's thought, experience, belief and outlook on life (Umberson et al., 2010; Christiansen et al., 2021). As such, generally speaking, experiences vary according to different generations and this generational factor can be significant especially in relation to experience and the experiencing processes of technology as the rapid development of technology continuously changes human interaction and communication. In the digital age, retailing and consumers become more dependent upon technology, which is a "*generation-shaping consideration*" (Munsch, 2021) and the experience and outcome in a smart servicescape partially, if not chiefly, depends on the effective use of technologies (Barile et al., 2021). As a result, the generational difference can be more significant on the shopping habits and experiences in a technology-enabled fashion store. From retailers' angle, different cohorts do bring influence and challenge as efficient marketing communication presupposes the understanding of consumer behaviour and expectations that vary according to different generation (Priporas et al., 2017; Vojvodić, 2019; Dunas and Vartanov., 2020; Alexander and Kent, 2022).

Marketers have an interest in exploring Gen Z's behaviour because they somewhat struggle to effectively deliver their promotion and value proposition (Munsch, 2021). Generation Z is the generational cohort born between 1995 and 2010 approximately (White, 2017) or 1997-2012 (Siregar et al., 2023), who are viewed as digital natives (Patranabis, 2012) and mobile natives (Lanier, 2017). Unlike generation Y or Millennials (1980-2000) who were exposed to and adopted technology and the internet from their early years (Holton and Fraser, 2015; Issa and Isaias, 2016), generation Z could be the first generation without awareness of the age before the existence of the internet (Fromm & Read, 2018; Munsch, 2021). In other words, they are brought up by technologies inseparable from their life. With such intensive exposure compared to other generations, Gen Z is believed to bear more familiarity and understanding of technology (Munsch, 2021). Accordingly, they see technology is essential in every context in their life such as institutional, working and personal settings (Roblek et al., 2019). Generally speaking, in daily life they trust technology as a boost to their confidence and working efficiency, with searching online for information being prioritised before in-person consultation. Furthermore, Gen Z are keen to communicate with others online by a mixture of text, emojis, stickers, pictures, voice, videos and internet memes. As such, they can be less patience since marketers with digital marketing strategy already feel uneasy to capture the full attention of digital natives who normally are willing to concentrate on one topic for mere 15 seconds (Munsch, 2021). They specialise in multi-tasking

online and offline and value peer acceptance and would often seek it through social media (Issa and Isaías, 2016; Pavlič and Vukić, 2019).

In respect of shopping in a fashion store context, Gen Z consumers' in-store shopping seems to have been reshaped because of smart devices and social media in their everyday life (Siregar et al., 2023). Moreover, an implication attributed to the generational characterises is the viewpoint on technology-enabled store environment (smart servicescape). Such a store environment with physical and digital artefacts as well as online and offline resources available via multiple platforms might bear a sense of 'extraordinariness' for some people, whereas it is also likely to have become an ordinary kind for Gen Z who have prolongedly led their life in this way. In other words, some consumers might feel this kind of in-store experience extraordinary, while Gen Z as digital natives likely feel it quite ordinary, because what a firm believes is possible to be viewed differently by a consumer (Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023). By choosing Gen Z as the subject, this research is able to water down the so-called extraordinariness of a digitalised store moving from the extraordinary side to the ordinary side of the consumer experience spectrum in marketing and consumer research stream (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Carù and Cova, 2003; Sussman & Alter, 2012). This is important because little extant store-related research can be located within the ordinary side.

Notwithstanding their character has already been studied, little is known about Gen Z's interpersonal experience with staff in a technology-enabled fashion store context. It is reasonable to deduce that these digital natives prefer the technology-based services more than traditional human-based services, for digital natives' overly relying on technology and internet could make them a little discomfort in face-to-face communications (Munsch, 2021). This might impact on their interactions with staff when patronising a physical store. Priporas et al. (2017) investigate "*generation Z consumers' expectations of in-store interactions in smart retailing*" and admit that technology can influence their in-store experiences significantly and those digital natives expect more from technology in helping their decision-making, improving transaction security and enhancing their shopping experiences. However, also in Priporas et al. (2017)'s study, Gen Z express their concern about the negative consequence brought by store digitalisation to the intersubjective aspect. Conversely, findings from other studies show that digital natives often shop in physical stores and desire 'co-created' experiences (Skinner et al., 2018), particularly through social interactions (Vojvodić, 2019).

In the current time, Gen Z are regarded as the hope for retailers, who lead the trends in retailing in the future, however, their shopping experiences in this digital age remain under-researched, especially the influence of smart retailing on their interpersonal interactions and the interpersonal experiences with staff so that the voice from Gen Z consumer calls for focus.

2.6 Research gap identification and research questions

The literature review has covered areas entailed by the aim of this study including consumer experience, the store environment and technology, frontline staff and Gen Z consumers. It can be seen from the review that each area has its own unsolved problems. In terms of consumer experience, marketing and consumer scholars are still in the process of accepting the distinction between what brands would like consumers to experience and what consumers actually experience (Bèzes, 2019), thereby being in the process of acknowledging the distance between what have been studied and what have been actually operative. This is evidenced by the recent call for more attention and empirical studies on the concept of 'ordinary experience' in consumers' everyday life (Roggeveen and Rosengren, 2022; Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023; Both and Steinmann,

2023). In terms of the store environment, although it has been well-studied through environmental theories (Bitner, 1992; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Pizam and Tasci, 2019; Laroche et al., 2022), in a technology-enabled store environment, previous studies reveal that there is still friction between technologies, the store environment and human (Roy et al., 2018; Bèzes, 2019; Alexander and Kent, 2022). In terms of staff and consumers, in the past decade studies have concentrated on the consumer's adoption of in-store technology (Inman and Nikolova, 2017); their preference for different channels (Kazancoglu and Aydin, 2018; Barann et al., 2022) and their interactional experience of in-store technology (Savastano et al., 2019; Siregar and Kent, 2019; Guan, 2022). However, apart from consumer-to-technology interaction, research on consumer-to-staff interaction and interpersonal experience remains scant, especially in the digital age where staff are in a paradoxical situation due to the impact of store digitalisation (Rafaeli et al., 2016; Huang and Rust, 2018; Ashtar et al., 2021), who are somewhat marginalised (Bèzes, 2019), especially with Gen Z consumers who are heavily technologically empowered (Priporas et al., 2017; Siregar et al., 2023).

This study sees that these unsolved problems in the three areas are interconnected. The lasting friction between technologies, the store environment and human in smart servicescape results from the lack of research focusing on consumer-to-staff interaction and experience in such a technology-enabled store environment, because no matter how advanced the design of a store environment is, eventually it is human (the consumer and the staff) who use technologies and store environment. And the interpersonal interaction must take place in *a natural setting* and the interpersonal experience must be *naturally-gained* experiences. This naturalness is the indication of the ordinary kind of experience in consumers' everyday life. In other words, it is unlikely, if not problematic, to study interpersonal interaction and experience in an experimental setting. Nonetheless, the ordinary, everyday experience of consumers, especially in relation to a (fashion) store environment, is what is lacking as the literature review has shown.

The root of the current research climate lies in the predominant Cartesian worldview that rules all the leading paradigms in marketing and consumer disciplines (Thompson, et al., 1989) in which much business and consumer research based on logical positivism and empiricism scientifically testing of theories should be grouped under the umbrella of Cartesianism (also see section 2.1). The essence of Cartesianism is to view human beings as a kind of substance - either an object situating amongst other things, or an enclosed entity with an organ named brain that can process information (McMullin, 2013). This worldview seals individual life world to a certain extent, or even worse, it does not allow individual life world to exist in the first place. Nevertheless, a human-centric standpoint towards consumers means the acknowledgment of individual life world consisting of their workaday life. As a result, it is not surprising to find that studies on consumers' experiences in their ordinary life is missing due to the abandonment of individual life world. Similarly, the dismissal of individual life world results in the friction between technologies, environment and human, for the majority of extant research on consumer in-store interactions and experiences (even with a qualitative approach) seem to have forgotten that it is consumers who patronise fashion stores *in their everyday life* (although this is foundational to qualitative research - the real world), where they encounter in-store technology, staff, other consumers and things in the store environment. Namely, consumers' use and feelings of technology-based and human-based services as well as the dimensions of a fashion store (servicescape) all take place in - and being influenced by - consumers' own life world. As such, the two worlds (store environment and individual life world) should be both underscored, other than merely highlighting one world, the store environment.

Even more complicated, the intersubjective encounter and the corresponding interpersonal experience is, in fact, the encounter of each individual life world. This is the reason why interpersonal experiences must be *naturally-gained* experiences that are more subtle and elusive to capture than the experience of using and interacting with things. When it takes place in a store environment as this research context, it should be the encounter of both the consumer and the staff's life worlds within the store environment. Namely multiple worlds are metaphorically overlapped at the moment consumer-to-staff interaction occur in a fashion store. Thus, it is not surprising that little is known about the interpersonal facet in marketing and consumer research realms, because it presupposes the acknowledgement of individual life world and an interpersonal interaction, in fact, represents the encounter of multiple life worlds. Therefore, beside the worldview on interpersonal encounters, the research strategies being employed to capture and analyse consumer experience of things (e.g. products, technology, a store environment) are inapplicable to interpersonal experience, because each subject's life world cannot be examined in an unnatural, experimental setting. Note that the conception of 'a natural setting' and research strategy will be further discussed in section 6.3.2.

Consequently, with overly-focusing on the physical (and digital) world (the store environment) as well as insufficient studies on the interpersonal facet (consumer-to-staff interaction), the interplay amongst human, technology and store environment remain obscure. To conquer the aforementioned research problems, this study adopts an alternative worldview inverse to the mainstream one in marketing and consumer literature. It means to see and understand the world afresh and holistically. Since articulation via vocabulary mirrors mentality, in the following chapters terms that are familiar and popular in marketing and consumer literature but mirrors the Cartesian mindset - such as terms belonging to behaviourism and (cognitive) psychology - will be replaced accordingly from the ensuing chapter and afterwards.

Based on preceding discussions, two research questions are proposed here:

- *What is Gen Z consumers' interpersonal experience with staff in technology-enabled fashion stores?*
- *How is Gen Z's interpersonal experience with staff formed in the digital age?*

Chapter 3 Methodology

This methodological chapter starts off by presenting a mainstream, psychological perspective on the concept of 'human experience' in order to contrast with ensuing elucidation of Heidegger's existential philosophy that is the overarching worldview of this study. After elaborating on the philosophical background, a figure will be presented as the integration of Heidegger's thinking with the smart servicescape framework developed in section 2.3.4, which makes the conventional environmental theory imbued with a consumer-centric, existential perspective as a transformation from the traditional understanding of the moment 'consumers are in a fashion store' into a Heideggerian understanding as 'consumers-being-in-a-fashion-store'. Subsequently, this chapter will centre on research strategy, where the two schools of phenomenology will be discussed followed by an extended comparison especially in terms of the conception: *Intentionality*. After establishing the philosophical underpinning and the accompanying research strategy of this study, the procedure of data collection and the interpretive approach *Hermeneutics* will be explained and the interpretive procedure will be outlined, before considerations of research ethics.

3.1 Human Experience under Contemporary Psychology

Generally speaking, the term ‘experience’ could be one of the few words that people use every day, but is hard to give a clear definition. In English, it contains two forms: the noun ‘experience’ and the verb ‘experiencing’, with multiple meanings subject to different contexts in daily life (Collins, 2024; Cambridge, 2024). To minimise the confusion, Jantzen (2013) refers to its German equivalents: *Erlebnis* means the verb ‘experiencing’ as a present volatile moment of sensing, feeling and knowing the ongoing situation, which can be further divided into three subtypes: 1) *Erleben*: an act of sensing and feeling; 2) *Erfahren*: an act of observing autobiographical knowledge; 3) *Erlebnis*: autobiographical knowledge (countable) dwelled in short or long-lived episodic memories. The noun ‘experience’ is rendered as *Erfahrung*, namely “a coming to know a fact”, which can be further divided into three subtypes based on different kinds of memory: 3) *Erlebnis*: autobiographical knowledge (countable) dwelled in short or long-lived episodic memories; 4) *Erfahrung*: practical skills (uncountable) dwelled in implicit procedural memories; 5) *Erfahrung*: conscious knowledge (uncountable) dwelled in generalised episodic memories. Accordingly, both *Erlebnis* (experiencing) and *Erfahrung* (experience) representing a state of mind. *Erlebnis* constitutes the act of having *Erfahrung*, namely ‘experiencing’ is a process to produce ‘experiences’ that can be viewed as outcomes of a past experiencing process (Jantzen, 2013; Zajchowski et al., 2017). An experience is thus a mental journey in which the memory of things happened in past but continuously being kept in mind (Sundbo, 2009).

The five types of experience are interconnected and transferable. According to Jantzen (2013)’s detailed discussion, the sensing and feeling process (experience 1) is associated with, or impacted by, former experiences consisting in practical skills (experience 4) and conscious knowledge (experience 5), which are developed before current experiencing processes. When the current experiencing moment ends, it becomes a type of past autobiographical knowledge/memory (experience 3). It might be remembered when one is experiencing something relevant in the further as a cycle. The recurrence of autobiographical knowledge/memory (experience 3) might be developed into practical skills (experience 4) and conscious knowledge (experience 5) as an experiential learning process (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Furthermore, during the current experiencing process, sensing and feeling (experience 1) often merge with knowledge gaining (experience 2) and could branch out to autobiographical knowledge/memory (experience 3), practical skills (experience 4), conscious knowledge (experience 5) or even a new sensing and feeling process (experiencing 1).

To follow Jantzen (2013), consequently ‘experiencing’ is a changing and ongoing process combining the unknown and therefore curious part with the known and hence presumed part. The unknown part becomes known later in retrospect and by knowing more one’s new potential can be generated for the further. As such, the complexity of human experience is reflected by the psychological coherence and ramifications. The coherence of human experience always involves the process of immediate feeling and sensing, a kind of bodily action, thereby being deemed to be corporeal and mental phenomena. Human experience as the present sensing and knowing blends with the past memory and knowledge as well as the hope and worries (Jantzen, 2013). Therefore, the five types of experience are intertwined together influencing the experiencing process and the presence is influenced by the past, which forms the future.

Attentionally, when it comes to human experiences in an environment (e.g. fashion store), under psychology the environment per se is often viewed as an external stimulus by which individuals’ experiences are directed as their emotions change such as the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-

R) model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) and atmospherics (Kotler, 1973). These frameworks underpinned by environmental psychology, approach human experience via three emotional dimensions: arousal, pleasure and dominance (Bakker et al., 2014), whereby experiences are evaluated based on emotional responses (Bastiaansen et al., 2019). This environmental psychological standpoint is drawn on the Cartesian assumption believing that human experiences are measurable and determined by *structural mechanisms* (Thompson et al., 1989).

Having outlined the traditional view of 'experience' and 'experience within environment', it can be seen that under psychology, the essence of a human being is a kind of substance. To the best, it is a substance with an organ called brain to process information (internal, mental journey/cognitive structure) and the pieces of information are received externally outside the body. It is as if a human was a self-contained, thinking material, which is initially *worldless* (Heidegger, 1927/2010). The next section will present Heideggerian thinking and elaborate how 'experience' and 'environment' work under Heidegger's philosophy that breaks through the Cartesian legacy 'dualism' by underscoring the *worldishness* of human beings. One will find in the end that the standpoint of 'a worldly existing subject with own temporality' is essential for this study to rethink the approach for the studied phenomenon as an overlooked angle in the literature about human *natural* interaction and experience within an environment (e.g. a fashion store).

3.2 Heideggerian Existentialism

The root of existentialism can be traced back to Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Danish thinker and pioneer of the philosophy of existence. Later, the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) advocated applying phenomenology as the methodology for Kierkegaard's existential philosophy (Valle et al., 1989; King, 2001). However, Heidegger (1889-1976) was not satisfied with Husserl's approach and thus developed the treatises *Being and Time* as well as *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* as the sequel. The two represent Heidegger's perspective of the existence of *Dasein*¹ and the accompanying methodology for the interpretation. Throughout his treatises, the existence of *Dasein* is Heidegger's primary concern and the leading question is "*How is Dasein?*". Due to the density of Heidegger's philosophy, it is convenient to begin with the original, indivisible, conceptional unity: "*being-in-the-world*", whereby the being of *Dasein* can be explained in the way that *Dasein* is always already being-in-the-world (a concise one), stated by Heidegger. The following sub-section will enlarge on this conceptional unity², which forms the foothold of this study for rethinking consumers' visit to fashion stores. The reason why Heidegger's phenomenology is chosen other than Husserl's or other existential thinkers' will be elaborated

¹ This is the term Heidegger uses to refer to the beings that we are. McMullin (2013) views the application of the term 'Dasein' as Heidegger's protest against the tendency of being dualism. The German term will be explained in more detail in the following sub-section.

² To avoid being limited by secondary literature, the primary references of Heidegger's philosophy in this study are:

Heidegger, M., 1927/2010. *Being and Time*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. State University of New York Press: Albany.

Heidegger, M., 1975/1988. *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Albert Hofstadter. Revised Edition Indiana University Press.

King, M., 2001. *A Guide to Heidegger's Being and Time*. Edited by John Llewelyn. State University of New York Press: Albany.

McMullin, I., 2013. *Time and The Shared World*. Northwestern University Press.

subsequently in section 3.3.

3.2.1 The being of Dasein and the being of beings

The first task is to have a close look at the German term *Dasein*, which leads to the contrast between Dasein and beings. Unfortunately, according to King (2001), there is no single term in English able to render the full meaning of Dasein. For simplicity, 'man' can be an expedient term, but this purely ontic term is incapable to fully express the ontological meaning of Dasein. Several alternatives in English phrases exist since the meaning of Dasein varies depends on the context in *Being and Time*, such as "*man's being*", "*being-here*", "*being-there*" and "*factical existence*" (King, 2001, pp. 47-49). Furthermore, in Heidegger's philosophy the expression 'existence' and 'to exist' are exclusively reserved for Dasein. The being of beings other than Dasein is named '*objective presence*' or '*real being*' and the structure of this mode of being is named '*reality*'. Thus, there is a basic existential distinction drawn in Heidegger's philosophy between Dasein and reality, which is reflected by the two phrases 'to exist' and 'to be real'. The reality of a real thing like a pen is characterised by a certain passivity as the pen itself cannot understand that it is a pen, which is only manifested to Dasein. Instead, Dasein exists in an actively disclosing way through understanding and Dasein's understanding belongs to each Dasein singly and uniquely. Thus this extreme individuation of Dasein is revealed as 'my being' or 'my existence' (pp. 30).

3.2.2 Three different meanings of the term 'world' in Heidegger's philosophy

What does 'the world' in the phrase 'being-in-the-world' mean? Does it mean a real connection of real things as a nature world? According to Heidegger (1927/2010, pp. 63-65; 75), it is certainly not. There are three different meanings of the term 'world' in Heidegger's philosophy (also see King, 2001, pp. 51-70). First, it is a pure existential-ontological concept where the world is the way in which Dasein exists since there must be a world to be in, namely being-in-the-world is an essential structure of Dasein's existence. Second, it means the pre-philosophical concept of world: nature as the common, default understanding of the term 'world' implying a real connection of real things, facts, people or the totality of beings in a common shared world. Third, it means the phenomenological concept of world: a life world surrounding Dasein. This is an *existentiell* concept of a world wherein Dasein lives. More specifically, it is the nearest life world of his/her existence. The surrounding world differs and varies individually in a certain way, which is the basis and starting point of Heidegger's thinking. Additionally, it should be highlighted that, according to Heidegger, only from the combination of the pre-philosophical concept of world and the surrounding life world that a *factically existent Dasein* can be drawn, because factual being-in-the-world always entails "*being-with intraworldly beings*" (Heidegger, 1975/1988). This leads to the divergence from Husserl's thinking as well as the fundamental distinction between Heidegger's existentialism and contemporary psychology (also see section 3.4.4).

3.2.3 The Structure of Dasein as Care and its Temporality

In *Being and Time* Heidegger interprets 'the being of Dasein' as care in an extremely complex way, which is articulated through three main structures: forwardness, thrownness and fallenness. They together delineate how the whole Dasein is and how Dasein wholly is (King, 2001) since Daseins care about who they are to be and hence how to be (McMullin, 2013). This sub-section will encapsulate the most fundamental aspects and concepts entailed by the three structures that inspire this research and help the interpretation of the data.

- *Forwardness/Possibility*

Heidegger defines the basic character of the existence of Dasein is '*for the sake of*'. The meaning

of this phrase suggests a purpose or an aim. According to King (2001), a purpose and an aim can also mean an end which might, in turn, be used as a means to a further aim and end. An aim cannot be a fact but something ahead of Dasein who conceives it as a possibility to achieve in the future. Here a question arises that how Dasein is capable of conceiving something like an aim. Heidegger's answer is that Dasein must throw themselves forward into the future, to discover things and events that are not completely non-existent, by which Dasein takes their own direction from the things and events in the future for what should be done here and now. Importantly, "*Dasein must be able to understand themselves not only in that I am, but in the possibility that I can be*" (King, 2001, pp. 32). The existence of Dasein is to be constantly "*ahead of*" or "*in advance of*". The "*I am*" is primarily understood from the fore-throw of an '*I can be*' (*I am able to be*)" and hence "*Dasein exists primarily from the future*" (pp. 32). This is disclosed to themselves in *the possible-being* (I can be).

Furthermore, according to King (2001)'s interpretation, *Possibility* is also relevant to Heidegger in the sense of "*empower*", "*enable*" and "*make capable of*", which Heidegger calls the essence of Dasein's existence (pp. 33). It by no means indicates that Dasein first of all really exists and then proceeds to produce its own essence. Rather, in order to make themselves into who they are, they exercise their freedom of choice. In other words, understanding themselves in their own *ability-to-be* enables Dasein to be Dasein in the most essential aspect of self. However, things and events in the future evidently only are as possibilities as events that "*can be*" (pp.34). The '*can be*' in itself implies that it can also '*not be*'. It would be impossible for Dasein to understand the '*can*' without the understanding of it as *possibly not*. Similarly, even if the phrase '*must be*' implies all possibilities are impossible except one (pp.35). Thus, Heidegger reveals that the being of Dasein is in advance determined by a *not*, who understands themselves in their being from the constant possibility that he can also not be. This is Dasein's finite possibility, freedom and self. The time-character of forwardness, in an ordinary understanding, can roughly refer to the future.

- *Thrownness/Attunement*

The existence of Dasein is to be constantly 'ahead of' or 'in advance of' and brings the possibilities toward Dasein his/herself, but only if Dasein already, in fact, *is*. The facticity of Dasein's being is revealed as being already here, thrown into a world. The phenomenal character of the '*I am*' is that it can never be grasped except as '*I already am*' --- it is, "*I am as having been*" (King, 2001, pp.36). The factual existence manifests itself in the way that Dasein can always and only find him/herself already here, with their thrownness in which moods and feelings rise (pp.56). Dasein can never get behind this 'already' and this dependence of Dasein is originally and elementally revealed in the mode of disclosure named *attunement* (Heidegger, 1927/2010). There are ways to form Dasein's attuned understanding, for example moods and feelings tune Dasein and bring Dasein in a way that he/she finds themselves in the midst of other things and people, dependent upon a world (Heidegger, 1927/2010). In everyday existence, the receptivity through the senses, the affection and perception of what is already there, is not a pure receptivity, nor a mere passive absorb what is given, but is an ongoing "*spontaneous activity of attunement*" making Dasein "*open and constantly keeps their open to whatever may approach from the world*" (King, 2001, pp. 57). Therefore, Dasein is a thrown subject whose thrownness is not like Act One or Two of an opera that can be finished, but rather it is a never-ending fact where Dasein *remains in the throw*. It can be approximately tantamount to the understanding that one always has a past that is ongoing into the present. However, for Dasein, his/her *world* never truly passes or vanishes as 'a past world', but 'has been' so that it is inappropriate to say Dasein remains in 'the past', but remains in *the throw* bridging between 'the past' and 'the present' as a never-ending process (until death befalls).

Therefore, the time-character of thrownness, in an ordinary understanding, can only be roughly referred to the past,

- *Fallenness/Being-with/Entanglement in Surrounding World*

In *Being and Time*, Fallenness implies 'falling prey' or captive to the world that is the basis of the factual being of Dasein who disowns him/herself by giving them away to things and events, in their occupations and in company with other people (Heidegger, 1927/2010). In a wider sense, the 'being-with-things' is reflected by "*circumspective commerce with things in a more confined or broader environment*" (pp.69). In Dasein's everyday existence, they are surrounded by their nearest world, wherein things (reality) show them in first place not as substances that happen to be there in a universal space but as utensils that are handily there within the world (pp. 72-75). In other words, unlike to sciences, the ontological character of the things within Dasein's everyday world, in Heidegger's thinking, is their handiness, rather than the material properties of things as substances. How is it possible for Dasein to understand the being-there of things? Heidegger's answer is that Dasein's everyday care understands the being of things from their relevance to the significance-structure of a world. Dasein's everyday having-to-do-with things discovers the handiness of things and only on the basis of already discovered handiness of things does their merely substantial presence become accessible (pp. 78-87).

It should be borne in mind that the traditional ideation of things originating from the substantial or objective presence is because the handiness has been completely overlooked as a result of Dasein's everyday forgetfulness (King, 2001). Heidegger does not completely dismiss the substance-oriented point of view, however, he asserts that the substantiality is mere one possible way in which the essence of beings can be disclosed by understanding. It means that there are other ways. The interpretation of substantiality as the explicit-theoretical-working-out is carried out in the definition of "*the basic concepts of science*" (Heidegger, 1927/2010), which is mathematical in character and quantitatively definable. There is a vast distinction between this scientific-theoretical mode of explanation and a circumspectly-deliberating-bringing-closer of handy things. Heidegger further stresses that the scientific method is to guide and regulate all approaches and access to things within its field. This is out of place in a *circumspect-taking-care* which is guided and stabilised by the care of Dasein's own *ability-to-be-here* in a *significance-structure* of the world. The factual existence enables Dasein to understand things first as utensils. The world surrounding Dasein as the first and nearest world - wherein Dasein entangles with beings and other people - is evidently the for-world, namely for the sake of Dasein's own existence. Through the relational complex "*by means of... in order to... for...*" (King, 2001, pp.70), Dasein inhabits this nearest for-world by dealing with businesses in it, which is in advance guided by a circumspect for-sight that discovers what things are for and under what circumstances they can be used as a means. The circumspect for-sight is thus the way in which the whole significance-structure of the world, '*by means of... in order to... for...*', is disclosed in an original, indivisible unity (Heidegger, 1927/2010, pp.76-81). Accordingly, in everyday life, Dasein with common sense sees things in advance in the light of their possible utility, serviceability, harmfulness, relevance or irrelevance to circumstances. The time-character of fallenness, in an ordinary understanding, can be roughly referred to the present, the 'now'.

- *Dasein as the unity of time*

The three main structures (forwardness, thrownness and fallenness/being-with) presented in the preceding section are articulations of the original whole of Dasein as *care* for who they to be, where Dasein exists as the unity of time: future, past and present (Heidegger, 1927/2010). In other words,

Dasein does not exist merely as a thing at this moment but bears the process in which Dasein is being thrown, falling and being brought to 'ripeness' by time and as time (King, 2001). The three main structures are inseparable as a whole of Dasein's existence. Talking about Dasein's factually existing already implies the process of falling away to the things and people that Dasein meets within the world. Similarly, speaking of thrownness already implies forwardness as only by understanding possibilities Dasein finds him/herself already thrown into a world, rather than merely occur in it in a thing-like way. Similarly again, talking about being-with/fallenness already entails thrownness and forwardness as only a being who understands his/her being-in-a-world can therefore lose him/herself to the things and people he/she meets within it. For a stone, it is impossible to lose itself. Therefore, the three main structures are intertwined as a whole which cannot be separated in a way that Dasein remains in the throw, while orientating his/herself in the (falling) present towards own possibilities in the forwardness as a "*fore-throw*" subject (Heidegger, 1927/2010). In a simplified sense, the present, now, can be regarded as the intersection of one's past experiences and the future purposes.

Whilst Dasein exists as the unity of time in which the three structures operate simultaneously, one thing that should be highlighted here, is that amongst the three structures, forwardness has a certain precedence, according to Heidegger, as the driving force. The forwardness (possibilities in the further) is the light of existence only possible to a thrown and falling being, because Dasein's own possibilities construct the unique self. The possibility cannot be disclosed generally but only singly and uniquely. Moreover, "*Dasein is not merely having that possibility only as a mere attribute or something objectively present*", but "*Dasein is essentially his/her possibility*" (Heidegger, 1927/2010, pp.42). The disclosure of the possibilities of a single being sets him/herself free for different ways of being him/herself as a free way of being. However, as discussed previously, Dasein (possibility) is determined by a not, namely he/she can only exist in one or another of his/her possibilities. Consequently, Dasein exists as a finitely free being, herein lies the nature of finite freedom.

Regarding the time-character, Heidegger's existential philosophy differs fundamentally from contemporary psychology. According to King (2001), the traditional understanding views the future and the past only as modes of the present and is inclined to give more weight to the past than to the future, because the past seems to be more real to human than the future, plus the past seems to have been the original time. For example, the past influences the current behaviour or experience. Conversely, Heidegger's interpretation differs strikingly in which the primary mode is the future, because, as already highlighted, Dasein understands him/herself and exists based on his/her finite freedom in choosing his/her singly and unique possibilities. Since the 'for the sake of' or 'for a possibility in the future' is the fundamental character of Dasein's existence, it can be argued that Dasein's existence, his/her comportment and experience, is guided by the future.

3.3 The Heideggerian worldview to illustrate Consumer-Being-In-A-Fashion-Store

So far, the preceding discussions have shown, albeit in an oversimplified way, the very basic content and some key conceptions of Heidegger's existential philosophy. The questions now become: how do the previous discussions enlighten the current study? How does the current consumer research apply Heidegger's philosophy to solve its research problem, while avoiding eventually returning to the traditional and dominant Cartesian view or reducing to a kind of general qualitative research? To answer these questions, the task in this sub-section is to integrate Heidegger's philosophy and the discussed key elements into the servicescape theory in order to markedly change its philosophical underpinning. Figure 3 is presented below to demonstrate this transformation as putting fashion stores back into consumers' life world who, at the same time,

remain in the store. In other words, consumers are not only in a fashion store, but the moment they patronise a store takes place in their everyday life as well. Namely, their own life world and the store environment are metaphorically overlapped at the moment. Thus, both worlds are underscored, rather than merely highlighting the store environment as the physical world. This standpoint can only be feasible by viewing consumers' visit to a fashion store as *consumer-being-in-a-fashion-store*, which requires an alternative worldview that is inverse to the mainstream one in marketing and consumer literature.

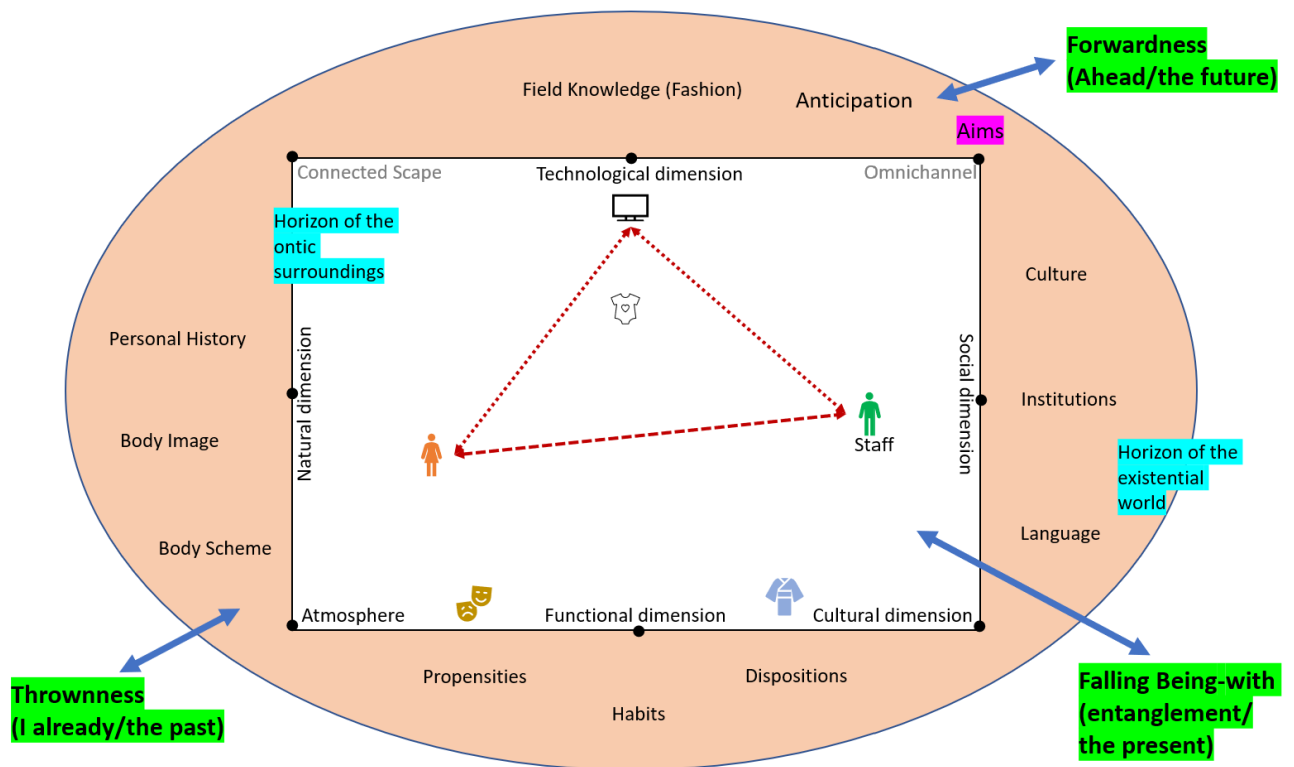


Figure 3. Consumers' being-in-a-technology-enabled-fashion-store: The integration of Heidegger's philosophy and consumer's visit to fashion stores

To elaborate, when consumers are in a technologically enabled fashion store, the physical store becomes a common shared world wherein consumers are entangled with physical and digital objects as well as the people in the store. The purposely-considered environmental dimensions of a smart servicescape (discussed previously in section 2.3.4) turn a conventional fashion store into the physical and digital combined environment. According to Heidegger, the (store) environment acts as a *thing-contexture* where consumers are surrounded by things that are viewed as equipment. For instance, mirrors are for trying on clothes. Yet, consumers do not first understand each thing separately, but as the unity of an equipmental whole. In other words, consumers 'make sense' of the environmental dimensions of servicescape as a whole if using the common articulation in marketing and consumer realms. The view of a store as an equipmental contexture is understood through consumers' everyday practical circumspection that is *unthoughtly*, other than a thematical understanding or deliberate thinking about the store dimensions. All things in the store have their own natural 'equipment-for' and all consumers have their own immanent reference to them. As such, the structure of the store is constituted by "*a contexture of the what-for, in-order-to*" (Heidegger,

1975/1988). In other words, each thing that consumers encounter is uncovered based on its specific functionality and the whole contexture, the store, is a whole functionality complex. Accordingly, a fashion store as interactive platforms (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018) is pre-understood by consumers as a specific functionality whole.

In Figure 3, a store environment as a common shared world is presented by the rectangle with the dimensions in smart servicescape framework developed in section 2.3.4. The rectangle forms the horizon of the understanding of the store. Moreover, besides the store as a common shared world, there is also a phenomenological world surrounding consumers, which is each individual consumer's life world. Every consumer is a world as he/she is world-disclosing. This disclosure of life world goes before consumers' experiences, because individuals' life world is each individual him/herself, while their experience is always *of* something or some content. The life world of every individual consumer is always understood by themselves in advance as they are '*already-being-in-the-world*' who then meet a whole functionality complex (a store). It is in advance disclosed to consumers whose comportment³ is guided by their own aims as the "*for the sake of*", by which the world become meaningful for each consumer on an individual basis. This is demonstrated by the larger light orange oval space in Figure 3 enclosing consumers and the store space which forms the horizon of their 'ability-to-be' and 'already-is' as the phenomenological world.

Therefore this figure illustrates the moment when consumers are in a store, which in fact contains not only the present but also the past and the future. As consumers exist in the store, their thrownness, being-with/fallenness and forwardness are intertwined and exist simultaneously. The being-with/fallenness makes consumers entangled with things and the people in the store environment whose understanding of, and comportment in, the whole functionality complex are guided by their thrownness (the past) and forwardness (the future). This forms a human(consumer)-centric, holistic, phenomenological perspective as '*consumer-being-in-a-fashion-store*'.

3.3.1 The intersubjective encounters in everyday life and the conception of everydayness

Having integrated the Heideggerian worldview and servicescape theory to illustrate consumers' being-in-a-fashion-store, specific heed of intersubjective encounters in the present needs to be taken into account since Gen Z's interpersonal experience with staff is the foci of this study, although it inevitably entails the conception of 'being-in-a-store' as a holistic perspective. The investigation of the interpersonal facet must also be aligned with the principle of Heideggerian philosophy. Nevertheless, an insufficient account of Dasein's social dimension is what we can read from Heidegger and the social ontology seems negative, argued by McMullin (2013). According to the author, in the philosophical discipline, the main criticism on Heidegger's existentialism centres on the interpersonal facet, for the theme of intersubjectivity in *Being and Time* is lacking or fragmentary. The cause is that, for Heidegger, Dasein exists in a way that he/she is never alone and even if there is no one physically presents, the absence is deemed as a present. The others are referred to the trace of their purposive activities and their work such as the book one writes and the movie one films, who exist worldly in the same way as Dasein dose. Therefore Dasein's being-in-the-world is always already with the present of things and others so that "*being-in is being-with-others*" (Heidegger, 1927/2010. pp. 114-118). Such a view seems to mean the possible ubiquitous existence of the others. Consequently, there are already some interpretations viewing

³ To contextualise, the term 'comportment' - used in Heideggerian scholarship and applied in this study to replace the traditional term 'behaviour' in order to avoid connotations with behaviourism - can be simplified as 'the ways of interacting' in this research context.

Heidegger's Dasein as a solipsism as if the being-with-others was always secondary to Dasein (McMullin 2013). The seemingly ubiquitous present of the others is the trigger for those critiques. The leading one, argued by Sartre (1905-1980) in *Being and Nothingness*, is that Heidegger is too focused on the existential ontological sense beyond concrete encounters and overlooks the others' particularity.

Nonetheless, McMullin (2013) reminds us that whilst the deficiency and misunderstandings on the interpersonal facet weakens Heidegger's work, there are unrecognised resources in his work that makes it possible to develop a Heidegger-inspired account of intersubjectivity without doing violence to the original work. The author demolishes Sartre's argument at the ontological level and re-emphasises the ontic event of encounter with concrete others in which Dasein's direct interpersonal encounters possibly occur. As such, Dasein is not only entangled with things with *care*, but also entangled with other Dasein with *solicitude* (Heidegger, 1927/2010). Specific to the modes of solicitude (the intersubjective encounter), Heidegger places much emphasis on inauthenticity compared to authenticity, because with the attribute of '*falling/fallen*' in everyday life, Dasein is giving him/her away to other Dasein. This is characterised by Heidegger as a kind of disowned, inauthentic way of existing. Accordingly, that Dasein exists and encounters other Dasein in everyday life is fundamentally based on an *average* way, which is reflected in the terms such as 'they'; 'one'; 'the crowd' (Heidegger, 1927/2010. pp. 122-126). These terms express sameness and interchangeability of others in social roles/practices and bear the tendency to conceal individual possibility, for Dasein and the others are regulated by a range of acceptable self-understandings and meanings which are counted as *norms* (McMullin, 2013). The norms, or communal standards, influence Dasein's engagement in the activities and the way the activities are carried out. Nonetheless, on the one hand Dasein adapts his/her to others as the maintenance of the averageness. On the other hand, Dasein simultaneously modifies and delimits his/her in accordance with the standard in social context, which is referred to as *distantiality*. The concealment of own possibility to conform a familiar pattern led by the public standards and meanings makes Dasein become indistinguishable, which is characterised by Heidegger as *levelling down* (Heidegger, 1927/2010. pp. 122-124).

The three facets of levelling down, distantiality and averageness together represent *publicness*, in which Dasein gives up self-responsibility, with being always-already interpreted at an average and anonymous level. As a result, the everyday mode of Dasein's existence as fallenness is nothing more than an inauthentic mask covering individuals' faces with purely negative and even chilling reverberations (McMullin, 2013) if considering the occurrences of Nazi in Germany in the West as well as the Cultural Revolution in PRC China in the East. The two episodes demonstrate exactly that the average people got involved in a monstrous cruelty and viewed the crime as a norm, while at the same time, nobody took the responsibility because it was the 'they' who did it but also 'no one' did it, as the constitution of everydayness emphasised by Heidegger. Thus, McMullin (2013) points out that there is a "*danger of viewing other Dasein as interchangeable representatives of the public norms and meanings*" (pp58), based on which Dasein understands his/herself and the others and therefore seemingly able to bypass the direct encounters with other Daseins. Attentionally, under such condition Dasein tends to give up his/her own possibilities because the possibilities are understood interchangeably "*not for me as me, not for you as you, not for us as us, but for one*" (pp. 193). This inauthentic mode therefore makes Dasein "*the same as worldly things*", who interprets others as "*thinglike*" (McMullin, 2013). As the echo of the abovementioned chilling reverberations, the attribute of the Heideggerian conception 'everydayness' implies that the everyday existence of human beings, or more specifically, the daily life of human beings in society is likely to be the 'breeding ground' for "*the banality of evil*", a concept coined by Arendt (1963) who ascribes the

banal evil to a lack of thinking occurring amongst average people in society. Even worse, if taking into account Heidegger's inauthenticity and fallenness, regardless of whether one is willing to think, or capable of formulating something more complex, under the seemingly-ineluctable impact of 'everydayness', human beings bear the propensity to slide into 'the banality of evil' as long as there is a society. A potential exception is that one becomes reclusive, however, the reclusive would likely be construed as the eccentric or oddity in society consisting in social norms and standards composed by the 'they'.

In contrast, under Heidegger's authentic mode of solicitude (the intersubjective encounter), Dasein acknowledges other Dasein's status not as 'thinglike', but as a "*co-constitutor of the world*" with solicitousness for the others "*in the full complexity and particularity*" of their existence, interpreted by McMullin (2013, pp. 202). While Heidegger does recognise the inverse mode of Dasein's inauthenticity, the authentic one nevertheless becomes an extremely rare situation since he tends to equate the inauthenticity to being-with-others in everyday life. It should be highlighted here that Heidegger himself does not cast any allusion of positiveness or negativeness to these conceptions in his explanation of how Dasein exists (as for him, it is what it is), however, the everyday way Dasein exists in society has been inevitably read 'less favourable'. McMullin (2013) argues that the inauthentic mode/fallenness should not be viewed as the dominate mode of everydayness in Dasein's care structure, but rather one of the two types of manifestation. The everydayness can be seen as a modally-indifferent condition bearing the characteristic of indifference, which is mere subtly expressed in Heidegger's *being and time*. Although Dasein's tendency of falling is inevitable in his/her everyday mode of existence, the fallenness/inauthenticity should be regarded as one extreme condition, rather than a default one, alongside the other extreme condition: authenticity. Namely the falling tendency does not equate to fallenness which should be replaced by *being-with*, by which the inauthentic mode is separated from average everydayness (McMullin, 2013). By doing so, a renewed structure of Dasein's everyday being-with-others is established. It allows more room for the interpersonal relationship to be made possible to oscillates between inauthenticity and authenticity. Thus, drawn on McMullin (2013)'s work, a figure of this modified mode of Heideggerian intersubjectivity is developed by the researcher of the current study and presented below (Figure 4) as an add-on source to the foci of this study: consumers and staff interpersonal interactions at the present. The difference can be seen by comparing to the previous framework (Figure 3) in terms of the dimension of fallenness. This point will be returned to later in the sub-section 3.6.1 where an interpretive technique aligned with this framework will be explained to reflect its characteristic during the interpretive process. And the conception of everydayness and its impact on the participants' experiences with staff will be returned to in section 5.1.1 for further discussion.

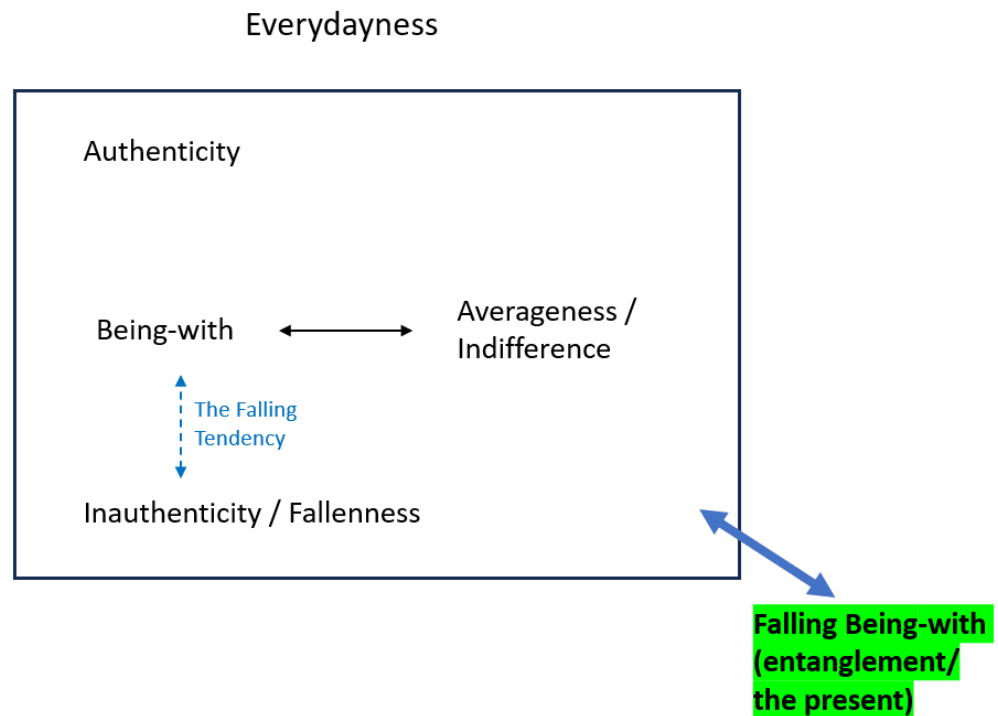


Figure 4. The intersubjective encounter in everyday life: Further integration of Heidegger's philosophy and consumer-to-staff interaction in fashion stores

Thus far, Heidegger's philosophy has been applied to the smart servicescape framework, alongside a more sophisticated framework of Heideggerian intersubjectivity has been refined and adopted. Nevertheless, the chapter of literature review has revealed that marketing and consumer disciplines have spotlighted the concept 'consumer experience' and tended to advocate the application of phenomenology as the method (e.g. [Thompson, 1989](#); [Helkkula et al., 2012](#); [Yakhlef, 2015](#); [Lipkin, 2016](#); [Vargo, 2020](#)). Questions arise that what Heidegger's philosophy to do with the concept 'experience' and how it works with phenomenology at a practical level? These questions are posed here but can only be answered more efficiently in the comparison with Heidegger's tutor: Husserl and his transcendental phenomenology in next section.

3.4 Research Strategy: Hermeneutic Phenomenology

This section moves to a more practical level in which phenomenology is viewed as a qualitative approach. It would be convenient to begin with the elaboration of the resemblance and difference between the two schools of phenomenology. A general comparison will be done first based on the extant methodological literature before a particular contrast on the philosophical conception of *Intentionality* that is the crux of phenomenology but often downplayed or even dismissed by extant phenomenological studies.

3.4.1 The two schools of Phenomenology

Phenomenology means the study of the forms in which something appears or manifests itself ([King, 2001](#)). It aims at the essence of a concept or a phenomenon in individuals' life ([Creswell and Poth,](#)

2018). The essence of a phenomenon indicates “a grasp of the very nature of the thing” (Van Manen, 1990, p.117). At a practical level, phenomenology aims to study various types of human experiences with the foci on what they experience and how they experience it (Kafle, 2011; Dowling, 2012; Neubauer et al., 2019). Two schools exist: transcendental phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology (generally called interpretive phenomenology). They resemble each other very closely due to the similar definition on the objective of each approach, but they approach it differently because of the different philosophical origins. To ensure the coherence in this research in terms of its ontology; epistemology; methodology and interpretation, it is essential to distinguish between the two kinds of phenomenological approach.

According to Neubauer et al. (2019), transcendental phenomenology originates in Husserl’s phenomenological philosophy wherein the ontological assumptions is that the reality is what appears in one’s consciousness internal to the subject. Husserl’s epistemological opinion indicates that the researcher “*must be separated from the world including his/her own physical being to reach the state of the transcendental, bias-free; understands phenomena by descriptive means*” (pp.92). This results in an analytical tactic, bracketing, which requires the researcher’s subjectivity set aside his/her own experience as much as possible during data collection and interpretation to obtain a completely new perspective towards an experience that is studied (Connelly, 2010). Eventually it aims to develop a textural description paired with a structural description of the studied experience, which together formulate an overall essence of the experience and its structure.

By comparison, hermeneutic phenomenology is cultivated by Heidegger who is a student from Husserl so that it shares some common heritage with the transcendental one (Valle et al., 1989; McMullin, 2013). Nevertheless, it is also viewed as a significant departure from Husserl’s work (Dowling, 2005; Neubauer et al., 2019) as it rejects Husserl’s ideation of bracketing out personal perspectives (Kafle, 2011). It functions as a mode of interpretation and interpretation is always rendered from some perspectives, by which ontological being is disclosed (Suddick et al., 2020). It bears the ontological assumption that focuses on the relationship between individuals and their lifeworld, with the understanding of human *lived experiences* as the interpretive processes situated in individuals’ lifeworld as a background (Frechette et al., 2020; Churchill and Fisher-Smith, 2021). For hermeneutic phenomenology, human experience cannot separate from the world involving one’s forwardness, thrownness and falling-being-with as shown in section 3.2 and Figure 6 in the chapter of Findings. Thus, the experiencer always already has an understanding of themselves within the world even if they are not aware of it due to everyday forgetfulness (Frechette et al., 2020). Accordingly, Heidegger’s focus is on the relationship between individuals and the world where individuals are viewed as actors whose realities are influenced by the world (Suddick et al., 2020). Hermeneutic interpretation is concerned with the meaning of an experienced phenomenon beyond a descriptive understanding (Dowling, 2012). In other words, hermeneutic approach develops meanings based on individuals’ everyday understanding of their experiences through the very trivial facets that may be taken for granted in their ordinary life (Wilson and Hutchinson, 1991; Frechette et al., 2020).

The epistemological assumption under hermeneutic phenomenology is that the researcher is “*part of the world and not bias free, who understands phenomenon by interpretive means*” (Neubauer et al., 2019, pp. 92). The researcher’s own experiences and background knowledge of the studied phenomenon play a part in interpreting what others have experienced of the phenomenon (Suddick et al., 2020; Emiliussen et al., 2021). The role of the researcher mirrors one of the key facets that differentiates between the two types of phenomenology, for in transcendental phenomenology, the researcher must bracket off his/her subjective perspective as much as

possible, while hermeneutic phenomenology acknowledges the relationship between the researcher and his/her world in the same way as the experiencers' relationship with their world and hence values the researcher's knowledge and experiences related to the research issue (Connelly, 2010; Emiliussen et al., 2021). As pointed out by Neubauer et al. (2019), it is the researcher's understanding of an existing phenomenon that makes his/her believe the merit of the investigation. Yet, the acknowledgment of the researcher's subjective perspective does not mean to violent the basic principle of a phenomenological inquire that specific presupposition and hypotheses in relation to the studied phenomenon must be precluded when the researcher interprets the description of an experience (Thompson, 1989). The interpretive process requires a part-to-whole iterative cycles, meaning that understanding is developed from the parts, by which understanding of the whole can be evolved (Suddick et al., 2020). Finally, either key themes as the essences of the phenomena (Thompson, 1990), or phenomenological insight (Van Manen, 2017), is developed through the part-to-whole hermeneutic circle. However, the findings of hermeneutic phenomenology should not aim at transferring a phenomena being studied into categories according to a prior theory (Polkinghorne, 1989).

In this study, hermeneutic phenomenology is the chosen approach and the researcher aims to answer the research questions by interpreting Gen Z lived experience with staff when patronising fashion stores. Since phenomenology is an approach to study multiple kinds of human experiences, the conception of *Intentionality* as a basic character of human experience cannot be bypassed. The following sub-section will be a comparison and discussion of Intentionality in both Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology.

3.4.2 Intentionality

Generally speaking, the concept Intentionality can be simplified as "*being conscious of*" or "*being aware of*" (Klaskow, 2011). In a wider sense, Intentionality can be viewed as *directedness* or *aboutness* of one's mental acts or states which always have content as "*of something*", such as thinking of/about something, wishing something, believing something (Hazarika, 2018). When one eyes a pen, his/her perception is a perception of a pen and the state of his/her experience is a representation of the pen, rather than experience itself. In other world, experience always have its content: the representation of something, which gives one a sense of something (Pollio et al., 1997). This character of representation is Intentionality. At a practical level, the tradition of phenomenology is to deal with the structure (aboutness/directedness) and the content of various types of human experiences, which are explained via Intentionality (Hazarika, 2018). As already pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, Intentionality is often downplayed or even dismissed by studies in hermeneutic phenomenology. Besides the reason that some researchers do not specialise in philosophy, interestingly even in methodological papers written by exponents of interpretive phenomenology, the concept Intentionality is missing (e.g. Thompson, 1989; Van Manen, 2017; Neubauer et al., 2019; Frechette et al., 2020). It is probably because that this conception is somewhat insufficient in the origin of interpretive phenomenology, it is, Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Thus, before looking for Intentionality in Heidegger's philosophy, the first task is to understand Husserl's Intentionality and the method Husserl developed to actually 'see' the Intentionality.

- *Husserl's Intentionality*

Intentionality is first introduced to contemporary philosophy by a German philosopher named Franz Brentano (1838-1917), however, his explanation of Intentionality had placed too much emphasis on the mental aspect but it later enlightened Husserl (Hazarika, 2018). As mentioned previously, the definition of phenomenology that the study of the forms in which something

appears or manifests itself implies that a phenomenon itself is incomplete, because the self-appearing or self-manifesting needs something to which the phenomenon can show itself. The ‘*needed something*,’ according to [King \(2001\)](#), as a place for the self-showing, is thought by Husserl to be transcendental consciousness (pure experience) which differs from empirical consciousness being studied by empirical science of physiology. According to [Hazarika, \(2018\)](#), Husserl was enlightened by the aboutness/directedness of Intentionality who asserted that the very essence of transcendental consciousness is to be ‘*consciousness of...*’, meaning that it goes out for an object, it aims at something, it intends something (even without a real object). Husserl argued that there is no world exist before one’s consciousness and everything exists in the world knowledgeable to human is through human’s acting in the world. To understand how things in the world can be knowledgeable to human, attention should be paid to human’s consciousness (experience) of the thing as well as the intentional structure of consciousness. Husserl believed that the task of philosophy is to unfold all the implications that lie enclosed in the intentional structure of consciousness and highlighted that human being’s awareness of the world is already an outcome of the act of pure consciousness ([Hazarika, 2018](#)). Therefore, the need is to develop a reliable method for gaining access to pure consciousness itself which acts as a sense perception.

The method Husserl developed to access pure consciousness is by bracketing out everything that might be included within human being’s perceptual view of an object, which was claimed to be “*presuppositionless*” ([Emiliussen et al., 2021](#)). For instance, when one eyes an object, one is seeing it with many assumptions and too many possibilities related to the object. These pre-occupied opinions must be suspended in order to access a pure consciousness. The process of suspending is called ‘*reductions*’ and the procedure proceeds step by step in three layers: “*Phenomenological Reduction*”, “*Eidetic Reduction*”, “*Transcendental reduction*” ([Hazarika, 2018](#)). Amongst the three layer, the first ‘*Phenomenological Reduction*’ directly leads to the suspension of the reality of the world, because it is viewed as a product of consciousness ([King, 2001](#)). Husserl aimed at seeing the “*before*” of the product of consciousness, namely those cognitive, sensational activities which first of all constitute this reality. Nevertheless, one may have already realised that Husserl’s phenomenology and his thought still bear a sense of Cartesianism, which separates the mental and physical worlds and views human being as a container of ‘mind’ ([Thompson, 1989](#)). Consequently, Husserl’s intentionality of human experience is somewhat still a relationship between one’s mental world (internal) and the real world (external). This must be sharply distinguished from Heidegger’s phenomenology.

- *Heidegger’s Intentionality*

Discussion of Intentionality is scant in *Being and Time* ([Heidegger, 1927/2010](#)). In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* ([Heidegger, 1975/1988](#)) being viewed as the sequel of *Being and Time*, Intentionality receives extended attention. At an overly-generalised level, Heidegger’s Intentionality is compatible with Husserl’s one as the conception in both thinkers’ thought indicates the directedness or aboutness. According to Heidegger, what Husserl thinks of Intentionality is a pure cognitive relation to things. To see the structure, he suspended the embeddedness of ‘one-in-the-world’. Consequently, not only the *is* of things, but also the ‘*I am*’, are precluded, for in Husserl’s thought one’s experience of self (reflected in the ‘*I am*’) is also a product of transcendental consciousness in the same way as the *is* of a thing. Therefore, the ‘*I am*’ must also be bracketed away. Whilst Husserl’s thought profoundly influenced Heidegger, it is this point at which Heidegger radically departed from Husserl. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Heidegger insisted that only from the combination of the pre-philosophical world and the life world surrounding Dasein that the factically existent Dasein can be drawn (see section 3.2.2).

Things are out there in the world, while Dasein encounters and understands the meaningful present of them based on Dasein's own interests and needs from whatever a practical basis or theoretical basis (King, 2001).

Thus, rather than cutting off the assumptions and possibilities, Heidegger embraces them, because not only the perception itself always shifts from one side to another, but Dasein can also project themselves to the things in the surrounding world as being-towards, a self-relating understanding (Heidegger, 1975/1988). As the discussion of fallenness in section 3.2.3 shows, Dasein's surrounding world is a significant whole wherein he/she deals with businesses, which is guided by a circumspect for-sight discovering what things under what circumstances they can be used as means. Accordingly, the directedness or aboutness is not merely referring to a pure cognitive relation to entities in the world, but rather it should be taken in a practical basis being reflected in an activity, because Dasein who acts purposefully is always led by the aims in the future which open various possibilities. For instance, an occasion where one decides to buy a new garment opens a possibility to go to physical stores later on and to consult (interact) with the staff. Having decided to buy this or that garment, a moment in the future (when the garment is worn) is already waiting for his/her who has already begun to think about how to pair the new one with old garments for that occasion. This could possibly lead to one's further actions as the reflection on one's own '*possible-to-be*'.

Thus, Heidegger's intentionality implies the one's understanding of own existence which is not a static moment but always being-towards something as '*for the sake of*' through circumspection. In Heidegger's philosophy, practical ways of handling things prevail over theoretical ways. As such, Husserl's '*perceiving subject*' must be replaced by the '*comporting subject*' (Hazarika, 2018). This is the reason why Heidegger defines Intentionality as "*comportment toward beings*" containing "*the understanding of the being of beings*" that "*is connected with the understanding of world, which is the presupposition for the experience of intraworldly beings*" (Heidegger, 1975/1988, pp.175). Accordingly, the structure of comportment (Heidegger's Intentionality) bears a wider meaning than the structure of consciousness (Husserl's Intentionality), for not only does Heidegger's Intentionality incorporates perceiving, but thinking, remembering, hoping, acting and so forth as well. They together indicate the interpretive situation of Dasein's comportment, namely a *hermeneutic condition*.

This hermeneutic condition leads to the further implications. In McMullin (2013)'s view, besides the directedness/aboutness, *normativity* and *mattering* are the two more features of Intentionality under Heidegger's existential philosophy. According to McMullin (2013), the directedness of Dasein's Intentionality entails "*some type of responsiveness to the norms determining the success or failure of its comportments*" (pp. 45). If the intentional aboutness accentuates the worldliness of Heidegger's Intentionality, the "*inherently normative nature*" reinforces the worldliness as well as the publicness in everyday life, for Dasein's worldly practices bear the conditions of failure and success and these conditions are shared in society. The failed and successful conditions reflect the third feature: '*intentional mattering*'. Dasein strives for successful conditions because he/she cares about the fulfilment. It matters because the striving as a reflection of who Dasein will be. These "*three features of Intentionality*" constitutes Dasein's "*base-level selfhood*" (McMullin, 2013, pp 40-51).

Nonetheless, unlike Husserl who cultivated a step-by-step method to actually 'see' the Intentionality, Heidegger's interpretation of phenomenology, according to King (2001), only prescribes *how* an investigation is to be carried out, without clarifying *what* is to be investigated. Some scholars in philosophy suggest that Intentionality in Heidegger's sense should be taken as

practical engagement or *involvement* in which Dasein is engaged or involved in the process of his/her being-in-the-world with the understanding of his/her project (e.g. Klaskow, 2001; McMullin, 2013; Hazarika, 2018; Wendland, 2021). It therefore establishes that mere perception is insufficient in understanding the world one dwells in, because it is not about understanding the properties of things, but one's 'possible-to-be' (Heidegger, 1927/2010). It implies a net of possibilities that make things show themselves and encountered (Hazarika, 2018). Thus, in terms of how to actually 'see' Heidegger's Intentionality, at the practical level this research will seek Gen Z's practical engagement hidden in comportment in their everyday visits to fashion store.

Notwithstanding Heidegger places the emphasis of Intentionality on one's comportment other than consciousness, the literary review of this research shows that marketing scholars advocate focusing on consumer experience through a phenomenological lens (e.g. Thompson, 1989; Helkkula et al., 2012; Lipkin, 2016; Vargo, 2020). Does it sound contradictory? It is and also it is not, because the conception 'consumer experience' under Heidegger's philosophy must be understood as consumers' *lived* experience. 'Lived experience' is a terminology exclusive of Heidegger's existentialism and its accompanying hermeneutic phenomenology (Van Manen, 2017), which will be elaborated in the next sub-section.

3.4.3 Lived Experience

At the beginning of this chapter, section 3.1 has shown a holistic psychology view of human experience with the German equivalents. It now comes to the question: what does *lived experience* exactly mean? Is there a German equivalent that it belongs to? There have not been a finalised definition of it. For Wilhelm (1987), lived experience is "*a nexus of lived relations to the world*" (cited by Van Manen, 2017, pp. 811). For Pollio et al (1997), it implies "*a rigorous description of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in all of its first-person concreteness, urgency and ambiguity*" (pp.5). For Thompson (1997), it acts as life stories or personal narratives containing events and characters. For Van Manen (2017), it is "*just the name for ordinary life experience as it carries us on in its lived everyday current*" (Van Manen, 2017, pp. 811).

According to Frechette et al (2020), the German equivalent of lived experience is *Erlebnis* which incorporates the immediate experiencing process providing the "*raw material*" for self-interpretation and self-understanding as the lasting form, "*the experienced*". Furthermore, not only does *Erlebnis* involve something as 'the experienced', but the "*being experienced makes a special impression that gives it lasting importance*" (Gadamer, 2004, p. 53 cited by Frechette et al., 2020). The methodological significance of lived experience only emerges once the import of the adjective 'lived' and "*the role it plays in phenomenological inquiry*" on the primal meaningfulness of an experience are to be understood (Van Manen, 2017, pp.812). The meaningfulness of lived experience is covered by the erosion of everyday *forgetfulness* and *taken-for-grantedness* (Van Manen, 2017; Frechette et al, 2020). Thus, lived experience acts as a hermeneutic conceptualisation containing the meaning of the experienced (Frechett et al., 2020). Hermeneutic phenomenology can hence be viewed as "*the study of what gives itself 'as' lived experience*" (Van Manen, 2017, pp. 813).

This could be construed as another angle to show the difference between the term 'experience' under Husserl's 'consciousness' and it is under Heidegger's 'lived experience'. The latter has been proved to be meaningfully broader than the former as it is not only referring the perceiving process. Thus, armed with the enhanced understanding of Heidegger's Intentionality and the concept 'lived experience', this study has carved out a unique approach by which the research questions can be properly interpreted and answered. Now, it is worth returning to Van Manen (2017)'s principle mentioned above that 'lived experience' is a terminology *exclusive* of Heidegger's existentialism

and its accompanying hermeneutic phenomenology. It implies that there are other (interpretive/hermeneutic) phenomenological studies applying and investigating the concept 'lived experience'. The following sub-section is to disentangle the current study from other phenomenological research, whereby the uniqueness of this study's approach can be better seen.

3.4.4 A Comparison between Heidegger's Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Merleau-Pony's Existential-Phenomenological Psychology

This study should be particularly heedful of a research school named as 'empirical existential-phenomenological psychology' deriving from Merleau-Pony (1908-1961), a French phenomenological philosopher. It is a combination of psychological insight (Gestalt psychology), empirical research and the existential philosophical element for psychological research on human experience (Pollio et al., 1997). At a philosophical level, it makes Gestalt psychology imbued with Heidegger's thinking by absorbing one part of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, 'being-in-the-world', while disregarding the other part, 'time'. At a methodological level, it later leads to interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) aiming at individual experience and life world from a psychological perspective (Smith, 1996). At a practical level, this combination has made it more applicable to empirical research, initially in clinical psychology (Fiske and Taylor, 1991) and then also appeared in marketing and consumer research realms (Thompson, 1989; 1990; 1997; 1998). At the first glimpse, this existential-phenomenological psychology research stream seems fit with the design of this study. Yet, Figure 5 below is to show the reason why this study is *not* following it by tracing back the roots of each school in philosophy.

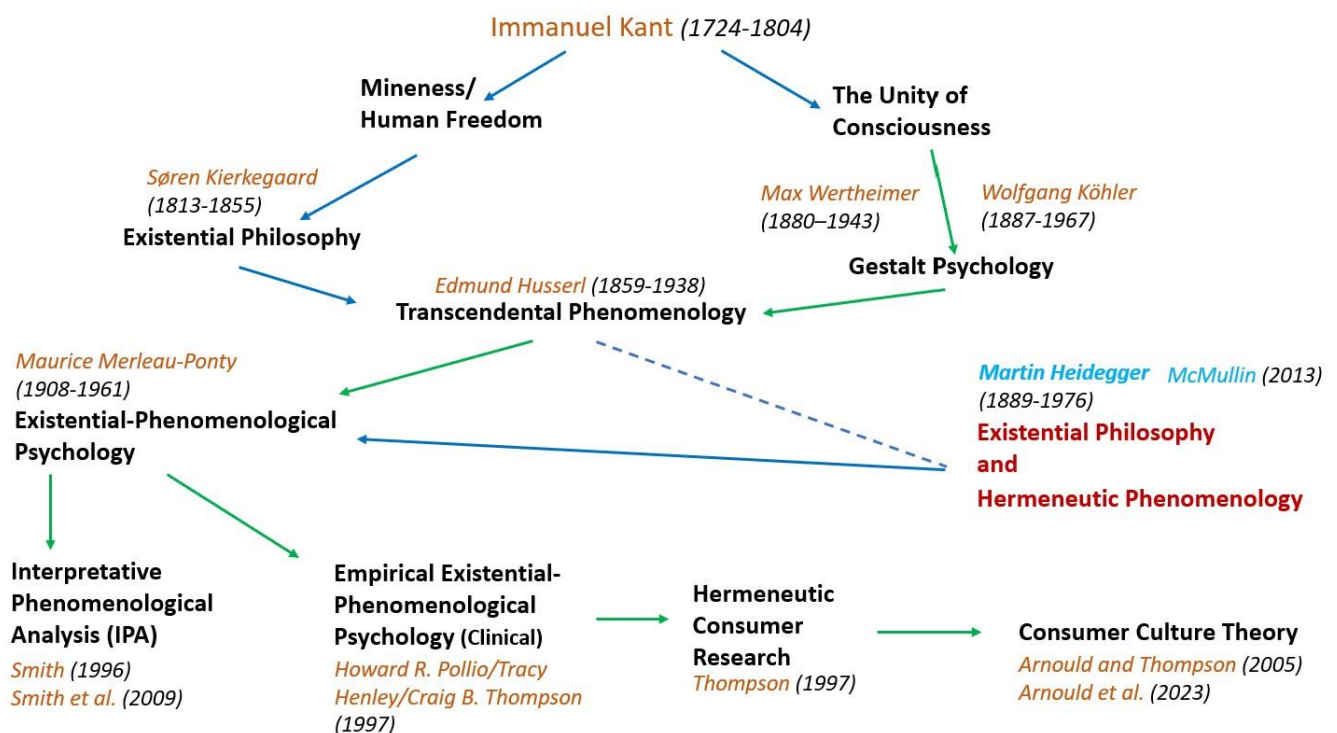


Figure 5. The clarification of the interrelationship between Heidegger's philosophy and other schools of philosophy/approach in phenomenology entailed by this study

To elaborate, Figure 5 shows that the family tree starts with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a German philosopher, the father of contemporary Western philosophy, who develops a range of ideas including the two key conceptions: Freedom (Bielefeldt, 1997) and the Unity of Consciousness (Morrison, 1978). Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), a French thinker blends Husserl and Heidegger's thought leading to a fresh approach, existential-phenomenological psychology (Valle et al., 1989; Pollio et al., 1997). Broadly speaking, it is the combination of Gestalt psychology, Husserl's Intentionality (as the structure of consciousness⁴) and Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world', with an interpretive analysis approach (Smitch, 1996) in order to form a holistic perspective on human experience and understanding of individuals' world (Smith et al., 2009). As elucidated in the preceding section, Husserl's thought still bears a sense of duality that consciousness is something internal and subjective, while the directedness of consciousness aims at things external and objective in the world. Yet, Heidegger is firmly against this dualism by emphasising *Dasein is the world*. The question arises how Merleau-Ponty merges the two contrasting perspectives? It is through the conception 'lived body' that the gulf is filled in (Engelsrud, 2005) meaning that human beings gain experience through the body and hence behaviour and experience are basically the same thing (see an instance exemplified by Ratcliffe, 2012, pp. 16).

In the contemporary psychological realm, existential-phenomenological psychology gains many exponents (e.g. Smith, J.A., Howard R. Pollio, Tracy Henley and Craig B. Thompson). They continue to further its methodology by making it systematic, hence more applicable to social and clinical research to study various human everyday experience such as 'feeling alone', 'making amends', 'love and loving', 'falling apart' etc. (Pollio et al., 1997)⁵. In terms of the IPA approach in practice, more recently it has been refined and rendered as human science methodology (Smith, 2010) attempting to accentuate its *scientific status* (Giorgi, 2011). Amongst the scholars following Merleau-Ponty's path, Thompson is the pioneer who brings this psychological-phenomenology approach into marketing and consumer research realms (Thompson et al., 1989). He strongly advocates that marketing research should abandon Cartesianism - along with other paradigms underpinned by it as the leading worldview in consumer research - and embrace an 'being-in-the-world' perspective (see. Thompson, 1989, 1998). In Thompson (1997), he presents a "*hermeneutic/narratological model of understanding*" (pp.440) in order to better interpret consumer experience, where cultural background and belief systems play a key role in the understanding of personalised meanings of stories since it mirrors self-identity and body image. This interplay is called "*Experiential Gestalt*" in Thompson (1997)'s work. It can be seen that in Thompson's research school, one's cultural background, belief systems and self-identity are predominant in interpretation, which later leads to the development of Consumer Culture Theory aiming to address "*the sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption*" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, pp. 868).

The green narrows in Figure 5 indicate the great influence of psychology. It should be noted that Heidegger is not interested in psychology whose philosophy stands in opposition to psychology (King, 2001), and it is worth restating that "*phenomenology is not psychology*" (Van Manen, 2017, pp. 816). In this study, the methodology does not take the prevailing IPA approach, instead it strictly follows Heidegger's thinking. To comprehend the methodological position of this study, its aim and two research questions must be kept in mind, which imply that this study centres around the relation between human and the technology-enabled environment by exploring

⁴ See the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony applied by Merleau-Ponty as a metaphor of human consciousness (Valle et al., 1989, pp14).

⁵ see Pollio et al. (1997)'s book: *The phenomenology of everyday life*

consumers' lived, interpersonal experience of staff. As such, not only does this research entail participants' life world, but also incorporates the store environment (servicescape) as a common shared world that, in this study, is as important as one's personal life world. It requires equal attention to both worlds, which is emphasised in section 2.6. In addition, one cannot talk about the experience with staff without the store context, because the store context, according to Heidegger (1975/1988), can be viewed as the surrounding world of staff, which defines who they are.

Admittedly, human/consumer experience and meaning are always influenced by personal history including cultural background, belief systems, body image, self-identity and so forth. Yet, this study does not single out and overly emphasise those aspects as Thompson and other IPA studies do, because those *personal factors* are all incorporated into one's thrownness in this study⁶, also shown in section 3.3 Figure 3. Here, an overlooked dramatic contrast between this study underpinned by Heidegger's existential philosophy and the phenomenological research using an IPA approach underpinned by existential-phenomenological psychology must be highlighted. According to the hermeneutic model in Thompson (1997), Thompson and other psychologists view personal history as predominant. Conversely, for Heidegger there are varied meanings of the term: history, not only the past events exclusive. It can also imply the origin or emergence from them as the coherence and continuity of a becoming, a causal nexus of events stretching through the past, present and future (King, 2001). As already highlighted in section 3.2.3, the '*for the sake of*' is the fundamental character of Dasein's existence since there is always an aim there that will then become means by which further aims will be achieved (Heidegger, 1927/2010) so that the primary temporal mode of Dasein is *the future*. Consumers (Daseins) are intentionally comporting toward others and things (in a store), according to their everyday care of things and other people associated with the possibilities in the future. Namely, the own *possible-to-be* is the primary formation of Dasein's understanding of the world. In line with this thinking, contrasting with the extant phenomenological research with a *psychology-imbued IPA approach* whose 'meaning-seeking' is bound with those said personal factors such as personal history, cultural background, belief systems, body image and self-identity, this study with a *Heideggerian-existentialism-imbued approach* sees that 'meaning' can also be disclosed by uncovering and comprehending the *hermeneutic condition* behind one's *comportment*, it is, the individual *significance-structure* in their own world (see section 3.2).

Therefore, now what it all comes down to is *Heideggerian Intentionality* (discussed previously in sub-section 3.4.2). The two research questions indicate that the primary aim of this study is not to find the Intentionality as the structure of consumers' pure experience with the staff, which turns them into a perceiving subject as Husserl and psychologists did, nor to over-emphasise any single personal factor of a 'yesterday-cognitive-experiential' subject as Thompson and other IPA research did. Rather, the most appropriate approach to answer the research questions in this study

⁶ It is recognised at the end of this study that, under the influence of science and psychology, those so-called personal factors are often singled out and theorised in order to examine and thematise human as an object by categorising various elements belonging to the personal world. Those theories being sought by social scientists and consumer scholars might be able to explain human (consumer) conduct, however, they fail to explain "*normal human conduct*" (Warde, 2014). Also see sub-section 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 in this study. For instance, consumer culture theory (CCT) and other cultural theories should be, in fact, more aptly counted as "*cultural psychology*" (Warde, 2014), alongside symbolic interaction theory, identity theory, social identity theory and so forth are comprised in contemporary social psychological theories (Burke, 2018).

is to view consumers as *a comporting subject*, thereby seeking their *practical* engagement as Intentionality that makes them involved with in-store interactions against the backdrop of their everyday care of things, by which the interpersonal experience and its formation in a store context can be delineated. Thus, by carving out its own methodology based on Heidegger's existential philosophy and Intentionality, this study differentiates itself from any of the extant research streams in marketing and consumer disciplines as well as the psychology-imbued IPA approach adopted by many phenomenological studies in literature (e.g. [Sadkowska et al., 2015](#)).

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data in this study were collected via a three-step design. As the core of phenomenology is the individuals' lived experiences of a phenomena, the first step was to locate the subject (Gen Z) of this study whose lived experiences with staff in fashion stores were under investigation. The second step was to locate the context of this study, the fashion stores on the high-street with the criterion of being the everyday kind of technology-enabled fashion stores for the subject. To ensure this, a store list containing a range of fashion stores was formed by both the researcher and the participants. The third step was to allocate participants a two-months period to visit or revisit the stores, plus other stores that they might visit in everyday life. After this period, phenomenological interviews were conducted with each individual participant.

3.5.1 Step 1 Locating the subjects

In this research, the age of the subject is fixed at Generation Z who were born between 1997-2012 ([Siregar et al., 2023](#)). Amongst this generational cohort, individuals born between 1998 and 2003 were deliberately chosen so that their ages in 2023 when the data collection was conducted were between 20 and 25. As discussed in section 2.5, this generational cohort has the richest experiences of technology since they have been brought up with it. The experience of technology in their early years is seen to give them more familiarity toward technology than any other generations, which results in Gen Z find technology essential in their daily lives. This, however, raises concern that Gen Z's intensive internet usage can be an obstacle to their interpersonal interactions and relationships ([Issa and Isaia, 2016](#)).

Criterion sampling, one specific type of purposive sampling which is often applied in qualitative research ([Creswell and Poth, 2018](#)), was chosen as the strategy for the selection of participants in this study for methodological rigour. In addition, [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#) point out that the more diverse the characteristics and background of the subjects, the more obstacles the researcher can face with interpretation. Therefore, the subjects of this study were limited to the East (HongKong and China), because they share the common background of the researcher who can be advantageous in this regard to develop a better understanding of the subject's narrative, a crucial aspect of phenomenological research. Thus, the participants were chosen according to several principles in terms of their age, background and willingness (interest in this research topic) and importantly, the ability to articulate their experiences. Although researchers' skills and capacity to gather phenomenological data are vital, according to [Weis and Fine \(2000\)](#) as well as the researcher's previous experience in conducting interviews, the interviewees' ability to describe what they experience should also be taken into account. It influences the quality of the phenomenological data which, ideally, should be packed with "*experiential detail, concreteness, vividness and lived-thoroughness*" ([Van Manen, 2014](#), pp. 297). The number of participants is relatively small in phenomenology due to the principle of depth not breadth ([Larkin et al., 2019](#)). According to the extant literature in phenomenology the minimal number is one participant

(Padilla, 2003) but it would be normally between three to ten participants as Dukes (1984) recommended. In this study, a total of six participants were recruited, one of whom was used for the pilot study. The information of the participants at the time when data collection was conducted is presented below (Table 1).

The majority of participants (5 out of 6) are from HongKong (HK), an internationally-recognised capitalist economy with highly developed high-streets and retail stores as outstanding as these in London. One is from Shanghai which is the economic centre of China and also a popular location where many global brands that aim to explore the huge market of China choose to set up their flagship stores. It means that these Gen Z participants do not lack shopping experiences in their lives. The age range, between 21-23 years olds combined with their international background, could imply a ‘visitor mentality/life’ where these participants are in the UK to experience ‘new life’ in a foreign country in a limited time period. Nevertheless, this ‘visitor mentality/life’ is what the researcher endeavoured to avoid during recruitment. The newly opened immigration route by the UK government, the BNO Visa, is helpful here. This visa classification lets HKers who hold the historical British National Overseas Passport (BNO) and their dependants settle in the UK. Accordingly, BNO and BNO Visa holders do not view the UK as a foreign country, which makes their mentality/life conform less to a type of visitor and more to the mentality of the indigenous, yet diverse population. Therefore, as shown in the table below, although there are a few of them who were students at the time when data collection was conducted, they were not exactly typical international students. In particular, there are also two Gen Z participants born in HK with British passports, a completely different situation compared to BNO (Visa) holders who aim to obtain British citizenship via the BNO route. More background information about those ‘born to be British’ HKers can be found in the interview of participant J presented in the appendix (pp.154) as the conversation between the researcher and J briefly touches on this aspect at the beginning of the interview.

Name	Age	Gender	Description
M (pilot)	23	Female	A master student in the UK who just graduated, HKer/BNO Visa holder, residing in London
J	23	Female	A forensic scientist, British HKer, residing in London
Y	22	Female	A dietitian, British HKer, residing in Nottingham
K	21	Female	An undergrad student in the UK who just graduated, HKer/BNO Visa holder, residing in Nottingham
W	22	Female	An undergrad student in the UK who just graduated, HKer, residing in Nottingham
Q	21	Female	A year 2 undergrad student in the UK, Chinese, residing in London

Table 1. Information of the participants

3.5.2 Step 2 Locating the stores

Fashion, comprising different types of clothing, beauty, accessories, shoes, bags, is chosen to be the domain of this research. The fashion industry directly contributes a comparative large per cent of UK GDP (Alexander and Kent, 2022). The geographical focus in this research is London High Street which is believed to have been playing the leading role in global fashion industry. The rapid technology evolution and growth of internet have changed the service landscape in the fashion retailing sector. Referring to the smart servicescape framework in section 2.3.4, technology enhances the interactivity of a fashion store. Based on the degree of technological integration, Kent et al (2015) categorises fashion store into four groups. To summarise, Level 1 group indicates that there is only human-based services available in store without any consumer-facing technology. This type of store centres on offering traditional store experience purely constructed by human-

based services. Level 2 group involves technological elements which are merely used as tools to either provide information or show videos related to brand heritage. This type of store aims at providing distinct brand experiences as well as being informative. Level 3 group applies technology as a facilitator enabling the workings of cross-channel strategy. WI-FI is provided in this type of store so that consumers can easily access brands' websites and online stores to gain more information and choices of the products via their smartphones. Click-and collect is another offer representing the cross-channel shopping experience. Level 4 group endeavours to build a fully integrated smart shopping environment to achieve omni-channel strategy (Bèzes, 2019) via the application of technology with both utilitarian and hedonic purposes (Kent et al, 2015).

Ideally, Level 4 group is qualified to meet the concept of 'smart fashion store' in this research. It provides a blended kind of experience with both real and virtual dimensions (Kent et al, 2015). Nevertheless, the result of the researcher's observation conducted in 2023 shows that in a post-pandemic era, fashion stores in London High Street should be more aptly grouped into Level 3 where technology is mainly utilised for store embellishment meshed with in-store mannequins for information display and the design of store space where big screens are installed for playing clips to create thematic areas for a dynamic store atmosphere. The cutting-edge kind of technology such as big interactive screens, magic mirrors and VR were rarely installed in central London's shopping streets. The reasons that cause fashion brands to become 'conservative' could be the cost of updating the software regularly to keep its attractiveness as well as consumers' one-time use, even though this kind of technology could help brands gain profile. This leads to a further shift that the in-store interactive screens tend to be smaller with more brands' investment in app-based interfaces and portable smart devices, for example H&M's virtual try-on app was launched at the end of 2022. The implication is that consumers tend to pursue more personalised information via personal devices so that currently consumer-controlled technology prevails over brand-controlled technology. As a result, in reality fashion stores are more towards the Level 3 in Kent et al (2015)'s classification.

Importantly, the store locating process was guided by the foci of this study, consumers' experience with staff in technology-enabled fashion stores. It means that this study takes into account the interactivity of a fashion store, rather than the typology of 'luxury and non-luxury'. By selecting stores based on their interactivity, both luxury and non-luxury stores have a chance to be included so long as they meet the criterion. This enables the data of this study to cover consumers' interpersonal experiences with staff in both kinds of fashion stores. Furthermore, the subject is Gen Z consumers and the broader context of this study is located in their everyday visits to fashion stores. Thus, restricting this study to luxury stores only could result in the problem of insufficient data since luxury stores might not be the majority of the fashions stores Gen Z consumers patronising every day. This was verified by the participants' descriptions of their daily visits to fashion stores including both luxury and non-luxury stores, amongst which luxury stores are the minority. Additionally, one may argue that consumers' experiences in upmarket stores can be a 'extraordinary' kind differentiating it from the experience in non-luxury stores that is quite 'ordinary'. Frist of all, since the data of this study have incorporated participants (interpersonal) experiences in both kinds of fashion stores, the findings interpreted from the data and shown diagrammatically at the end of chapter 4 are deemed capable of covering both the said types of experiences. Second, both the two kinds of experiences can be incorporated into consumers' daily store-related experiences as one lives through. In line with this thinking, the concern on the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary experiences in luxury and non-luxury fashion stores can be eliminated. And the cause of this concern will be explicitly addressed in section 6.3.

What is more, to accentuate the phenomenological attribute of this study and avoid a data collection method that is experimental, the list of fashion stores was constructed by both the researcher and the participants to ensure that it indeed covered the stores the participants patronise in their everyday life. It doubles down on the experiences of participants' everyday visits to fashion stores, other than placing the participants in a selected store deliberately for this study. This is the principle of the data collection in this study and it is what differs from previous store-related studies wherein a specific commercial place is chosen and the subject is invited, which bears a sense of 'creating an experimental setting'. The stores were chosen from London high-street and the list is presented below (Table 2). The participants were also encouraged to visit at least two stores on the list that are new to them, if there are any, as an exploration in their leisure time without the researcher being in attendance. A two-month period was allocated to each participant to experience these fashion stores. After it, both the 'newly gained' experience and the 'former' experience in relation to shopping in both luxury and non-luxury fashion stores were collected.

Store Name	Postcode (London)
Adidas Flagship Store	W1C 2PG
Burberry Flagship Store	W1B 4TB
Dr. Martens	W1F 9PX
Lululemon	W1B 4JP
Liberty London	W1B 5AH
LEVI's	W1B 5TJ
Nike Town	W1C 1DE
Tommy Hilfiger	W1B 5SG

Table 2. Information of the fashion stores

3.5.3 Step 3 Phenomenological Interviews

In general interviews are understood as a tool to reveal the meaning of subjects' experiences and to uncover life world from the subjects' view (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015; Creswell and Poth, 2018). The pivotal attribute of phenomenological interviews is *a conversational style* with less pre-set questions, other than a Q&A session (Becker, 2018). The conversation is circular rather than linear found in prevailing qualitative research approaches (Thompson, 1989) and the flow of the dialogue is mainly led by the interviewees. Main questions in phenomenological interviews should be descriptive in order to provide a context to entry into a non-judgmental and descriptively-focused course of dialogue, rather than to intentionally confirm theoretical hypotheses or trigger interviewees' rationalisations and prejudgment (Thompson, 1989; Becker, 2018). Follow-up questions are critical as they can keep the conversation on going with more descriptions and the follow-up questions must be formulated *in concert* with the conversation. In short, phenomenological interviews are inherently unstructured. In addition, a tactic of phenomenological interviews is to minimise explanation-seeking questions such as 'why' and 'what caused you to do that', which can also preclude the researcher from being overly intrusive (Thompson, 1989) as it shifts the foci away from interviewees' description. For the follow-up questions, the researcher should intentionally use as many interviewees' own terms as possible in order to "*remaining unencumbered by conceptual predilections*" (Thompson, 1989, pp 138).

Name	Duration of Interview (approximate)
M (pilot)	52mins
J	75mins
Y	98mins
K	71mins
W	68mins
Q	82mins

Table 3. Duration of each interview

Table 3 is presented above to show the duration of each interview since the length of a phenomenological interview is relatively longer than a normal interview in qualitative research according to the attributes discussed in the previous passage. The interviews started off with icebreaker activities to build rapport with, and gain general background information about, the respondent. During these “*grand tour*” questions (McCracken, 1988), the researcher gently shifted the focus of the question to the research topic by asking the question such as “when I mention visiting fashion stores, what comes to your mind?/what do you think about?”; “when I mention the staff, what comes to your mind?/what do you think about?”; “could you tell me how you normally visit fashion stores?” etc. These open-ended question aim at the description of participants’ mundane activities, hobbies, chores which are associated with patronising fashion stores in their everyday life. Furthermore, another nuance of a phenomenological interview lies in the sense of *asymmetry*. In a common interview, normally there would be “*an unequal power dynamic between the interviewer and the interviewee*” and “*the interview is ruled by the interviewer*” (Creswell and Poth, 2018 pp. 173), while in a phenomenological interview the positions of the respondent and the interviewer are equal. The role of the interviewer is more like “*a non-directive listener*”, who should not be seen as “*more powerful or knowledgeable because the respondent must be the expert on his or her own experiences.*” (Thompson, 1989, pp.138). Note: A single case of a participant will be presented in the appendix to illustrate how the interview (and interpretation) are conducted in this study.

3.6 Interpretation: Hermeneutics

For qualitative research, data analysis involves some general steps such as organising data; preparing transcripts; reading and coding; developing themes and representing data (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Nevertheless, in the ‘psychology-free phenomenological research’ realm, Van Manen (2017) reminds that: “*Phenomenological understanding and insights may not necessarily (or even likely) come from procedural analysis of a sample of data*” (pp. 819). As such, specific to phenomenological research, even systematic coding effort is not necessarily needed, for “*the meaningful insight often cannot be secured by a planned systematic method*” (pp. 823). Rather, the analytic process is conducted through “*an inceptual process of reflective wondering, deep questioning, attentive reminiscing, and sensitively interpreting of the primal meanings of human experiences*” (pp. 819). Van Manen (2017) believes that insights often do not emerge when one is occupied by systematic tasks but might likely appear when one truly does nothing. Thus, for Van Manen (2017), the method of phenomenological interpretation should be viewed as a “*nonmethodical method*”. Bearing Van Manen’s opinion in mind, in Thompson’s hermeneutic marketing research, Thompson (1997) did develop a procedural interpretive approach to deal with the volume of data produced by phenomenological interviews. When participants start to compose the narratives of their experiences, what flashes through their mind are often those interactions, activities and events that are salient for them in their lives (Becker, 2018) and these

salient aspects are unfolded based on a non-linear timeline. Accordingly, the interpretative method in this study is based on [Van Manen \(2017\)](#)'s nonmethodical principle while partially referring to the 'part-to-whole' interpretive technique in [Thompson \(1990; 1997\)](#)'s hermeneutic approach as a general guide to deal with the amount of data generated by unstructured/phenomenological interviews.

3.6.1 Interpretive Technique

Thompson's early works provide great resources for conducting interpretation at a practical level, which are partially referred to by this study in a way that precludes any psychological aspect. Accordingly, data in this research were carefully interpreted based on the "*part-to-whole*" hermeneutic process, where the text was read as "*an autonomous body of data comprised of respondent reflections on lived experiences*" ([Thompson, 1989](#), pp. 140). It is not only relatable to analysing and thematising the studied experience, but also calls for researcher's personal engagement in the texts and the background knowledge on both the studied phenomena and the participants' life world, thereby developing a holistic understanding of the participants' voice ([Thompson, 1997](#)). Apart from the attitude of hermeneutic phenomenology which has been presented in previous sections, the interpretive process was reflected in two key respects: *the hermeneutic circle* and *fusion of horizons* ([Suddick et al., 2020](#)). It means that hermeneutic studies can unfold meanings which are hermeneutically and intentionally connected, it is, in Heidegger's thinking, the hermeneutic condition of Dasein's comportment in everyday life mentioned in section 3.4.4. The hermeneutic circle indicates an ongoing, circular analytic process that is reflected in "*the interpretation of textual data*" through "*a series of part-to-whole iteration*" ([Thompson, 1997](#), pp. 441).

The procedure of this part-to-whole iteration, to follow [Thompson \(1990, 1997\)](#), contains two complementary stages. The first is an *intra-textual* way of interpretation in which the researcher goes through a single transcript as a whole to grasp a first sense and then by repeatedly reading the transcript multiple times, an integrated understanding is developed. At this level, the phenomenological consideration centres on these experiential situations and problems of the single interview. The second stage is an *inter-textual* way of interpretation in which the researcher makes cross-transcript comparison with different interviews. At this level, the phenomenological consideration concerns on the similarities and differences emerging from other participants. This intra-textual and inter-textual interpretive cycles as the interpretive process entails a constant interrogation of the plots in consumers' narratives ([Thompson, 1997](#)). As such, every single text is used to grasp a better sense of the essential of the experience being studied, which simultaneously influences the understanding of every individual case.

The hermeneutic circle as part-to-whole dialogue results in the formulation of understanding as *Fusion of Horizons* ([Suddick et al., 2020](#)). It provides a pathway for the extension of meanings from what appears directly in the narratives, leading to an integrated understanding of the participants' lived experiences in their lifeworld and the researcher's own horizon of knowledge ([Vessey, 2009](#); [Suddick et al., 2020](#)). The integrated understanding is furthered by revisiting the interpretation of each participant's narrative and capturing the related meanings across the collective whole. In this stage, interpretive themes are developed between the researcher and the text ([Thompson, 1990](#)). The text as personal narratives conveys individual significance of the circumstances, experiences and events ([Thompson, 1997](#)).

- *Binary Themes*

The conception of binary themes needs to be highlighted when it comes to the development of

themes in this study. This means was advocated by Thompson (1997) in his methodological paper regarding an existential-phenomenological-based “*hermeneutical framework for deriving marketing insights*” from consumer experience. Nevertheless, detailed discussion and comparison have been made in section 3.4.4 showing the departure of Thompson’s psychological foothold from Heideggerian worldview. To reiterate, the former stems from Merleau-Ponty’s existential-phenomenological psychology that, with a glimpse, resembles Heideggerian existentialism very closely, but still, psychology is opposite of Heidegger’s thinking. This can be further proved by the conception of binary themes which, according to Thompson (1997), is offered by “*a body of psychological research that indicates that binary contrasts provide major organizing principles for human cognition*” (pp.446). As such, in Thompson’s studies the application of the binary relations to the interpretation of the text is based on the “*figure/ground perception*” in Gestalt psychology (Thompson et al., 1989).

In this research, however, the conception of binary themes borrowed from Thompson is for a distinct purpose. A binary relation is capable of showing the contrasting thematic facets and able to delineate a dynamic meaning relationship as an ideal means to represent the modified, sophisticated framework of Heideggerian intersubjectivity in section 3.3.1. It can efficiently illustrate the existential modes as well as the potential oscillation from everyday indifference towards the two extreme modes of authenticity and inauthenticity. Therefore, the binary theme is capable of showing the dynamic interpersonal experience as a solicitous continuum based on the two extreme modes of Dasein’s existence, because being-with-others in everyday life maintains itself in many mixed forms such as “*being-for*”; “*being-against*”; “*being-without*”; “*being-with-not-mattering*”; “*being-with-passing-by*” and so forth (Heidegger, 1927/2010, pp.114-126), where “*even at the extremes of this continuum, however, both dimensions are always present*” (McMullin, 2013, pp.185). As such, in this study binary elements were employed to show the leeway and to delineate the subtle change reflected in the participants’ interpersonal experience with staff under various circumstances described during the interviews.

3.6.2 Theory in Hermeneutic Phenomenology

As discussed in the preceding section, interpretation in hermeneutic phenomenology is less structured (Van Manen, 2014; 2017) and less rule-bound (Neubauer et al., 2019). Importantly, hermeneutics as an interpretive approach bears “*an atheoretical nature*” (Pollio et al., 1997). It indicates that the analytic goal is neither to test a prior theory, nor to categorise a phenomena based on the theory as conformity. However, this does not mean that the previous review of literature is unimportant. For this phenomenological study aiming to explore consumers’ interpersonal experience with staff in a technology-enabled fashion store, the literature review covers the ground in terms of consumer experience, store environment and technology, Gen Z consumer and frontline staff. They help establish the framework of knowledge, focus on the research aim, develop research questions, locate the stores and participants (Neubauer et al., 2019). Particular to servicescape theory, the application of the traditional ‘stimulus-organism-responds’ model has resulted in a great number of store-related studies that view store environment as stimulus. This research, however, places consumer store-related experience in their life world forming the sense of ‘consumer-being-in-a-fashion-store’ in which both the physical world (store environment) and the personal life world are allowed to remain as interpretation (see section 3.3), other than placing consumer in a chosen store which seals the personal life world as examination or experiment, for a theoretical structure having no contact with lived experience is meaningless under the perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology.

Furthermore, the theories as the researcher’ background knowledge can also be an aid to

interpretation, because even the atheoretical nature of hermeneutic phenomenology admits that all interpretation is articulated from some perspective (Pollio et al., 1997). The interpretive background is important in terms of digging meanings out of a phenomenon and comprehending the findings, because, according to Heidegger's philosophical principle, a phenomenon is always partially constituted by some *always already* existing elements in one's life world as their own lived experiences with meanings. Therefore, by understanding those pre-given elements (e.g. extant theories in the field and the background of the participants), a phenomenon can be better interpreted as Emiliussen et al. (2021) suggest that rather than centring on the modes of suspending the researcher's subjectivity, phenomenologists should learn to embrace the embedded nature of knowledge and exploit it when interpreting complex phenomena which "*cannot be brought to intuition without the proper preconceptions*" (pp.5).

3.6.3 Interpretive Procedure

Whilst a (psychology-free) phenomenological study needs to be nonmethodical (Van Manen, 2017), a general procedure outlining how data were processed in this study is presented here for an organisational purpose. A six-steps interpretive process for actual interpretation is shown below. During the interpretive process, the researcher returned to the participants to conduct additional interviews for more detailed understanding of a particular issue raised in the subject's narrative, suggested by Fleming et al. (2003). This was done by one face-to-face conversation and one online conversation with two participants depending on their preferences. Note that all inaugural interviews with the participants were conducted in person since participants' non-verbal expression during face-to-face conversations is as valuable and conducive to the hermeneutic interpretation as what is spoken. All transcripts were printed out and the researcher marked out key points when reading every sentence line-by-line and took note in the margins of transcripts that were documented.

- *Step 1*

The first step is of data management. All digital version of the data including the audio record of interviews and the transcripts were organised into digital files using a pellucid naming system. The researcher can benefit from the pellucid naming system when trying to locate a particular material (Creswell and Poth, 2018). All digital data were saved on a computer and duplicated by using Microsoft Cloud Service. All text materials were printed out for interpretation and documented as analytic evidence.

- *Step 2*

The researcher treated every single narrative as autonomous body of data (Thompson, 1989) and initially read a single transcript as a whole several times to grasp a first sense. Then, during repeatedly reading, signified statements and expressions were marked via "*an emic approach*" relying on participants' own language (Thompson, 1989). For example, regarding the respondent's experience, the term 'fear' - which was used by multiple participants to describe their feelings in relation to patronising fashion stores and interacting with the staff - was chosen and shown in the final diagram in the end of the chapter of Finding, rather than designating a more formal or academic kind of vocabulary such as 'anxiety' or 'angst' that a qualitative researcher usually does during the process of coding who would 'distil' the respondent's own words into, or reduce them down to, a few key themes. In addition, the development of other elements in the final diagram also adheres to the *emic approach* using participants' own terms as much as possible in order to bring to light their *lived experience* in relation to the staff and fashion stores in their life world.

- *Step 3*

After the interpretation of the first transcript, the researcher moved to the next transcript repeating step 2 and so on, until all transcripts were interpreted. Importantly, each transcript was not interpreted in an isolated manner, but rather, every interpretation of a single transcript helps gain new insight that in turn further the understanding of other transcripts ([Thompson, 1997](#)). As such, the researcher went back to prior cases with re-interpretation as well as seeking similarities and differences until the interpretation of every individual case was finalised as the process of the *part-to-whole iteration* explained in section 3.6.1. To instantiate: regarding the scenes of patronising fashion stores, after reading one participant's descriptions, the researcher marked the scenes described by other participants since all interviews are unstructured and the researcher had to locate the similar content in each conversation before cross-interpreting the descriptions. Some key points the researcher gleaned from all participants' descriptions on the scenes of their everyday visiting fashion stores were the shared purpose of visit and the shared practical engagement (Intentionality) during their in-store interactions with things and people.

- *Step 4*

During the process of the *part-to-whole iteration*, the researcher gleaned the similar patterns as well as the multiple facets of the studied experience, while the process of the *Fusion of Horizons* ([Suddick et al., 2020](#)) also began operating. As explained in section 3.6.1, this process acts as the fusion of two horizons of knowledge: one is the participant's knowledge of their lived experience and the other is the researcher's background knowledge conducive to developing a better understanding of the studied phenomenon. This process was ubiquitous during the interpretation. To instantiate: as pointed out in Step 2, to follow the emic approach the term 'fear' appears in the final diagram in the end of the chapter of finding, rather than a more formal or academic term such as 'anxiety' or 'angst'. Yet, discussion will be extended to the relation and distinction between participants' fear and angst/anxiety in this research context through a Heideggerian perspective later in chapter 5, which also reveals the reason why participants 'fear' to visit fashion stores, or interact with staff, in their everyday life, rather than being anxious about it. This understanding can only be developed based on the fusion of the researcher's own knowledge of Heidegger's philosophy, the research context as well as participants' own understanding of their lived experience.

- *Step 5*

This final step acts as the extension of the previous step on the *Fusion of Horizons*, where major interpretive themes and elements were developed and where binary themes were applied to delineate and demonstrate interpersonal experiences as explained in section 3.6.1. Each thematic union was described first and then all unions were organised diagrammatically as the final presentation of the findings. It can only be done by the fusion of participants' own knowledge of the experience they have lived through as well as the research's knowledge in terms of the literature in the entailed research fields, research philosophy and the familiarity of the ethnic background of the participants helpful to better understand their experiences.

Thus far, the method and the procedure of how data are interpreted in this study have been theoretically elaborated in section 3.6 and practically instantiated step-by-step in sub-section 3.6.3. However, the interpretive procedure above is for an organisational purpose only as stated at the beginning of this sub-section, because not all the actions during the interpretation can be rendered into words in (psychology-free) phenomenology where the nature of the interpretation should be less structured, less rule-bound, and even nonmethodical and atheoretical ([Pollio et al., 1997](#); [Van](#)

Manen, 2014; 2017; Neubauer et al., 2019) as pointed out previously. It implies that the researcher's capacity and intuition in dealing with the amount of phenomenological data are vital to the interpretation. This differentiates the current study from many qualitative studies within and outside marketing and consumer disciplines based on logical positivism or empiricism where strict analytic procedures are employed⁷. The purpose of a scientific-like, strict analytic procedure results from the view that a phenomenon is regarded as a machine-like system that can be studied and measured by taking it apart since "*components in isolation are assumed to operate the same as components in unison*" (Thompson et al., 1989, pp134). The strict analytic procedures are to examine the separate parts of a phenomenon singularly, whereby a phenomenon is reduced to a set of necessary properties (Warde 2014) and any aspect of it that cannot be measured are viewed as *incidental*. Therefore, eventually a phenomenon is rendered in mathematical or scientific terms as the influence of Cartesianism in methodological prescriptions (Thompson et al., 1989). In contrast, this Heideggerian phenomenological study views these aspects that cannot be measured and hence incidental to a phenomenon under Cartesianism are otherwise *essential* to a phenomenon (also see section 6.3). For more detailed illustrations of how the phenomenological interview was conducted and how the data was interpreted in this study, a case of participant J is presented in the appendix. This single case also acts as the 'background information' of the final encompassing presentation in Chapter 4 that further exemplifies the processes of data interpretation.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This research entails some general ethical issues existing amongst qualitative studies. Prior to data collection, the purpose of a research project should be explained to participants without any pressure on them to sign consent forms. During data collection, ethical issues include minimising disruptions in the site and avoiding deceiving participants. After data collection and interpretation, researchers should avoid partiality with participants and disclosing results (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018). In this study, the participants signed the consent forms voluntarily and the places of interviews were chosen by the participants themselves, rather than the researcher in order to maximise their comfort. In respect of store observation, in ethnography the main ethical concern centres on the nature of field observation, namely the degree of others' awareness of the researcher who is conducting observation (Goulding, 2004) and to what extent the content of the research project should be revealed is also contentious (Creswell and Poth, 2018). However, unlike observation in ethnography that requires prolonged field work for data collection, observing the stores in this study is not the primary way to collect data, but to see the store itself. Therefore, the dwelling time is markedly shorter than ethnographical observation. It was done by the researcher's short visits to the stores in the same way as a normal consumer browsing in a fashion store, which minimises the concern. As specific to phenomenology, ethical concern is primarily rooted in its in-depth nature of data that is potentially able to reach sensitive aspects of personal life (Thompson, 1989). Nonetheless, due to the topic of this research, possibilities of sensitive and contentious data remain faint. Informed consent is required and anonymity was ensured following NTU's research ethics policies and procedures. The participants anonymised with 'codes' (M;J;Y;K;W;Q) to disguise their names, which are listed in section 3.5. The personal data are stored on a single password protected computer and Microsoft Cloud Service, which follows the university's

⁷ as well as the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach in psychology that binds itself scientific status (Smith, 2010).

guidelines and regulations on research ethics.

Chapter 4 Findings

The findings of this research reveal Gen Z's interpersonal experience of in-store staff through Heidegger's worldview. The structure of the findings is composed of four layers. The first layer is the purposes of patronising the store as forwardness (to the future). The second layer is in-store Intentionality (in the present). The third layer is the interpersonal experience with staff as the 'falling being-with' (in the present). The fourth layer is the attunement as thrownness (from the past). Importantly, the four layers are closely interconnected. The interpersonal experience with staff is presented at the third layer by five themes with binary elements to delineate the horizon of the experience, which enables the oscillation between two extremes under variable situations. The findings represent a holistic perspective of a phenomenological interpretation on consumers in-store interaction and experience, which covers both facets of the physical environment and personal life world as 'consumer-being-in-a-fashion-store'. The four-layer findings are taken apart first and presented piece by piece with illustrative excerpts from the five interviews wherein the pseudonyms of the interviewees are used. This chapter unfolds with the first layer: the purposes, and then moves to the second layer: Intentionality, by which the third layers: interpersonal experience is revealed. It leads to the fourth layer: attunement as thrownness that shows the emergent attribute developed by organising the negative parts of the four binary themes of the interpersonal experience with staff. Finally, to provide a clearer sense as well as a better answer to the research questions, the four layers are assembled in one piece and the whole picture is presented diagrammatically by Figure 6 in which the interrelatedness and the attribute of circularity can be better seen.

4.1 The First Layer: Purposes of Patronising Fashion Stores

The purposes, for something in the future, act as forwardness. It is an overarching element that determines possibilities and hence plays a leading role in consumers' in-store comportment, then experience. There is always a purpose when consumers patronise a fashion store. Specific to an in-store scale, the purpose can be categorised as 'for the sake of possession' and 'for the sake of (simply) seeing'. Yet, if zooming out to a life-world scale, the purposes of patronising fashion stores such as purchasing products and simply browsing, become means to an end which is, however, not necessarily an end but will become another means to achieve further goals that consumers have ahead of them. All participants inadvertently expressed their purpose when either describing a day they visit fashion stores in their daily life, or how they usually visit fashion stores.

K: I travelled to Prague recently and during that time we visited the high street as my friend wanted to buy something. It was the last day we stayed in Prague and we had no specific arrangement in our itinerary. We decided to have a stroll around the high street...sometimes when we have no purpose to buy something but just take a stroll to kill time. For example, after having a dinner together and we meander around the city centre.

Y: Normally, in a weekend day, I wake up and go out for brunch or lunch. After that, I stroll around high street visiting small fashion stores and department stores, because this is good for digestion (laugh).

Q: To avoid a crowded environment at weekends, I would choose a weekday to go

to fashion stores and go with my friends or parents. I usually already have some target products and then go to stores. If I manage to find the product, I may end up purchasing. If not, I will take a stroll in the store and on the high street.

W: Most of time if I go with friends, it is actually the situation where I accompany my friends who have something to buy.

In participants' descriptions, 'have something to buy', 'want to buy something' and 'have some target products' clearly demonstrate one common purpose that occasions their visit to fashion stores, which is 'for the sake of possession', while 'take a stroll', 'kill time', 'meander around', 'browse' imply the other purpose which is simply 'seeing something'. This is classified into Heidegger's third mode of 'seeing': idle curiosity, alongside the other two modes "circumspect for-sight" and "theoretical only-looking-at". As discussed previously in section 3.2, 'circumspect for-sight' means that we circumspectly understand, or take care of, things in order to accomplish our tasks, while 'theoretical only-looking-at' means that we understand things purely theoretically or scientifically (detailed discussion of the modes in daily life context will be conducted in the next chapter). The third mode, idle curiosity, can be viewed as a degenerated mode of "circumspectly seeing". It is demarcated by the word 'idle' implying "greed for the new" when there is "nothing more at hand that needs to be taken care of" in our everyday life (King, 2001, pp.86). Namely, there is currently no other tasks except for 'looking' itself. During the interviews, this study managed to capture participants' feeling about 'idle curiously seeing' in fashion stores:

I(Interviewer): What does it feel like when exploring a store?

K: It feels like... there is always something new there waiting for me to see. It is like an entertainment that not only can be gained from purchasing and owning the product, but also from simply looking at new things. Also, sometimes I feel bored to see stores displaying something similar.

Y: [...] sometimes I quite enjoy window shopping and especially encountering a product that appealing to me. So when I go to fashion stores without a targeted product, I enjoy the exploring process and open to everything.

Speaking from a broader angle of life world, with the said purposes, it turns out to be that patronising fashion stores in participants' everyday life is a mundane, routine-like activity that does not counted as an extraordinary occasion. Oftentimes the stores are merely one of the stops in their itineraries. This is well demonstrated when the purpose is of 'idle-curiously seeing':

J: [...] I would go shopping with friends at a weekend and normally we eat out first and then shopping. It is a kind of after-lunch activity and after visiting the stores, we would go to cinema and restaurant to have dinner as the closure of the whole relaxing day during a weekend.

K: Normally at a weekend, we have a brunch first and go to the city centre spending some time meandering around the high street until we feel hungry again (laugh).

In terms of 'for the sake of possession', when participants patronise stores under this purpose, it is actually a means to achieve their further goals. This implies how participants' life world affects their in-store experience and comportment. It can be seen from the descriptions below:

J: [...] I remember that it was a day I went to a suit store with my parents as I were

preparing for an interview and needed to dress in a formal way [...]

Y: [...] recently, I am looking for a wedding dress for attending my friend's wedding [...]

Q: [...] It is a skirt that I wore during the graduation ceremony of my high school, which is not very formal but the most formal one I have so far. The ceremony took place in August and I had bought the skirt in July for my summer holiday trip. It makes me look nicer when taking photos. Although I did not buy the skirt only for the ceremony, I did consider whether the skirt would be suitable for that occasion when choosing the skirt [...].

There are some typical descriptions from participants which clearly show how Gen Z's store-related comportment is bound up with their purpose:

I: Could you tell me how you usually visit fashion stores?

J: If the propose of my visiting fashion stores is for buying something really, I would normally ask someone to accompany me to go shopping as I need others' opinions and suggestions. Whereas, if I just want to browse about the new fashion trend and style or buy essentials, I will do it on my own with wearing my headphones to listen to music, which can prevent me from others' intrusion.

W: If I want to buy something, I will search online. For example, to have a look at the online stores and online reviews written by other consumers.

Although the categories of products too can influence the need of others' opinions (especially the advice from staff which will be discussed later), J would not need others' opinions and suggestions when making her decision in the store if she did not aim to buy something, because the possibility of needing others' advice is completely omitted. Likewise, if W did not harbour the purpose of possession, she would not have a look at the online store and online reviews on the product she aims to buy. Namely under the purpose of possession, more possibilities remain open during participants' shopping journey.

So far, the interpretation has demonstrated two different purposes of patronising fashion stores as broader influence that can affect 'what happens' at the next stage so that the interpretation now moves to layer two in order to demonstrate how participants' in-store comportment and experience are influenced by the purposes 'for the sake of possession' and 'for the sake of seeing'.

4.2 The Second Layer: In-store Intentionality

As already discussed in the previous chapter, talking about human experience through Heidegger's worldview means that experience is co-constructed by the subject and the world, not something taken place inside the brain. The subject and the world is linked by Intentionality involving not only intentional directedness when referring to a perceiving first-person, but also intentional normativity and intentional mattering if referring to a practical first-person (McMullin, 2013). Accordingly, when talking about experience of a certain element within a fashion store (servicescape), the element is inextricable to the store context. Similarly, when talking about consumers' experience of staff, the staff should be 'attached' to the surroundings, rather than 'detached'. Thus, a holistic perspective is required on consumers in-store comportment being

reflected in their in-store Intentionality, based on which, to seek where the role of the staff fits in. The in-store Intentionality can be gleaned from the combination of participants' purposes to visit fashion stores and the corresponding in-store interactions. In other words, the in-store Intentionality is heavily influenced by the purposes of patronising stores, while also strongly affecting participants' experience of staff. As such, the workings of this section is to particularly highlight the inextricableness in relation to the elements of the research enquiry within both life world and the physical store environment.

- *Being directed towards the store environment*

The first stage of Gen Z's in-store Intentionality can be triggered under both 'for the sake of seeing' and 'for the sake of possession'. This can be illustrated by presenting participants' descriptions of the moment of entering a store, in which their engagement is directed towards the store environment itself since participants first need to understand the surroundings. This includes a moment of looking at the environmental design, while feeling the atmosphere, before looking for the products.

Y: As soon as I entered the store, I feel the store atmosphere very energetic. There were many screens playing clips and the shoes on display were not static in one position, but something was able to make them turn around. It was a bank holiday so the store was crowded full of hustle and bustle. DJ was playing live music in the store, which is loud as you could hear it across all floors. Then I went to upper floors and felt the store very spacious with many different products on display. It was good.

K: I remember a time visiting a department store. There was a huge mannequin with only the part of head displaying sunglasses. I saw it as soon as entering the store. I felt so cool and had a close look at it. So if there is some special design or adornment in the store, I will be quite interested. They attract me more than the products sometimes. Also, whether the store space is tidy and clean can cast an impression on me.

After acquiring an overall understanding of the store environment, participants' Intentionality shifts from the environment to products, because no matter whether they patronise the store is for the sake of possession or for the sake of seeing, the product is central. The excerpts below show that the complicated design of Selfridges made it hard for J to find the location of her targeted product. Similarly, the layout of Nike Town made it hard for Q to locate the type of clothing she wanted:

J: [...] I really like the design of Liberty, especially during Christmas. There was a huge Christmas tree in the middle of the store. The signs for each floors are clear. By comparison, I find the design of Selfridges too complicated. I feel, it is hard to find the right department and the right floor [...]

Q: [...] When entering the store, at first glance I saw the mannequins but I did not see any technological element until I realized a big screen is located at the other side of the store [...] My feeling of the store is that it is a big store with many garments on display, which makes me feel confused about the layout and arrangement. Even though it was not crowded at the moment I visited, I still felt hard to find a specific type of clothing, because there are multiple thematic areas displaying some things similar, not very clear about where I should look around.

However, as emphasised in the appendix regarding the case of J, there is a fundamental distinct distinction of 'looking at a product' between 'for the sake of seeing' and 'for the sake of possession'. For the former, the products can be counted as 'a new thing' as an environmental element amongst other elements such as a beautiful store decoration or a big screen playing clips. Thus, consumers' browsing about these displayed products is to constantly move attention from a new element to a newer element. To reflect this existential sense, the products that are eyed by consumers are categorised into the store environment under the purpose 'for the sake of seeing'.

- *Being directed towards the product*

It is only under the purpose 'for the sake of possession' that participants' Intentionality can be authentically directed towards a product. The descriptions below show how J and Q's in-store Intentionality is genuinely directed towards the product:

J: I remember that it was a day I went to a suit store with my parents as I were preparing for an interview and needed to dress in a formal way. When browsing in the store, a suit was appealed to both my mom and I so that we chose it with a paired shirt and trousers. I tried it on and my mom's comment was quite positive.

Q: It is a skirt that I wore during the graduation ceremony of my high school, which is not very formal but the most formal one I have so far. The ceremony took place in August and I had bought the skirt in July for my summer holiday trip. It makes me look nicer when taking photos. Although I did not buy the skirt only for the ceremony, I did consider whether the skirt would be suitable for that occasion when choosing the skirt.

The nuance is that when browsing a garment in the store for the sake of possession, J and Q are not mere for 'seeing', but constantly project themselves forward to the future thinking of, such as, the occasion(s) the garment will be worn and how to pair it with other owned fashion stuff on that day etc. The purpose 'for the sake of possession' makes more possibilities open compared to the 'for the sake of seeing' in which one is satisfied by simply eyeing things. When one's purpose of seeing is fulfilled, he/she stops browsing and leaves the store. The distinction of the ways one eyes products can better contrast through a scene of patronising store with friends described by J, which also mirrors the interconnection between the purposes and in-store Intentionality:

J: [...] But it is not necessarily the situation that I intend to buy clothes. Visiting fashion stores with friends can also be a spur-of-the-moment-thing. For example, sometimes we plan to visit a gallery or go to the cinema and restaurant and we bypass a fashion store, being attracted by its window display. In that case, I prefer to head into the store to see and try the garment in the display window. 'I think this one fits you well or not very well', my friends would give their comments to me.

I: If a garment is commented by your friends as 'fit you well', will you buy it?

J: Well.... not likely. I am not keen on impulse buying. Before making the decision my purchase, I would consider whether I have already had something similar in my wardrobe; how this garment matches my existing clothes; whether it is simply my desire or a real need etc., lots of things in my mind.

The mode of idle curiosity makes J and her friends simply want to eye the new garment on window display without thinking of the possibilities in the further in her life world. However, by the

researcher's immediate follow-up question, the meaning of 'change in purpose' from idle curiosity to possession is accidentally revealed. A change from 'simply seeing it' to 'owning it' leads to 'lots of things' on J's mind in relation to the product.

- *Being directed towards checkout*

This final stage of Intentionality is also exclusive of the purpose 'for the sake of possession'. Having chosen the product, participants' engagement is directed towards the checkout process. This stage can be seen from participants' talking about their experiences and choice between human-based checkout and self-checkout terminals. These excerpts below indicate the directedness of participants' Intentionality at this stage:

Y: In Zara, I choose the traditional way using human-based check-out. I noticed that in Uniqlo, there are terminals with baskets to help customers check-out. I like that terminal and use it every time. If it was installed in Zara, I would use it too.

K: I like them. Some self-check-out technology requires you to scan like the Uniqlo one, while in Decathlon, it can scan automatically when you put your clothes in the basket. I find it very convenient. I wish all stores have this kind of technology, very fast.

Q: I prefer self-check-out terminals as I do not need to spend time waiting for the staff to enter the code of the product in their system. It is the same situation when I am in a supermarket like Tesco, I choose self-check-out which can speed up the process. Also, I think it is good to do things by myself. However, if in a luxury store, I will expect the staff to do more.

W: I prefer to let the staff do the rest of things. For example: In a supermarket, if I am alone, I will choose to find a cashier. I cannot be bothered to scan everything by myself. Yet, if I go with my friends, I will choose self-service as I can do it together with my friends. This is also applicable to fashion stores where I like to find a cashier. Also, if in a luxury store, the check-out process can be quite enjoyable as I can see how the staff pack the product I chose. I will get a beautiful pack at the end. During this process, I can take photos and post it via Instagram or other social medias.

J: [...] I like to see the real garment in the physical store where I pin down the exact style/colour and then I make the purchase online, because I hate queuing in the store [...] there is always a long queue in front of the till in the fashion store I normally visit. I feel frustrated when queuing in such a long line, such a waste of my time. Also, sometimes I have my plan to go to other places so don't want to carry bags, because of which, I would return home to order online. Yet, admittedly if something urgent, I will buy it in the physical store.

In addition, these excerpts indicate that the influence of the store environment can be very subtle and personal on participants' in-store experience and comportment. For example, during the interviews J and Q repeatedly mentioned the matter of the density of other consumers and the queue before the till. It could result from their background as they are from HK, an over-crowded place, so that they are very sensitive about it. Below the two additional descriptions are typically related to this point. Pink as the thematic colour of a store, alongside the pink garment, appeals to W emotionally. Similarly, since Y loves flowers, the florist shop located at the entrance of a store

gives Y a very positive first-impression, although the density of the crowd later repels her.

W: [...] Lululemon is a spacious store with the place where you could sit. I found the pink colour of the store beautiful. I was also attracted by the pink yoga clothes on display as I love the colour of pink. It is my favourite colour.

Y: [...] Regarding Liberty London, there was a flower shop at the entrance which attracted me since I love flower. My first impression on the store was very positive. Again, the store was crowded so I had a quick tour, during which I spotted some products I like so I stayed to have a close look at them. Yet, the crowded environment made me want to escape.

The interpretation so far has revealed the two purposes of participants' patronising stores and established their in-store Intentionality including three stages: the store environment, products and checkout. When consumers visit fashion stores for the sake of seeing, their in-store Intentionality is directed towards store environment and the products as part of the store environment with no further stages disclosed. When patronising fashion stores for the sake of possession, the first stage of in-store Intentionality is still being directed towards store environment. Then it is directed towards two further stages: products and checkout. The interpretation also elucidates the interconnection between the purposes and Intentionality. The two purposes act as a kind of preconditions of in-store Intentionality directing participants' practical engagement and in-store comportment. Therefore, the current presentation has shown that because comportment (the interaction) is the source of one's experience, the interpersonal experiences between participants and staff should be interpreted based on different stages of Intentionality guided by their purposes. Thus, having illustrated the first two layers, the following interpretation will move to the third layer and reveal the interpersonal experience with staff.

4.3 The Third Layer: Gen Z's Interpersonal Experiences with In-store Staff

In this study, consumers' experience with staff is interpreted from a holistic perspective through five themes including four themes with binary elements. The notion on the application of the binary element is to delineate the dynamic, always-changing nature of interpersonal experience, which has been explicitly discussed previously in the section 3.3.1 and 3.6.1. The intersubjective encounters and the manners in which consumers interact with staff are principally determined by consumers' in-store Intentionality at the second layer that is also influenced by their purposes of visit at the first layer, which has been interpreted in the preceding passages. This section will centre on the interpersonal experience and present the five themes in chronological order, which are: 'Being There'; 'Being Autonomous/Being Manipulated'; 'Being Acknowledged/Being Ignored'; 'Trustful/Distrustful'; 'Efficient/Inefficient'. They emerge in tandem with the three stages in-store Intentionality.

- *Being There*

The preceding presentation has shown that both of the purposes 'for the sake of seeing' and 'for the sake of possession' can trigger the first stage of Intentionality that is being directed towards the store itself, for participants need to understand the environment when entering a fashion store. At this moment, there is a permeating sense that participants feel staff 'being-there' which is both ontic and existential, namely, physically present and non-physically present.

In terms of existential being-there, it means that even without their physical presence, staff are

still already there in the store, since Heidegger emphasises in interpersonal relation that Dasein's 'being-in-the-world' is always already 'being-with-others-in-the-world'. K's description implies this sense:

K: [...] whether the store space is tidy and clean can cast an impression on me. I find the garments in some stores are not arranged in order, which repels me. I do not want to browse and make my purchase in such an environment [...] I think the staff are somewhat responsible for keeping the store environment in order [...] last week in London, I met up with my parent's friend to have dinner. It has been a while since we last meeting so we talked about various topics including the new job I had gotten. During the conversation, I realised that I did not have many formal clothes and needed some for my new job. So we went to stores after dinner on a whim as I did not rush to go home, namely this time I did not search in advance. When bypassing H&M, the big spring-sale advert attracted us so we decided to have a look. The store was crowded and not in a tidy and clean condition. In some parts of the store, the garments were in a mess and this made me have no desire to browse. We mainly stayed in the area where garments were left in order. We eventually bought two new garments and queued for a long time to get the cashier.

When K was browsing and choosing the garments in H&M, there is no staff following her, namely the staff was physical absent at that moment. However, the appalling condition of the store environment can still cast a negative feeling towards K on the in-store staff as if the staff was not absent at that moment. According to Heidegger, it is because not only does Dasein understand him/herself from what he/she does, but also understands other Dasein in the same way. In this research context, K understands herself in what she cares about in her world (e.g. the need of new clothes for the new job). Similarly, K also understands the staff in what they do, have and need in their world. The store as a shared environment is, on the one hand, a public commercial world for K, but, on the other hand, the same shared environment is a workplace for staff whose duty involves taking care about the things and items within the place. Thus, consumers' experience with the staff already incorporates an 'environmental encounter' which cannot be separated from the meaning of the shared background context as well as the activities within it. This point can be further demonstrated by participants' descriptions on what they think about when a physical fashion store is simply mentioned:

J: Garments are tidily arranged with a range of different styles available to try. The store is divided into different sections for different products or the same product but different colours. Wait, it can also be many garments in a mess. People crowd into the store. The store is large with several floors and big escalators. Cahiers are always busy and there are always long queues before tills.

K: Brands, garments on display, try-on, consulting with staff about products' availability and hang-out with friends.

W: The first thing comes to my mind is the price; cheap or expensive. Also, people, staff and attitude. I mean, you may be looked down by the staff who even roll their eyes if you wear cheap clothing, especially in luxury stores.

A mention of fashion stores is enough to cast an impression (as a pre-understanding) of the in-store staff, namely staff are encountered as "they are in their being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1925/1990, cited by McMullin, 2013). The store is the staff's workplace and also a shared

commercial context in which participants not only physically encounter the staff, but also in what staff do and care. The impression of the staff is prescribed to their social role in everyday life such as taking care of the in-store garments and answering consumers' questions about it. This impression is also formed by participants' lived experiences of staff. These act as the sources of the current experience of staff, even without participants' entering a store and actual interaction occurs. This kind of pre-understanding of staff can heavily affect consumers' experience. The interpretation will return to this point later.

In terms of ontic being-there, it means that the participants sense the physical presence of staff. This physical presence of other Daseins differs fundamentally from the physical presence of things. The following description was gained when participants talked about their feeling about the staff when entering stores:

Y: [...] I did not talk to the staff directly, but I had a feeling that they knew I was there. For example, when I went to the second floor, there were few staff already and we had eye contact. Since I did not have any specific product to buy, they did not approach me. It is OK. I knew they were there. So if I need them, I could find them. This is the same experience of my visiting stores for killing time.

Q: I think that I just need a greeting but no more small talk. The greeting makes me feel that the staff is there and can assist me if I have any questions. I do not like talk to the staff more at that moment when entering the store.

Verbal greetings or even eye contact can cast a feeling of staff's being-there-ready-to-assist and this feeling varies individually according to distinctive life worlds (participants' personal situations) such as their moods and the attendance or company of others (including others' moods). According to Heidegger, moods reflect Dasein's thrownness making one realise that he/she is already in the midst of other beings in the world. Participants' mood implies that they are always already under certain emotions being cast by the things and other Daseins in the world. Some of participants' detailed description of mood below well demonstrates this connotation as well as the consequence: the willingness/unwillingness to interact with staff. See the excerpts below:

W: Actually, it depends on my mood on that day. If I am in a good mood, I may want the staff to introduce more about the products. I think that if I buy something I am familiar with, I do not need the staff harassing me, while if I buy something I am unfamiliar with, I want the staff to introduce about it as well as their opinion [...] it is difficult to explain. I think the mood at that moment entails various factors such as whether I am in a hurry to leave the store; How the day is going; whether I encounter some troubles; Whether there are lot of things on my mind recently; How the weather is on that day; whether the bag I am carrying is heavy; Whether I am happy and so on. Those altogether can influence my mood. For instance, if it is a hot weather and I am carrying a heavy bag, I will be less tolerant towards the staff who approaches me to talk.

J: I feel that when I am in a good mood. I can accept more interactions. Otherwise, with a bad mood, I yearn to be alone when visiting fashion stores [...] My 'bad mood' doesn't mean a depressive level of emotion. I think, more accurately, it means my 'social energy', high or low. I would say, when my social energy is high, the interaction with staff (e.g. a conversation or small talk) is likely to occur, namely If the staff is a bit intrusive, I can tolerate it more.

K: When browsing the store alone, it is actually a condition where I do not want to talk. When I visit a store alone, it also means that I probably already have a chosen product and just want to have a look at the real thing. However, if I visit the store with my friend, I do not mind having a small talk with the staff because I am already in a mood of talking.

Furthermore, since participants who are in a good mood tend to be more tolerant even if the staff are a bit intrusive, this implies a kind of emotional reaction to the feeling of staff's being-there and this emotional reaction varies according to staff's demeanour such as being impersonal, warm, intrusive, professional and so forth:

W: My feelings of the staff can be influenced by various factors like their appearances. For example, if they looks snobby, I will have a bad feeling and experience even before talking to them.

J: The staff...I think, the staff in HK stores and the staff in UK stores should be talked separately. In HK, the staff tend to be impersonal and you would be likely left browsing the store alone. By comparison, you would get warmer welcome from UK staff who would say 'hi, how can I assist you today' when you head into the store. They are very friendly making you feel warm and patient listening to your questions and finally answering with enthusiasm [...] For Levi's, when I headed into the store, a female staff gave me a warm welcome by nicely saying 'hi, what can I get you today?' There are four to five staff in the store. At that moment, some of them were arranging the clothes and there are staff available at the till. They looks very professional in doing their work.

- *Being Autonomous and Being Manipulated*

This binary theme reflects the feeling when staff approach participants, at the first stage of in-store Intentionality under both purposes for the sake of idle curiosity and for the sake of possession. The experience can oscillate between two extremes according to the demeanour of staff, namely 'greetings versus small talk', alongside various factors such as the level of store and the participants' moods. The interpretation of this theme begins with an excerpt from W:

W: [...] (I hope staff) do not reach me first before I ask you questions. I can tolerate small talk during greeting but no more because I need time to browsing and choose what I want.

Here, the term 'small talk' mentioned by W calls for attention. It is common to have a small talk when meeting other people in our daily life and this is very evident in the UK. Similarly, it is not rare to see staff reaching consumers to do small talk as a greeting. This kind of everyday discourse, according to Heidegger, mirrors the publicness of everyday being-together. It is characterised as 'idle talk', alongside 'idle curiosity', form the public disclosedness of everyday being-with-others. In everyday life, discourse has the attribute of communication via spoken-out language, by which the listener is drawn into a disclosing relation to the things that are talked about. However, Heidegger reminds that there is a predisposition of everyday discourses where the speaker and the listener are talking not for the sake of truly understanding the things as the subject of the talk, but rather is for the sake of understanding the talk itself, without "*the going back to the things themselves*" (King, 2001, pp.84). Consequently, what is shared through this discourse is simply an average understanding of the talk itself. In other words, everyday being-with-others is a "*mutual talking-together*" wherein what has been said have been repeating in the current course of idle talk

(King, 2001). In a commercial environment participants seem to be aware, albeit implicitly, of the meaninglessness of this disclosing relation formed by small talk so that they tend to avoid it. The concepts 'idle talk' first appears at the first stage of participants in-store Intentionality and then reoccurs at the third stage of in-store Intentionality, which will be returned to later as the interpretation unfolds. The function (or purpose) of introducing the concept of 'Idle talk' here is to better understand consumers' interpersonal relation with staff. The excerpts below illustrate participants' contrasting feelings when facing a concise kind of greeting and small talk at this stage:

W: I would say that when I enter a store, I need some time to know the store first and then find my target. Sometimes staff will be there or reach me greeting, I will response but what I am actually thinking is that 'please do not come to talk to me. Leave me alone'.

Q: I think that I just need a greeting but no more small talk. The greeting makes me feel that the staff is here and can assist me if I have any questions. I do not like talk to the staff more at that moment when entering the store [...] If I have no purpose to buy something, I will be willing to listen to the staff when they introduce the new products. But after it, I still yearn to be alone.

K: Just say hello if the staff greet me. If the staff intends to talk more, I will tell them 'I want to browse alone. I can understand it is their professionalism so that although I am not inclined to talk, I do not have a negative kind of feeling.

Y: Normally the staff would welcome me and I would give a kind response. Yet, honestly I do not really want to talk to them. I can understand this is professionalism [...] I prefer being left alone. But it depends. For luxury brands stores, I would expect the staff reach me to have a small talk, by which I tell them my need.

As illustrated previously, few-words greetings or even simply eye contact can cast a feeling that a friendly staff is there ready to assist, whereas when staff turn a greeting into small talk, the image of staff turns, namely from 'friendly-ready-to-assist' to 'intrusively-ready-to-luring'. This change is triggered when participants sense that the 'distance' between the staff and themselves is shortened, while they are 'not inclined to talk' and 'yearn to be alone', although the degree varies depending on the level of a fashion store. The main factor that repels participants is the pre-understanding of staff, which entails an environmental understanding of others. As mentioned in the preceding paragraph on the theme of 'existential being-there', consumers understand staff in what they do, have and need in their world. The store as a shared environment is, on the one hand, a public commercial world for K, but, on the other hand, the same shared environment is a workplace for staff. The fashion store is a place the staff belong to, which determines the duty of the staff and hence the possibilities of the staff in the world. Consequently, when staff begin a small talk with consumers in a fashion store, there is a possibility that the staff use communicative skills to achieve high turnover for the firm they are working for. The listeners understand it so that the feeling of 'being lured' or 'being persuaded' emerge. This can be further illustrated through the excerpts below:

W: I notice them at the very beginning as I am the person who fear to be approached by the staff when browsing in fashion stores. I feel intrusive. I hate being chased by staff who aim to sell things by introducing me new products I am not interested in [...] Actually, small talk is OK as long as I do not feel that the staff is trying to lure me into buying something.

J: I just feel that if the intention of staff's talk to me is to sell a garment, I would rather not start the conversation at the beginning [...] I often wear headphones when go to physical stores alone. If the staff talk to me, I will just nod as I am listening to music. So it is effective.

To avoid being manoeuvred, technology is deployed to deter staff from approaching. Some participants tend to wear headphones and listen to music when entering stores, by which they themselves can lead their in-store experience, namely 'yearning-to-be-alone' achieves a feeling of 'being autonomous'. Y gave a description of her feeling on this:

Y: [...] Normally for me, browsing in a store means I did not prepare to start a conversation with others. If someone reaches me to talk, I can be very open towards them. However, in my everyday life, when I visit fashion stores, I do not expect someone talking to me. I think that it is my own shopping experience of exploring a store and the products. I do not need others to lead me through that experience [...] I prefer self-exploring. Just like online shopping, I explore online stores on my own to see what appeal to me. In the same way, when I go to physical stores, I like self-exploring and do not need someone leading me.

Nonetheless, the two extremes can be reversed if participants' purposes change. When participants' in-store Intentionality is directed towards the store environment itself (which includes products and staff) for the sake of seeing, 'being alone' is preferable as it leads to a positive kind of feeling of 'being autonomous' and the talk to staff cast a negative sense of 'being manipulated'. Yet, when participants' Intentionality is directed towards the product for the sake of possession, the same 'being alone' hence leads to a negative kind of feeling 'being ignored' and the talk to staff casts a positive feeling of 'being acknowledged'. This demonstrates how participants' purposes of patronising fashion stores determine their experiences with staff. This will be elucidated in the following paragraphs.

- *Being Acknowledged and Being Ignored*

From now on, the binary themes of experiences are led by the purpose 'for the sake of possession'. Similar to the theme 'Being-there', 'Being Acknowledged and Being Ignored' is viewed through two perspectives: ontic and existential. The ontic 'being acknowledged and being ignored' is straightforward, which is associated with staff's acknowledgment and ignorance of their physical existence when participants are inclined to consult due to their willingness to purchase a product. J and Q gave descriptions on the experience of being acknowledged physically, in which the method they used to avoid being physically ignored is 'shopping in a weekday' and 'do not buy things in a flagship store'.

J: I remember that at that moment, the staff was very busy as there were many consumers asking questions and seemingly, there was only one staff available. So I had to wait for a long time, but the overall experience was still good, because when I was waiting, I felt that the staff did not totally forget me as I was told that 'sorry, I am a bit busy at this moment. I will get back to you as soon as possible', something like 'acknowledging my existence', albeit busy. So I felt ok with that.

J: What is more, I am personally not a fan of flagship stores. I feel.... since it is a flagship store, it is likely to attract many people, maybe too many for me, and the staff are normally busy in flagship stores. Therefore, if you really want to buy something, a flagship store may not a good choice. I prefer non-flagship stores due to

staff's availability which influences the service quality you receive from the staff.

Q: To avoid a crowded environment at weekends, I would choose a weekday to go to fashion stores [...] I remember a time when my friend and me was meandering around the London high street, we saw a shoes store with a collection of many shoes' brands [...] the staff was busy to take care of other consumers, but she came back to us to check if we had any need while we were trying on. This is good. So as long as the staff can answer our questions, I feel ok with the service.

The acknowledgment of consumers' physical existence leads to a positive feeling and this polite manner constitutes good service quality. By comparison, the ignorance of consumers' physical existence causes very negative consequences according to K's description below:

K: [...] It occurs to me that during the time in Prague, I enter a store to buy scent. Since I already have a target to buy, I would like to ask the staff some specific questions about the product. However, the staff ignored me when I entered the store by talking to other customers. I waited for 10 minutes but the staff still treated me as non-existing. So eventually I left the store. I think, for me, if I come to the store for browsing without specific questions, I do not mind being ignored. If I show the sign that I am interested in a product and want to consult with the staff who then still treat me as non-existing, it is a bad experience.

I: So you did not buy what you aimed to buy at the end, did you?

K: No. I did not buy anything, just left.

Furthermore, K's description also shows the interconnection between purpose, Intentionality and experience. Without the purpose 'for the sake of possession', it is fine for K to be left alone in a fashion store, whereas, with the purpose, being left alone in a store becomes a 'bad experience'.

The existential perspective on 'Being Acknowledged and Bing Ignored' is more subtle and elusive. It can be generated during a consulting process wherein actual interaction between consumers and staff occurs. For example: consumers ask some questions or staff give advice and comments when they are choosing or having try-on. J' description below on a candid staff represents the theme 'being existentially acknowledged'.

I: Have you ever encountered a candid staff?

J: Yes, in HK.

I: Could you describe the moment and your experience on a candid staff in a fashion store?

J: I remember that it was a day I went to a suit store with my parents as I were preparing for an interview and needed to dress in a formal way. When browsing in the store, a suit was appealed to both my mom and I so that we chose it with a paired shirt and trousers. I tried it on and my mom's comment was quite positive. She liked it. At this moment, a staff approached us and said 'this one is good, but for you it makes you look a bit older. Within your budget, there are other options in our store. You can try them on and make comparisons here. Do not rush to make the decision', a kind of 'one-to-one adviser [...] During our conversation, the staff asked my budget and recommended some suits within my budget.

During the conversation between J and the staff, J sensed that it is a genuine comment because the staff gave an opposite opinion to her mum. Most importantly, this opinion is not purely for selling a garment that J intended to buy and achieving high turnovers since the staff 's recommendation was based on her budget. This is a kind of acknowledgement of her own situation who could feel that the staff did care for her, although the level of 'staff care for customers' does not reach the level of 'parents care for descendants' due to the environmental attribute of a fashion store. As a result, J counts the staff as a candid staff, which can be viewed as a kind of praise. The similar pattern can be seen in Y and Q's descriptions on their salient experiences with staff in which they could feel staff's acknowledgement of their own situations, who did not simply aim to sell products. For Y it is whether a garment is truly suitable for her and for Q it is the care of her ethnic background, based on which the staff made recommendations.

Y: [...] I remember one day I visited a small shop. The staff or the owner of the shop, I am not sure, knew the product very well, e.g. the fabric and attribute. She gave me advice on whether this colour is suitable for me and let me try the garment with other colours. She did not give me a feeling that she was selling and trying to persuade me to buy the garment I had been interested in. Rather, because the garment I had tried was not so fit with my style, she said 'maybe you should try other styles' and recommended me other garments as if the products were her treasures (laugh). She told me about the attribute of each product patiently and which part of the garment she thought was attractive. By having this good conversation, I was more willing to buy. The whole shopping experience is really good and this is the most memorable experience I have got in HK, very unique.

Q: It is a time when I visited a duty-free store in Heathrow Airport as I intended to buy lipsticks for my friend. The staff was a smooth talker with excellent communicative skill. She was friendly and warm, with saying lots of good words to me while I had a try on, but I did not feel intrusive. For example: she asked me where I come from and when she knew I come from China, she gave me advice about what are suitable for Chinese girls. Then she let me wear the lipstick and I felt it indeed looked good. Honestly, I did not come to buy lipsticks for myself but after trying on what the staff recommended, I decided to buy the one for myself. I feel that her opinion is really useful. Maybe this is because she is also a female staff and her gender gained me more trust. It is a good shopping experience. [...] Additionally, I also found the lipstick nice after wearing, plus her advice and recommendation. The crucial aspect is that her comments were based on the effect of the product on me, other than simply saying lots of good words, plus after trying, I did feel the product goes along nicely with me, which is another crucial aspect. She also gave some practical advice. For example: she said 'I could wear it on whatever occasions, even without make-up'; 'it does go along with you nicely'; 'I am correct that this fits with Asian girls' etc.

The other extreme of this binary thematic experience 'being ignored' can be seen from the marked contrast below between the aforementioned Q's good shopping experience in Heathrow and her another experience. Note that although Q did mention the gender of the staff when shopping beauty product in the descriptions of the two scenes, the researcher deduced that it can be counted as one element, but not a deciding factor that affect her experience with the staff. The deciding one is 'being existentially ignored', in which the staff treat her as a thing, from which staff can gain profit.

Q: By comparison, I remember another time when trying on beauty stuff in another store. It was a male staff who served me and commented: 'it looks good'; 'it go along nicely with you', something like that. Yet, I personally did not feel in the same way so that I did not listen to him. I had a feeling that he just wanted to sell the product to me.

The fundamental difference between the descriptions - 'comments were based on the effect of the product on me' and 'simply saying lots of good words' - lies in the mode of staff's care in which the former bears the sense of acknowledgment of Q's personal life world and the latter bears the sense of ignorance in which staff simply give positive comments without referring to Q's personal world. Moreover, the existential acknowledgment and ignorance can also be reflected in the patience and impatience of staff. This can be seen in J and W's excerpts below:

W: I remember that I needed to queue before entering the store and when queuing, there were staff armed with IPAD to ask consumers what product each one was going to see and buy. After telling the staff what product I aimed to see, the staff guided me to another staff [...] The staff was very friendly and knowledgeable who could answer all the questions I asked [...] because the footfall was at a high level at the moment so they asked me first to see if I am a consumer who really want to buy something. If not, the staff would probably not allow me to enter the store. It is a trick to limit the in-store footfall. I felt the brand does not like consumers meandering in the store.

I: So you actually do not like the staff's behaviour who reached and talked to you with this kind of purpose.

W: No. I do not like this. It was actually a negative feeling, a bad experience, although I can understand the reason. Also, apart from the friendliness of the staff, there was a sense of hurry in the staff's tone when I talked to her about the product I was choosing. It meant that they rushed to finish my case for the next consumer. I do not like this feeling. It was not a relaxing shopping experience. I even had not got time to enjoy and appreciate the store itself, while I was being pushed to choose and pay the product quickly and left. However, since I am not a VIP customer for Burberry, just an ordinary consumer, I can understand this kind of treatment which is not unacceptable.

J: [...] maybe more than two hours. I feel that the staff was really nice. Patiently explained everything and answered our questions. Also, I think, luckily we were the only three consumers in the store at that moment. If there were other consumers, perhaps, the staff wouldn't be that patient.

Despite staff's friendliness, W saw the purpose of the comportment of staff in Burberry store and felt their impatience during her shopping, which results in an overall not-so-good shopping experience. By comparison, J had a very good shopping experience when receiving service from a patient staff. The 'being acknowledged and being ignored' leads to the next binary thematic experience when participants interact with staff 'for the sake of possession' of products.

- *Trustful and Distrustful*

Trust is as an overarching theme when it comes to interpersonal experience because, according to [Ratcliffe \(2017\)](#), as long as there is a relation between two (or more) subjects, there is trust. The

author instantiates three modes of trust: A trusts other people, which is a kind of “*one-place trust*”. Then the other people can become a specific individual as A trust B, a “*two-place relation*”. This can be further narrowed down by referring to a specific action or situation: A trusts B to do C, which is a “*three-place relation*”. For the broadest sense, that A trusts other people can be described as ‘having trust’ without a particular content and this results in the pre-understanding leading to an all-enveloping anticipation in interpersonal experience (Ratcliffe, 2017). For this research context, trust does have its great effect throughout participants’ in-store Intentionality stages. At the first stage, the interconnection between trust and participants’ experience with staff is reflected in the oscillation in the binary theme between ‘being autonomous’ and ‘being manipulated’. At the second stage, during the consulting process, ‘being acknowledged’ and ‘being ignored’ also mirror the theme ‘trust’. For example, J once mentioned: “it is really hard to find a staff who are honest with consumers. I do like a candid staff”, which conveys a sense of trust in the staff who should be honest and candid in giving advice during the consulting process.

Generally speaking, participants in this study express distrustfulness towards staff in high-street fashion stores including both non-luxury and luxury stores. It can be seen in the common comportment that participants tend to simply ask staff ‘practical questions’ or ‘detailed questions’ about the product, rather than questions related to personal style. What is behind this comportment is that in order to properly answer enquiries about personal style, it requires staff to know the consumer’s particular life world. Yet, participants view staff as ‘strangers’ or ‘unknown people’ and hence tend to treat staff in a ‘thinglike’ way, whose function is merely for checking the availability of a certain size or colour of a chosen product. For enquiries about personal style, participants make a choice between unknown staff and known people such as friends and parents. Obviously, participants choose to consult with known people about personal style when shopping. There are some excerpts below from multiple participants talking about the choice:

I: You said that normally you would ask others to accompany you when truly want to buy a garment. Who would you prefer to be the company?

J: Friends.

I: As you said, you would like to have your friends’ advice which is important. How about in-store staff’s advice? Would you seek it?

J: Barely.... I feel that the frontline staff would have their purposes of selling the product [...] Also, having done the research and chosen several garments I think they may fit me, I would like to go to the physical store with my friends, since I need their advice.

I: What happen if you go to physical store to buy clothes alone?

J: Normally it would end up buying nothing (laugh). Alternatively, I would go to physical stores to try on and pin down the size and then return home and ask my friends.

I: Can you recall the moments when you interact with any staff during the entire shopping process?

Y: When I had a try-on in the fitting room, the staff ask whether the size is ok for me.

That is all. I did not ask their opinion as I do not rely on them that much [...] I like spending time with friends, just do not like communicating with staff.

W: ...I asked my friend about her opinion first. I would like to know whether the product I chose looked nice and whether it was suitable for my style. If I get an approving answer from my friend, I will then ask staff some detailed questions about the product.

I: Will you consult with staff about their opinions on personal style?

Q: No. I barely ask staff about their opinions. Even if I ask some questions, they are about size and availability, other than styling. For example, whether this garment is suitable for my style. I wouldn't do this. I would talk to my friends about this kind of topic.... I trust my friends more than the staff because they know me and my style in my everyday life. So their advice are more reliable.

From these descriptions above, it can be seen that friends play an important role during participants' shopping journey: they are the first choice when comments and advice are needed. Q feels that friends' advice is more reliable as they better know her everyday style (the influence of friends will be further discussed in sub-section 5.1.3 and sub-section 6.1.2 in the following chapters). By comparison, if asking a stranger about personal style, the advice will likely become 'unrealistic' and the experience will normally be a disappointed kind according to Q's description below:

I: Can you describe a scene that you interact with in-store staff?

Q: I remember a day I met with my friends to have lunch together. After lunch, we were meandering around the streets and saw a store specialising in trousers so we entered to browse and try. The staff brought me several pairs of trousers as recommendations. Yet, after trying on them, I felt that the size and the style would not fit with me. So I returned them to the staff who then brought me some others, which were again not fit with me. So eventually I did not get what I wanted.

I: What is your feeling about the staff at that time?

Q: I feel that perhaps he is a new staff because during the conversation with him, I told him the style I like and size, based on which he recommended some options of the in-store trousers that 'were the best-selling' and 'should fit me very well', he commented. But actually the trousers he chose did not fit me at all, neither the size nor the style. It was obvious that the pair of trousers was too big but he commented that 'it is OK'. I rejected his suggestions and he brought other pairs of trousers for me to try again but it ended up the same situation. After all, I feel that the staff may be a newcomer without enough knowledge of the products and the advice provided by the staff was a kind of 'unrealistic suggestion'.

Nonetheless, there is a factor particularly associated with the trust towards staff in terms of seeking advice, which is the category of the product. J talked this in detail with the concept of 'everyday and non-everyday clothes', alongside W's concept 'something familiar and something unfamiliar'.

It can be defined as 'casual and formal styles' specific to the group of Gen Z.

W: Normally after asking my friend, if I still want to know some specific questions, I will ask the staff. Also if it is not an expensive product, I probably do not need to ask staff. But I will need my friends' opinions no matter how much money the product is. [...] I feel that if I buy something I am familiar with, I do not need the staff harassing me, while if I buy something I am unfamiliar with, I want the staff to introduce about it as well as their opinion.

J: Not the same communicative style with the staff in the suit store. For example, when I go to Uniqlo, the only reason that makes me talk to staff is to ask about the size and availability of a garment I would like to buy [...] I think ultimately it depends on what kind of product I am buying. In terms of everyday clothes which are not costly, I do not need staff's advice as my friends wear the same kind clothes as well and they know me more than staff do. So I would take their opinions and would not need staff, because even if I bought one that is not suitable for me, it doesn't matter. However, if buying non-everyday stuff, I would need professional advice from the professional staff.

A suit in a suit store is quite formal and more expensive than clothes in Uniqlo. Due to the lack of knowledge and experience on wearing formal clothes, J is inclined to seek professional advice from professional staff. It should be noted that in terms of seeking advice when buying a chosen product, technology plays a role that in fact prevents participants from interacting with staff. Oftentimes when participants patronising a fashion store with the purpose to purchase, they have already had a target product in mind and already known the product information because they do research in advance via technology. What is more, at the moment they do need to consult with others about a garment, participants can make contact with their friends via smart phone even if a friend is not physically in the store. These situations further reduce the opportunities of the occurrence of consumers-to-staff interaction. There are some excerpts illustrating the influence of technology on this:

J: I do research before going to the physical store. The process of buying a product for me is, let us say to buy a T-shirt, I would have a look at the full range of T-shirts on a brand's official website first and choose 3-5 products in different styles, which I find suitable for me. I then go to the physical store of the brand to check the details of the garments, for example, to see if the colour is the same as I saw on the website and to feel the fabric, by which I eliminate the options that I don't like from the initial list of the products I chose online.

Y: If I have a target to buy, I will (do research online). For example, when buying a skirt, I would browsing different online stores first, see if there is anything I am interested in. If there is one, I will see if any physical store of that brand is located near my home. Then I will go to the physical store to have a look at the real product.

I: If you want to buy a garment and need more information, will you go to a physical store and ask the staff directly?

Y: Never (laugh). Even if I have some questions about a product when browsing in a store, I will search reviews online via social medias to see other people's experience

about this product.

I: You are happy with the skirt?

Y: Yes. the size is OK. I am just consulting with my friends about the style and how to pair it. I have sent them the picture.

I: When you have a try on in a store, do you consult with the staff?

K: If I go to stores on my own, I won't do that as I don't like to talk to unknown people. Sometimes I would ask some practical questions such as what it is made of, but I would not ask the kind of question like whether the garment is suitable for me. However, if I really want to know others' opinion on the style, I will take a photo and sent it to my friends.

By doing research via smart devices in advance, participants already have pre-learned knowledge on the chosen garment. Even though sometimes consumers do not search before going to stores, they in fact passively acquires information from digital marketing as well as online influencers. These can further undermine the role that staff play as a guidance on product information. Below R and K's descriptions are chosen to illustrate this aspect:

I: Do you think that you are a person interested in fashion trend?

Q: Well.... I would say that I used not to be this kind of people before but I am getting more interested in fashion in recent years after beginning my university life. I tend to follow some Youtubers who create videos about street styling in cities around the world. By watching their videos, I learn more about styling and new trendy products.

I: Will you search online before going to the physical store?

Q: I normally do not search online before visiting fashion stores. Sometimes I register with the brands via my email address and then I get promotion mails from them. So I have an impression of what the brand recently launched. If there is something I am interested in, I will remember it and look for it when hang out next time. Overall, I am the person keen to offline shopping.

I: How do you find your target before heading to the store? Searching online?

K: Yes. Online influencers on YouTube and Instagram affect my decision quite often who will record the video about their try-on in the stores advertising the new fashion trend and how to pair it with other clothes. I often have a look when the videos pop up and see if the style suitable for me. If so, I will do more research about a specific garment, e.g. go to the official website for more information. Additionally, if I see my friend wearing a garment that I feel is suitable for my style, I will ask her where to buy [...] But normally I do not deliberately search for new fashion trend as their videos will pop up on social medias. I am a kind of passive watcher.

- *Efficient and Inefficient*

This binary theme of experience often appears when talking about the use of things to do something in order to achieve a goal. The appearance of this theme in participants' interpersonal experiences with staff reveals a tendency to treat staff as a thing. Furthermore, this binary theme also covers the influence from technological and environmental elements on the interaction and experience between participants and staff, especially the choice between human-based and technology-based services and the experience when the two types of service combines. The integration of human-based and technology-based service is experienced at both the second and third stages of in-store Intentionality led by the purpose 'for the sake of possession'. As illustrated previously, when at the second stage where participants' Intentionality is directed towards the products they aim to buy, oftentimes they merely ask staff to check the availability of a certain size or colour. This interactive style bears an inherent thinglike attribute, for a quick Q&A with staff about the availability of chosen garments is efficient for participants to fulfil their goal of gaining information of the product in a convenient way. At this moment, although staff are Daseins as well, they are viewed as a machine-like entity. However, compared to a real machine, participants are more inclined to staff since the navigation via an unfamiliar in-store terminal can be a time-consuming task with the extra effect to learn and the fear of being seen by others in W's description. Attentionally, K expressed her hygienic concern of in-store terminals, which can be seen as a result of the pandemic, plus Y and J's expressions demonstrate the implication of treating staff as a thing.

W: I like the technological element but prefer asking staff directly rather than using interactive screens to find the answer by myself. I feel bothered to learn how to use it. If I look for a product, I will find a staff who can do it for me. Also, if I am in a hurry, I definitely won't use or play interactive screens. However, I am more inclined to use it if going to the store with my friends. But if I am alone, I won't play it. I am a bit socialphobia and too shy to be seen by strangers when playing games, which makes me nervous and the strangers may laugh on me, while together with friends, I feel better [...] I do not like using a device that is unfamiliar to me. Just like I do not like talking to unknown people. They are the same. I still talk to staff only insofar as it is necessary. For example, I need to ask some questions about the garment.

K: [...] When I have questions, I expect them to answer my questions [...] I barely use this kind of thing (interactive screens). If I want the information, I will ask the staff directly. For example, I will ask the staff about the availability of a product, rather than using the screen. I find the touch screen not hygienic and I am too lazy to use it. Maybe there are people who like using it for information [...] (For me) there are many products and it is hard to find my target amongst the categories via the in-store interactive screens. It is a bit less efficient than consulting with staff directly.

Y: [...] the moment I need staff is when I need to ask about the availability of a certain size or have other questions.

J: I hope they can answer my questions if I have any, but do not invade my 'personal shopping space'. I mean, I hope the staff can just leave me alone and I would call them if I needed.

While participants show little interest in using those in-store interactive technologies, they

expressed quite positive feelings when staff use technology for them. Namely the efficiency of this process can be further enhanced by the combination of technological element and human element.

I: How was your experience when staff answering your questions with IPAD?

J: It was good. IPAD makes the whole process smoother. Before, if you would like to know the availability of a product in a store, the staff probably need to go to the warehouse to check by themselves and I need to wait, which is inconvenient. Armed with the PAD or technology, the information /the answer I need is just serval clicks away. So the process is quicker and convenient.

K: I find the IPAD useful as it can tell the staff about the stock, by which the staff do not need to go to warehouse to check availability on their own when I ask them about it.

In terms of the physical environmental elements that are able to influence the interaction and experience with staff, W expressed some clues when having try-on with the need of staff's opinion, in which the physical design become a significant factor in the interaction between she and staff since with mirrors and fitting rooms available, the interactive process would be smoother and more efficient.

W: [...] the fitting room. I mean whether there is a fitting room available at the moment when I have chosen a garment is important because I like consulting with the staff when trying the new garment. In the same way whether a mirror is easily to be found can influence my interaction with staff when I am having a try-on. Also, it is good that chairs or sofa are provided in the store since normally I am not going to the store alone. My friends can sit in the sofa waiting outside the fitting room, which makes me not in a hurry to finish my shopping. Those elements together influence my experience of the store as well as the interaction of the staff.

Thus far, the binary theme 'efficient and inefficient' at the second stage of in-store Intentionality where participants' engagement is directed towards the product has been illustrated. The following illustration will move to the third stage of Intentionality, namely after choosing the garment(s), participants' engagement is directed towards checkout. At this stage, participants make a choice between human-based and technology-based services to help them achieve their aim to pay and leave. Whether or not this process can be done easily and frictionlessly is participants' top priority and hence 'efficient and inefficient' is the main theme being experienced. The concept 'small talk' that first appears when participants enter stores still has its significant influence on the choice participants made at the stage of checkout, alongside the concept 'strangers', which results in the preference for in-store self-check-out terminals.

I: What is your experience on using automatic check-out?

J: I find it faster and smoother than human-based one (in Tesco). It is the same feeling in a fashion store. You know in the UK, 'small talk' is a kind of culture which is what I dislike deeply (laugh). I think, the purpose of my visiting the store is either to buy something or to relax. So why do I need to talk about personal life with the staff? Why do I need to listen to the staff taking about a TV drama? I do not care, OK? I just want to buy what I want and leave [...] I think, a 'small talk' is necessary to the people that you meet regularly, such as your colleagues and friends. Yet, I can see no reason why I should have small talk with staff as we probably won't meet

again.

Y: For example, in the UK, when you are in a queue maybe for check-out, small talk likely happens. If so, I will end the conversation quickly since I do not know that person [...] I cherish efficiency so that everything needs to be done swiftly. Maybe because I come from HK (laugh). Since I will probably never see the same staff again, I do not want to talk more to the staff.

K: I would choose self-check-out. There are terminals in Uniqlo London. I find it very useful saving my time queuing [...] Some self-check-out technology requires you to scan like the Uniqlo one, while in Decathlon, it can scan automatically when you put your clothes in the basket. I find it very convenient. I wish all stores have this kind of technology, very fast.

The influence of other consumers can also be seen at this stage. As mentioned previously, due to the background of the participants, they particularly have a very low threshold in terms of the density of the crowd. To avoid queuing before the till, J even prefers choosing garments in a physical fashion store and doing the transaction online at home.

J: [...] I like to see the real garment in the physical store where I pin down the exact style/colour and then I make the purchase online, because I hate queuing in the store [...] there is always a long queue in front of the till in the fashion store I normally visit. I feel frustrated when queuing in such a long line, such a waste of my time. Also, sometimes I have my plan to go to other places so don't want to carry bags, because of which, I would return home to order online. Yet, admittedly if something urgent, I will buy it in the physical store.

Nevertheless, at the stage of checkout participants' need would be very much influenced by the level of store. In a luxury store, the human-based service can become a joy. In the excerpts below from W and Q, they express their expectation in high-end stores.

W: I prefer to let the staff do the rest of things [...] if in a luxury store, the check-out process can be quite enjoyable as I can see how the staff pack the product I chose and I will get a beautiful pack at the end. During this process, I can take photos and post it via Instagram or other social medias.

Q: I prefer self-check-out terminals as I do not need to spend time waiting for the staff to enter the code of the product in their system. It is the same situation when I am in a supermarket like Tesco, I choose self-check-out which can speed up the process. Also, I think it is good to do things by myself. However, if in a luxury store, I will expect the staff to do more.

Thus far, the application of binary themes enables the experience of staff to be delineated on a full scale, which reveals the possible oscillation between two extremes caused by various factors both environmental and intersubjective. The environmental factors include (but are not limited to) the level of store and the store environment (dimensions of servicescape), while the intersubjective factors involve the demeanour of staff before and during the actual interactive process, plus a pre-understanding of staff from participants' lived experience. Through the 'part-to-whole' interpretative technique, it can be sensed that participants' feeling gained from each negative side

of the four binary themes dominates the overall experience of staff. The context is now set for illustrating this permeating negative feeling as the confluence of the negative sides of these binary themes, which manifests itself in the additional feeling of 'being under pressure'.

From an existential perspective, the essence of this pressure stems from participants' care about themselves and others. As explained in the previous section 3.2.3, Dasein is care-laden and the existence of his/herself can be seen as the manifestation of care whose temporality is reflected in forwardness, falling being-with and thrownness. In this research context, the pressure is implicitly experienced and reflected in two salient experiences: changing the initial purpose and to be judged.

- *Pressure - Change in Purpose*

This facet of pressure can be gleaned by uniting the negative sides of the binary themes against the backdrop of some typical excerpts from the participants. For instance, the feeling of being manipulated is associated with distrustfulness, which act as both a result and source of the feeling of being existentially ignored. Below J's overall description of her experience on staff is an exemplar of the combination of the three negative theme of interpersonal experiences in a fashion store context.

J: [...] I feel that the frontline staff would have their purposes of selling the product. They are very skilful in luring you to buy their product. Oftentimes, when you try a garment, no matter whether it is truly suitable for you, the staff would give positive comments. For example: if it doesn't look good when you try on, they would say 'it fit you well. You looks very charming in wearing this.' They persuade you to buy, but after you buy it, you don't really feel satisfied after your cool-down at home. So I think, it is really hard to find a salesperson who is honest with consumers. I do like a candid staff.

What is going to be elaborated here is what is behind this pressure. J does not have a clear target to buy and enter a store - just want to browse - but eventually ends up making a purchase after interacting with staff. Under this circumstance, there is a change in her initial purpose of patronising the store. With the hindsight J expressed the feeling of being persuaded to buy during the interview. In the case of J, the force of the change in purpose is driven by impulse buying as a result of unrealistic complements from staff. A similar pattern can be seen in W's description about her shopping experience:

W: Actually, I had thought of having a pair of sunglass in the UK one year ago. I had been to some stores of other brands to have a try-on, but failed to find the one suitable for me. So I would say I had already had a purpose to buy and encountered the one in the Liberty on that day. At the beginning, I did not think that I could find one suitable for me. I just had a look at the products on display and try-on. During my try-on, I found it nice, plus it was the brand I like, Chanel. So I felt that I had a desire to buy. However, I hesitated by the price which was higher than my expectation. Also, there were other similar products in other areas of the store with the price that were 10-times lower than the Chanel one but I could not see the difference. So I hesitated but I felt that I wanted a brand one rather than those non-brand cheap ones. Also when I was having try-on, the staff reached me to persuade me, which made me feel that I must buy one. Under all those feelings, I eventually bought the expensive one. However, after a cool-down, I was a bit of regret as the price is too high.

In the case of W, initially her purpose was to buy a pair of sunglasses but the one she tried was in fact too costly to buy. However, it is the staff who made W feel she must buy it. At that moment, W disregarded the cost of the product and acted against her initial purpose. There are two pivotal factors causing W to act in that way. The first is an other-exerted one. The staff use his/her excellent communicative skills to turn the product into a kind of overwhelming force for W, who felt that the pair of sunglasses she had hesitated to buy became the one she must possess, otherwise her life would lose lustre. The second is a self-exerted one. After receiving the service from the staff in the luxury section of the department store, it is the interpersonal relation that makes W feel that she should buy it as the result of W's care about herself and others (the staff). For the care about herself, she eventually made the purchase to avoid being looked down by the staff in the luxury section. For the care about others, because the staff spent time and made effort to serve her in terms of introducing different products and providing personal opinions, W felt obliged to make the purchase. The pressure caused by the care about others is explicitly expressed by Y's description:

Y: Honestly, there are many times I feel pressure when shopping in stores. The pressure comes from staff, the conversation. I would feel pressure to buy because they have already been serving me, talking to me a lot, explaining and answering my questions. They have been occupied by me for a long time so that I would feel inappropriate not to buy. Even if I did not have the purpose to buy, the staff made me feel that the product was not bad and maybe I needed it [...] I remember that it was a time I bought beauty stuff. I entered into a store alone browsing and trying the lipsticks. I had spent lots of time in the store, while the staff approached me and said, 'how can I help you'; 'let me help you apply the lipstick'. This made me had a feeling that I have used your product; I have spent your time etc. so that I need to buy something. Eventually I spent quite a lot of money in that store. This scene also happens in terms of buying garments. It is the same feeling. For example, in a small store, when I was browsing the garments, the staff approached me and began to introduce different colours and styles, with taking some garments to the fitting room for me to try on. After it, I would feel the garment not bad and likely to buy.

What made Y change her initial propose from simply seeing to possession is that the staff spent a relatively long time to serve her. The time and effort of staff elicit a feeling that it is inappropriate not to spend money. This 'care about others' is also marked by a feeling of embarrassment in J's description about her experience of patronising a luxury store wherein staff's meticulous service made J felt inappropriate to just leave without buying. Thankfully J left the store without guilt since her friend bought something. As such, the feelings of inappropriateness and embarrassment can be intensified or eased based on the level of store.

I: Can you recall a time when you buy something in a luxury brand store?

J: Actually, I have never bought a thing in luxury brand stores, but my friend did and I accompanied her to go to the store that time. It was such an excellent service experience. The staff serve us with great patience as my friend tries a lot of products in the store. Also, the staff provided a meticulous service who took care of both my friend who actually bought the product and me who did not spend money in the store. For example: we were provided seats and beverages.

I: So at the end your friend made the purchase.

J: Yes. However, I think, it is the staff's meticulous service that causes embarrassment when you just browse in a luxury fashion store. If the service is not that good or the staff do not approach you to talk, you can just leave whenever you finish browsing without feeling guilty. Yet with an excellent service, you would feel a kind of inappropriateness to leave without spending money in the store.

- *Pressure - To Be Judged*

The other facet of Gen Z's pressure triggered by staff in fashion stores is manifested by the feeling of being judged in terms of either affordability or knowledge. Generally speaking, consumers' affordability is often assumed by staff based on a superficial level such as consumers' dress style and the amount of money they spend in a store. In the same way of W's case that has just been interpreted, there is a possibility that consumers, especially young people, make purchases to avoid being looked down by staff as the care about self in interpersonal relations. This feeling of being judged varies depending on the level of store since the participants in this study often experience this feeling in luxury stores, where there is a firm image of staff as snobs.

J: In HK, if you can afford to buy many stuff, they will change their attitude. I mean you will receive good services. if you only spend a little money in the store, they won't care about you [...] It really depends on how much money you spend because they will get commission. Also, the staff would judge you according to your dress style. If you wear cheap clothes, they probably will see you as a person who enters the store only to browse rather than spend money. In this case, the staff will hardly approach you and talk to you. Alternatively, if you wear some upscale stuff, they will assume that you can afford to buy the product in the store. So they serve you with a good attitude.

Y: [...] Although I have not been treated disrespectfully in my life, I can feel that the staff would more welcome me if I spent more money. I remember a time when my family and I travelled to Paris and one of my relatives asked me to visit LV to buy a garment, for her. We entered the store but did not receive greetings. We found the clothing department by ourselves and reached a staff to show a picture of our target. They were quite helpful to check the availability of the size we asked for, but it was not available so we left. My feeling is that at that moment, they did not treat us badly [...] We dressed in a traveller style, not a lavish one and did not look like we were going to buy lots of products. So the staff did not treat us warmly neither [...] Another time I went to London and entered a luxury store, maybe I am not a person who looks like rich so the staff did not serve me at first. It was me who reached the staff and ask if my targeted product was available.

The feeling of being judged in terms of knowledge emerges mainly in a sport store. Sports training requires a certain level of knowledge because it is somewhat individual and professional, so is the choice of sports accessories. At this rate, Gen Z participants need professional advice but this kind of professional advice differs from the one when they buy formal garments for special events (e.g. a suit). Sports clothes and shoes, albeit professional, would likely still be worn by Gen Z in their everyday life and hence still be counted as 'everyday clothes' such as running shoes or sport leggings. Additionally, in such a sport store environment, staff are normally quite sportive with character who are within the same age range of Gen Z participants in this study. Therefore, Gen

Z consumers hold a tendency not to consult with the staff as *unknown peers* for them. They do research on their own or consult with their friends, rather than asking ‘peer staff’, which prevents them from revealing that they are actually a sports fledgling who lack knowledge. There is a subtle feeling of avoiding being looked down in terms of knowledge by peer staff. The dialogue below in which J’s described about her feeling on staff in sports stores implies this facet.

J: I think...the staff in sports stores are normally not an intrusive kind. It makes me feel that because you visit sports stores for products related to your own training, you should know what you want to buy and you should find the product by yourself. The moment that I need the staff is to find the right size of a chosen product that I have already chosen by myself.

I: So you know what function and which product you want in terms of the sports product?

J: I do not know (laugh). Well.... if I intend to buy a product, I will do a lot of research in advance.

I: So it is a kind of pretending to know?

J: Yes.

Thus far, the preceding interpretation has revealed Gen Z consumers’ interpersonal experience of staff in a technology-enabled fashion store through the five themes with binary elements at the third layer, alongside the purposes of patronising fashion stores and the in-store Intentionality at layer one and layer two which, in tandem, help form the interpersonal experience. Now, the presentation of the findings will move to the fourth layer that, in this research context, never-endingly affects participants’ experience of staff, the fashion products as well as the fashion store itself.

4.4 The Fourth Layer: Attunement and Circularity

Having presented the first layer as forwardness and the second and third layers as falling-being-with, the fourth layer acts as thrownness. A common term for this Heideggerian terminology is ‘past’, with a customary understanding that one’s past experiences of what happened before influence the current experience. However, as pointed out in section 3.2, this common term and customary understanding can only be counted as a simplified, approximately view on the concept of thrownness. For Heidegger, the past is not about something or an event far away from a person who is reminiscing at the present about his/her time in the bygone era. Rather, the past is ‘tuned in’ to the present and the future of the person as the three temporal dimensions are entangled and intertwined inextricably with each other. Namely, ‘I was’ literally means ‘I have been’ and one’s ‘having-been’ makes the understanding of his/her possibilities unceasingly attuned. Accordingly, one’s understanding is always the ‘attuned understanding’ as the ground of one’s feeling, opinion, impression, stereotype, prejudice (of something or someone) in everyday life. In this research context, as unfolded in the preceding passages, a negative feeling - as the confluence of the negative sides of these binary themes of participants’ experience with staff - already permeates throughout each stage of in-store Intentionality. It manifests itself in the additional feeling of ‘being under pressure’ that is implicitly experienced by the participants.

It is this permeating feeling of pressure that acts as the bridge between participants' past experiences of staff in fashion stores and the current experience gained by their in-store interaction with the staff at the present. More specifically, the feeling of pressure can be already there (implicitly) before consumers' visit to a fashion store as a pre-understanding/feeling influences their upcoming interactional experience with staff at the present, while it can also be gained during the process of interacting with staff. The former and the latter influence each other and this interplay represents thrownness as 'I was as I have been' in this research context. Eventually, the accumulation of pressure manifests in the feeling of *fear* which is participants' own term to describe their feeling about interacting with staff and even, entering a fashion store.

W: [...] I am the person who fears to be approached by the staff when browsing in fashion stores.

K: Normally I go to fashion stores with other people such as parents and friends. I am a person who fears to enter a store on my own [...] If I visit the store alone, I will feel pressure.

Y: I feel that those in-store technology is good, because I am a person who fears to interact with in-store staff.

On the one hand, fear formed by the accumulated pressure can intensify the negative sides of each binary theme: being manipulated, being ignored, distrustful and inefficient, although some of them might be more salient on an individual basis. On the other hand, these negative feelings gained from actual interactional processes in turn enhance the pressure and then fear. Even for the first non-binary theme 'being-there', participants can still feel pressure due to the accumulated pressure and fear that have been mirrored in their pre-understanding of staff's demeanour (see the sub-section of the theme 'being there' in section 4.2.3). The common pattern gleaned from participants' descriptions indicates that the negative parts of each binary themes prevail and form the confluence as pressure. This acts as a source of fear and this source is what the participants' have lived through, it is, their lived experiences. As such, pre-understanding developed from participants' lived experience acts as a source of their pressure and fear.

Nevertheless, this pre-understanding is not the only source of the pressure and fear in relation to fashion stores and staff. Besides what actually took place with participants in their lived experience, word of mouth such as offline in-person talk and online reviews can help form the pre-understanding of staff as well. More importantly, those are composed by others and in Heidegger's term, it is *they* who compose (also referring to section 3.3.1). Heidegger characterises this way of discourse as *hearsay* in which information is heard and then passes on without actually going into it, namely we neither know whether what we heard is true, nor whether we really understand it. This groundless communication amongst people generates an average explanation of the world in everyday being-with and provides the possibility of a delusion of virtually understanding everything in the same way as the "*average understandability*" disclosed by idle talk (King, 2001).

In this research context, there are two ways that participants gain a pre-understanding of fashion stores, staff and fashion products before the actual interaction occurs. One is through everyday discourse with their friends or others via both online and offline channels as hearsay, while the other is through their own previous experience of the store or similar stores. Unlike the pre-understanding from participants own lived experiences, the one from hearsay is groundless and therefore bears the chance of falsification, albeit non-intention. The preceding discussion has revealed an overall negative experience of staff contributing to a negative kind of pre-

understanding and hearsay too offers a negative kind of pre-understanding of staff for participants. The dialogue about W's experience below implies the influence of hearsay on staff:

I: When I mention 'physical stores', what comes to your mind?

W: The first thing comes to my mind is the price; cheap or expensive. Also, people, staff and attitude. I mean, you may be looked down by the staff who even roll their eyes if you wear cheap clothing, especially in luxury stores. Actually I have no courage to enter luxury stores as I know the price is too high for me.

I: You have just told me about being looked down by staff. Have you actually experienced this situation or did you hear from others?

W: I know this from the internet. For me, normally I enter physical stores because I have something to buy. I do not like entering a store and having lots of try-on without actually buying something. If so, the staff will definitely roll their eyes. To avoid this, when I enter a store, I already have my targets on my mind. This is why I almost always spend money when going to physical stores. As a result, I have not been treated like that. I do not want to be treated like that so I will behave in a way that seemingly I really want to buy something in physical stores.

I: So you know this from others online but do not have real experience of this kind of unpleasant situation.

W: No, I do not have any real experience about this.

According to Heidegger, Dasein can never evade being touched and seduced by hearsay that offers average explanation of things and others in the world. This is evidenced by the fact that impression, stereotype, prejudice of something/someone (or a group of people) mentioned at the beginning of this sub-section are commonly seen in everyday life in society. For the participants, before they patronise a fashion store, fear is already there being carried by thrownness in which the pre-understanding of staff is gained from both lived experience and hearsay. For the staff, it means that they can have a little chance to define themselves because they are already defined by the 'they' as well as the commercial environment they work in every day. Fear can generate and intensify pressure which is simultaneously gained during the interactive process with staff. The pressure, in turn, strengthens fear. Consequently, participants' interpersonal experience with staff is trapped in a vicious circle. This circularity of the studied experiences will be reflected in the diagram (Figure 6) shown in the following section.

In addition, before moving to the next section, there are other excerpts showing how participants' thrownness is 'tuned in' to their being-with at present and forwardness. This is reflected in how one's purpose is influenced by the attuned understanding and how the influenced purpose in turn determines one's comportment at present, because Dasein's understanding of his/herself directs he/she to the things and people as means for the purposes, the everyday dealing with things mirrors who one is, according to Heidegger. More specifically, it means that human existence and experience are not in an isolated way, neither complete subjective nor objective, but in a subjective and objective co-constructed manner. Since all of the Gen Z participants in this study were not born in the UK but they emigrated to the UK or immigrated into the UK years before partaking in this research, below some excerpts demonstrate how a change in life influences their understanding of themselves, their comportment and experience. The change is both objective and subjective:

K: In HK, I normally choose to go to physical stores browsing and purchasing because the garments there are quite suitable for me. I mean, for Asian people. In the UK, however, I normally find what I want before going to physical stores because the style of the garments on display are not so suitable for me. I need to make lot of efforts to search [...] The dominant fashion orientation in the UK differs from HK so that I can barely find a garment suitable for my style. Thus I must do research in advance before going to fashion stores. But in HK I often visit fashion stores without a specific target and, importantly, I can learn the latest fashion trend during the time I am browsing in stores. [...] Also, the physical stores in the UK I often visit are not high-end, but a fast-fashion kind in which I find the style, for example, the pattern on the displayed garments sometimes are too old for me.

W: I think I have got used to the HK life style, full of hustle and bustle, while life in Nottingham is so boring, lack of entertainment [...] That kind of relaxing life barely exist after I moved to Nottingham because there are no high streets, no friends. I spend most of my leisure time at home [...] In HK I prefer going to physical stores, while in the UK, I choose online shopping more often which is convenient.

Y: [...] In the UK, I prefer shopping online, because in Nottingham, I can barely find a fashion brand I like. The high street is not so attractive and it is a quiet city so that the times I go to high street reduces sharply comparing to when I was in HK. I would rather shop via online stores at home.

I: Have you returned to HK for shopping since you moved to the UK?

Y: Yes. But I did not return to HK in the past few years. This is why I liked that brand before in High School. I have been stayed in Nottingham since my university time so that I could not buy the products from that brand. As a result, I begin to find other brands available in the UK as alternatives.

I: How's the result? Have you found some UK brands you like?

Y: Just some global chain brands like Zara. I am struggling because the UK local style does not suit me, not my style. It results in that sometimes I buy online from HK and let it send to the UK. In the UK, what I normally visit are Zara, H&M, Uniqlo. It is hard to find some local small shops (suitable for me) in the UK.

These descriptions reveal that an objective change of the living environment in participants' life (from HK to the UK), which, in the field of fashion, means the limited product ranges and brands' availability in the UK high street for people from the East. This leads to the attunement in their everyday life consisting in habitual and routine forms of action (e.g. visit to fashion stores). According to the descriptions, participants adjust to the change in the objective environment in two ways. First, they go to the high-street and visit brick-and-mortar stores less than they used to. Instead, they tend to do more online shopping due to much more choice on products and brands. Second, they adjust the purpose to patronise fashion stores in a way that they reduce the chance of simply browsing but do more research to find their target in advance. It mirrors the change from doing less 'for the sake of seeing' to doing more 'for the sake of possession' when patronising fashion stores in the UK.

Apart from the attunement caused by the objective change, participant Y's description below reveals the attunement as a subjective change, namely a change in everyday surroundings gives rise to attunement in self-understanding of 'who and how she is to be'.

Y: [...] Indeed, many HK girls like luxury bags, however, in the UK, I did not find many people carrying luxury bags in their daily life or workplaces in Nottingham. So the degree of peer-pressure is less for me compared to HK. Now I prefer spending my money in other areas of my life other than buying luxury bags.

I: Imaging if you were living in HK now, would you buy more luxury stuff?

Y: I think so. I would think that I should buy luxury bag and carry it in my daily life because others do this. If people around me carried beautiful bags, I would buy as well. But this is not my daily living environment now so I can only imagine the scenario. Also, in HK due to Tax free, the price is not too high so if I like a luxury product, I probably will buy in HK. But, now I am living in the UK, so that is no longer my lifestyle.

It can be seen that for the participants in this study as a group of Gen Z immigrants into the UK, a change in the objective world leads to adjustments in everyday life, which forms the attuned understanding of self, others and things in the world. Eventually Y's understanding on who and, more importantly, how she is to be, is attuned by the combined influence of thrownness, being-with at present and forwardness. In other words, the significance-structures in each participants' world has been attuned and the significance-structure acts as a meaning framework, according to which participants as consumers orientate their practical engagement and comportment in everyday life as the workings of Dasein's temporality.

Thus far, the ongoing presentation of the findings have revealed the interpretation of the last piece of the studied experience, layer four. In the following section, the four layers will come together in one piece and the whole picture will be presented diagrammatically as the summation of the chapter of Findings, in which the interrelatedness can be better seen.

4.5 A Coherent Whole

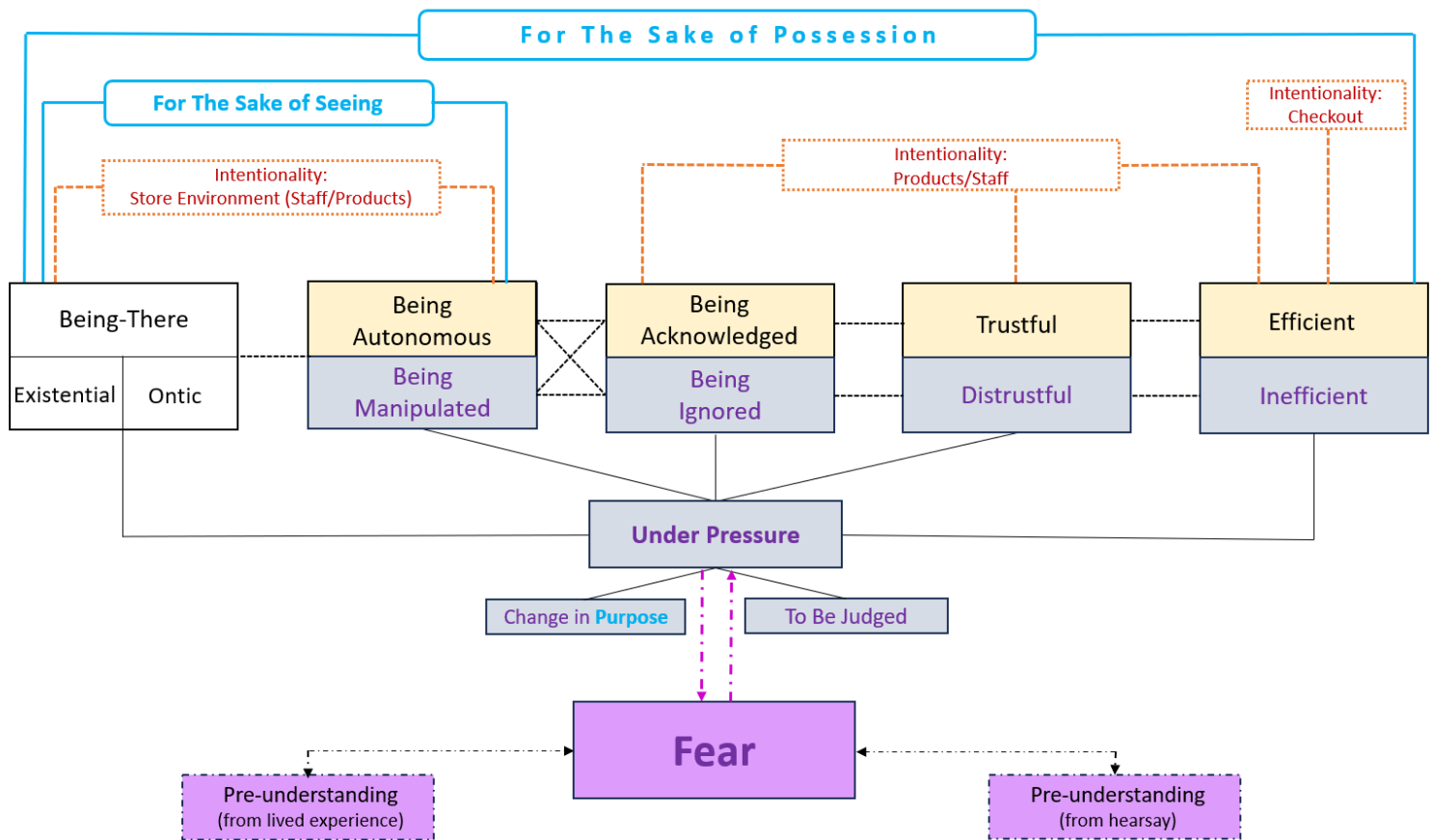


Figure 6. Gen Z's interpersonal experience of staff in technology-enabled fashion stores and its formation

The findings interpreted from the set of interviews are in alignment with Heideggerian worldview that Dasein does not exist worldlessly independent of the world but rather he/she always exists in relation to the worldly context, where the existence of Dasein is the intersection of the past, the present and the future. As such, human experience always has a context, which is not only influenced by the present in the objective environment (e.g. a fashion store) but being influenced by time as a whole. This complex is demonstrated by Figure 6 unifying the four layers representing the three temporal dimensions (the further, present and past) and showing the circularity, for which their interconnection and interrelationship have been explained in detail as the interpretation of the data has unfolded in this chapter. The Figure is conducive to a clear demonstration of the holistic perspective on the studied experience since this two-ways, four-layers diagram enables the interconnection and interrelatedness between each layer to be shown in a clearer way. It illustrates how the interpersonal experiences in a fashion store are influenced not only by the people and things in the shared surroundings (layer 2 and 3), but also with consumers' purposes (layer 1) and the past with grounded and groundless experiences in their life world (layer 4). Its circularity means that if one reads it from the top, a whole picture of the in-

store experience of staff unfolds in a way that the purposes at the top layer - as the leading force from one's forwardness - guide in-store Intentionality at the second layer - wherein consumers are entangled with staff, other consumers and things – which forms participants' experience with staff at layer three and then layer four. Yet, if read in reverse order from the bottom to the top, the fourth layer at the bottom demonstrates the inevitable influence from one's thrownness on the current experience, namely with the pre-occupied feelings and understanding of staff, consumers patronise a store, whose experiences with staff then unfold in a fashion store environment. Thus, Figure 6 is capable to exhaustively demonstrate Gen Z's interpersonal experiences with staff in a technology-enabled fashion store as well as a holistic, phenomenological view on the formation of the experiences in Gen Z participants' daily life.

This diagram echoes Figure 3 in section 3.3 in the chapter of Methodology, which comprehend consumer in-store experience with staff on the basis of Heidegger's thinking. It implies the worldishness of consumers' everyday experiences, because preceding interpretation has proven that to understand the experiences at layer 3, the understanding of layer 1, layer 2 and layer 4 are required. In other words, talking about human experience in an isolated way is meaningless. By reaching the preconceptual and non-theoretical dimensions beyond the servicescape at the present, the findings bring to light the intentional structure of the studied experience that has been already operative in consumers' visit to fashion stores in their everyday life, yet being overlooked or forgotten by scholars in studying consumer (in-store) experience, who have been too entrenched in a modern scientific standpoint. In the next chapter, the view of consumers' patronising fashion stores as consumers' being-in-a-fashion-store - that has been interpreted and demonstrated diagrammatically in this chapter - will be further elucidated in line of Heidegger's philosophy by formally inserting the workings of temporality throughout the four-layers framework. Attentionally, as mentioned in section 3.6.3, to follow the emic approach, the term 'fear' is applied as the main theme in layer 4. In the following chapter, the distinction between participants' fear and angst/anxiety in this research context will be discussed, by which the reason why participants 'fear' to visit fashion stores, or to interact with staff, in their daily life will be revealed.

Chapter 5 Discussion

The four-layers framework (Figure 6) is capable of addressing the two research questions: 1) *What is Gen Z consumers' interpersonal experiences with staff in technology-enabled fashion stores?* 2) *How is Gen Z's interpersonal experience formed in the digital age?* As shown in the framework in section 3.3 in the chapter of Methodology, the shared store environment means consumers' entanglement with things and people as *consumer-being-in-a-fashion-store*, a holistic perspective drawn from Heideggerian existentialism. According to Heidegger, Dasein's being-in-the-world is essentially being-with-others-in-the-world, wherein there is a clear distinction between Dasein and things. As such, consumer-being-in-a-fashion-store is, in fact, consumer-being-with-others-and-things-in-a-fashion-store, which conveys an underlying relationship as 'being-in-relation-to...'. The two categories of being-with: being-with-others and being-with-things, call for further attention. By exploring Gen Z consumers' relations to things and staff in the store environment (servicescape), the position of staff in a technological enabled fashion store in Gen Z consumers' in-store shopping process can be better seen. Thus, this chapter is organised as follows: in section 5.1 the category 'being-with-others (staff)' will be discussed in order to better comprehend the four-layers

framework of the interpersonal experience. With a formal introduction of time and also the backdrop of everydayness, each theme, particularly the binary elements, will be elaborated, which accentuates a *mutually-thinglike treatment* occurred in everyday consumer-to-staff encounters. In section 5.2 the category 'being-with-things' will be further elucidated, which results in three modes of consumers in-store comportment (the ways of in-store interaction). The relation between time and the ways of interaction will also be discussed. With a deeper understanding on consumers' in-store interaction with staff and things based on Heidegger's existential philosophy, a phenomenological, consumer-centric perspective on servicescape, along with new insight into marketing theories will be summarised in section 5.3.

5.1 Consumer's being-with-staff-in-a-technology-enabled-fashion-store

With a holistic perspective on consumers-being-in-a-fashion-store, this study particularly focuses on the interpersonal aspect 'being-with-others' that is deemed to be the most intricate aspect in everyday life. The essence of this intricateness will be revealed in this section. Apart from the ontic 'being-with' where staff are physically adjacent to consumers in a store environment, the existential 'being-with' implies 'being-amongst' which means that consumers are always under the circumstances of 'being-with-staff'. Even though one is alone at the moment, the realisation of being alone has proved that the others are present as absence (Heidegger, 1925/2010). Both ontic and existential attendance of staff are reflected in the first theme 'Being-There'. This feeling occurs not only during the actual visit to a store when staff are physically absent, but even before the visit. This is evidenced by participants' responses when the concept of a fashion store is simply mentioned as well as the talk about the store condition (e.g. tidy and clean or in a mass). It is because a fashion store as the everyday workplace of staff already bears the relation to them who cannot be separated from the store context.

5.1.1 The impact of everydayness on Gen Z consumers' everyday being-with-staff and interpersonal experiences

This feeling of staff, simply cast by a mention of fashion stores, is very much a mixed kind of pre-understanding gained from the combination of staff-related lived experiences and hearsay in thrownness. On the one hand, in a lived experience one lived through what happened and understood it. Thus, it is a kind of grounded pre-understanding. On the other hand, in hearsay information is heard and then passes on without actually experiencing it so that pre-understanding gained from hearsay turns out to be *groundless*, despite the credibility of the involved speaker and listener (e.g. word of mouth). Although the element of pre-understanding gained from both grounded and groundless experiences is operative across all the themes in Figure 6, the first theme 'Being-There' particularly represents the workings of *attuned understanding* in everyday experience with staff. It acts as a bridge linking between the already-known to the upcoming, which is mirrored by the circularity of Figure 6 as the reason why participants' pre-understanding on staff is overall a negative kind. This negatively attuned understanding subtly triggers tension when direct interactions between Gen Z and staff occur. Common small talk catalyses the tension as well since participants are aware of its meaninglessness and have understood it as the opening of the manipulation exerted by staff. This is shown in the theme 'Being Autonomous/Being Manipulated' in the stage of Intentionality being directed towards the store environment when Gen Z consumers entering a store who do not need staff to interact, except swiftly exchange greetings.

Here the Heideggerian conception 'idle talk' is applied in order to better understand the common small talk in everyday life. Idle talk is another way that forms the public disclosedness of everyday being-with-others. As mentioned in chapter 4, this everyday discourse has the tendency that the

speaker and the listener are doing the talk for the sake of understanding *the talk itself*, rather than for the sake of genuinely understanding *the things as the subject* of the talk. Since language is in itself understandable for both the listener and the talker, what is shared by everyday communicating talk largely lingers on what has been said by others (King, 2001). Consequently, idle talk is groundless too, the same as hearsay. Noted that besides the two, the third constitutive conception of everyday disclosedness that is reflected in the interpersonal experience is the purpose 'for the sake of seeing' which is possible to also be groundless. This will be elucidated in the following section 5.2.2.

The three ways of groundless disclosedness constitute Dasein's *everydayness* in which one can only grasp an *average understanding* of what is heard, talked and seen (also refer to section 3.3.1). This average understanding is attributed to average explanation being published by, and amongst, the masses. Heidegger hints that this ambiguity can be dangerous because it can become the medium for uprooting Dasein from his/her primary understanding of things and others. The phenomenon of everyday ambiguity formed by groundless disclosedness mirrors the inevitable movement of falling in everyday life, in which Dasein is falling into an inauthentic mode of existence who seems to have seen and understood everything by passively accepting public interpretations. In this research context, this ambiguity is reflected in the situation that some participants cannot disentangle what they heard from what they actually experienced. In other words, their grounded experience and the groundless experience are mixed up, which is particularly shown in section 4.2.4 in the chapter of findings.

As already discussed in section 3.3.1 in the chapter of Methodology, Heidegger originally does not differentiate the three conceptions: average everydayness, being-with and fallenness, which results in that the inauthentic mode is the default mode of being-with in everyday life. Later, these conceptions have been disentangled from each other by McMullin (2013)'s work. McMullin argues that average everydayness should be regarded as a neutral conception despite Dasein's falling tendency, by which fallenness should be viewed as the consequence of the falling tendency equivalent to the extreme pole: the inauthentic mode of existence. Namely there is the other pole: the authentic mode. Accordingly, it allows of room of oscillations between the two extremes, referring to the framework (Figure 4) shown in section 3.3.1.

At an ontic level, the room of oscillation between authenticity and inauthenticity can be experienced through the uncertainty of intersubjective interactions. As noted by McMullin (2013), although one is able to somewhat predict others' move by understanding their worldly, purposive practice, he/she can never completely predict others' action. If so, the other would be a duplicate of his/herself. The uncertainty of intersubjective encounters reflected in the always-changing interpersonal experience has been embodied through the adoption of binary elements in layer 3, which is introduced in section 3.6.1. It is to convey the sense of the potential oscillation of Gen Z's experience with staff between the aforementioned two extreme modes as the instability of the binary elements. Before fully understanding these binary themes and interrelation, the conception of *time* must be formally introduced here and further elaborated through Heidegger's worldview since it is what makes intersubjective interactions and interpersonal experiences much more complex than the subject-to-object interaction and experience.

5.1.2 Temporality

As every individual is unique and one can never fully predict others' actions, the foothold of the uniqueness lies in time. As discussed in section 3.2.3, Dasein exists as the unity of time through own thrownness, forwardness and falling being-with/fallenness, which acts as the *temporal structure/temporal dimensions* of care. Dasein's temporality, according to Heidegger, bears four

features: “*spannedness, datability, publicity and significance*”. Every Dasein has his/her own temporal system in which the *now* one mentions is not isolated but spanning back and forward. The duration of the *now* depends on what is happening within it, namely “*how I am that time*” (Heidegger, 1925/1992 cited by McMullin, 2013, pp.119). For instance, in everyday being-with-one-another in public, one at the moment says ‘now it is time to do this or that’, while another one too says ‘now this or that happens’. The same ‘now’ is accessible for one and also another in the public, but what are expressed by the same ‘now’ are things and events at *the datable present* yet in relation to individuals’ own significance-structure in one’s life world. Namely when people are simultaneously talking about ‘now’ at the present, it means that there are many ‘nows’ coexisting in *the public now*. The ‘nows’ mentioned by individuals are the same in the public world, while also different in their own worlds. The sameness and difference of the *now* is characterised by Heidegger as “*double visage*” (McMullin, 2013). On the one hand, it represents the ordinary time linked to the datable present in everyday life, which called “*world time*”. On the other hand, it represents Dasein’s originary temporality wherein the *now* that goes back and forward allows particular events, things and people to present within one’s own significance-structure in his/her life world. This enables one to achieve some certain import according to self-understanding.⁸ Noted that this section (5.1) centres on Dasein’s temporality in relation to being-with-others(staff) and the temporality in relation to being-with-things will be elucidated in the following section 5.2.

The two kinds of *now* are overlapping, whereby it is the temporal particularity that makes each individual unique. As such, the everyday Dasein-to-Dasein interaction is essentially “*a constant project of heedfully acknowledging a temporalizing presence*” of the other (McMullin, 2013, pp.161). Accordingly, in a fashion store where consumers, staff and things coexist at the present, the ‘being-with’ between one consumer and a member of staff can be viewed as two temporal systems that are reconciling with each other based on shared social norms within the store environment. As McMullin (2013) pinpoints: “*The ‘with’ of being-with is a constant speaking out of my now to the others such that we come to share a particular temporal now and thereby establish a common space of measured meaning*” (pp. 140).

With a more explicit understanding of time, it is necessary to return to the conception of being-with-others-at-present to see how time fits into the modes of Dasein-to-Dasein encounters reflected by the binary elements in Figure 6. Dasein’s modal difference and indifference during an intersubjective encounter has been discussed in section 3.3.1 in the chapter of Methodology, however, in what way this (consumer-to-staff) encounter manifests itself authentically or inauthentically? The answer lies in the ‘thinglike treatment’. Since Dasein and things are ontologically different, a person can only treat another person/other people, or being treated by another person/other people, *as if* he/she were a thing. Now it comes to a question how this thinglike treatment during a Dasein-to-Dasein level encounter is possible? As discussed previously, Dasein has his/her own temporal structure incorporating thrownness, forwardness and falling being-with/fallenness. The corresponding temporal characteristics can be approximately understood as past, future and present. Amongst them, only the falling being-with/fallenness at the present can manifest Dasein’s factual existence, while the other two consist in each Dasein’s life world. Therefore, for Heidegger, the thinglike treatment indicates that one is treated solely based on the *worldly factual facet* of his/her existence as an *intra-temporal* basis, without recognising and acknowledging one’s temporalising existence as an *inter-temporal* basis. In everyday life, this thinglike treatment enables the tendency of an anonymous and undifferentiated

⁸ For more detailed discussion about time, please refer to Heidegger, Martin., 1925/1990. *History of the concept of time*. Indiana University Press.

way to live, namely one amongst many interchangeably. According to [McMullin \(2013\)](#)'s interpretation, this inauthentic mode results in a situation that Dasein understands and experiences his/her possibility not for his/herself, but for 'one'. In other words, inauthenticity makes Dasein forget his/her responsibility for 'who/how I can be'. (see section 3.3.1 for historical instances).

This inauthentic mode under solicitude (care about others) is articulated by Heidegger as *leaping-in*, meaning that one takes another's care away from him/her and hence leaps in for him/her. It manifests itself in everyday practice when one does another's job for him/her, rather than viewing him/her as a co-constitutor of the shared world as a particular temporal now. This involves a sense of domination and abuse through interference and displacement, whereby forms the interchangeability of one for another in ordinary life. In contrast to the intra-temporal-centric, inauthentic leaping-in, Heidegger phrases the authentic mode as *leaping-ahead* inverse to the thinglike treatment. Under leaping-ahead, one is treated based on an *inter*-temporal basis, whose temporal structure is implicitly recognised. This leads to authentic solicitude that cares about one's full particularity and complexity wherein it is not that Dasein is a finished and fixed intra-temporal thing-like entity, but that Dasein is always on his/her way as the unfinished that cannot be defined simply through one of his/her temporal facet (now) within the temporal structure of care. Namely there is always something as Dasein's pending 'not-yet-to-be', which accentuates Dasein's potentiality, responsibility and hence existence. As a result, authenticity is able to drag Dasein out of his/her everyday falling tendency towards fallenness. To care about others' existence and potentiality, one does not leap in to take over the care of another, but first gives the care back to the other as leaping ahead in order to nurture the other's potentiality and responsibility in everyday practice, according to [McMullin \(2013\)](#)'s interpretation.

5.1.3 The workings of temporality in the themes of the studied interpersonal experience

Thus far, with the expanded understanding of time and the two extreme modes of Dasein's existence, the binary themes in Figure 6 can be better comprehended. They essentially illustrate the changing interpersonal experience resulted from the authentic and inauthentic modes of intersubjective encounters when participants meet staff in their daily patronise to a fashion store under different purposes and stages of in-store Institutionalality. The theme 'being autonomous/being manipulated' demonstrates the two extreme poles of the interpersonal experience gained when participants enter a store and the initial direct interaction occurs. At this moment participants are here to 'see' (or need to 'see') the store environment (including the products) with attuned understanding on staff. Preceding discussions have revealed that the pre-understanding tends to be a negative kind due to the combination of grounded experiences and groundless experiences, plus the environmental understanding on staff who works in a fashion store as a commercial place. Consequently, if staff approach participants for greetings by small talk, a sense of being manipulated can be triggered. Small talk at the moment of the initial encounter can be quite 'intensive' for participants since staff are strangers for them. Therefore, they refuse to waste time and effort on the groundless idle talk, for participants know their ultimate aim is to facilitate trade, by which they can even get commission. At this rate, the staff actually exert a thinglike treatment on consumers, for the particularity and individuality of participants are removed who are reduced to interchangeable tools for the staff.

This thinglike treatment can be sensed by the participants who therefore seek autonomy. The feeling of being autonomous can be gained by being left alone. Yet, in this context, it does not mean that exchanging greetings is not needed, despite the fact that Gen Z participants in this study are indeed accustomed to a fast-paced lifestyle, with more time spent on friends and their smart

devices. Rather, greetings in a proper manner at this stage of in-store Intentionality can be an effective way for staff to cast a positive impression towards consumers. A proper manner for staff is to show kindness but keep distance by giving eye contact and a nod of recognition with smile (without starting a conversation). For consumers, this can convey a sense of being respected and also being cared as the staff are not intrusive yet at-hand-ready-for-assisting if needed. Note that this situation can be reduced to a simpler one wherein the staff keep distance to consumers without showing recognition of consumers with kindness. This can easily cast a feeling of indifference towards consumers, despite being somewhat acceptable for the Gen Z participants in this study.

Importantly, the influence of time manifests itself in this binary theme. The feeling of being autonomous results from the combination of being left alone and staff's non-intrusiveness, which is a practical indication of the authentic mode, wherein the staff with his/her own temporal system are, in fact, accommodating the participant's one. By comparison, the feeling of being manipulated results from being approached by the staff starting small talk or beginning introducing new products who then becomes intrusive. What exactly the feeling 'being intrusive' means in this context is that the staff is imposing his/her own time system over the participant's one. According to Heidegger, "*when Dasein places itself in the reticence of carrying things through, its time is different. Publicly regarded, its time is essentially slower than the time of idle talk, which lives faster*" (cited by McMullin, 2013, pp.228). Since participants yearn to be alone at that moment, their time is essentially slower than the time of the staff who are doing, or intent to do, 'their job'. Consequently, the staff with faster temporal system tend to dominate the shared public time at the present where the participants who live slower at the moment hence feel being manipulated. To address this issue, technology becomes a means for participants, which plays a part to minimise the impact from staff's contact at this moment. This is evidenced by some of the participants' description in chapter 4 that they often wear headphones when entering a store alone.

The following binary theme 'being acknowledged/being ignored' in the framework also demonstrates the oscillation in participants' interpersonal experience due to the authentic and inauthentic modes of Dasein-to-Dasein encounter. Interestingly, its interconnection with the preceding binary theme reveals the underlying association between experiences at the present and purposes formed in life world, because the same treatment 'being-left-alone-by-staff' receives contrasting results. Under the purpose 'for the sake of seeing', it develops positive experience as being autonomous, however, when the purpose changes to 'for the sake of possession', it forms negative experience as being ignored. Similarly, the same treatment 'being-approached-by-staff' receives contrasting results as well. Under the purpose 'for the sake of seeing', it develops negative experience as being manipulated, while under the purpose 'for the sake of possession', it forms positive experience as being acknowledged.

Notably, besides the ontic aspect, the theme 'being acknowledged/being ignored' can also be understood on an existential basis during the process of consumer-to-staff interaction, especially for a product that participants intend to possess. The experience of being acknowledged results from staff being able to provide personalised advice and recommendations with patience, which must be based on the individual's situations such as one's personal dress style in everyday life and the budget. This individualised attention shows staff's implicit recognition of consumers' particularity, by which consumers' environmental understanding on staff who are here to facilitate trade can be somewhat counterbalanced. This is evidenced by participant Y's feeling that "*She did not give me a feeling that she was selling and trying to persuade me to buy the garment I had been interested in*", which is often accompanied by other positive terms such as 'candid', 'sincere' and 'patient'.

that are normally applied when describing positive experiences with staff.

Moreover, what is actually behind this positive feeling is that consumers are receiving an authentic-oriented treatment from the staff. In such a situation, the staff do not desire overriding consumers in order to manoeuvre them into purchasing this or that product as leaping-in to take over consumers' own task of choosing products. Rather, the staff leave consumers room letting them make their own decisions as leaping-ahead to give the task back to consumers themselves. This mirrors Dasein's temporality in which the staff are slowing themselves down to accommodate participants by giving time for consumers to consider. At this rate, the temporal aspect has already been obvious attributed to the term 'patient' that is often utilised when consumers describe positive experiences with staff. As [McMullin \(2013\)](#) added, patience can be pivotal and a great effort in intersubjective encounters, for it conveys a sense of "*silent co-willing*" and "*encouragement*".

Conversely, the experience of existentially being ignored results from that staff either simply provide positive comments when consumers are trying a garment on, or provide advice that is too general and not carefully thought about on an individual basis. It indicates the failure of staff who do not recognise consumers' particularity of existence, whereby the inauthentic mode of solicitude is under operation. The hollow dialogue can immediately enhance the environmental understanding of staff held by consumers that they are here to facilitate trade. In such a situation, the staff desires overriding consumers in order to manoeuvre them into purchasing this or that as leaping-in to take over the task of making decision that otherwise belongs to consumers themselves. This is evidenced by Q's description that "*it was a male staff who served me and commented: 'it looks good' [...] Yet, I personally did not feel in the same way so that I did not listen to him. I had a feeling that he just wanted to sell the product to me*" and J's description that "*I feel that the frontline staff would have their purposes of selling the product. They are very skilful in luring you to buy their product. Oftentimes, when you try a garment, no matter whether it is truly suitable for you, the staff would give positive comments [...] So I think, it is really hard to find a salesperson who is honest with consumers. I do like candid staff*", alongside other participants who expressed the similar feeling.

Furthermore, participants' feeling that the insincere staff with their unreliable comments and advice are trying to facilitate the trade mirrors the workings of Dasein's temporality too. At this rate, the staff are utilising their time to dominate participants' time since the time of the staff is faster than the participants' one. The temporal aspect in the experience of being existentially ignored can be easier recognised by referring to W's description on impatient staff in one of Burberry flagship stores in London. W admitted that the staff is very friendly and knowledgeable who could answer all questions she asked. This should have given W a good shopping experience, however, as the interaction between she and the staff was underway, W began to feel that "*there was a sense of hurry in the staff's tone [...] It meant that they rushed to finish my case for the next consumer. I do not like this feeling. It was not a relaxing shopping experience. I even had not got time to enjoy and appreciate the store itself, while I was being pushed to choose and pay the product quickly and left*". In this situation, the impatient staff was feeling that W was taking too much time of him/her who therefore refused to accommodate the temporalising of W. What is behind the impatient staff's comportment is the belief that, as [McMullin \(2013\)](#) stressed, "*the time required for you to express your being in the world is taking time from the expression of mine*" (pp. 228-229).

The last two binary themes, 'trustful/distrustful' as well as 'efficient/inefficient' are less about the authentic and inauthentic modes that are implicitly experienced by the consumers during the former binary themes, but more about the results of the first three experiential-oriented themes in Figure 6. These outcome-oriented themes, resulted from an ongoing interactive process and experience with staff since participants entering a fashion store, are experienced by consumers

more explicitly and vividly. Unlike to the former two binary themes which entail the change of the purpose and the corresponding shift of in-store Intentionality, the last two occur only under the purpose 'for the sake of possession', because only when consumers have their aims to buy this or that, their in-store Intentionality can have the chance to be *circumspectly* directed towards the products and checkout. This implies a change in the mode of consumer in-store comportment, which will be discussed in the following section 5.2 where consumers' being-with-things will be elaborated. For now, the current discussion centres on the interpersonal aspect.

- *Trust and Distrust: the intra-temporal enquiry and the inter-temporal enquiry*

As discussed in section 4.3 in the chapter of findings, trust is an overarching theme when it comes to interpersonal experience and it inherently bears circularity. In this research context, that consumers trust staff (non-specific) as the one-place trust (A trusts others) can be seen as the result of the combination of grounded experience and groundless experience, it is, one's attunement developed from thrownness. This one-place trust (or distrust) towards staff is operative throughout all stages of in-store Intentionality and can impact on the encounter with a specific member of frontline staff when a consumer enters a fashion store. As a specific consumer-to-staff interaction unfolds shown in the previous interpretation of the first three themes in Figure 6, the two-place trust (A trusts B) - which means consumers trust this or that specific member of staff - can be viewed as the result of a current ongoing interactional process with a specific member of staff in terms of what kind of treatment (leaping-in or leaping-ahead) being disclosed to the consumer. On the one hand, the consumer's feeling of a 'leaping-in' kind of treatment casts negative impact on the two-places trust of the specific staff, which in turn influences negatively on the one-place trust of the role of staff in general. These act as the inhibitor for the three-places trust (A trusts B to do C) which, in this research context, manifests itself as consumers' refusal to consult with the staff more about personal style. On the other hand, consumers' feeling of a 'leaping-ahead' kind of treatment can build trust of a specific member of staff, which in turn enhances the three-places trust so that a consumer is more likely to talk to the staff about personal styling that entails the consumer's everyday style in his/her own life world as a kind of 'deep' interaction (this point will be returned to in the ensuing passages). Therefore, although the one-place trust - developed from both grounded experience and groundless experience - can cast a general impression on staff in fashion stores, it nevertheless can be altered through the actual encounter and interaction later as the circularity of trust formed by Dasein's temporality.

Moreover, consumers' trust and distrust towards staff can also be affected by various factors, amongst which two factors are the most salient. The first is the competition from friends/parents as the known people and staff as strangers. Data in this study show that friends/parents play a large part when it comes to patronising fashion stores in Gen Z's everyday life, wherein Gen Z participants have been utilizing a fashion store as means to enhance their friendship or family connection. At this rate, understandably participants trust these already-well-known people more and are inclined to consult them about personal questions, for instance, the style of the garments after try-on, other than to consult staff as unknown people. The second is the different concepts of everyday-clothes and non-everyday-clothes in participants' life world. As interpreted in chapter 4, the two concepts indicate something familiar and something unfamiliar, which are defined as 'casual and formal styles' specific to the group of Gen Z consumers. When Gen Z intend to buy casual clothing that they have been commonly wearing in their daily life, the possibility of consulting with staff about personal style is markedly reduced since they master their own everyday dress style very well and will give more trust to their close friends if opinions are needed. Whilst Gen Z do need to consult with staff when they intend to buy formal clothes worn in non-

everyday events such as job interviews and graduation ceremonial, the term ‘non-everyday’ indicates that such a formal situation does not occur frequently in their life world (for the time being), which further reduces the possibility of consulting with staff about personal style.

Importantly, consulting staff about personal style can be seen as a ‘deep’ interaction between the consumer and the staff, wherein a mutually authentic-oriented encounter can possibly occur. For the staff, as discussed previously, in order to provide more personalised advice, they need to somewhat care about the temporalising of the consumer. For instance, what the consumer’s everyday dress style in thrownness and what style the consumer aims to be in forwardness, based on which a personalised recommendation can be made by the staff to fulfil the consumer’s need at the present. Similarly, for Gen Z consumers, the willingness of consulting staff about personal style presupposes the trust in staff’s professionalism. This implies consumers’ acknowledgment on the temporalising of staff, in which they value the rich experiences on fashion styling staff have gained during their career in thrownness and believe staff’s capability to provide useful advice and opinions at the present, which helps the consumer achieve their goals (purchasing a suit now and for a job interview afterwards) in forwardness in their life world. This echoes the third-places trust (A trusts B to do C) discussed previously. Thus, due to the characteristic of the questions that are asked by consumers during the deep interaction with staff, this kind of inquiry is defined as *inter-temporal enquiry* in this study. Notably, an inter-temporal enquiry implies a sense in which not only do consumers acknowledge the temporalising of staff, but consumers somewhat open the door of his/her life world and ‘lets staff in’ by communicating with staff about personal style and goal as the representation of consumers’ trustfulness towards staff. This is the subtle distinction compared to a contrasting kind of consumer-to-staff interaction (that will be discussed immediately below).

Nevertheless, as already pointed out, the possibilities of deep interactions between Gen Z consumers and staff are reduced by two factors: 1) the competition between the known (friends/parents) and the unknown (staff); 2) the distinction between casual and formal clothes in Gen Z’s life world. They together show the distrust-oriented tendency towards staff that impedes the occurrence of consumer-to-staff interactions. What is more, the technological element helps further reduce the said possibility. It enables consumers to contact their friends/parents by text, audio and video messages when needed, even if friends are physically separated with them, alongside overloaded information brought by technology before Gen Z consumers patronise a store, evidenced by the descriptions of multiple participants in this research.

If the possibility of ‘deep’ interaction between Gen Z consumers and staff has become scarce, what kind of interaction it normally is? It is a superficial kind meaning that the temporality of care is removed and both the consumer and the staff only stick with one temporal dimension: the present. This directly leads to the binary theme ‘efficient/inefficient’ at both the second and third stages of in-store Intentionality. As pointed out in chapter 4, these experiences often appear when talking about the use of things in order to achieve goals. The superficial kind of consumer-to-staff interaction is described by participants as “*only asking practical questions*” such as the colour and availability of a certain size as well as some more specific information of a chosen product (e.g. fabrics). This kind of question is defined in this study as *intra-temporal enquiry* that is opposite to the aforementioned *inter-temporal* one. At this rate, Gen Z consumers are exercising the thinglike treatment upon staff who have been relegated to a machine-like position since they treat staff as useful tools providing only the answers to their practical questions. Although obtaining the information from practical questions can entail the usage of a product in the future as a certain level of forwardness that the consumer projects forward, it does not equate with the deep interaction discussed above, because the very distinction between an intra-temporal enquiry and

an inter-temporal enquiry lies in not only the acknowledgment on the temporalising of staff, but also consumers' willingness to somewhat open the door of their personal world as discussed previously (e.g. communicating with the staff about personal style and the upcoming event, for which a pair of shoes will be worn).

When making intra-temporal enquiries, consumers obtain answers to the practical questions from staff (without trust) who then have lost their peculiar temporalising as Daseins and hence can be regarded as, or replaced with, non-human tool. For the participants in this study, these 'tools' (staff) are handier and more useful than those in-store interactive terminals/screens being installed for the purpose of information-searching due to various reasons such as the cost of time and efforts to navigate a terminal, the outdated software that often lags behind consumers' own smart devices, the unwillingness to be seen in a public area as well as hygienic concern of communal terminals, according to data from this study. Furthermore, at the third stage of in-store Intentionality, this 'thinglike-oriented' binary theme becomes dominant since self-checkout-technology has been very popular amongst Gen Z consumers as well as the usage of staff as means of checkout. Similar to the first stage of in-store Intentionality, most of Gen Z participants in this study are inclined to avoid human-based encounters due to groundless idle talk, except in luxury stores, where seeing staff wrapping the product in a beautiful gift box during the final checkout process can even become joyful, evidenced by W's description.

It needs to be re-emphasised here that Dasein's everyday being-with-others inherently bears the tendency of falling towards inauthenticity. In this research context, it is reflected in the fact that the negative sides of each binary theme weigh heavily in participants' narratives. The inauthentic mode does not only refer to the thinglike treatment that Gen Z consumers exert on staff, but vice versa. Namely, consumers treat staff as a handy thing at hand which can be efficient or inefficient when needed, while staff treat consumers as tools, from which staff can make profit, with existential manipulation/ignorance and ontic ignorance that staff exert on consumers (see chapter 4 for participants' description). This *mutually thinglike treatment* between consumers and staff can be further evidenced by two additional feelings experienced by participants, which particularly bring pressure to Gen Z consumers as shown in Figure 6.

First, the feeling of being judged in terms of dress style and knowledge (mainly when it comes to sports products) demonstrates the intra-temporal treatment that staff exert on consumers, wherein staff label consumers and judge their affordability solely based on the face a consumer shows at that moment as the inauthentic mode treating others as a thing. In general, this has led to a picture of snobbery in the participants' impression of staff in fashion stores. Second, a change in participants' initial purpose after communicating with staff often cast negative feelings after being persuaded or being lured into spending more money on purchasing more clothes than planned. As a result, consumers spend more money, while high turnover can be achieved and commission might be given to the staff. On the one hand, it indicates the inauthentic mode of the staff who treat consumers as a tool for profit. On the other hand, it also implies the inauthentic mode of consumers who are persuaded, because what is behind this situation of changing initial purposes in this research context, is that consumers forget the initial purpose being formed based on the individual significance-structure in the context of their temporalising. In other words, consumers isolate the present (now) from their thrownness and forwardness, while being absorbed by particular things at present showing the 'obtrusive' worldliness of the world. Note that changing initial purposes can also happen without staff's persuasion as participants in this study describe occasions in which they were attracted by garments and purchased during the process of browsing in stores or window shopping. It shares some features of the well-established concept 'impulse

buying' in consumer psychology (e.g. [Amos et al., 2014](#); [Iyer et al., 2020](#); [Mandolfo and Lamberti, 2021](#)). Yet, opposed to a psychologic lens, this research has offered an alternative perspective on this issue through Heidegger's worldview showing the disposition to inauthenticity in everyday life.

5.1.4 Angst

Eventually, everything that is being experienced at the present will become one's lived experience, which acts as an ongoing process of thrownness that continuously attunes Daseins to their being-with at present. It makes Dasein realise his/her already-being-in-the-midst-of-other-things-and-people-in-the-world. This is shown by the circularity of Figure 6, wherein Gen Z's overall negative experience with staff and the accumulated pressure converge into the theme 'fear' at the fourth layer, alongside the pre-understanding from consumers' lived experience as well as the pre-understanding from hearsay also contribute to it. The theme of fear at layer four requires more reflection. According to Heidegger, fear that is commonly experienced as 'fear of' or 'fear for' always has its 'whereof', with being chained to a disclosing reference to other things, people and events in the dimension of falling-being-with. This is evidenced by participants' descriptions presented in section 4.2.4. For example: W who fears to be approached by the staff; K who fears to enter a store on her own, and T who fears to interact with in-store staff. Evidently, in these participants' descriptions of fear, there is not an end-of-life threat and the participants are not in fear of life or something dangerous. Rather, it is an everyday way to use the term 'fear' to describe daily moods and feelings, in which the term 'fear' is almost synonymous with some other terms that are more moderate such as 'worried'; 'frightened'; 'afraid' and so forth.

Then what is behind this moderate, unpleasant feeling in everyday life? It is *angst* that acts as the bedrock of all everyday fears and worries, which is defined as "*the experience of becoming aware the universal concerns*" about personal life ([Davidov and Russo, 2022](#), pp.233) - the result of Dasein's care about his/herself in terms of who he/she will be and how to be ([Heidegger, 1927/2010](#)). As pointed out by Heidegger, because fear always has its definite reference in the world, it therefore is an inauthentic mode of attunement only being referred to the ontic dimension of the world in everyday life. By comparison, angst as the bedrock of everyday fears and worries is an authentic attunement drawing Dasein out of the operation of his/her falling-being-with in the ontic dimension of the world in daily life. It reminds Dasein about the various possibilities of *self*, not an average understanding of possibilities of the '*they*'. What characterises angst is the shift of concern from the things in the world to the world itself. In other words, in angst the world itself becomes the matter of concern, other than those particular things and events discovered or met within it, for the world becomes the meaningful context of Dasein's temporalising as being-in-the-world ([McMullin, 2013](#)). What is more, according to [McMullin \(2013\)](#)'s interpretation of Heidegger's scholarship, since Dasein's being-in-the-world is essentially being-with-others-in-the-world, it must entail the publicly-oriented Dasein-to-Dasein encounters. Thus, in angst, not only do the things and events found in the world as the worldliness of the world fade away, the falling indifferent *they* in Dasein's everyday public life and the public way in which Dasein is interpreted by the *they* (the masses or the society) are also taken away. Namely angst draws Dasein from the everyday life where he/she is governed by social norms (see section 3.3.1) to the authentic understanding of own potentiality-to-be.

Therefore, it can be inferred that angst consists of two dimensions. One is the concern about the world as a meaningful context of one's life world. The other is the concern about the intersubjective encounter as the coexistence and reconciliation of multiple Daseins' temporality in the world time now. Essentially all of the two dimensions are closely associated with Dasein

his/herself as who and how he/she will be. In this research context, this two-dimensional ontological meaning of angst behind the respondents' everyday fears are reflected in the findings of this study either explicitly or implicitly. The following passages will elaborate on the two dimensions of angst in this research context.

In terms of the intersubjective dimension of angst, besides the preceding interpretation and presentation of how the inauthentic mode in consumer-to-staff encounter is experienced as one of the sources of Gen Z consumers' angst, it can be implicitly gleaned from the series of comportment participants described during the interviews, including doing research ahead, wearing headphones when entering a fashion store, choosing self-checkout terminals when purchasing, visiting fashion stores with friends and the choice of purchasing online. All these measures can be viewed as ways to avoid human-based service, because the interpersonal interaction with the unknown staff concerns Gen Z consumers who feel uncomfortable doing it. The uncomfortableness principally comes down to, as discussed, the reconciliation of the temporality of the consumer and the staff. The reconciling process has been delineated by the binary elements in the third layer of Figure 6. More specifically, it is the *instability* between these binary elements that particularly contribute to Gen Z consumers' fear and angst since they care about themselves through, but uncertain about, how they are treated by unknown staff (e.g. being looked down or being respected; being ignored or being acknowledged etc.) as well as how they treat unknown staff in a public shared store environment (e.g. reluctantly respond to staff's approaching with some manners due to social norms). Additionally, the possibility of changing the initial purposes and overspending money as the outcome of the interaction with staff can be another force behind the uncomfortableness, as discussed previously. The instability and the unwanted outcome can result in 'fear of interacting with staff' (described by participant T and W) in Gen Z participants' everyday visit to fashion stores.

In terms of the worldly dimension of angst, Gen Z consumers' fear of entering a fashion store (described by participant K) possibly mirrors the underlying meaning of a fashion store in their own life. Since consumers patronise fashion stores either for the sake of seeing, or for the sake of possessing something in relation to fashion, it implies a sense of materialism that embodies an overly important role in money and possession of material goods in life, (see studies in the research stream of materialism: [Richins, 2004](#); [Dittmar et al., 2014](#); [Lucic, et al., 2021](#)), especially when materialism meets fashionability ([Talaat, 2020](#); [Frechette et al., 2023](#)). According to the Heideggerian conception of 'everydayness', Dasein understands others and his/herself in the context of social roles in everyday life, who thus are anonymous and interchangeable as the average way of Dasein's existence. This mode of existence presupposes the profound conformity of social norms and standards, which involves adjusting oneself to others. Yet, on the one hand, this 'adjusting' is for accommodating the others where one modifies the way he/she acts to meet the standard in society. On the other hand, this 'adjusting' means one's endeavour to have him/herself distinguished from the crowd and maintain his/her individuality within a social-norms-enabled scope ([McMullin, 2013](#)). Fashion bears both features. It can be used not only to adhere to social affiliations (e.g. uniforms and dress codes), but also as an extension of one's own identity, status and self-wealth in everyday social life ([Kim et al., 2018](#); [Kaur and Anand, 2018](#)). Particularly for young people, they are more inclined towards individualism ([Franceschelli and Keating 2018](#); [Keating and Melis, 2022](#)) and materialism ([Arthur et al., 2019](#); [Talaat, 2020](#)). This is evidenced in this study by Y's description of life in HK where the female youth tend to possess more luxury bags because of peer-pressure, discussed in section 4.4 in the chapter of findings.

According to [Maison and Adamczyk \(2020\)](#), materialism has two facets. One is an end in itself,

namely purchasing for the sake of possession as the sole source of satisfaction. The other is a means to an end, namely purchasing for the sake of something else as to achieve another goal. Thus, it is possible that materialism manifests itself not only in high-end consumers in the high-end stores, wherein owned luxury products symbolise both one's status and the joy of possessing goods, but materialism can also be found in the mass market and ordinary consumers wherein one can be satisfied simply by purchasing affordable products more than needed. For example, participant Y often regrets overspending money, especially during seasonal sales when purchasing a lot at a time. The latter happens more often to Gen Z consumers in fast fashion stores since they have just started their careers with comparatively less disposable income, but normally end up overspending money, or purchasing somethings beyond their actual need, in the same way as those high-end consumers in high-end stores. Consequently, a kind of pressure of the store context related to materialism is already in Gen Z consumers' understanding when simply mentioning the phrase 'fashion stores', which is evidenced by the findings of this study as K's expression on the fear of entering a fashion store sometimes, plus W regrets purchasing a pair of luxury sunglasses beyond her actual affordability.

Furthermore, this worldly-context-led dimension of angst in turn can enhance its intersubjectively-led dimension, because the materialistic store environment (the worldly context) is likely more closely associated with materialists themselves who can be both the consumer and the in-store staff, according to Heidegger who asserts that it is from the nearest worldly contexts in workaday life that the understanding of one is formed. This can be gleaned from participants' descriptions on both staff and themselves. In terms of staff: 1) the negative interpersonal experiences of being manipulated and being ignored; 2) the negative impression on staff as a picture of snobbery who have the propensity to judge in terms of affordability based on one's dress style and the amount of money spent in the store. And in terms of consumers themselves: 1) the regret after changing the initial purpose and hence spending more money than one planned; 2) embarrassment when receiving services from the staff, but without the purpose to buy, especially in luxury stores.

Nevertheless, in angst, a particular attractive product one bought (e.g. a designer garment), or a particular glitzy fashion store one loves to patronise - as the worldness of the present - becomes *insignificant*, alongside the social norms and standards of everydayness that one is bound, too, become meaningless. What then becomes salient is the meaning of the store context (incorporating the meaning of the products they purchase) towards consumers' own life as being-in-the-world in which the interpersonal relationship (consumer-with-staff) as being-with-others is inherent. In other words, as an authentic kind of attunement gained from the ongoing thrownness, angst is the care about oneself as one's authentic potentiality-for-being-in-the-world (who and how he/she will be). This reflective thought is most likely, if not only, available through hindsight (Rebecca, 2002, cited by [McMullin, 2013](#)). In this study, the foci of data collection is participants' lived experience, into which hindsight is incorporated. Angst is experienced by the Gen Z participants in this research context even more subtly and implicitly compared to the everyday, inauthentic mode of attunement: fear, which can only be revealed through hermeneutic interpretation.

In summary, with the re-introduction of time, the preceding discussion has explicitly presented Gen Z consumers' being-with-others (staff) under their being-in-a-technology-enabled-fashion-store, through an extra exploration of the themes at the third and fourth layers (with the influence from the first and second layers) in Figure 6. The binary elements at the third layer indicate the two modes of a consumer-to-staff encounter (a Dasein-to-Dasein level encounter): authenticity and inauthenticity. They are reflected in the poles of solicitude (care or concern about others) as

intra-temporally leaping-in and inter-temporally leaping-ahead. To reiterate, as stressed by McMullin (2013), in everyday being-with-others, the two modes are experienced implicitly in many mixed forms, namely one person can barely, if not never, encounter the other purely intra-temporally nor purely inter-temporally, but at a time the two modes are experienced as a blend in which one extreme prevails over the other to some extent. This modally blended intersubjective encounter has been delineated through the binary elements, which not only show the two extreme sides of the experience resulted from the authentic and inauthentic modes, but also imply a continuous oscillation between them. The instability of the binary elements, alongside the pressure experienced from the staff's leaping-in manner due to the falling tendency of everydayness, contribute to fear, an inauthentic mode of attunement in everyday life. Consumers' fears of entering fashion stores and interacting with staff essentially mirrors their concerns about themselves, which is angst, an authentic mode of attunement undermining one's forgetfulness and fetching one back from the falling everyday life.

5.2 Consumer's Being-with-Things (-and-staff) in a fashion store context

The preceding section has explicitly discussed Gen Z consumers' being-with-staff and the corresponding interpersonal experiences at the layer 3 and layer 4 in Figure 6, this section is set for the discussion on consumers' being-with-things(-and-staff). As discussed, in everyday life people tend to exert thinglike-treatment upon others, especially between consumers and staff in a fashion store as a communal commercial environment, which is reflected in the operation of time in intersubjective encounters. Namely, to some extent staff are included in consumers' being-with-things in a fashion store context. As already highlighted, the two purposes in this research context (layer 1) - 'for the sake of seeing' and 'for the sake of possession' - give rise to different stages of in-store Intentionality that determine the different possibilities of consumers' in-store interactions and hence influence their comportment (the ways of interacting.) The two purposes echo Heidegger's two categories of comportment: 'circumspectly discovering things' and 'simply seeing'. The following paragraphs will explicitly discuss the modes of in-store comportment by revealing how time works in consumers' (Daseins') being-with-things. And only by comprehending consumers' in-store comportment, the integration of people, technology and store environment can be possibly delineated in the following chapter.

5.2.1 The circumspect discovery of things

To be contextualised, 'circumspectly-discovering-things' is represented by the purpose 'for the sake of possession' at layer one, in which consumers' in-store comportment is led by a goal of owning an intended product. After that, the goal becomes a means for another aim. Under this purpose, consumers' relation with things (as the care of things) are based on a 'circumspect foresight' which discovers things at hand as utensils in what they are for. This helps consumers bring the things (and thinglike staff) near that can be useful in fulfilling the goal in the store environment. For instance, because of the need for a suit for job interview, the try-on process is triggered in which some aspects of the functional dimension of servicescape such as a fitting room or a mirror is needed to accomplish the try-on task, during which staff might be needed too for advice on some occasions. If the consumer is satisfied with the chosen suit with the decision to buy, a self-checkout terminal or a cashier will be needed to accomplish the task of checkout. Note that the purpose 'for the sake of possession' does not necessarily mean an actual purchase in the store. One may patronise a physical store to have try-on but end up purchasing nothing in the store. For instance, J finds it convenient to go to a store touching and trying the real product she aims to buy but returns home purchasing online after making the final decision. Q described an occasion

that after trying the jeans on in a store, she did not like it and hence left the store without spending a single pound. Namely, different results might exist after a series of in-store activities guided by the purpose ‘for the sake of possession’.

What needs to be highlighted here is, regardless of whether or not consumers make in-store purchases under ‘for the sake of possession’, their comportment, the series of in-store activities, is based on the mode of *circumspect for-sight*. It makes the *handy utensil* ‘appear’ (or brings it near) to accomplish (or better accomplish) the current task. According to [King’s \(2001\)](#) interpretation, this ‘making-things-appear’ indicates ‘letting-things-be-relevant’ and bears the very temporal character of Dasein’s being-with-things. For instance, consumers already know that the purpose of a mirror installed on the wall is for try-on (for Gen Z consumers the purpose could also be for a selfie via smartphone, told by participant Q), so that after browsing in the store and choosing the garments, if a try-on is needed, they probably head to the front of a mirror. At this rate, on the one hand, before one’s actual try-on process begins, the mirror itself retains the consumer’s intention to try garments on as forwardness. On the other hand, since consumers already know the purpose of the mirror when seeing it, this letting-things-be-relevant implies the ‘remembering of what a thing is for’ grounded in one’s thrownness. In other words, when the consumer enters a fashion store and spots a mirror, he/she either lets the mirror ‘await’ the moment of his/her try-on, or the consumer is awaiting the try-on moment to use the mirror. Still in other words, at a glimpse of a thing, a relation between ‘intention and awaiting’ in one’s temporalising context immediately emerges, e.g. the relevance of a mirror to mirroring. This awaiting-remembering-making-things-appear as handy utensils represents the temporal structure of one’s circumspectly being-with-things. Note that this ‘circumspectly-deliberating-making-handy-things-appear’ can also manifest itself in ‘circumspectly-deliberating-avoiding-unhandy-things’. For instance, some participants in this study would wear headphones when entering fashion stores alone to avoid human-based service.

As such, circumspective discovery of things enables one’s everyday taking care of things to be operated smoothly without an explicit theoretical understanding of them, until it is interrupted by four occasions interpreted by [King \(2001\)](#). The total of five occasions of a Dasein-to-things encounter (including the four modifications of the temporal structure) are listed here. The first occasion is a basic awaiting-remembering-making-things-appear: e.g. occasions of using a handy thing to accomplish the current task. The second is an ‘arrested’ awaiting-remembering-making-things-appear: e.g. an occasion of being stopped by a damaged thing. The third is an awaiting-remembering-not-making-things-appear, e.g. an occasion of missing something. The fourth is an awaiting-unremembering-making-things-appear, e.g. an occasion of being resisted by an unfit thing at hand. The fifth is an *unawaiting*-remembering-making-things-appear, e.g. an occasion of being taken by surprise.

The preceding discussion has explicitly demonstrated how one’s being-with-things (and-thinglike-others) is led by his/her purposes. Namely one’s ‘awaiting-remembering-making-things-appear’ lets things be relevant in order to accomplish a series of tasks to fulfil the purpose. This is shown in Figure 6 that only under ‘for the sake of possession’ the possibilities of the second and third stages of in-store Intentionality can be opened, because taking a close look at garments and making comparison between them; consulting friends and staff about it; having a try-on; using self-checkout terminals or a cashier can be counted as a series of in-store tasks for the purpose of owning it. Therefore, these ensuing activities matter to consumers and hence a kind of “intentional mattering” inheres in one’s circumspectly-dealing-with-things. According to participants’ descriptions in this study, when consumers consult staff about a garment, either simply a quick

Q&A for intra-temporal enquiries or a deep interaction for inter-temporal enquiries, the intentional mattering is reflected in the care about *efficiently* receiving the correct, personalised answer for their purpose of possessing a garment that meets their need. This is evidenced by Figure 6 where efficiency even becomes a component of their lived experience with staff. What is more, the being-with-things-and-others in everyday life is also guided by social norms (e.g. properly using things in a shared environment and interacting with others), which acts as measures and standards to judge whether one succeeds or fails in their projects. Therefore, in-store Intentionality at layer two is not only about the *directedness* towards this or that as an intentional orientation to find handy things, or thinglike persons, within the store environment to fulfil the purpose, but also involves “*intentional normativity*” and “*intentional mattering*” as the three features of Heideggerian Intentionality interpreted by McMullin (2013) mentioned in section 3.4.2.

In this line of thinking, J eventually chooses the option of online purchase as the final stage of her purchasing journey because the purchase matters to her and she endeavours to accomplish it successfully in a convenient way. She finds online purchasing *handier* than the option of in-store purchasing since it frees her from the task of waiting in the queue for checkout (either human-based or technology-based) in a crowded store environment and the task of carrying the new garment or shoes from the store to home, described by the participant. Thus, J circumspectly, deliberately avoids the in-store purchasing method, while choosing the online one. What is more, a failure to accomplish the task of checkout is very much the same as an occasion of being stopped by a damaged thing, or being resisted by an unfit thing at hand if the checkout process is not going smoothly. It is likely to become salient in one’s lived experience, which would be remembered. In practice, for human-based services, Q described an occasion that she failed to find jeans suitable for her style and left the store with the feeling that the staff is fledgling who is not helpful. For technology-based services, it is reflected in the “*widespread dissatisfaction with failures of technology*” (Alexander and Kent, 2022, pp.5).

5.2.2 Simply-seeing as a way to discover things

- *Idle curiosity*

Having discussed ‘circumspectly-discovering-things’ as one of the two categories of consumers in-store comportment and its temporality, the ensuing discussion will centre on the other one: simply-seeing. According to Heidegger, this category can be further divided into two modes: idle curiosity and theoretical-only-looking. In figure 6, the purpose ‘for the sake of seeing’ at layer one chiefly alludes to idle curiosity according to the interpretation of the participants’ descriptions. As briefly explained in chapter 4, this way of access to things can be viewed as a degenerated mode of circumspection, because it is when one’s everyday ‘circumspect for-sight’ finds nothing at hand that needs to be dealt with. In this research context, consumers either see things for the sake of seeing itself or look at things as means to other purposes such as killing time, roaming after a big lunch as a form of exercise, accompanying friends to enhance friendship and so forth, mentioned by the participants. Nevertheless, the question why idle curiosity is defined as a degenerated mode of circumspection has not received a proper answer. Now with the formal introduction of time in this chapter and its workings in Dasein-to-Dasein and Dasein-to-things encounters, the answer to this question can be deduced based on King (2001)’s interpretation of Heideggerian scholarship.

According to King (2001), idle curiosity implies “*greed for the new*” because currently “*nothing more at hand that needs to be taken care of*” and hence it is “*a constant jumping off from the new to the still newer*” (pp.86). Therefore, it does not stay with the target, but “*hovers merely on the public surface of things*” (pp. 245). Notably, even the so-called new thing and the still newer things are not actually chosen by the one who is seeing. Rather, the things that one’s idle curiosity desires to see are

actually decided by the *they*, a concept has been repeatedly mentioned in section 3.3.1 about the conception of everydayness and the interpretation of *hearsay* in section 4.2.4 and also section 5.1.1. The ‘they’ are completely interchangeable, whose function is to disburden the responsibility of one’s everyday existence, because strictly speaking, the ‘they’ are actually nobody who could be responsible for anything said and done (King, 2001, pp.82). In this research context, for instance, participants (with their friends) meander around the high street and browsing in a fashion store to see something new to kill time, whereby they let themselves occupied by the new trendy clothes, new films, new popular dishes in popular restaurants known via both online and offline word-of-mouth (hearsay). Stores are decorated by new seasonal themes with endorsements from celebrities. Nevertheless, these new things are in fact not chosen and decided by the participants’ themselves, but the ‘they’ who decide what fashion trends are in and out this season, which restaurants are worth visiting as well as who are celebrities now and who are the has-beens. Consequently, being guided by the nobody ‘they’, Dasein disowns (or bears the disposition to disown) his/herself. Therefore, idle curiosity is *groundless* in the same way of aforementioned idle talk and hearsay composed by the ‘they’, which represents the falling tendency (McMullin, 2013), if not the fallen/inauthentic mode (Heidegger, 1925/2010), of Dasein’s everydayness. Namely, idle curiously discovery of things acts as intra-temporal care of things.

- *Theoretical-only-looking*

The other mode of simply-seeing is characterised by Heidegger as ‘theoretical-only-looking’. Before comparing it to idle curiosity, the connotation behind it in terms of two distinct worldviews needs to be addressed first. The fundamental distinction lies in *the essence of beings*. Heideggerian Existentialism understands the essence of beings from the handiness of things within a world. This is a Dasein-oriented viewpoint because it is only within Dasein’s own life world that things can be circumspectly discovered (understood) via ‘intention-awaiting-letting-things-be-relevant’ based on the whole temporal structure ‘awaiting-remembering-making-things-appear’ as discussed previously. On the contrary, ‘theoretical-only-looking’ representing Cartesianism understands beings as substantial reality and hence isolates a thing from a world. Here it needs to be emphasised that, as briefly mentioned in chapter 3, Heidegger did not completely dismiss the substantial, scientific viewpoint, but rather he asserts that it is just one possible way in which things can be understood, not the only way. The dominant position of the scientific understanding of things results from Dasein’s everyday forgetfulness, whereby the ‘awaiting-remembering-making-things-appear’ driven by the handiness of a thing has been completely overlooked. Perhaps this way of understanding a thing is too ordinary and insignificant and people take it for granted who tend to believe that only the explicit-theoretical-working-out can be counted as the true understanding of a thing. Nevertheless, as King’s (2001) interpretation shown, Heidegger’s stance is that “*circumspectly deliberating bringing closer of handy things*” surpasses explicit-theoretical-working-out, because the former is guided by, and stabilised in, the care of one’s own ability-to-be in the world. By comparison, in the latter, this Dasein-oriented, unmethodical guidance and the world are all lost and replaced by the appropriateness and strictness of the method of science (pp, 273).

Having presented the distinction between the two worldviews that helps better understand the ‘theoretical-only-looking’ mode, this paragraph is to discuss the significant difference between theoretical-only-looking and idle curiosity as a degenerated mode of ‘circumspect for-sight’. The two modes of ‘purely-seeing’ resemble very closely but differ fundamentally so that they must be distinguished from each other. The key lies in temporality. As explained previously, idle curiosity is groundless and does not stay with things, but “*hovers merely on the public surface of things*” (King,

2001, pp 245) as the intra-temporal being-with-things at the present. By comparison, although a theoretical-only-looking can be viewed as a different mode to approach things, it in fact gains its ground in the substantiality of things, because this way of seeing is to stay with the thing in order to understand it based on the facts and truth which are possible only gained through one's thrownness. As King (2001) points out that the theoretical-only-looking "*conquers a new ground for itself in staying near to things, which is itself grounded in an authentic being-in-the-world*" (pp. 245). Now, with the ongoing discussion about theoretical-only-looking as one of the two modes of simply-seeing, a question about its association with the studied phenomenon (Figure 6) arises. Does this mode of seeing occur in consumers' visit to fashion stores? The answer is affirmative. As mentioned previously, in terms of the ways to discover/understand things in daily life, participants tend to forget the circumspect disclosure of things based on the usability (or unusability) in one's life world. This forgetfulness makes the theoretical disclosure of things based on the substantiality become dominant. When one is looking at a thing, it is possible for he/she to inadvertently depart from the original circumspect discovery and fall into the theoretical one. This possible modification occurs frequently in everyday life.

To Instantiate, in this research context, when a consumer is in Nike Town trying a pair of running shoes on, it is common to hear a comment that 'the shoes are lightweight'. This comment is susceptible to both ways of discovering things. On the one hand, for the perspective of 'circumspect for-sight', the running shoes bear a tool-character and the purchasing of the shoes is for the sake of jogging which can either for the sake of losing weight, or keeping fitness, or partaking in a marathon in the future and so forth. This 'letting-the-running-shoes-be-relevant' in one's own life world represents the "*within-worldish character*" of the shoes (King, 2001) and its lightweightness is conducive for better accomplishment of the said tasks in the future. On the other hand, for the perspective of 'theoretical-only-looking', the running shoes do not bear its tool-character anymore, but being viewed as a corporeal thing, whereby the acknowledgment of its lightweightness is simply a result of the comparison between this particular pair of shoes to the law of the heaviness of shoes in common. It implies that the shoes fall out of the world as an "*unworlding*" (Heidegger, 1925/2010). Therefore, whilst this mode of 'simply seeing' is not marked in the framework (Figure 6), in fact it can possibly occur anytime at any stage of in-store Intentionality. To exemplify it in another way: no matter at the first stage of in-store Intentionality under the purpose of seeing (the mode of idle curiosity), or at the second stage of in-store Intentionality under the purpose of possession (the mode of circumspect for-sight), a consumer might ask the staff what a garment is made of (this is characterised by the participants in this study as 'practical questions'). This enquiry might be either 'for the sake of a proper wash' after the purchasing, or 'for the sake of dress properly' in a special occasion in the near future and so forth. However, this enquiry can also mean that the consumer is simply curious about the fabric of the garment (e.g. a garment with sequins). As such, the mode of theoretical-only-looking cannot be ruled out when scrutinising consumers' in-store comportment.

Thus far, this section has enlarged on the three modes of being-with-things, which are circumspect, idle curious and theoretical-only-looking discovery of things, as well as their temporality. The three modes can be viewed as three ways of Dasein's comportment, which have been contextualised in this research context: Gen Z consumer's visit to a technology enabled fashion store. Comprehending the temporal attribute of each mode helps grasp the essence of consumers' in-store interactions with things (and thinglike others). Similarly, in the previous section the temporality of intersubjective encounters has been explicitly discussed showing the essence of the mixed forms that are manifested in consumer-to-staff (a Dasein-to-Dasein level) interaction. Thus, a detailed understanding of Gen Z consumers' being-with-things-and-staff-in-a-technology-

enabled-fashion-store has been formed. The essence of the ways of consumers' interactions with staff and things indicates the essence of consumers' relation to staff and things in the context of a smart servicescape, which was set to explain in detail at the beginning of this chapter.

5.3 A summation of the insight that Heideggerian existentialism provides

The preceding discussion brings new insights into the theories in marketing and business disciplines. First, this study complements [Ramaswamy and Ozcan \(2018\)](#)'s conceptualization of agencial assemblages for interactional creation of value within an interactive platform. In that study, the authors argue that a purposefully built environment can augment the interactional outcome because the interaction activates the needed components of that environment. However, the primary foci of that conceptual study is the physical interactive platform itself, rather than human-beings. It results in a lack of explicit explanation of how various components of the environment become needed, or how the components are activated by experiencers as an assemblage. For the current study, the primary foci is centred on individuals. As reviewed and synthesised in section 2.3, this study views a smart servicescape as an interactive platform and certain things within a technology-enabled fashion store are brought near by consumers' interaction. Drawn on Heidegger's existential philosophy, the preceding discussion explicitly addresses the said two questions about the ways things and staff become needed and being brought near. It is through consumer's letting-things-be-relevant and making-things-appear that the elements in servicescape dimensions become needed by consumers and hence are brought near, thereby forming the assemblage and achieving the desired outcome. The desired outcome is thus meaningful and valuable for the consumer because achieving one's desired outcome can be equivalent to fulfilling his/her purpose that is formed within a significance-structure in one's life world. The purpose, in turn, guides consumers' Intentionality and hence interactions in a fashion store environment as discussed and shown in Figure 6. In other words, consumers orient themselves in servicescape as an interactive platform at the present according to the significance-structure that their own world provides.

Therefore, secondly this study complements the research stream of S-D logic (e.g. [Vargo and Lusch, 2004](#); [Vargo, 2007](#); [Vargo et al., 2008](#); [Vargo and Lusch, 2016](#); [Vargo et al., 2023](#); [Jaakkola et al., 2024](#)) by bringing an existential perspective on the creation of value, especially for the point that "*value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary*" ([Vargo et al., 2020](#), pp.17). Although the conception of value is beyond the scope of this current study, S-D logic's phenomenological perspective on value has profoundly influenced the view of consumer experience due to the interrelationship between the two conceptions, which has been particularly highlighted in chapter 2 Literature Review. S-D logic dismisses the conventional, well-established viewpoint on value in G-D logic that the value of an object is prescribed by the manufacturer as value-in-exchange. Through a phenomenological angle, S-D logic asserts that the value of an object is determined by individuals when they use it in a specific context in their life world as value-in-use or value-in-experience. Indeed, this viewpoint on value can be aligned with Heidegger's thinking. The use of a product in a specific context in one's life world is the very moment one uses a thing as a tool to achieve his/her purpose, which is the fundamental character of human existence. Therefore, whether a product is valuable for the user is determined by the user based on the criterion of whether or not the product is handy enough, or handier, to deal with everyday tasks, by which further goals could be achieved as an inter-temporal perspective. On the contrary, the viewpoint on value in G-D logic is developed based on an intra-temporal perspective that overlooks "*the existential constitution of being-in-the-world*" ([King, 2001](#), pp.74) and once "*the*

original whole of being-in-the-world" has been forgotten, economists and theorists begin to superimpose value on the substances that *"have fallen out from the significance-whole of a world"*, just as *"the commerce between a supposedly worldless subject and a cognised 'world'"* (pp.74).

Third, this study has established a phenomenological, consumer-centric perspective in servicescape research stream. The evolution of servicescape theory and the formation of consumer (within-servicescape) experience have been reviewed in section 2.1 from an earlier firm-controlled perspective where consumers are passive receivers whose behaviours and experiences are stimulated by controllable environmental elements, to a provider-consumer balanced angle where consumers partially actively use the environment and form their experiences in a period of time, to a more recent, consumer-centric perspective where servicescape is viewed as an assemblage (Fuentes et al., 2017). By referring to Heidegger's thinking as well as the participants' lived experience, this study has revealed and elucidated the essence of this assemblage viewpoint reflected in the ways consumers interact in a built servicescape, it is, in short, consumers orient themselves in servicescape according to the significance-structure that their own world provides. This carves out a fresh perspective on servicescape that transforms the aforementioned provider-controlled and provider-consumer-balanced angles into an authentic consumer-centric perspective and understanding of servicescape dimensions. It shows that the formation of consumer (within-servicescape) experience is principally triggered by consumers themselves, albeit somewhat depends on the capacity of the purposeful-built environment. It changes the initial theoretical underpinning of servicescape theory (Bitner, 1992; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011) from behaviourism and cognitive psychology to a human-centric, phenomenological perspective as one of the theoretical contributions of this research.

Additionally, the essences of consumers' in-store comportment that have been explicitly discussed in this chapter also casts new insight into the relation between people and things in servicescape, which is contrary to the conventional foci that is chiefly about the influence of the physical environment on consumers' behaviours. The extant environment-oriented emphasis results from an intra-temporal mindset on methodology that seals the dimensions of consumers' own life world. As a consequence, only the dimension of the present where consumers' interaction occurs within servicescape can be seen. This has its implications on research in marketing and consumer research realms, which will be elaborated in the following chapter. Therefore, in the end of the current chapter, armed with the enhanced understanding on the relation between people and things in servicescape, the current discussion will move to the implications that Heideggerian existentialism provides in terms of practical, theoretical and methodological aspects for store-related research in marketing and consumer disciplines.

Chapter 6 Implications

This chapter centres on the implications that Heideggerian existentialism provides. It begins with the managerial aspect in section 6.1 focusing on the integration of human-based and technological-based service in a technology-enabled fashion store. This is delineated by a new framework built upon Figure 6 in the chapter of Findings as a conjuncture of consumers' intentional structure, the essences of their in-store interaction as well as the services available in a smart servicescape context (a technology-enabled fashion store). The theoretical implication is introduced in section 6.2 through an emerged phenomenon shown in the new framework and hence the marketing strategy, along with the theoretical underpinning behind it, are elaborated

and questioned. It further leads to the methodological implication for store-related consumer research in marketing and consumer disciplines in section 6.3.

6.1 Managerial Implications

The foci of this section moves from interpersonal experience and its formation to the integration of in-store service and consumers' ways of interacting with things and people, it is, the integration of human-based and technological-based service in a fashion store in the digital age. Since the sophisticated, four-layers framework (Figure 6) in Chapter 4 is already developed based on an existential, holistic perspective, it is capable of being the foundations to illustrate where and how human-based service fits in in Gen Z consumers' use (or understanding) of the store environment (the servicescape). Thus, drawn on the potential of Figure 6 that bears the key elements and conceptions of Heideggerian existentialism, in the ensuing section a second framework on the integration of human-based and technological-based service within servicescape dimensions is presented. After elaborating on the newly developed diagram, further implication on consumers' everyday visits to fashion stores will unfold.

6.1.1 Integration of in-store Service, Store environment and Consumer Comportment

The integration of different kinds of service in a fashion store context is portrayed based on the conjuncture of the dimensions of smart servicescape, consumers' intentional structure and the ways of consumers' in-store interaction. All of them have been explicitly discussed in the preceding sections. It is shown in the second framework (Figure 7) where the original layer 3 (the interpersonal experience as 'being-with at the present') is replaced with the integration of service and servicescape dimensions. The original layer 4 (thrownness) is also replaced with the ways of consumers in-store interactions. The original layer 1 (the purpose/forwardness) and layer 2 (in-store Intentionality) remain unmodified. It is because, as highlighted in chapter 3, although thrownness as an ongoing process neverendingly attunes Dasein's understanding (until the arrival of death), in Heidegger's thinking it is forwardness that plays the decisive role of driving one's actual comportment (the ways of consumers' in-store interactions) in the present. Thus, Figure 7 that stems from the original Figure 6 is capable of illustrating the integration of service and consumers' interactions at the corresponding stages of their Intentionality in servicescape from an existential, holistic perspective.

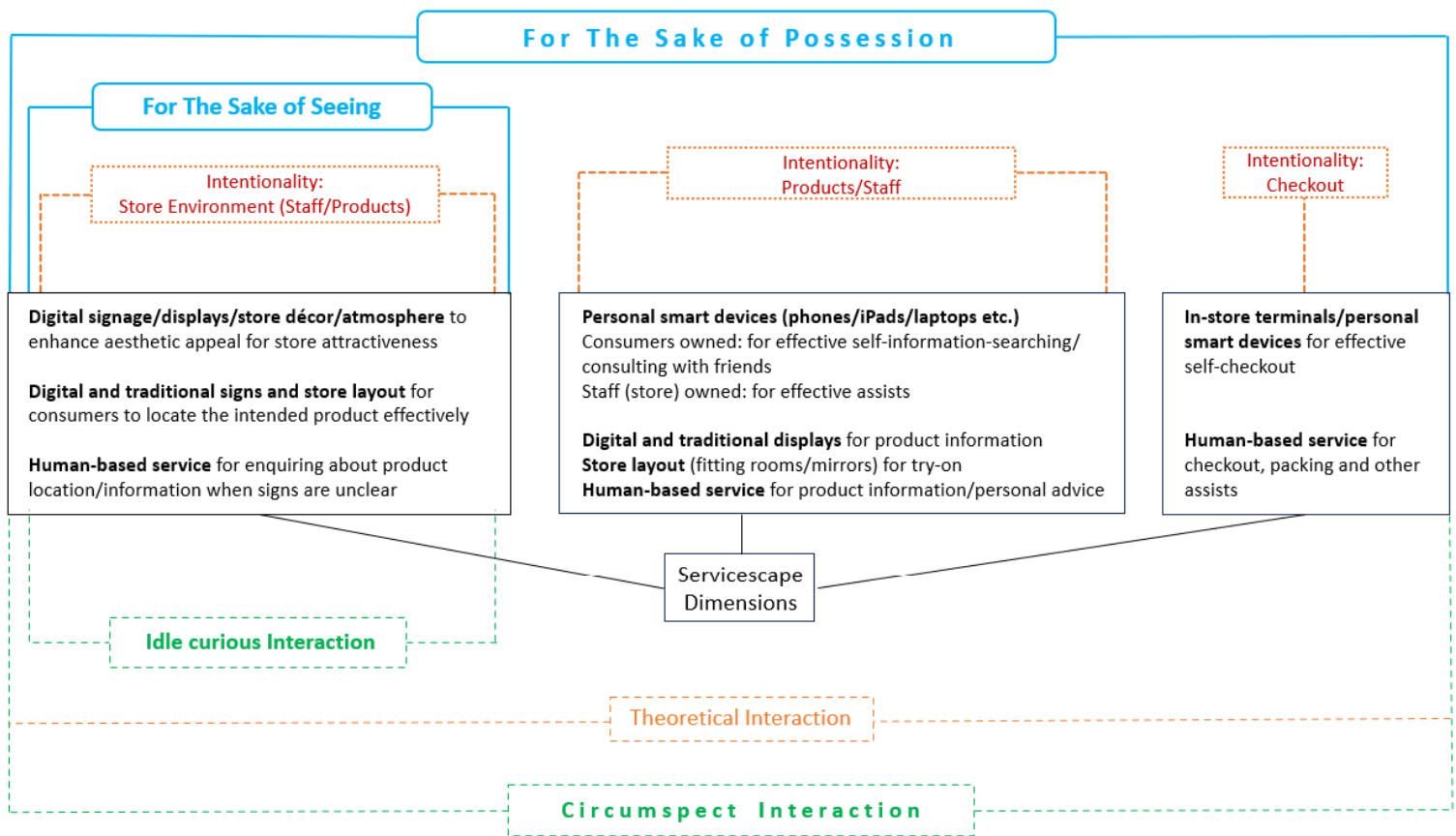


Figure 7. Integration of in-store Service, Store environment and Consumer Comportment

To elucidate from a managerial angle, there is progression from left to right represented by the three stages of in-store Intentionality at layer 2 as a ‘journey’ of consumers’ visit to a fashion store. The first stage indicates that when entering a store, the environment itself (including products and staff) engages consumers, but the degree of engagement can vary depending on the purposes of visit. For instance, according to participants’ descriptions, when going to a store for the sake of possession, likely they already have a target in mind. Alternatively, they enter a fashion store browsing, but with the aim of finding garments suitable for them (not idle curiously browsing). Being led by the purpose of possession, consumers’ engagement towards the store environment is principally for understanding the arrangement of the store in order to *efficiently* find the right area and the target product, which is a circumspect kind of interaction with the environment and people. As a result, the degree of engagement towards the store environment (servicescape) itself relatively low, which leads to the situation that consumers’ dwelling time spent on meandering in a fashion store environment (e.g. to enjoy its physical and technological dimensions) is comparatively short. At this rate, digital displays/signs can increase the level of efficiency for consumers to quickly locate the target product, especially in spacious / department stores. For example, participant Q pointed out the unclear signs in Nike Town London, as contrast to the clear signs in the Liberty London, plus participant J also found the signs in the Liberty London are clear but in Selfridges she is too confused to find the right department. Also, participant K mentioned that the unclear signs could result in the increased need of staff in terms of asking for directions at this stage.

By comparison, when patronising a store for the sake of simply seeing, consumers are likely to be 'arrested' by the tangible and intangible dimensions of the store environment since the way of seeing and interacting is an idle curious kind. As a result, the dwelling time browsing in a fashion store can be comparatively long and hence the degree of the engagement towards the store environment is relatively high. Predictably, at the first stage the in-store technological element plays a pivotal role since store-owned technology such as digital signage and displays can increase aesthetic attractiveness and cast vivid and dynamic store atmosphere. It is evidenced by the data of this study in which participants describe the moment of being attracted to the inner design of stores as well as the visual merchandising when entering the stores on London high street (e.g. Nike Town and Lululemon), which is in alignment with previous studies on atmospheric in the digital age (e.g. [Kent et al., 2015](#); [Pantano, 2016](#); [Savastano et al., 2019](#)).

The second stage of in-store Intentionality exclusive of the purpose of possession indicates that after understanding the store environment and locating the target product, consumers begin to interact with the product circumspectly. To reiterate, consumers' Intentionality can also be directed towards a product at the first stage when they are simply browsing the store, but after it, they are satisfied. However, in everyday life it is common for consumers to be attracted by the product when browsing and then gain a desire to buy. When the purpose changes from *simply seeing* a product to *possessing* a product, the way of in-store interaction changes as well. At this moment, consumers' primary need is of explicitly knowing the product they intend to purchase, which implies two dimensions. The first one is that consumers care about, if using the participant's term, the 'practical questions' such as the fabric as well as the availability of a certain size and colour. The second one is that consumers care about the questions in relation to their personal life such as whether this product is suitable for their daily dress style, or whether it meets the dress code of a special occasion in the further and so forth. At this stage, staff play a pivotal role because of their knowledge (experience), intuition and empathy that technology is unable to provide.

In terms of the enquiry belonging to the first dimension, according to the findings of this study and the essence of the ways of in-store interacting discussed previously, consumers tend to view staff as a tool by asking them directly, because for participants it is the most *effective and efficient* way to accomplish the task of having information of the product they want at that moment. For this facet, retailers must have their staff well-trained who should acquire sufficient knowledge of the products they sell. It seems to be a truism but worth highlighting due to the circumstance that a number of staff working in high-street brands are part-timers. Alternatively, consumers also search product information via their own smart devices as 'second best', which is in alignment with earlier studies on in-store use of smart phones (e.g. [Verhoef et al., 2015](#); [Fuentes et al., 2017](#); [Grewal et al., 2018](#); [Bèzes, 2019](#)). In addition, it is possible that staff's poor knowledge of the product can be one of the factor driven consumers to rely more on their devices to solve enquiries. Notably, the combination of staff and smart devices is conducive to a better result, because participants particularly express positive feelings when staff use technology (e.g. iPads) to provide information about the target product for them due to enhanced efficiency and convenience.

In terms of the enquiry belonging to the second dimension, Gen Z consumers' choice between known people (their friends and parents) and unknown people (staff) depends on the categories of the product as discussed previously. For this kind of enquiry, the ideal situation is when staff's intuition, empathy, knowledge and training combines with technology and AI, by which better outcomes can be produced ([Huang and Rust, 2018](#); [Barile et al., 2021](#)). An everyday instance (also see section 2.4.3) can be that a member of staff in a shoe shop with own knowledge and experience in the area uses technology and AI to quickly check the inventory and obtain the information on

a certain style or series of boots, which is not made available for all consumers. After efficiently obtaining the information, the staff synthesises it with his/her own field knowledge on boots and styling as well as the information of the consumer, by which personalised recommendations for the consumer can be provided.

The third stage of in-store Intentionality indicates that when it comes to checkout, in-store technology (e.g. a self-checkout terminal) has been widely accepted in non-luxury stores by Gen Z consumers. Here in-store technology serves as a means to avoid unnecessary interactions with staff and to accomplish the checkout task more quickly, conveniently and, again, efficiently, which is in alignment with earlier studies (e.g. Pantano and Viassone, 2014). Alternatively, in the omnichannel age consumers can choose 'browsing offline and ordering online' via personal devices after making the choice with the consideration on the coming events and personal style. For example, a consumer might need to attend another event after patronising a fashion store and hence decides to order online. However, in luxury stores even for Gen Z consumers, staff are still needed since human-based service has been viewed as part of shopping merit. In addition, as discussed previously, the theoretical way of interacting can occur regardless of what purposes and stages of in-store Intentionality. Note that in Figure 7 the use of technology is restricted to the in-store period only excluding the periods before and after consumers' store visit.

6.1.2 The primary source of gratification when patronising a fashion store

It can be seen from Figure 7 that the purpose of possession leads to consumers' circumspect interaction and hence highlights efficiency, while the purpose of seeing leads to idle curiosity and hence highlights attraction and enjoyment. The former is a more utilitarian kind, while the latter is, relatively, a hedonic kind. The reason to hold reservations about the hedonic aspect is based on Gen Z's everyday store-related experience as well as the interpretation in this study from an existential perspective, which have been presented in detail previously. Here, it must be underscored that, admittedly, the participants do enjoy the moment they are meandering around the high street and browsing the products in fashion stores, especially accompanied by known people (e.g. their friends and parents) referring to the scenes they described in the interviews in Chapter 4. However, the source of their enjoyment is not very much from the so-called hedonic experience provided by a physical fashion store. The reason is that, as discussed in section 5.2.2, under the mode of idle curiosity, consumers in fact do not really care about what they see and what are displayed in fashion stores. Rather, they simply need something to 'occupy' them at that moment they are meandering around.

What is the primary source of the enjoyment when consumers are browsing in a fashion store or strolling around the high street (with their friends and parents) in their everyday life is *the leisure time* they have after four or five dull weekdays, either to spend on themselves alone, or to spend with their friends and family. And when browsing in a fashion store, if the consumers happen to find some fashion products that are 'handy' (suitable to be worn on some occasions) in their life world, plus a friendly, patient staff, it would be a great delight that augments the overall enjoyment, yet it is secondary. This is the essence of the hedonic aspect of experience in a fashion store, wherein the satisfaction starts off in consumers' life world (inter-temporal), being associated with things and people at the present (intra-temporal), and finally ends up in consumers' life world (inter-temporal) again. And it is subtly reflected in the participants' descriptions that in general they feel more willing to interact with staff when in an amiable mood, mentioned by participant J as well as when patronising fashion stores together with others (especially friends). Namely, companionship can even water down the prevailed negative feelings towards staff and even in-store technology. This notion is evidenced by the following descriptions from the participants in

this study: K's description that *"I am more inclined to talk to staff with the attendance of my friends comparing to when I visit a store on my own. Yet, this normally happens when the staff approach me first"*; Q's description that *"In terms of the interactive screen, I would say that I am more willing to try it if my friend(s) being with me together when visiting fashion stores. If (going to a store) alone, I will avoid it as I feel uncomfortable to play (the software) in front of other people"*; W's descriptions that *"I often go to fashion stores with my friends. I do not like visiting stores on my own"* and that *"If I go with my friends, it will have less impact because with my friends, my bad mood can be watered down and my good mood can be augmented. If I go alone, the impact of a bad mood can be bigger"*.

As a result, this refreshed, human(consumer)-centric perspective provides further managerial implication. In terms of the environmental aspect, what consumers really care about during their daily visits to fashion stores is what seems 'too' trivial for brands and retailers. For example, at the first stage of consumers' in-store Intentionality being directed towards store environment itself, clear signs should be provided in spacious stores and department stores. When trying on garments in the in-store Intentionality stage being directed towards products, easy access to mirrors and fitting rooms is essential for consumers. Yet, based on the researcher's own observation, this is not easy especially in a spacious store, which is also expressed by the participants shown in the previous section. In addition, W particularly expresses the wish of 'easy-access to in-store facilities' in the interview. This kind of trivial aspect consists in consumers' everyday experiences of visits to fashion stores and eventually accumulates their overall shopping experience of a fashion brand. Thus, brands and retailers need to be aware of the import of the mundane, trivial aspect. Also, according to W's description, the environmental aspect (the design or visual merchandising) is not the primal reason for her to enter a fashion store. Rather, it is the product that she is interested in, with the thinking that it may be useful in the future in her life world, that makes her patronise the store. Thus, although the environmental aspect of a fashion store is important, its influence should still be counted as secondary as interpreted in the preceding passage. It is both the products (which might be useful for consumers in the further) and the store environment (whose visual design can reinforce the interest in the product), that are together forming a fashion store environment in an everyday life context.

In terms of the human aspect, staff need to be at least familiar with the products they sell and well-trained to use in-store smart devices to check product information for consumers. Specific to the interpersonal encounter with consumers, at the first stage of consumers' in-store Intentionality being directed towards store environment itself, staff make eye contact with consumers and smile when consumers enter and browsing, without starting small talk. This can cast a sense to consumers that the staff is ready for assistance but not intrusive, a very positive feeling for Gen Z participants in this study. To reduce consumers' feeling of being manipulated, it is not recommended to staff to start small talk or introducing seasonal products. However, when consumers approach staff to consult as they shifts their Intentionality to the products, the principle is not to ignore the consumer, even if the staff is occupied by another task at the moment. During the consulting process, the key for the staff is to be patient and friendly, along with their professional knowledge and intuition/empathy to solve consumers' enquiries. At the stage of checkout, if human-based service is chosen, staff should be aware of consumers' interests at this stage, it is, again, efficiency/convenience, rather than small talk. Additionally, things can be somewhat different in luxury fashion stores where human-based service (the packing process at the final stage) is part of the merit of shopping in such a store discussed previously.

In terms of the technological aspect, at the first stage of consumers' in-store Intentionality being directed towards store environment itself, digital signage, displays (e.g. big screens showing

fashion catwalks, shows, models and celebrities) are conducive to an enhanced store atmosphere and welcomed by the participants, which fulfils consumers' desire to be 'arrested' when meandering around. At the stage of Intentionality of checkout, all Gen Z participants in this study are quite accustomed to self-checkout terminals. It results from that consumers value the efficiency this kind of technology is able to provide. Thus, brands and retailers should invest in the said kinds of technology at the two stages and have them well-maintained in order to minimise the failures of technology. Regarding the stage of consumers in-store Intentionality being directed towards products entailing the interacting process with staff, it is personal smart devices that play a pivotal role including consumer-owned smart phones and staff-owned smart devices such as IPAD. Gen Z consumers' preference for personal, portable devices over in-store terminals is evidenced in this study and in alignment with earlier studies ([Fuentes et al., 2017](#); [Bèzes, 2019](#)), which has been interpreted previously in terms of the familiarity of own devices and frictionless software operation as well as the ways of consumers' interaction. It implies that rather than using in-store terminals as the main option to link the physical world to the digital world, fashion brands and retailers should think more of how to have personal devices linked to the store environment (and the in-store technology) as a bridge to achieve the physical and digital combined experience that is more consumer-controlled ([Bèzes, 2019](#)).

For instance, a digital map for spacious fashion stores and department stores can be useful since unclear in-store signs make it harder to locate the right section in a spacious stores reported by the participants in this study. Yet, the downside of mobile Apps is also quite obvious since consumers probably cannot be bothered to install extra Apps that they use less frequently. As such, QR codes can be a way to have the store linked to personal smart devices but bypassing the action of installation since it can be scanned by using the phone camera without installing other Apps. The content of QR codes can be linked to pages on websites for various purposes such as providing additional product information, showing advertising clips and offering product personalisation, plus being linked to social media platforms for consumer community engagement.

Thus far, the managerial implication on store environment and frontline staff has been presented through the combination of a Heideggerian perspective and data from the Gen Z participants in this study. However, the participants' preference for personal, portable devices over in-store interactive terminals calls for further attention. According to their narratives in Chapter 4 and Figure 7, it is evident that in-store interactive technology is missing throughout the stages of consumers' in-store Intentionality. Although past years have witnessed an inflow of fashion brands' investment in it, this study does not advocate this kind of in-store technology. The following section will elaborate on this emerged phenomenon by first exploring the theoretical underpinning of this practice that fashion brands attempt to insert interactive technology into physical stores and then interpreting this phenomenon through an existential perspective and presenting the reason why interactive technology is missing in Gen Z consumers' everyday visits to fashion stores, which forms the theoretical implication of this study.

6.2 Theoretical Implications

The framework of the integration of human-based and technological-based service in a fashion store (Figure 7) indicates the absence of in-store interactive technology throughout the stages of Gen Z consumers in-store Intentionality. This type of technology, from interactive terminals as an earlier version to interactive screens that are slimmer on the wall or counter as an advanced version, is what fashion retailers have been endeavouring to introduce to, and insert into, the process of consumers' in-store shopping ([Pantano and Vannucci, 2019](#); [Kim, 2021](#)) with the belief that the

combination of physical and (store provided) digital experiences is an innovative way to enhance consumer in-store experience (Alexander and Alvarado, 2017; Siregar and Kent, 2019) and value (Ziaie et al., 2021). However, according to the data provided by Gen Z consumers in this study, in-store interactive technology is missing in their everyday experience in relation to patronising fashion stores. This is in alignment with Alexander and Kent (2022)'s longitudinal study revealing that many consumers find in-store interactive technology “trivial” and “invisible”, whereby the authors point out that “*the friction of the integration of technology, people and environments*” still exists, which hampers technology readiness (pp.7). Based on the findings of this current study, it turns out to be that in-store interactive technology is barely ‘wanted’ and ‘needed’ in the participants’ daily visits to fashion stores. As such, the problem of technology readiness pointed out in Alexander and Kent (2022), in fact, chiefly refers to the interactive kind of technology, because the digital signage and displays; the smart devices owned by both consumers and staff; the self-checkout terminals are adopted very well by Gen Z consumers at the corresponding stages of in-store Intentionality. Accordingly, the dissonance lies in the store owned, interactive technology which for consumers, can provide both utilitarian experience (e.g. the check of product availability) and hedonic experience (e.g. playfulness and fun) (Alexander and Kent, 2022), while for fashion retailers, it can gain economic efficiency (e.g. reduction of staff and management costs), attract adverse publicity and improve brand image (Bèzes, 2019).

6.2.1 The friction on technology readiness

Nevertheless, if rethinking this phenomenon from a Heideggerian perspective, Gen Z consumers’ dismissal of in-store interactive technology is doomed to take place in their everyday visits to fashion stores. Referring to Figure 6 in the chapter of Findings, when consumers patronise a fashion store for the sake of possession, the utilitarian aspect of the interactive technology is supposed to play a part during the second stage of the in-store Intentionality, it is, the selecting process, wherein intra-temporal enquires about a product likely arise. As discussed previously, at this moment, Gen Z consumers’ expectation is to obtain the information *efficiently* and *conveniently* and hence staff is likely to become their first choice since they expect staff to be versed in the products they sell in their workplace. Alternatively, personal smart devices (e.g. smart phones) can be second-best attributed to the familiar, personalised interface with frictionless software operation. By comparison, there are various downsides of using store-owned interactive technology such as software lagging and failures, difficulty to use, the cost of time learning how to use and the unwillingness to be seen by other consumers, mentioned by both the participants in the current and earlier studies (Giebelhausen et al., 2014; Siregar and Kent, 2019; Alexander and Kent, 2022). Additionally, as a communal interactive terminal/screen, hygienic concern arises due to the Covid-19 pandemic mentioned by participant K in this study. These factors have made the utilitarian aspect of the technology less effective and efficient. Consequently, it is the ineffectiveness and inefficientness that impedes consumers’ utilitarian use of in-store interactive technology, because ‘utilitarian use’ is grounded in the mode of circumspect discovery of things. One exception can be that the interactive terminal/screen is able to provide the functions and experiences unable to be gained via personal devices, for instance, personalisation and co-design in a fashion store, pointed out by Bèzes (2019). Yet, this scenario presupposes consumers’ purpose of personalising a product in the first place and then the possibility that their personalising cannot be done elsewhere.

Then what about the hedonic use? The hedonic experience gained by the in-store interactive technology seems to perfectly meet the mode of comportment: idle curiosity, in which consumers are to be attracted by something new and exciting in a fashion store at the first stage of in-store Intentionality in Figure 6/7. Yet, the answer is likely still a negative one. As explicitly discussed in

sub-section 5.2.2, this 'greed for the new' does not *stay with* things, but constantly jump off "*from the new to the still newer*" (King, 2001). Therefore, idle-curiously-seeing is superficial and merely reaches the surface of things. Conversely, the in-store interactive technology requires consumers to 'stay with' it, because of the time and effort a consumer makes to learn how to operate it. Even if for some versions of the terminals that have the extreme intuitiveness of the interface and ease-of-use, to obtain the hedonic experience, consumers need to spend time to play and interact with the installed software, plus the learning process on how to play a specific software in a public place. This learning process is even likely to require a consumer to shift the mode of their comportment from idle-curiously-seeing to theoretical-looking-at. This can be the very reason why participants in this study express their reluctance to utilise in-store interactive technology, who describe the feeling of being bothered to study how to operate it. Thus, the 'not-to-stay' characteristic of idle curiosity discussed in sub-section 5.2.2, alongside the aforementioned factors such as the cost of learning, unwillingness to be seen and hygienic concern of a communal terminal/screen, have made little room for the in-store interactive technology in consumers in-store shopping process.

Thus far, this section has explored the friction on technology readiness in fashion retailing, principally caused by the insertion of interactive technology in consumers in-store shopping. It is disconnected from Gen Z consumers in-store shopping process, which conflicts with some earlier studies (e.g. Pantano and Gandini, 2017a; Pantano and Gandini, 2017b). This conflict echoes the distinction between what the retailer would like consumers to experience and what the consumer actually experiences in this omnichannel age (Bèzes, 2019). The comparison between the current study and an earlier study (Siregar and Kent, 2019) clearly shows the different results. Whilst Siregar and Kent (2019)'s study empirically proves that consumers do gain rich interactive experiences through the moment of interacting with the in-store terminal, in the current study Gen Z participants express their apathy towards this kind of technology, alongside Alexander and Kent (2022)'s study. In this study, participants' attitude towards interactive terminals contrasts sharply with their attitude towards self-checkout terminals since the latter technically has become Gen Z participants' first choice if available, while the former is indeed largely "*invisible*" (Alexander and Kent, 2022). So what does the term 'invisible' mean in consumer in-store shopping process? It means that the in-store interactive technology is ruled out by consumers' *circumspect for-sight* that is formed in consumers' own life world involving the 'awaiting-remembering-making-things-appear' discussed in section 5.2.1. This is associated with the concept of consumer 'ordinary experience' discussed by Heinonen and Lipkin (2023), which will be returned to in section 6.3.

6.2.2 The hedonic shopping experience

The disconnection of in-store interactive technology from consumer in-store shopping process demands further investigation. The idea of fashion retailers' investing in interactive technology is driven by the conception of smart retailing via store digitalisation (Roy et al., 2017), which serves as a means of omnichannel strategy for retailers as well as an omnichannel experience for consumers. The core of an omnichannel experience lies in its fluidity and seamlessness (Rigby, 2011; Hure et al., 2017; Shen et al., 2018) achieved by full integration of channels with enhanced interactions (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018; Grewal et al., 2020). It can be inferred that the ultimate goal of the fluid, seamless omnichannel shopping experience results from a refined shopping process which incorporates accessing, comparing, choosing, purchasing and returning (Beck and Rygl, 2015) making the entire shopping journey more *efficient*. Therefore, the gist of an omnichannel shopping experience is about efficiency and convenience as this is what the smart retailing and omnichannel strategy initially aim for. Additionally, the pursuit of efficiency and convenience during consumers' (in-store) shopping process is well evidenced in this study through participants' various descriptions on their everyday store-related experience such as webrooming

and choosing several preferred garments before patronising a physical store to inspect the real products and making the final decision; consulting staff about product information and availability; choosing self-checkout terminals for purchasing and so forth. All of these are chiefly guided by the principle of pursuing *convenience and efficiency* in a fashion store. This aspect is already reflected in the utilitarian usage of the interactive technology such as checking product information and availability. However, as the data shows, Gen Z consumers tend to let the staff deal with these intra-temporal enquires or using personal smart devices due to, again, efficiency and convenience. Note that for the utilitarian aspect, in-store interactive technology could have been more convenient before than it is now due to the development of the software, system, and physical design of personal smart devices that have outperformed in-store interactive terminals/screens nowadays.

The preceding passage highlights the initial goal of the smart retailing and omnichannel strategy, whose aim is for enhanced efficiency and convenience. Nevertheless, according to the literature in relation to omnichannel retailing, the introduction of in-store interactive technology and other cutting-edge technologies draws marketing scholars' much attention to aspects such as immersion and playfulness (e.g. [Savastano et al. 2019](#); [Siregar and Kent, 2019](#); [Guan, 2022](#); [Pangarkar, et al., 2022](#); [Bonfanti et al., 2023](#)). They are more exhilarating compared to the aspect of everyday efficiency/convenience. And to some extent, the participants (or even the researcher) found this facet of shopping too obvious and trivial to talk about during the interviews in this study that centres on daily in-store shopping experiences. In line with Heidegger's thinking, this somewhat mirrors Dasein's forgetfulness. The forgetfulness of the very essence of one's shopping-related activities, especially for marketing scholars and retailers, can be the root of the obstacle on in-store interactive technology, because what has been under marketing scholars' spotlight is the *hedonic experience* supposed to be gained in a purposefully built physical store. Especially under the tendency of store digitalisation, the interactive technology is supposed to fulfil the task better than any other environmental element.

The theoretical underpinning of this hedonic-oriented perspective on consumer experience can be traced back to [Holbrook and Hirschman's \(1982\)](#)'s work on hedonic and utilitarian value of consumption and later the semantic work on the typology of 'experiential value' ([Holbrook, 1999](#)). Yet, due to its complexities, the typology itself does not lead to a wave of hedonic-oriented research, with only few studies applying it ([Gallarza et al., 2017](#)). Rather, it is the combination of the conceptions 'experiential value' ([Holbrook, 1999](#)) and 'experience economy' ([Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 2011; Pine, 2023](#)) that trigger the hedonic orientation in both marketing scholars and practitioners. Exponents of experience economy hold the viewpoint that firms should focus on designing an attractive and memorable experience which is the main selling point other than tangible goods. This idea of selling a designed experience can be applied in various situations such as using a product, a series of service and a particular place like a theme park and a trip during holidays.

Because a fashion store is designed by the fashion brand as a man-made commercial place, it seems to perfectly match the conception 'experience economy'. By taking it for granted, marketing scholars and practitioners endeavour to design an attractive and memorable in-store shopping experience for consumers to consume. Retrospectively speaking, shopping in a brick-and-mortar store has long been viewed as a kind of entertainment with rich hedonic shopping motivations ([Jones, 1999](#); [Arnold and Reynolds, 2003](#); [Guido, 2006](#); [Borges et al., 2010](#); [Blázquez, 2014](#)). As a result, marketing researchers coin the term 'leisure shopping' differentiating it from 'utilitarian shopping' ([McCarville et al., 2013](#)). More recently, combination of 'experiential value'

and 'experience economy' lead to the ideation of 'experiential retailing' (Alexander, 2019), for which the burgeoning technology can best assist. Accordingly, the cause of the aforementioned hedonic-oriented perspective in omnichannel strategy is actually the integration of two conceptions: experiential retailing and smart retailing. The latter is described as a physically and digitally combined space forming an experiential context in which technologies help facilitate both 'efficient' and 'exciting' experiences (Pantano and Naccarato, 2010), which delivers omnichannel experience (Bèzes, 2019). This 'experiential smart retailing' view (or 'experiential retailing with technological element') has guided an increasing number of studies focusing on the 'exciting' experience, especially after the introduction of interactive technology such as interactive terminals/screens and AR/VR (Guan, 2022).

Nonetheless, findings from few studies, more specifically, from the studies focusing on everyday shopping experience, show a contrasting results. For example, apart from the aforementioned study (Alexander and Kent, 2022) discovering that interactive technology is mainly invisible in the participants' life, Triantafillidou et al. (2017)'s empirical study, albeit quantitative, centres on leisure shopping experience in fashion retail stores, but the result suggests that, to the best, only moderate hedonic experience is produced. The respondents in that study express very little sense of escapism, learning and adventure during their daily visits to fashion stores. The authors of that study admit that fashion shoppers are "*more goal-oriented*" and "*desire to pursue their shopping tasks fast and precisely*" (pp. 1050). In addition, the hedonic aspect of experience is also insignificant in earlier ordinary-life-oriented, store-related studies (e.g. Johnstone, 2012; Pecoraro and Uusitalo, 2014).

Through the perspective of Heidegger and also based on Figure 6 and Figure 7, this study argues that the conceptions 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; 2011; Pine, 2023) and hedonic value (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holbrook, 1999) should not be (overly) emphasised in the fashion retail sector where researchers and retailers tend to have it accentuated. To elaborate, based on the ways of in-store interaction, the preceding discussion has explicitly presented the reason why consumers show apathy towards interactive technology within a fashion store context since this kind of technology is ruled out by consumers' circumspect for-sight. The 'circumspect for-sight' is closely associated with one's purpose formed based on the significance-structure in one's own life world as discussed in previous chapters. According to the participants in this study, the primary purpose of patronising fashion stores in their everyday life is to purchase fashion products that are useful for various occasions and events in the future, followed by another purpose to simply see something in (or around) the store (in order to kill their leisure time). As such, consumers do not patronise fashion stores for the sake of playing in-store interactive technology in order to have fun gained from a digital and physical combined experience provided by the technology. This is what brands and retailers would like consumers to experience. Nevertheless, if they are asked whether they feel pleasure when visiting fashion store in their leisure time, the answer is probably affirmative, alongside previous studies have shown some concepts to reflect it such as leisure shopping and hedonic shopping value discussed in the previous passages. This seems conflicting and to comprehend this phenomenon, time is the crux. Namely, this phenomenon must be interpreted through an inter-temporal view, other than the common intra-temporal mentality.

The essence of the hedonic shopping experience through an inter-temporal worldview has already been pointed out in section 6.1.2 tilted: the primary source of gratification when patronising a fashion store. To reiterate, the primary source of the hedonic shopping experience/value in relation to everyday visits to fashion stores manifests itself in the leisure time consumers can have

after four or five dull weekdays, either to spend on themselves alone, or to spend with their friends and family, for the sake of either relaxing, or enhancing friendship, or building family affection and so forth. This is commonly referred by the participants in this study to their *mood*, e.g. ‘when in a mood to visit fashion stores or in a mood to talk to staff’, according to participants J and W. Even though the current interactional process and feelings in a physical store environment can somewhat alter the overall experience to either positive or negative directions, it can only be counted as a secondary source, not the primary one. As such, the source of the hedonic-oriented experiences and value in relation to fashion stores starts off in consumers’ life world (the mood and attunement in thrownness), being associated with things and people in a fashion store (falling being-with at present), and finally ends up in consumers’ life world (the purpose in forwardness). Thus, it is inappropriate to overly emphasise the hedonic experience and value provided by physical store environment.

What is more, patronising a fashion store differs fundamentally from using a product. When one is using a product, for example, a gaming console, the experience of fun and playfulness can be certainly gained because it is the user’s purpose and the product’s function. In a similar way, when one is visiting theme parks such as Alton Towers or Disney World, the hedonic aspect of the consumption is significant. Nevertheless, a fashion store is not the same case, because consumers’ understanding of a fashion store differs fundamentally from a theme park, a theatre or a game console. They patronise fashion stores primarily for purchasing (and seeing) fashion products either alone or in the company of others. Note that for the latter, due to the significance of companionship for Gen Z consumers, a fashion store has become a social platform where oftentimes they are accompanied by friends or they accompany friends. Whilst the past decade has witnessed the burgeoning technology and its profound influence on human beings’ everyday life, it does not change one’s understanding of a fashion store, even a technology-enabled one. Conversely, with the technological and omnichannel factors, consumers expect to experience an even more convenient and efficient in-store shopping process during their entire shopping journey. In addition, the omnichannel era enables consumers to ‘access’ a fashion brand and products anytime and anywhere via personal smart devices. This can somewhat water down the sense of escapism or entertainment when patronising physical fashion stores, especially for Gen Z consumers who have too many options for entertainment compared to consumers in the analogue era two or three decades ago (e.g. [Jones, 1999](#); [Arnold and Reynolds, 2003](#)).

In terms of technology and AI, since the essence of Daseins’ existence never changes, consumers essentially view them as a tool for themselves to (better) fulfil purposes, no matter whether the purpose is to entertain, or to complete a difficult task. As scholars in technology-related disciplines have already pointed out that technology is eventually for humanity’s purposes and benefit, who must be better off using it through the combination of human intuition, empathy, technology and AI ([Huang and Rust, 2018](#); [Barile et al., 2021](#)). It can be inferred that one major influence caused by the ongoing development of technology on humanity is associated with the ubiquitous internet, WIFI and smart devices. In the current time when this study is conducted, the ‘social-media-always-at-hand’ in daily life is making the world time at the present even faster and hence more instable, especially for Gen Z who are multitasking with short attention span and receiving overloaded information from hearsay, idle talk and idle curiosity gained by online content such as rumours and gossip without fact-checking. This instability of time catalyses and enhances the *average understanding* of everything including Daseins themselves, which, in turn, catalyses and enhances the falling tendency of everydayness driving humanity more towards inauthenticity.

In closing of this section, the theoretical implication the Heideggerian worldview provides for the

marketing discipline and the fashion retailing sector is that both theorists and practitioners misplace their attention and efforts due to the forgetfulness of the fundamental way of discovery and understanding of things. The application of the concept 'experience economy' as well as the emphasis on the hedonic-oriented shopping experience and value in a fashion store context stray from fashion consumers' actual need in everyday life. Furthermore, what worsens the situation is that not only does this mismatch occur at the theoretical level and the managerial level in which those ideations are implemented in the fashion retailing sector, this mismatch also has its influence on the methodological level in which due to the forgetfulness, marketing researchers have been studied what brands and retailers would like consumers to experience for years and overlook what consumers actually experience in their daily life. This will be elaborated in the following section as the methodological implication.

6.3 Methodological Implications

This section will discuss methodological implications that Heidegger's thinking provides for store-related marketing and consumer research. It starts off with the two kinds of experience - 'ordinary experience' and 'extraordinary experience' - that have appeared in the literature for decades (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Carù and Cova, 2003; Helkkula et al., 2012; Warde. 2015; Both and Steinmann, 2023), with particular emphasis on the relation between each other, an issue recently arisen in Heinonen and Lipkin (2023)'s conceptual review. This recently-recognised issue embodies a question on what kind of experience should be studied when it comes to the conception 'consumer experience' or 'consumption experience'. Through Heidegger's philosophy as an alternative worldview, this section is going to clarify the relation and hence address 'what to study' before 'how to study'. Subsequently, a critique of the application of phenomenology in marketing and consumers disciplines will be presented.

6.3.1 The relation between ordinary experience and extraordinary experience in consumer life world

This sub-section is to provide an alternative view on the relation between 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' experiences as part of the methodological implication. It is driven by the newly-increased amount of attention to the concept of 'ordinary experience' as reviewed in Chapter 2 under the circumstance that the conception 'consumer experience' has been the domain of extraordinary experience, according to the extant review papers (e.g. Helkkula, 2011; Warde. 2015; Lipkin, 2016; Bèzes, 2019; Both and Steinmann, 2023; Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023). Particularly for store-related studies, servicescape theory (Bitner, 1992; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011) has made a major contribution to the extraordinary-experience-oriented research flow due to its compatibility with the mentality of 'designing and providing memorable experience'. Above all, the concept 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Pine and Gilmore; 2011; Pine, 2023) is the leading principle that makes that mentality entrenched deeply, especially when it combines with another concept 'experiential value' (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Holbrook, 1999) as mentioned in the previous section. More recently, Heinonen and Lipkin (2023)'s conceptual study provides an in-depth review about the two kinds of experience and problematises the conventional approach that bears a strong sense of dualism. According to the study, extraordinary experience is characterised as "*something unique, novel and unforgettable*" surprising consumers and connecting with them "*on an emotional level, and stimulates all five senses*" as "*peak (external triggers) and flow (internal triggers) that comprise dimensions such as novelty and hedonism*" (pp. 1723).

In stark contrast to extraordinary experience, the ordinary experience - that should not be counted as a new concept since it is already advocated in Carù & Cova (2003)'s study - fails to obtain much

attention. It is commonly viewed as a routine-like, familiar, yet humdrum experience in one's everyday life (Carù & Cova, 2003; Heinonen et al., 2013; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014). In Heinonen and Lipkin (2023)'s study, the authors develop the "*mechanisms*" of ordinary-consumer-experience followed by six aggregate characteristics as its components and suggest focusing on the "*accumulation, presence, and pertinence of the stimuli from the perspective of everyday life*" (pp. 1731). Besides the fact that ordinary experiences are not marketable as easily as the extraordinary ones, the reason why the concept of ordinary experience is underdeveloped in marketing and consumer realms is because the predominant worldview and corresponding methods in these disciplines do not allow the everyday life experience to exist in the first place. The understanding of both kinds of experience is still principally based on psychology underpinned by rationalism (that is under the umbrella of Cartesianism stated in section 2.1 and section 2.6). This is evidenced by the vocabulary marketing and consumer researchers have been applying in their studies and vocabulary mirrors mentality. To instantiate, these are the most commonly found terms from the citations above such as 'emotional level'; 'stimulate'; 'five senses'; 'peak'; 'external'; 'internal'; 'stimuli' and 'mechanism'.

The consequences of this mentality manifest themselves in two ways. First, for the studied phenomenon, it implies that experiences, both ordinary and extraordinary, are objectively measurable as a machine that is composed of independent components. By disassembling it and studying each component in isolation, "*the essence of its function can be determined*" (Thompson, et al., 1989, pp134) because of the assumption that the components operate the same as they are in unison. It results in that any aspects of it that cannot be measured are viewed as *incidental* to its function (Thompson, et al., 1989). As a result, the phenomenon is reduced to a set of necessary and sufficient properties. For example, the six aggregate characteristics of ordinary experience developed by Heinonen and Lipkin (2023, pp.1730). Predictably, there will be studies examining the relative importance of those characteristics and the measurement of ordinary experience in terms of the types of the context, the offerings, the consumer characteristics and so forth in the near future as a rehash of how extraordinary experience was studied previously.

Second, for the subject who experiences the phenomenon, it implies that the subject is receiving a 'thinglike' treatment, for the subject is viewed as either "*an object banging up against other things located in the world*", or "*a closed private arena of beliefs and representations*", which are "*either too close or too far from the world*" (McMullin, 2013, pp.17). As such, the subject and the phenomenon have always been studying intra-temporally because of a need to experimentally and/or quantify and measure it. Even if the terms such as 'life world' and 'everyday life' have been applied when marketing and consumer scholars attempt to define 'ordinary experience' (see citations above), the worldview behind the definition is still nothing more than the one behind consumer psychology. This intra-temporal mindset lets an inquiry of a phenomenon commence and end in a single dimension of the subject's world, with the aim of quantifying or measuring the studied phenomenon by using whatever quantitative or qualitative approaches.

What is more, this mindset also forms a common logic that the extraordinary kind of experience is designed and provided by the firm, which exists *outside* consumers' everyday life in a *novel* or *unusual* way. Whilst a question about the interplay between the two kinds of experience has arisen by Heinonen and Lipkin (2023), with an intra-temporal mentality, the answer is likely to be that time will wash off the extraordinariness of any firm-provided novel experience and eventually an extraordinary experience becomes ordinary. Therefore, firms have to continuously design and provide the 'out-of-ordinary' experience to cater to consumers who embrace hedonism and escapism in order to survive, because of "*the way human mind works and its never-ending quest for*

the next big thing” (Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023, pp1721) as the desire for “*dopamine, a reward neurotransmitter that gratifies us whenever we encounter novel stimuli*” (Wise & Rompre, 1989 cited by Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023, pp1721).

Nevertheless, if considering the two kinds of experience from Heideggerian worldview, the relation differs markedly. One acquainted with Heidegger’s philosophy would realise that “*the way human mind works and its never-ending quest for the next big thing*” (repeated cited for emphasis), in fact, falls into one of the three modes of Dasein’s comportment, idle curiosity, it is, the most groundless one in which Dasein disowns his/herself whose “*greed for the new*” makes him/her constantly jump off “*from the new to the still newer*” (King, 2001), especially under the conception of *everydayness* as the pivotal attribute of human everyday life (see section 3.3.1 and section 5.1.1 for *everydayness*). Namely, after experiencing something unfamiliar and novel that is counted ‘extraordinary’, Daseins (consumers) are attuned by it, if not forget it, and then seek another ‘extraordinary’ experience to have themselves occupied. Importantly, all of these actual activities and feelings, either ordinary or extraordinary, take place in the single dimension where Daseins factually exist: the present. This is the essence - interpreted from the Heideggerian phenomenological perspective - of the concept ‘extraordinary experience’. Moreover, on the basis of Heidegger, it is, a genuine Dasein (consumer)-centric lens, the relation between the two kinds of experience in marketing and consumer research disciplines, in fact, turns out to be problematic.

To elaborate, the first problem is that even the so-called ‘extraordinary’ experience and the corresponding activities actually take place in consumers everyday life, other than the logic that “*the ordinary customer experience is important by its existence in everyday life*” (Heinonen and Lipkin, 2023, pp. 1721). It is as if the ‘extraordinary’ kind of experience and the corresponding activities do not exist in consumers’ everyday life and if it was true, how it is supposed to be experienced? A different logic should be that whatever kinds of experience must be lived through by consumers in their everyday life in order to actually experience them. And as explained in the previous passage, it is exactly the so-called extraordinary experience that largely mirrors the very characteristic of *everydayness* of consumers’ ordinary life. Thus, both of the two kinds of experience are incorporated into consumers’ *lived experiences*. Additionally, according to previous methodological papers in the realm of phenomenology, the definition of lived experience, as discussed in section 3.4.3, is a combination of the noun ‘experience’ and the verb ‘experiencing’ (the sensory process) in English, which is covered by the erosion of everyday *forgetfulness* and *taken-for-grantedness* (Van Manen, 2017; Frechette et al, 2020). Based on Figure 6 in the chapter of Findings, this study defines the conception ‘lived experience’ as *a retrospective experience (of something/someone), which bears the attribute of everydayness and incorporates the experiencing process, the feelings, the outcomes and the attuned understanding*. As such, it can be seen that the conception ‘lived experience’ is more holistic and inclusive, which already incorporates the outcome-based and the interaction-based facets that are the two main approaches to study consumer experience (Helkkula, 2011; Lipkin, 2016) reviewed in section 2.1.

The second problem is that the kind of ‘extraordinary’ experience - that marketing and consumer researchers gravitate towards - turns out not to be extraordinary at all attributed to the forgetfulness and attunement that everyday life exerts on consumers. Again, with a consumer-centric lens, what is true extraordinary for consumers should be what is meaningful for themselves and this must be formed according to the individual significance-structure in their life world. As such, it is questionable whether both the extraordinary experience and the ordinary experience can be measured by some components and characteristics of the mechanisms that extant studies are keen to developed. Ironically, if interpreting the relation between the two kinds of experience

from a phenomenological perspective, this answer would be the very antithesis of that answer discussed based on an intra-temporal worldview in the previous passages that time will eventually turn any extraordinary experience into the ordinary one. As the comparison, the phenomenological interplay between the two kinds of experience is that eventually, it should be some ordinary lived-through experiences that turn out to be quite extraordinary (Van, 2017) after the erosion of everydayness is washed off.

To instantiate, in the context of this study the extraordinariness can be gleaned from the most salient scenes in the participants' life. In terms of the participants' horizon of their own lived experience and understanding, by describing the scenes during the interviews Y and Q recognises what kind of staff-based service they truly want and how their need and experiences of staff vary under different circumstances in their life. Similarly, the phenomenological interview makes J aware of the role of friends in her everyday visit to fashion stores and the purchase of fashion items, along with other participants' realisation of the aspects that are otherwise covered by everydayness. And when the participants' horizon of their understanding meet the researcher's horizon of understanding, insight can be formed such as the meaning of a good or bad staff-based service to them (particularly referring to layer 3 in Figure 6), the primary source of satisfaction when Gen Z consumers visit fashion stores (particularly referring to section 6.1.2), the crucialness of authentic-oriented treatment (even a touch) that staff exert on Gen Z participants (discussed throughout previous sections) and so forth as the fusion of horizons of the participants and the researcher mentioned in section 3.6.1.

Thus far, drawn on Heidegger's philosophy, this section has discussed the essence of 'extraordinary experience' that has been studying in marketing and consumer research disciplines where most of the studied extraordinary experiences, if not all, fall into an intra-temporal mode of comportment (idle curiosity). In line with this intra-temporal perspective, the relation and interplay between extraordinary experience and ordinary experience have also been clarified. Subsequently, as a comparison this section has also illuminated the relation and interplay between the two kinds of experience through an inter-temporal perspective as a human-centric angle, with the emphasis that both the extraordinary or the ordinary take place in consumers' everyday life and should be incorporated into consumers' lived experiences. Lived experience means an experience that a consumer has lived through in his/her everyday life, which must be a naturally gained experience, other than experimentally. Thus, having addressed what to study, the next sub-section will centre on how to study.

6.3.2 Natural settings as the precondition of consumer 'ordinary' experience

Since lived experience is de facto a naturally-gained experience (of someone or something) in one's everyday life, now the question becomes how to locate consumers' everyday experience (of a store or a product or an event) that is natural in their life world. This might not be difficult to fathom when talking about the everyday experiences of using a product since there have already been several conceptual academic papers without the reference to Heidegger's philosophy highlighting that emphasis should be placed on the experience gained by the use of products in subjects' own daily life contexts, whereby the design of the product can be improved (Battarbee, 2003; Forlizzi and Battarbee, 2004) and the value can be better understood (Vargo and Lusch, 2008; Vargo et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the matter of naturally-gained, everyday experience can be particularly obscure when it comes to store-related consumer research, because all the (experimental) studies know that the research subjects need to be in the studied store environment as a built physical world to experience it, however, hardly any study is heedful enough of the simultaneously existed personal life world. For store-related qualitative research, being unaware

of the personal life world can have a consequence that it potentially violates the foundational tenet of qualitative research: the collection of data must be in “*a natural setting*” according to [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#)’s definition of qualitative research.

The interaction-based approach in [Helkkula, \(2011\)](#) and [Lipkin \(2016\)](#) discussed in section 2.1 - which is a favourable approach for studying consumer in-store interactional experience - is particularly susceptible to the aforementioned violation. Having reviewed in section 2.1, in earlier studies behaviourism is dominated by a quantitative approach. Even the servicescape theory itself is adopted from the S-O-R model ([Mehrabian and Russell, 1974](#)). Later, store-related studies tend to adopt cognitive psychology as an updated version of behaviourism to study the processes of consumers’ interaction with a particular thing or under a particular circumstance, which is phrased by marketing and consumer scholars as ‘consumer’s information processing’ or ‘decision making’ ([Thompson, et al., 1989](#); [Pareigis et al., 2012](#)). This approach focuses on consumers’ interactive process in a limited period of time within the store environment. Ethnography accompanied by follow-up interviews is a common set of methods for data collection since it is believed that field observations allow observing *actual behaviour* ([Elliott and Janke-Elliott, 2003](#)) and interviews ensure participants *enough freedom* to express their experiences ([Creswell and Poth, 2018](#)), which is deemed more advanced compared to the previous quantitative approach via questionnaires.

However, the *actual behaviour* and *enough freedom* seem plausible, because the interaction-based approach is de facto a protocol analysis (or prototyping study) that is often applied in the realm of technology design (e.g. [Forlizzi and Battarbee, 2004](#); [McCarthy and Wright, 2004](#); [Hassenzahl and Tractinsky, 2006](#); [Wright et al., 2018](#)). And regardless of whatever postulate (rationalism, positivism, empiricism, behaviourism, cognitive psychology or the protocol analysis), they are all under the umbrella of Cartesianism ([Thompson, et al., 1989](#)), which bears a mechanistic view on reality, a dualistic view on human-beings, a predictive view on research logic and a componential view on research strategy, summarised from [Thompson, et al. \(1989\)](#). More specific to human-beings, Cartesianism views humanity as a kind of substance - either an object situating amongst other things, or an enclosed entity with an organ named brain that can process information ([McMullin, 2013](#)) as matter substance and thinking substance. Consequently, under this mentality, the actual behaviour observed from field observations is not actual and the enough freedom ensured by interviews is not enough since the personal life world is sealed. (In fact, even questionnaires would have several open questions in the end as some freedom for the participants).

One may argue that many studies applied the interaction-based approach actually take into account personal factors. Indeed, even the original atmospherics theory and servicescape theory underpinned by behaviourism considered personal factors by stating that the perceived environment may vary depending on individuals ([Kotler, 1973](#); [Bitner, 1992](#)). However, *personal factors* differ from *personal life world* significantly in terms of the influential scope, which is already reflected in the terms: one is merely a factor, while the other is the whole world. And this mirrors the very distinction between Cartesianism and Heideggerian existentialism. For Cartesianism, a phenomenon can be measured, in which the personal factor (the individual facet) is merely viewed as one kind of factors that cannot be measured and hence *incidental* to the function of the phenomenon. By comparison, for Heideggerian existentialism, it is Dasein (the consumer) who actually experiences and contributes to the phenomenon, which not only takes place in the physical world in the present as the measurable dimension (e.g. servicescape), but also entails the unmeasurable, untheoretical dimensions (the life world). More importantly, the unmeasurable, untheoretical dimensions prevail over the measurable one, because, as repeatedly stressed in Chapter 3/4/5 and also shown in figure 6, consumers’ interaction with things and others in the

present (a measurable fashion store/servicescape as the physical world) and the interactional experience are primarily orientated according to the significance-structure in their life world⁹.

Thus, it has become clear that, without a change in philosophical assumptions, the presupposition - that consumers' actual interaction and experience in a store environment are accessible simply by changing the research approach from quantitative to qualitative - is highly questionable. In other words, it is debatable that whether the store environment can be counted as a natural setting at all if participants are invited to a chosen store where the in-store interaction and experience are under investigation without consideration of the personal world, namely in what way the store fits into participants' life where the in-store interaction is conducted and the in-store experience is gained in an everyday basis. Consequently, the setting turns out to be more experimental, leading to that the findings and implications of those research have potentially developed based on the unnatural, extraordinary kind of experiences. In the omnichannel age, the consequence becomes more palpable as [Both and Steinmann \(2023\)](#) point out that there is a considerable "*need for research to delve into customers' actual, lived experiences within omnichannel retail contexts*" (pp. 459), alongside [Heinonen and Lipkin \(2023\)](#) who call for more empirical studies on consumer ordinary experience in everyday life and [Bèzes \(2019\)](#)'s reminder on the difference between what brands would like consumers to experience and what consumers actually experience as well as [Roggeveen and Rosengren \(2022\)](#)'s call for a human focus over customer experience.

To collect qualified natural experience, the crux is how to 'let it be' in a natural setting by avoiding preset situations. An (interactional) experience gained within a particular period of time in a chosen store environment is more likely to be an unnatural experience gained in an unnatural setting due to the lack of *everyday life context*. Thus, without a change in worldview, this seems quite paradoxical for store-related research. The natural experience of something (e.g. interactive technology or a physical store) can only be located in consumers' everyday use of it. What does it mean by 'everyday use of it' and how to 'let it be'? This can only be achieved by taking into account the purpose of using a product or patronising a store since purposes are formed in consumers' own life world, which is the principle of this study stated at the beginning: placing consumers in a fashion store, while the life world remains. It is to ensure that the studied experience within the servicescape is formed based on the practical engagement orientated by the significance-structure in consumers' own life world as repeatedly highlighted previously. In other words, the interaction and experience are *for the sake of participants' themselves (their life)*, other than *for the sake of this or that research project*. And the former is what the participants have lived through as the conception 'lived experience' in Phenomenology.

As mentioned in section 6.2, few extant studies that do not adhere to Heideggerian phenomenology still manage to collect the natural kind of store-related experience, albeit inadvertently. For example, [Pecoraro and Uusitalo \(2014\)](#) and [Triantafyllidou et al. \(2017\)](#) apply an on-site approach for the recruitment of participants, observations, questionnaires and interviews. This approach ensures that the answers are from the respondents who patronise the chosen stores spontaneously in their daily life. [Alexander and Kent \(2022\)](#) conduct a 5-years longitudinal study in which participants talk about store-related experiences in their everyday life, alongside an earlier store-related study conducted by [Johnstone \(2012\)](#) in which participants are asked to photograph stores that they visit regularly in daily life and talk about the experience. Unsurprisingly findings interpreted from an everyday perspective often conflict with the findings in prototyping-like studies (see [Triantafyllidou et al., 2017](#); [Alexander and Kent, 2022](#)), plus the

⁹ Here echoing the footnote in section 3.4.4 pp54.

disconnection of interactive technology from consumer in-store shopping process found in this current Heideggerian phenomenological study.

Detailed discussion on how to apply phenomenology to address consumers' natural experience (of fashion stores) has been presented in chapter 3. As additional insights into the application of phenomenology, in terms of collecting subjects' everyday experience, observation can be a complementary data collection method to phenomenological interviews as long as the observational context is counted as *the nearest everyday world* of the subject. For example, a study focusing on staff in fashion store can include observations in the store since it is the everyday workplace of the subject in the same way as some phenomenological studies in the clinical discipline focusing on nurses' lived working experience in which on-site observations are conducted (Frechette et al., 2020). Above all, phenomenological interviews should still be the primary method for data collection in phenomenological research due to their essential attributes, which has been explained in section 3.5.3. In terms of the interpretation, the researcher's subjectivity and background knowledge can form the upside to the research because, as pointed out in Chapter 3, the fusion of horizons of the researcher's and the participants' knowledge is conducive, if not essential, to 'decoding' complex phenomena (Emiliussen et al., 2021). However, it needs to be emphasised that phenomenological research itself bears "*an atheoretical nature*" (Pollio et al., 1997, see section 3.6.2) so that the question is how to balance the two principles. Taking the current study as an example, the smart servicescape framework developed in section 2.3.4 delineating the dimensions of store environment can be viewed as one of the meta-assumptions being held by the researcher. Yet, any specific preconceptions must be precluded. For instance, when a participant describes a day visiting Nike Town London, in such a technology-enabled fashion store the hedonic-oriented experiential value as a hypothesis must be recognised and abandoned. As Thompson, et al. (1989) reminded, the researcher must "*attempt to grasp, rather than impose, meanings emerging from the dialogue*" (pp. 140). One useful tactic is that interpretation relies on participants' own language as much as possible, although this applies to most if not all qualitative research (see section 3.6.3 step 2 and Chapter 4).

6.3.3 A critique of Heideggerian phenomenology in marketing and consumers disciplines

Having clarified the stance on the issue of natural setting and natural experience, this sub-section serves as an additional critique of the application of phenomenology in marketing and consumers disciplines. First, the attribute of phenomenology is depth and predictably this depth of focus constrains its "*inferential range*" (Larkin et al., 2019). This could be a downside when the breadth of focus is required from marketing and consumer research for generalisation, by which marketing strategies are developed. This is in line with the characteristic of the corresponding research realms and evidenced by the fact that little phenomenological studies exist in marketing and consumer disciplines. However, recently-gained attention on consumers' ordinary experience and sustainable consumption might change this situation, for this study sees the association between the two interests. The adoption of phenomenology in studying consumer everyday life involving everyday consumption experience can bring to the light the mundane use of things with the habitual and routine forms of action. This is able to provide powerful insights into (fashion) sustainability and can also be extended to sociological reflection. However, as already shown in Chapter 3 and also pointed out by phenomenological literature (e.g. Van Manen, 2014; Neubauer et al., 2019; Frechette et al., 2020), a phenomenological study requires the corresponding philosophical assumption to be operative throughout the research project. This can be a challenge for marketing and consumers researchers not acquainted with relevant philosophy.

Second, interviews as the most frequently employed method for all qualitative research

approaches, especially for phenomenology, bears its own downside that the interviewees are not always telling what they do and feel (Elliott and Janke-Elliott, 2003). Despite respondents' doing this on purpose which must be precluded, the essence of it stems from Dasein's (falling tendency towards) inauthentic mode of existence which, in fact, is somewhat inevitable. In other words, it is too easy for a research interview to fall into the style of idle talk, whereby only the superficial feeling and meaning are exchanged as the ambiguity of everydayness that further veiling the phenomenon. Thus, the job of phenomenological interviews is to peel off Dasein's forgetfulness, thereby moving beyond respondents' inauthentic-oriented voices. In this way, the researcher acts as "*an archaeologist brushing away the sand covering an ancient fossil*" (Frechette et al., 2020, pp.7). This, in practice, underscores the crucialness of follow-up questions that must be formulated in the course of the conversation with the respondent as a way to probe (alongside nonverbal cues) due to the unstructured nature of phenomenological interviews. Additional methods for data collection can also be considered for phenomenological research as extra help to uncover the studied phenomenon such as personal documents and observation being conducted in *the nearest everyday world* of the subject, pointed out in the previous section. Third, the recruitment of participants can also be a challenge, although a small number is not counted as a limitation in phenomenological research. In theory, there are two basic requirements for the participants in a phenomenological study. One is that participants should have rich experience of the studied phenomenon, while the other is that ideally, they should also be willing to, and more importantly, be able to, describe their rich experience in depth. In practice, sometimes it is not easy to find ideal participants like this and the inarticulate and inauthentic interviewees could lead to insufficient data.

In closing this chapter on implications, the preceding sections have illuminated how Heidegger's thinking serves as an alternative perspective in terms of the practical, theoretical and methodological facets of marketing and consumer research realms. It provides down-to-earth managerial implication, yet being overlooked or forgotten by fashion brands and retailers, which is otherwise pivotal for the formation of consumers positive shopping experience in their everyday life. It also challenges some well-established theories and concepts in marketing and consumer research realms as well as the corresponding research approaches that back them. It is a truism that the notion 'experiential retailing' is inherently hedonic-oriented, which acts as a principle that guides many store-related studies in the digital age. This tendency has methodologically resulted in a number of prototyping-like research where participants are required to use and experience a certain object for the sake of the research project itself and then report their 'user experience'. However, when being located in an individual everyday life context, it presents other challenges¹⁰. This is the pitfall that so far draws little attention of marketing scholars who thus have been studying what they would like to study which is, in fact, unnatural and hence quite 'extraordinary' for the participants in their life world. It therefore perpetuates a vicious cycle in which the more extraordinary-experience-centric studies, the more support in hedonic-oriented experiential value theories. At a practical level, it has been reflected in the assumed undue import of the interactive technology and the hedonic aspect in the fashion retailing sector discerned by the current and earlier studies (Triantafyllidou et al., 2017; Alexander and Kent, 2022). The crux of this situation, pointed out previously, is that marketing researchers tend to forget the basic, everyday

¹⁰ A tacit implication of this point is that there could potentially have broader influence on studies beyond the store-related research stream, e.g. in research studying user experience of a specific product in a life world context (often with a 'meaning-seeking' approach), the product is, however, newly given to the participants for that study. Namely it otherwise does not exist in the participants life world before (and after) that research project.

understanding of a fashion store and technology, who then seek a theoretical possibility of turning a fashion store into a theme-park-like place in order to meet the theories in relation to hedonic aspect of consumption (e.g. escapism and experiential value). This is the very situation reminded by Heidegger that due to everyday forgetfulness, Daseins ignore the basic and fundamental way of discovering and understanding things, thereby more inclining towards a theoretical path.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the lack of research on consumers' relation to staff in the digital age causes obscurity on the position of staff in a technology-enabled store context (Bezes, 2019) which, in turn, worsens the friction between people, technology and environment (Roy et al., 2018; Alexander and Kent, 2022). Not only does this study investigate Gen Z consumers' interpersonal interaction and experience with staff, but also endeavours to portray direction of the workings on the co-existing human-based and technological-based service in fashion retailing sector. Echoing the research objectives outlined at the beginning in sub-section 1.1, on the basis of Heidegger's existential philosophy this study views 'consumers' visit to a fashion store' as 'consumer-being-in-a-fashion-store'. It implies the acknowledgement of both the physical and personal life world, thereby incorporating consumers' being-with-others and being-with-things, which are reflected by consumers' corresponding comportment as the ways of their in-store interaction. The exploration of the intersubjective encounter through a phenomenological perspective results in a sophisticated four-layers, comprehensive framework (Figure 6) illustrating the answers to the research questions about Gen Z's interpersonal experience with staff and its formation in everyday visit to fashion store in the omnichannel age. By enlarging on consumers' being-with-others(staff) and being-with-things, this study reveals the essence of the ways of consumers' in-store interaction, thereby forming an enhanced understanding of consumers' being-in-relation to staff and things in a (smart) servicescape context. This enables possible direction of the integration of human-based service and technological-based service in a technology-enabled fashion store to be portrayed based on an existential perspective. As shown in Figure 7, the absence of interactive technology in Gen Z consumers' in-store shopping process in their daily life indicates that scholars should not assume the undue importance of hedonic-oriented experience and value provided by store-owned interactive technology and even by the store itself. Having discussed, they are secondary sources of consumers' gratification when patronising fashion stores and the primary one is the time itself that consumers spend alone or with others.

The contribution of this research is multiple-fold. In respect of the theoretical aspect, first this study rethinks servicescape theory through an individual-centric, existential perspective, thereby establishing a phenomenological, consumer-centric view in servicescape research stream (Bitner, 1992; Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011; Alexander, 2019; Pizam and Tasci, 2019; Nyrhinen et al., 2022). Second, this study cultivates a smart servicescape framework by referring to health care realm (Kwon et al., 2017; Kang et al., 2019) and the conceptualisation of interactive platform (Ramaswamy and Ozcanb, 2018) to present an updated version in the field of (fashion) retailing in the digital age. Third, this study addresses the interpersonal interaction (Gen Z consumer and staff) within a technology-enabled fashion store as a smart servicescape context, which fills in an underdeveloped research area (Kim and Kim, 2012; Immonen et al., 2017; Bolton et al., 2018; Nyrhinen et al., 2022). Forth, armed with a human-centric, existential perspective, this study complements Ramaswamy and Ozcanb (2018)'s theory by fleshing out one of the key facets: how

on earth different components of the platform are assembled by consumers' interaction. It also complements S-D logic in terms of the phenomenological formation of value (Vargo, 2007; Vargo et al., 2008; Vargo et al., 2023; Jaakkola et al., 2024). Fifth, last but not least, the intersubjective encounter and interpersonal experience that have been explicitly interpreted and discussed in this study are not restricted to consumers and staff in a fashion store context. Shown by Figure 6 and Figure 7, the relation between consumers and staff (intersubjective encounters) as well as the relation between consumers and things (modes of interaction) are capable of being two frameworks for future research within and beyond marketing and consumer disciplines since they are cultivated based on existentialism that is the foundation of human-beings' interactions and experiences.

In respect of the methodological aspect, first this study adopts Heidegger's thinking (Heidegger, 1972) entirely in its interpretation of the studied phenomenon, thereby providing insight into practically organising Heideggerian-worldview-oriented research. Second, this study answers the calls for 'viewing consumers as human' (Roggeveen and Rosengren, 2022) and 'studying what consumers actually experience' in a technology-enabled store environment (Bezès, 2019) in their everyday life contexts (Heinonen and Lipkin, 2022; Both and Steinmann, 2023) by carving out fresh methodology with a Heideggerian-existentialism-imbued interpretive approach differing from the extant IPA one. The uniqueness lies in the integration of the two principles: putting fashion stores back into consumers' life world' as consumers' everyday store-related experience, while the servicescape (physical world) remains where their interaction and experience with staff take place and being explored, by which consumers relations between things and staff within the servicescape dimensions can be seen. This position seems contradictory but being achieved by Heidegger's viewpoint, it is, *a worldly existing subject with own temporality*. Third, to address the research questions, the methodology of this study is innovatory in terms of its philosophical assumption, data collection, data interpretation and the illustration of the findings.

Moreover, the alternative worldview in this study helps better comprehend the friction between people, technology and store environment (Roy et al., 2018; Bezès, 2019; Alexander and Kent, 2022) and hence leads to fresh managerial implication on direction of the integration of human-based and technology-based service in a fashion store, based on which the application of hedonic-oriented, experiential value theories into fashion retailing sector as well as the taken-for-granted notions: 'natural settings' and 'natural experiences' in the area of store-related research are challenged. In addition, through a phenomenological perspective, this study illuminates the two kinds of experience 'ordinary and extraordinary' as well as their relation and interplay as the answer to Heinonen and Lipkin (2023).

7.1 Limitations and Recommendations

The limitation of this study concerns the homogeneity of participants in terms of age, ethnicity, geography, sector, and scale. It results from the characteristic of phenomenology (depth not breadth), the research area of this study (fashion retailing) and the specific consumer group this study explores (Gen Z). Future research could be done with different consumer groups in different cities/countries. The variety of participants might lead to different interactional experiences as the result of the distinctive differences in individuals' life worlds. And Figure 6 - Gen Z's interpersonal experience of staff in technology-enabled fashion stores and its formation - can become a mode or framework for future research investigating 'human (consumer) lived experience (within a certain environment)'. What is more, if thinking through a consumer-centric perspective, the pivotal and overarching recommendation is that further research should be aware of the matter of 'natural setting' with special care about the design of research. Bearing this in

mind, some well-established areas in marketing and consumers disciplines might find it worthwhile to revisit such as 'consumer experience' and 'consumer/experiential value', especially within a certain environment. In line with this thinking, the inconspicuous facet of consumption needs more attention, particularly referring to fashion items and products. Such research could contribute to a better understanding of consumption and the experience from the under-explored, everyday use of things. For example, since the concepts 'everyday clothes' and 'non-everyday clothes' are discerned from the participants' fashion-related narratives in this study, future research could explore the distinction within a life world context regarding different possibilities they entail for both consumer and firms. This consumer-centric perspective would bring new insight into consumerism.

Finally, at this stage, one may have forgotten the brief mention of Merleau-Ponty's existential-phenomenological psychology in section 3.4.4 that serves as a differentiation between this study and the extant psychological phenomenology research underpinned by Merleau-Ponty's thinking within and outside marketing and consumer realms. Besides those psychology-imbued IPA studies of individuals, a crucial conception belonging to Merleau-Ponty, the lived body, has been introduced to research on 'consumer experience within retail environments' (Yakhlef, 2015). In that conceptual paper, Yakhlef, too, discerns the sweeping issue that extant studies are overly dependent upon "*the theory of mind*", it is, the internal aspects such as affective, sensuous and emotional when it comes to 'human experience within a built environment'. As a solution to conquer this duality, Yakhlef adopts the perspective of 'embodied body movement' suggesting a spatial approach to illuminate the relation between a consumer and a surrounding (retail) environment as reciprocity resulted from body's motility, the extension and retraction of the spatiality of the body.

In contrast, by no means alluding to rightness and wrongness, the current study has demonstrated the relation between consumers and staff as well as things within a surrounding store environment through *a temporal perspective* distinct from Yakhlef (2015)'s spatial one. It is because, for Heidegger, Dasein "*dwells in time more originally than in space*" (King, 2001, pp.293), whereby the phrase 'being-in-the-world' in a non-abbreviated form should be 'being-in-time-along-with-things-and-others-within-the-world'. And the overlooked/forgotten temporal constitution of space results from, again, the 'falling prey' obsessed with an intra-temporal mentality (Heidegger, 1927/2010). Nevertheless, a detailed comparison and discussion on how Heidegger's temporality and Merleau-Ponty's spatiality work in studying human/consumer (in-store) experience (in the digital age) are beyond the scope of this study, yet might be intriguing enough to pique more thought in the future. Thus, this study has the potential to establish a distinctively new strand of research by paving the way with a human(consumer)-centric, non-psychology perspective and a Heideggerian-existentialism-imbued approach for future research in the literature of marketing, consumerism and sociology.

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Appendix

- *An illustration of data collection and interpretation: the case of J*

This interpretation of a single interview of J is presented first as an exemplary to demonstrate the interpretive process in detail that is applied to the rest of the data. A descriptive summary is provided in the end of this case for quick grasp. This single case also acts as 'background information' of the final encompassing presentation as the 'part-to-whole' interpretive technique. J was born in Hongkong (HK) with a British passport. After completing the course of her primary school in HK, her parents sent her to the UK studying at a boarding school and then at university. Normally J would travel back to HK during school holiday time. At the time of interview, J was a 23-years-old forensic scientist residing in London. The interview lasts approximately 76 mins. Since J is not an acquaintance but a completely foreigner for the researcher and a phenomenological interview needs to be in-depth, it is imperative to build rapport with J and gain general background information through the opening part of the interview, which acts as an icebreaker. As a dual-passports holder, J's background drew the researcher's attention and hence became the starting point of the conversation:

I (interviewer): How long have you been resident in the UK?

J: This is the tenth year.

I: So long. I can sense that you are a British passport holder.

J: I was born with a British passport, because my parents already have it. So this is something hereditary.

I: This is the simplest way to become a British, I think. Do your parents live in the UK as well?

J: No. They live in HongKong (HK). I came to the UK during my high school time and then studied in a UK University and now work in the UK.

I: Your Mandarin and Cantonese are excellent. Your parents must have designed a multilingual educational method since you are a child. Amazing.

J: (Laugh), thank you. I think, Chinese language is something that you should not forget.

I: Can you still remember that back to your childhood which language you had firstly learned? Mandarin, Cantonese or English?

J: The first one is Cantonese and then English. Until I went to a HK primary school, I was taught Mandarin there.

This short conversation gives an overall educational and family background of J. It seems to the researcher that as a British, J also embraces the culture of her birthplace to a large extent. What surprised the researcher is how fluent she is in Mandarin. Here some background information needs to be provided that for many HongKongers (HKers), Cantonese is their mother tongue.

Although Mandarin would be taught in HK schools, most of HK youth would be insouciant in the class because they do not need to take the exam at the end. In fact, many HKers learn Mandarin from Taiwan Youtubers and TV dramas as Taiwan is a democratic country whose ideology is relatively close to HKers. The following dialogue tells that during her high school and university years, J often went back to her hometown during summer holidays, especially during COVID-19, which implies her close ties with HK.

I: Great. Have you ever returned to HK during the past 10 years?

J: Yes. Since I studied in a UK boarding school, every summer holiday the school would close. So I would go back to HK every year before my university time. During the summer holiday in my university, I travelled and undertook some part-time jobs so that I barely returned to HK after entering the university. But I was in HK during the summer in 2020 because of the pandemic.

After the opening portion, the researcher used a general question: “Could you tell me how you usually visit fashion stores?” to change the conversational direction to fashion-related topics. This question provides a context for J to talk about her experiences on patronising fashion stores. The dialogue was as follows:

I: Could you tell me how you usually visit fashion stores?

Jess: It depends on my mood and also, I feel difficult to make decisions (when shopping for fashion items). If the propose of my visiting fashion stores is for buying something really, I would normally ask someone to accompany me to go shopping as I need others’ opinions and suggestions. Whereas, if I just want to browse about the new fashion trend and style or buy essentials, I will do it on my own with wearing my headphones to listen to music, which can prevent me from others’ intrusion.

This seemingly highly generalised and summarised response is rather informative, in which several key points need j’s elaboration such as “depends on my mood”; “for buying something”; “just want to browse”; “ask someone to accompany me”; “prevent me from others’ intrusion”. The researcher chased one of them immediately:

I: You said that normally you would ask others to accompany you when truly want to buy a garment. Who would you prefer to be the company?

J: Friends.

I: Could you describe a scene of shopping with friends in HK?

J: I would go shopping with friends at a weekend and normally we eat out first and then shopping. It is a kind of after-lunch activity and after visiting the stores, we would go to cinema and restaurant to have dinner as the closure of the whole relaxing day during a weekend.

I: The night life in HK is fantastic.

J: Yes, it is. But I cannot go back to home too late, so we normally go to the high street in afternoon.

A scene of patronising fashion stores at a weekend in J’s life emerges. It is a mundane, routine-

like activity, not something special, let alone extraordinary. The emphasis of the weekend scene is not even placed at the fashion store. Rather, the whole 'hang-out' event is marked by a pervasive sense of companionship of friends through a series of leisure activities including having lunch and dinner, visiting places such as cinema and stores. A fashion store is merely one of the middle spots and J views it as a "after-lunch activity". Jess later gave another example to restate this theme:

I: So when visiting fashion stores, you try the garment on and let your friends comment on how it is.

J: Indeed. But it is not necessarily the situation that I intend to buy clothes. Visiting fashion stores with friends can also be a spur-of-the-moment-thing. For example, sometimes we plan to visit a gallery or go to the cinema and restaurant and we by-pass a fashion store, being attracted by its window display. In that case, I prefer to head into the store to see and try the garment in the display window. 'I think this one fits you well or not very well', my friends would give their comments on me.

This description seems just to repeat what has been said previously showing how trivial visiting fashion store it would be for J. Yet, the statement that "it is not necessarily the situation that I want to buy clothes" repeatedly reveals a sense of aim, or intention, or purpose. A hang-out event with friends, killing time and relaxing in a fashion store does not necessarily entail the intention to buy. Plus what J said early:

[...] If the propose of my visiting fashion stores is for buying something really, I would normally ask someone to accompany me to go shopping as I need others' opinions and suggestions [...]

For a broadest sense, J categorised her visit to fashion store based on the two intentions: *intention to buy* and *intention not to buy*. In other words, sometimes J and her friends visit fashion stores for the sake of purchasing something really, while the rest time they patronise fashion stores for the sake of relaxing, which can be counted as J's social life with her friends (other than staff). Namely, for J a fashion store is a place (or one of the spots) where her friendship is enhanced, but not the interpersonal relation with the staff. In J's life so far, the in-store staff is largely missing regardless of J's intention to buy or not to buy. By seeking friends' comments on the garments she chose, the role of staff seems to have been replaced. The conversation later unfolded as such:

I: You also told me that you feel hard to make decision when buying fashion products and need some advice.

J: But not the advice from staff (laugh).

I: whose advice?

J: Friends. I think that the main factor may be the trust of my friends' fashion vision. Well...as I am talking to you about this, I find no reason not to trust staff's fashion vision. It sounds a bit contradictory (laugh).

In phenomenological Interviews, it is common that the respondent realises something that has been overlooked in his/her life. Here J expressed a sense of mistrusting staff. The reason why J inclines to her friends rather than staff can be better understood through the part-to-whole hermeneutic circle of the whole interview transcript. What needs more attention at the current interpretive phase is J's intention of patronising fashion stores. The 'for the sake of' in advance

determines what will happen next. The primary aim of the interpretation now is to outline J's in-store Intentionality, because the experience of in-store staff can never be expressed without the store context. Only by seeing through J's in-store Intentionality, her experience and the way to create the experience can be delineated. Thus questions about the store itself are inevitable. Specific to J's visit to fashion stores, the researcher asked:

I: When I mention "visiting physical stores", what comes to your mind?

J: Garments are tidily arranged with a range of different styles available to try. The store is divided into different sections for different products or the same product but different colours. Oh, it can also be many garments in a mess. People crowd into the store. The store is large with several floors and big escalators. Cahiers are always busy and there are always long queues before tills.

When talking about the store itself, what occurs to J is an over-all impression on the store design, the layout and the way the garments are placed. Two aspects that seems particularly salient are the footfall and tidiness of the store. They are reflected by other dialogue when talking about shopping habit, for which J mentioned 'a long queue':

I: Do you buy clothes online more than offline, or the opposite?

J: Well...I feel that I am a bit unusual in terms of shopping fashion stuff. I like to see the real garment in the physical store where I pin down the exact style/colour and then I make the purchase online, because I hate queuing in the store.

I: So the footfall of Nike town is too much for you.

J: Yes, and normally, H&M and Zara are the stores I visit frequently if I need to buy my everyday clothes. So usually there would be a long queue in that kind of store. But speaking of Tommy, there is no queue in the store usually.

When J heads into a fashion store, the footfall in the store gives her an immediate feeling. J is rather sensitive about it since a crowd store is likely to cause negative feeling for her. Other excerpts from the interview about heading into a store:

I: Tell me something about your visit.

J: I think, there were not many staff in Nike Town but many consumers when I headed into the store. My overall feeling on the store is that there is not a clear sign to show the location and floors of different kind of products. Also, the store is big with a crowd of people walking around so you need to make some efforts to find the way by yourself [...] I really like the design of Liberty, especially during Christmas. There was a huge Christmas tree in the central of the store. The signs for each floors are clear. By comparison, I find the design of Selfridges too complicated. I feel, it is hard to find the right department and the floor. What is more, I am personally not a fan of flagship stores. I feel... since it is a flagship store, it is likely to attract many people, maybe too many for me, and the staff are normally busy in flagship store. Therefore, if you really want to buy something, a flagship store may not a good choice. I prefer non-flagship stores due to staff's availability which influences the service quality you receive from the staff.

The excerpt clearly shows that the store environment draws J's attention first. When entering the

Liberty London, she was first attracted by the design of the store environment. After enjoying the unique design, J looked for the sign that could guide her to her target. She prefers the clear sign in the Liberty but felt confused by Selfridges where signs were too complicated. At the same time, the footfall in the store influences her in-store experience. A crowded store immediately casts a negative feeling that she would not receive a good service from the staff. On the other hand, the over-all feeling of a store can also lead to a positive impression on staff as when the researcher asked what come to her mind when mentioning physical fashion store and how is her visit of Levi's:

J: [...] Garments are tidily arranged with a range of different styles available to try. Wait, it can also be many garments in a mess [...] For Levi's, when I headed into the store, a female staff gave me a warm welcome by nicely saying 'hi, what can I get you today?' There are four to five staff in the store. At that moment, some of them were arranging the clothes and there are staff available at the till. They looks very professional in doing their work.

By juxtaposing J's responses of the two questions, it can be seen that when heading into a store, a tidy store environment makes her feel that the staff are professional, whereas a negative feeling on the staff would be cast when the store environment is in a mess. More importantly, the over-all experience of a store environment also manifests J's Intentionality. It is directed to the environmental aspects as a whole when enters a fashion store, in which the experience of staff can be influenced by other aspects of the store environment, e.g. tidiness and mess. Moreover, as demonstrated previously J visits fashion store either for the sake of buying, or for the sake of relaxing and killing time. The following description also shows how the 'for the sake of relaxing' guides J's in-store Intentionality and interaction:

I: So when visiting fashion stores, you try the garment on and let your friends comment on how it is.

J: Indeed. But it is not necessarily the situation that I intend to buy clothes. Visiting fashion stores with friends can also be a spur-of-the-moment-thing. For example, sometimes we plan to visit a gallery or go to the cinema and restaurant and we bypass a fashion store, being attracted by its window display. In that case, I prefer to head into the store to see and try the garment in the display window. 'I think this one fits you well or not very well', my friends would give their comments on me.

I: If a garment is commented by your friends as 'fit you well', will you buy it?

J: Well.... not likely. I am not keen on impulse buying. Before making the decision of purchase, I would consider whether I have already had something similar in my wardrobe; how this garment matches my existing clothes; whether it is simply my desire or a real need etc., lots of things in my mind.

I: Usually, garments in display window are really beautiful.

J: Yes. But oftentimes, they become less attractive after you buy it (laugh).

When J and her friends patronise a fashion store together for the sake of relaxing and killing time, they enjoy the environmental aspect of the store and spending time together on browsing the garments. Even if a garment is so attractive that J cannot help to have a try-on and the approving comments of her friends, impulse buying is unlikely because of J's intention not to buy when heading into the store. The intention, or aim, is pre-established which in turn determines the

possibilities of J's in-store comportment. It also indicates that when visiting a fashion store for the sake of socialising with friends, the possibilities of buying and interacting with in-staff are low. Below there is another example for the interconnection between purposes and possibilities:

J: Well..... I would be attracted by a good store design. For example, when I have no plan to go shopping but by-pass a fashion store with attractive window-display or inner-design, I would normally head into the store. Even if the brand is new to me and I do not want to buy anything, A good design will 'drag' me into the store. This is also a chance to know a brand that I did not know before.

Not always patronising fashion stores with friends, this time J gave a description of going to a fashion store alone. The window display as part of the store environment first drew J's attention and dragged J into the store. J was excited about the upcoming experience of a store and a fashion brand unknown to her. By exploring the store, J would quite enjoy the design and garments on display but did not hold the aim to buy. Another description of visiting Nike Town:

I: Let us back to Nike Town, a flagship with the theme of sports and technology.

J: Well, yes, a flagship. I remember that there is space in the middle of the store where you can customise products and the store is a modern place with streamlined design which attracts me to take a tour of each floors, even though I have no plan to buy anything, but there are many sections with different themes to explore such as running, football, basketball, men, women etc.

I: It seems that in such an environment, you would either browse on you own or having your friends with you browsing together. Regarding the staff, it seems as if they do not even exist.

J: Yes.

Without the intention to buy, the purpose of entering a store becomes merely 'seeing something'. The store environment and displayed garments engaged J, because of which understandably the staff are not needed. At this stage, it can be summarised that J's Intentionality in a fashion store is directed to the store environment including the garments. After enjoying these 'new things', J leaves the store because her purpose has been fulfilled which is the 'for the sake of relaxing and killing time'. The staff are not needed at this stage of J's Intentionality during the process of simply seeing. However, it does not mean J did not have any experience with in-store staff at all. As she revealed:

J: [...] However, on the one hand, for those cases, the purpose of entering the store is to browse and hence I yearn to be alone without the interruption from the staff. When the staff talk to me, I would feel.... a bit embarrassed.

Plus the previous dialogue:

J: [...] Whereas, if I just want to browse about the new fashion trend and style or buy essentials, I will do it on my own with wearing my headphones to listen to music, which can prevent me from others' intrusion.

Now the interpretation moves to the experience with staff when J's visit to fashion stores for the sake of seeing something. Because only after establishing the 'for the sake of what' and J's Intentionality in the store, her experience with staff and how it is created can be interpreted. When

J enters a fashion store without the intention to buy, she yearns to be alone and does not want her 'seeing process' to be interrupted by the staff. If staff approach and talk to her, she feels embarrassed. Embarrassment cannot be counted as a positive experience and more information is needed to see what behind this experience. The researcher used the question "When I mention the staff in the stores, what comes to your mind?" to set the context of staff and J's description unfolded as follows:

I: When I mention 'the in-store staff', what comes to your mind?

J: The staff...I think, the staff in HK stores and the staff in UK stores should be talked separately. In HK, the staff tend to be impersonal and you would be likely left browsing the store alone. By comparison, you would get warmer welcome from UK staff who would say 'hi, how can I assist you today' when you head into the store. They are very friendly making you feel warm and patient listening to your questions and finally answering with enthusiasm.

J gave a general comparison between HK and UK staff and pointed out that the common demeanour of HK staff is being impersonal who normally let consumers browse alone. Yet, UK staff would at least give consumers a warm welcome. J was born in HK so that she seems to have accustomed to the style of HK staff since previously she said she does not want to be interrupted. The following dialogue revealed her thought on staff in a more detailed way:

J: Well, in HK, if you can afford to buy many stuff, they will change their attitude. I mean you will receive good services. If you only spend a little money in the store, they wouldn't care about you [...] It really depends on how much money you spend because they will get commission. Also, the staff would judge you according to your dress style. If you wear cheap clothes, they probably will see you as a person who enters the store only to browse rather than spend money. In this case, the staff will hardly approach you and talk to you. Alternatively, if you wear some upscale stuff, they will assume that you can afford to buy the product in the store. So they serve you with a good attitude.

From this excerpt, a picture of snobbery in a capitalism, consumerism society, in which the concern of 'being looked/talked down' emerges. It seems to J that entering a fashion store can trigger pressure because the staff would judge consumer based on their appearance. To receive a good service, one must dress with caution. The staff would be kinder towards people who dress up spending more money in the store, while snub those who dress down spending little money or browsing in the store only. The staff would not waste their efforts and time to serve a dressing down person since the chance of getting commission is low. Here a sense of insincerity is marked. Although J was talking about her impression on HK staff, this negative impression seems to have been firmly embedded in her view and inevitably impacts her experience about staff in the UK, as the follow-up comment confirmed:

I: This normally happens in the stores of luxury products.

J: Yes.

I: Do you think the staff in the UK luxury store behave in the same way as what you described about HK?

J: I think so. They also get commission, probably.

J mentioned that staff in the UK would give her a warm welcome when she entered a fashion store. What does this feel like? Is this a positive experience? J described as follows:

J: They would give a warm greeting and start talking to you, but maybe too warm. Most of time I visit luxury brand stores just for browsing, not purchasing. So I feel awkward to receive such a warm welcome. It is a waste of their politeness, I think.

Without intention to purchase, J would feel a waste to be given a warm welcome, in which she senses that the purpose of the greeting is to lure her into spending money. At this moment, the consumer-to-staff interaction is not necessarily for her due to J's impression that this kind of interaction is insincere. It shows that the 'for the sake of' determines the possibility in the further since J visits the store is for seeing something new so that the possibility to interact with staff in her world is almost none. J later even directly confirmed this:

J: [...] when I headed into Levi's, the staff said 'Hi' to me and asked 'what can I get you today', but I just replied 'I am just browsing. If I need you, I will let you know.', something like this.

J: Well.....I just feel that if the intention of staff's talk to me is to sell a garment, I would rather not start the conversation at the beginning.

An excerpt from the interview to describe a scene of shopping in a luxury store with friends can be an additional source to disclose what J actually feel when receiving an excellent service while actually not aiming to purchase:

I: Can you recall a time when you buy something in a luxury brand store?

J: Actually, I have never bought a thing in luxury brand stores, but my friend did and I accompanied her to go to the store that time.

I: How was that?

J: It was such an excellent service experience. The staff serve us with great patience as my friend tries a lot of products in the store. Also, the staff provided a meticulous, sincere service who took care of both my friend who actually bought the product and me who did not spend money in the store. For example: we were provided seats and beverages.

I: So at the end your friend made the purchase.

J: Yes. However, I think, it is the staff's meticulous service that causes embarrassment when you just browse in a luxury fashion store. If the service is not that good or the staff do not approach you to talk, you can just leave whenever you finish browsing and do not feel sorry for the staff. Yet with an excellent service, you would feel a kind of inappropriateness to leave without spending money in the store.

Since J graduated from university and started her career not long time ago, her disposable income was not much. She does not go to luxury store frequently but her experience with staff in luxury store came from accompanying her friends shopping in luxury stores. In her description, on the one hand J was very pleased about the meticulous service provided by the staff. On the other hand, it was such a meticulous service that enhanced her feeling of embarrassment under the purpose to browse. Feeling inappropriate to leave without spending money after staff's meticulous

service implies a sense of being gaslighted. J was aware of this and trying hard to avoid it since she would rather not start the conversation at the beginning. One method J applied is:

J: [...] I often wear headphones when go to physical stores alone.

I: So it works in terms of avoiding being invaded by staff?

J: If the staff talk to me, I just need to nod as I am listening to music. So it is effective.

Consequently, under the purpose 'for the sake of simply seeing', staff are not needed throughout the process of browsing in the store. Yet, the greeting moment at the very beginning has become the only moment, by which J's experience with staff is formed. This can be proven by a review of her early description:

I: Tell me something about your visit.

J: I think, there were not many staff in Nike Town but many consumers when I headed into the store. ...I feel that the few existing staff were immersing in their own world and they did not want to approach me and talk to me. For Levi's, when I headed into the store, a female staff gave me a warm welcome by nicely saying 'hi, what can I get you today?' There are four to five staff in the store. At that moment, some of them were arranging the clothes and there are staff available at the till. They looks very professional in doing their work. In terms of Tommy, the staff did not draw my attention honestly. Yet, it is the security guard on the ground floor who smiled at me.

I: So you have an impression of the security guy?

J: Yes.

I: Did you make any purchase in those stores?

J: No. I just browsed.

As already interpreted, when entering a store, J's Intentionality was first directed to the store environment with being engaged by the design of the store. She also gained a first experience of in-store staff at the same time. At this juncture, the staff are part of the store environment. A greeting moment is the first touchpoint wherein staff could make an effect on J when she heads into the store. As J expressed previously, a warm welcome can cast a positive experience, whereas there is a boredom threshold by which a warm welcome could become too warm.

So far, it can be summarized that under the purpose 'for the sake of simply seeing', J's in-store Intentionality is first about the store environmental aspects including the garments on display. Staff, too, are included as one of the store environmental aspects. The greeting moment is the only juncture, by which an interaction is created and forms a feeling on staff. If staff leave J browsing alone, a feeling of impersonalness would be cast. If staff approach J to talk, a feeling of intrusiveness would be cast. A greeting without talking seems to be the most appropriate degree for the interpersonal interaction when J patronises fashion stores without the intention to buy.

The interpretation has presented how J's experience with staff is formed when she visits fashion stores for the sake of seeing. The following interpretation is to show how J's experience with staff is formed under the purpose 'for the sake of purchasing'. When J goes to a fashion store aiming

to buy a garment, more possibilities are opened in advance. A typical one is doing research online. See J's description about what she would normally do if purchasing a garment:

J: [...] I do research before going to the physical store. The process of buy a product for me is, let us say to buy a T-shirt, I would have a look at the full range of T-shirt on a brand's official website first and choose 3-5 products in different styles, which I find suitable for me. I then go to the physical store of the brand to check the details of the garments, for example, to see if the colour is the same as I saw on the website and to feel the fabric, by which I eliminate the options that I don't like from the initial list of the products I chose online. After making the final decision, I would return home to buy the one.

To buy a T-shirt, lots of activities are done before the actual visit to a physical fashion store. The process of gathering information of the garment online is as salient as what to be done in a physical store. The physical store has been partially replaced by the brand's online official website and the online store when it comes to the selecting process. Moreover, after finalised what to buy, J even preferred making the purchase at home via the online store if something not urgent since the preceding interpretation has shown that she could barely tolerate queuing before the till. Yet, although J relies upon the online store for doing research before and making the purchase after, a physical store still played an important role in the middle for her as she needs to see and touch the real garment. But this is not always the case:

I: Do you buy clothes completely online without going to the physical store to see the real product?

J: Well....I would say I have bought many fashion stuff online, including this one I am wearing today which I simply chose and ordered online without visiting the physical stores. It depends on the types of clothes, for example: if a garment is cheap layered T-shirt I am going to wear under a jacket, I probably choose to buy it online.

The type of clothing somewhat determines whether J would go to physical stores. For an everyday garment (e.g. a cheap layered T-shirt), it is unlikely for J to buy in a physical store. The pace of modern life and the convenience of using technology could be the main reason of this shopping habit. J also gave a description that could be another reason of doing research in advance:

I: How was your pervious visit to the Adidas store?

J: Well....I think...the staff in sports stores are normally not a intrusive kind. It makes me feel that because you visit sports stores for products related to your own training, you should know what you want to buy and you should find the product by yourself.

I: So you know what function and which product you want in terms of the sports product?

J: I do not know (laugh). Well.... if I intend to buy a product, I will do a lot of research in advance.

I: So it is a kind of pretending to know?

J: Yes.

I: How do you do research in advance?

J: I google the kind of garment and have a look at the official website to see the range of the garment. Then I read the review from other users. After those activities, I decide what kind of garment I want to buy. Then I go to the physical store to have a look at the real product to see whether it meets my anticipation and whether there is another recommendation from the staff.

The context of this excerpt is to buy a pair of training shoes in an Adidas store. Having entered the store and understanding it as J's Intentionality was first directed to the store environment, wherein for J, the staff is part of the store environment. At this junction, the consumer-to-staff interaction, the greeting moment, was missing as the staff did not approach J first but left her browsing alone. Contrary to the purpose 'for the sake of seeing' where J yearns to be alone, this time, 'being left alone' by staff cast a different feeling towards her as 'not intrusive' that conveys a sense of 'not caring'. J also described her experience of the staff in Nike Town:

J: [...] I feel that the few existing staff were immersing in their own world and they did not want to approach me and talk to me [...]

A sense of being slighted emerged. J admitted that the staff in sport stores were normally not an intrusive kind and seemed unwilling to talk to her as they kept themselves busy. Indeed, due to the size of the store, e.g. Nike Town, consumers were normally left doing self-service. The staff in sports store are also relatively young dressing in a sports style with a relaxing, if not idle, working style chatting to each other during the working hours. Their comportment made J feel not being cared and this kind of treatment must have been experienced many times in J's life as her lived experience so that she have accustomed to it and hence forms a view that self-service is 'a kind of norm' in sports store. What is more, besides purchasing sports shoes and garments, J in fact has been doing self-service all the time. For instance, doing research online before going to the physical store reflects how in-store staff are being replaced by technology in J's life, because in-store staff is no longer the main source of product information. When J's aim is to buy something, she patronises a store with much information she already studied via online searching before.

Moreover, it implies a key distinction of being engaged by a product under the 'for the sake of seeing' and the 'for the sake of purchasing'. Both purposes could lead to J's entering a fashion store with her in-store Intentionality being directed towards the store environment. Then J would be attracted by a garment and even have a try-on under both purposes. Here the distinction lies in the possibilities. When J was appealed by a garment without the intention to possess, she is merely being 'arrested' by the feeling of constantly seeing something new. The 'seeing' itself was the actual occupation at that moment. On the other hand, the purpose to buy opens up a set of possibilities making J look forward. See what J previously stated:

J: [...] I am not keen on impulse buying. Before making the decision my purchase, I would consider whether I have already had something similar in my wardrobe; how this garment matches my existing clothes; whether it is simply my desire or a real need etc., lots of things in my mind.

By thinking of 'how this garment matches my existing clothes', J already projected herself to a context in the future, namely the occasion in the future in which the new garment will be worn, how it will be worn, whom she may meet when wearing the garment and so forth. By comparison, J would not think of that much if her purpose was merely to 'seeing things'. What is more, the occurrence of interacting with staff is also one of the possibilities opened by 'for the sake of

purchasing'. J gave a description of a time she bought a pair of Chelsea boot:

I: [...] You also use your own smartphone to access the online stores of the brand before going to physical stores?

J: Most of time I would do that, but not always. I remember that it was a time when I wanted to buy a pair of Chelsea boot. I had searched for what brand is good in Chelsea boot, browsed the website and chosen one. I then went to the physical store as I wanted to try on. After checking, the staff told me that my preferred product was unavailable in that store and suggested paying a visit to another store nearby. Alternatively, the staff could help me order online in the physical store and let the boot delivered to my home. Since I was in a hurry to have the boot for my work, I accepted the advice from the staff and went to another store.

I: How was your experience in another store?

J: I remember that at that moment, the staff was very busy as there were many consumers asking questions and seemingly, there was only one staff available. So I had to wait for a long time, but the overall experience was still good, because when I was waiting, I felt that the staff did not totally forget me as I was told that 'sorry, I am a bit busy at this moment. I will get back to you as soon as possible', something like acknowledging my existence, albeit busy. So I felt ok with that. Yet, the boot is still unavailable in the second store so eventually the staff helped me order online.

With the purpose 'for the sake of buying a pair of Chelsea boot', J did research online gaining the knowledge of the product. Even the selecting process had been done online before visiting the physical store. Yet, the store is still playing an important role since it is a place wherein J could have a try-on. Unfortunately, J's target product was unavailable in the store so that she had to go to another one. She eventually ordered online in the second physical store due to the availability of the product. Product availability could be a drawback of physical channels compares to online channels, plus the waiting time before the till mentioned by J. As a result, J's shopping preference was an online and offline mixed form, thereby searching online, try-on offline, ordering online and have the product delivered to home. In terms of the interaction with in-store staff, the traditional role of staff who give professional advice was missing. J's purpose to interact with staff is to try on the pair of shoes she already chose before. Moreover, J highlights her feeling of 'being acknowledging'/'being cared' during the waiting time, because the staff did not ignore her when busy. Regarding doing research for more information of the product, the researchers asked a question:

I: How do you do your research? Will you use in-store terminal or interactive screen for entertainment?

J: I would use my smartphone. I barely use in-store terminal. Yet, speaking of the interactive screen for entertainment, it is interesting and I would like to play but still not going to buy anything after it.

The influence of technology on Gen Z consumer's in-store interaction with staff is one of the foci in this study. Some fashion brands provide touch-screens in physical stores to display more information and to build a digital and physical combined shopping experience, however, J is more inclined to her own smartphone. Yet, through J's experience of in-store technology, some clues about the conjunction of human-based and technology-based service in everyday life are

uncovered.

I: Have you ever noticed any technological element in those stores?

J: IPAD. Oftentimes when I ask the staff about the size and availability, they would navigate their IPAD screen to find the answer.

I: So as long as the staff can tell you the information about the size and availability, you feel satisfied.

J: Yes. It is enough.

I: How was your experience when staff answering your questions with IPAD?

J: It was good. IPAD makes the whole process smoother. Before, if you would like to know the availability of a product in a store, the staff probably need to go to the warehouse to check by themselves and I need to wait, which is inconvenient. Armed with the PAD or technology, the information /the answer I need is just serval clicks away. So the process is quicker and convenient.

This description shows that the purpose 'for the sake of purchasing' leads to the possibility for J to interact with in-store staff. Due to research being done in advance, the staff was needed merely to check the availability of a certain product of a certain size/colour. At this point, the portable technology armed by the staff smoothed the process, in which in-store technology plays a role in the interaction between J and staff. Importantly, for J the in-store staff was relegated from their traditional role of 'guides' to mere a machine-like role for checking availability. J later added that:

J: [...] Initially I did research online and already found the target. I then went to the store to see the real product and asked few specific questions. Finally, I returned home and bought online [...] The moment that I need the staff is to find the right size of a chosen product that I have already chosen by myself.

From J' description the role of staff was largely replaced by herself, plus she already said that she loved seeking advice from friends. Thus, it can be understood that her friends can somewhat be counted as a kind of replacement on the role of staff as well. J reveals the feeling which makes her trust friends more than staff:

I: As you said, you would like to have your friends' advice which is important. How about in-store staff's advice? Would you seek it?

J: Barely.... I feel that the frontline staff would have their purposes of selling the product. They are very skilful in luring you to buy their product. Oftentimes, when you try a garment, no matter whether it is truly suitable for you, the staff would give positive comments. For example: if it doesn't look good when you try on, they would say 'it fits you well. You looks very charming in wearing this.' They persuade you to buy, but after you buy it, you don't really feel satisfied after your cool-down at home. So I think, it is really hard to find a salesperson who is honest with consumers. I do like a candid staff.

J's lived experience of seeking staff's advice permeates distrustfulness. She knows well about how staff would use their communicational skill to persuade/lure consumers to spend (more) money. Under this circumstances, J could easily sway and buy something that she would regret later at

home. J seems well aware of this 'tension' and tries hard to avoid it. To be autonomous, she has applied various methods such as doing research online in advance, using in-store technology for information-checking, wearing headphones, using self-check-out, going shopping with friends and so on:

J: [...] if the intention of staff's talk to me is to sell a garment, I would rather not start the conversation at the beginning [...] I often wear headphones when go to physical stores alone.

I: If there is a technological terminal that allows you to check the information you need by yourself, will you use it?

J: Yes. In that case, there is no need to talk to the staff. I am the kind of person who would rather use self-check-out terminal than using human-check-out-service in Tesco (laugh).

Furthermore, not only because of the negative experience of being manipulated which makes J avoid interacting with in-store staff, the British culture 'small talk' was found to be another main cause. J described her experience about self-check-out, which leads to her feeling about 'small talk':

I: What is your experience on using automatic check-out?

J: Well... I find it faster than human-based one, smoother. It is the same feeling in a fashion store. You know in the UK, 'small talk' is a kind of culture which is what I hate deeply (laugh). I think, the purpose of my visiting the store is to either buy something or relax. So why do I need to talk about personal life with the staff? Why do I need to listen to the staff taking about a TV drama? I do not care, OK? (laugh). I just want to buy what I want and leave.

I: Well... you are a British. This is your culture.

J: Yes, but... I think, a 'small talk' is necessary to the people that you meet regularly, such as your colleagues and friends. Yet, I can see no reason why I should have small talk with staff as we probably won't meet again [...] They don't really want to know about your true feeling (laugh) and They ask (how are you) because of politeness.

Serval points need to be elaborated regarding this excerpt. Because of the social norm, J needs to treat the unknown people she meets in everyday life with politeness and vice versa. Small talk is common in the UK, which likely takes place at the beginning of the direct interaction between she and the staff in fashion stores. The content of small talk is usually about everyday trivia, which makes J feel unnecessary and a waste of time. For J the purpose of small talk should have been to enhance the ties with her friends, colleagues or any other acquaintances she know already. Yet, the in-store staff in J's opinion are complete strangers whom she would probably never meet again after her store visit and hence she could see no reason to make small talk with the staff. Consequently, to reduce the contact with staff during her purchasing process, J preferred using self-check-out technology. For J, the process would be faster and smoother without human-contact. It echoes the preceding interpretation that in-staff were relegated to mere a machine-like role being objectified only for certain purposes during J's store visit.

What is more, the sentence that 'I just want to buy what I want and leave' indicates the third stage of J's intentionality under the 'for the sake of purchasing', which is 'pay and leave'. J's Intentionality shifted from 'being directed towards the store environment', to 'being directed towards the product' and finally being directed towards 'paying and leaving'. It can be seen that when under the purpose of purchasing, the possibility on the direct interaction with the staff is obviously higher compared to the purpose of seeing. In the former, all three stages can be the touchpoint of human-based service, while in the latter, only at the greeting moment a direct interactive experience with staff can be possibly formed. As interpreted previously, being engaged with a product under the purpose 'for the sake of seeing' differs fundamentally from being engaged with a product under the purpose 'for the sake of purchasing'. The purpose of purchasing opens up further possibilities to interact with staff. After chosen the product, J's Intentionality is directed to 'paying and leaving'. At this stage, because she endeavours to avoid making 'small talk' and queuing before the till, she prefers either using the self-check-out terminal, or placing an online order. Consequently, little interactive experience with staff can be formed. J expressed her experience at the 'paying and leaving' stage:

I: [...] It sounds that you don't have the desire to buy the preferred garment immediately in the store, do you? You have the patience to wait for the delivery?

J: Well, it is because there is always a long queue in front of the till in the fashion store I normally visit. I feel frustrated when queuing in such a long line, such a waste of my time. Also, sometimes I have my plan to go to other places so don't want to carry bags, because of which, I would return home to order online. Yet, admittedly if something urgent, I will buy it in the physical store.

I: It even takes longer to get what you want than queuing and purchasing in the store.

J: it is not only about the waiting time. With online shopping at home, I can avoid queuing with a crowd for a long time in a store. I mean that 'avoiding a crowd' is equally or more important for me. I would rather spend time at home or do whatever except for queuing with many people. Furthermore, the door-to-door delivery is convenient.

So far, the interpretation has presented how J's experience with staff is formed by delineating the three-stages in-store Intentionality. It discloses that J actually does not need staff that much since most time she do self-service when patronising fashion products. Nevertheless, J does not completely turn down staff, although she believes most staff insincere:

J: [...] So I think, it is really hard to find a salesperson who is honest with consumers. I do like a candid staff.

The researcher immediately asked this follow-up question:

I: Have you ever encountered a candid staff?

The dialogues was as follows:

J: Yes, in HK.

I: Could you describe the moment and your experience on meeting a candid staff in a fashion store?

J: I remember that it was a day I went to a suit store with my parents as I were preparing for an interview and needed to dress in a formal way. When browsing in the store, a suit was appealed to both my mom and I so that we chose it with a paired shirt and trousers. I tried it on and my mom's comment was quite positive. She liked it. At this moment, the salesperson approached us and said 'this one is good, but for you it makes you look a bit older. Within your budget, there are other options in our store. You can try them on and make comparisons here. Do not rush to make the decision'. It was like one-to-one service.

I: how long did you stay in the store?

J: Maybe more than two hours. I feel that the staff was really nice. Patiently explained everything and answered our questions. Also, I think, luckily we were the only three consumers in the store at that moment. If there were other consumers, perhaps, the staff wouldn't be that patient.

I: Did the staff's advice entail the price?

J: During our conversation, the staff asked my budget and recommended some suits within my budget.

I: So you do need staff in terms of the professional advice.

J: Indeed. It must be professional advice. I do not like those staff who always give me positive comments like 'you look well in that suit'. They are not sincere, only luring.

J described a scene years ago as an exception of her overall negative experience with staff. It was an experience of a candid staff, which is salient in her life since she remembered the scene vividly. On that day, J went to a suit store with a clear purpose of purchasing a suit. This purpose also became a means to achieve other purposes in the near future such as attending a job interview and getting the job and so on. So when browsing the suits in the store, J was not only for 'seeing things' but constantly projecting herself forward to the future such as the occasion she will be wearing the suit and how to pair it with her owned fashion stuff on that day. This was the first time a suit is needed in J's life and a good suit is not cheap so that she was accompanied by her parents who gave advice and funding. It is also because J has no self-confidence in terms of her knowledge on suit. After J and her parents chose a suit, a staff kindly gave an opposite opinion and then patiently showed other options on style according to J's budget. During this one-to-one service, the opposite opinion and the recommended style within her budget make J feel this is a sincere staff, who think of her, rather than own commission. It also shows that J in fact needs staff but only for professional advice. In the case of purchasing a suit in a relatively high-end suit store, the role of staff returned to a conventional role. Since J already said that she feels difficult to make decision when shopping for garments due to lack of self-confidence on fashion so that she would love seeking advice from someone else. The researcher asked a follow-up question based on her description of the experience on buying a suit:

I: Would you listen to your friends' advice when buying a formal suit?

J: No (laugh). I would listen to the staff. I think, the point is that I would listen to whoever can give me professional advice. For buying a suit, I trust the in-store staff who have the professional knowledge. Speaking of my everyday clothes, for

example, in Uniqlo, I do not think I need the staff. My friends' advice is good enough for me.

I: Do you feel that the advice given by your friends is really important in your decision-making process?

J: Emmmm.... not the defining advice but important. It is one of the factor I would consider, because I have no self-confidence on having my clothes paired with each other well.

This conversation reveals a distinct distinction between shopping for everyday clothes and shopping for a suit. Obviously, the latter is more unfamiliar, more formal and expensive for her age. It therefore leads to two different communicative forms with the staff in the suit store and the stores J visited regularly for everyday clothes. For everyday clothes, as interpreted previously, the staff was largely relegated to a machine-like kind for checking the availability of certain colour and size, because the role of staff was largely replaced by J herself by research being done before patronising the store as well as her friends whom J trust more than the staff:

I: What happen if you go to physical store to buy clothes alone?

J: Normally it would end up buying nothing (laugh). Alternatively, I would go to physical stores to try on and pin down the size and then return home and ask my friends.

I: Even for those non-professional, everyday clothes?

J: Well.... Yes. I can make the decision by myself, but the process can be very difficult and slow. I think I have got used to asking friends, trusting themselves more than myself (laugh).

Finally, what J mentioned at the very beginning of the interview should not be overlooked. To review:

I: Could you tell me how you usually visit fashion stores?

J: It depends on my mood [...]

J briefly mentioned 'depending on my mood' but the conversation then shifted to another direction. The researcher asked Jess to talk more about 'the mood' in the follow-up interview. The dialogue unfolded as follows:

I: Could you talk more about "depending on my mood" when answer the question: how do you usually visit fashion stores?

J: I feel that when I am in a good mood. I can accept more interactions. Otherwise, with a bad mood, I yearn to be alone when visiting fashion stores.

I: It seems to me that your definition of 'bad mood' is related to the willingness of interacting with others, or it influences your willingness of interacting with others. It is not exactly meaning a bad mood.

J: Kind of. My 'bad mood' doesn't mean a depressive level of emotion. I think, more accurately, it means my 'social energy', high or low. Well... I would say, when my social energy is high, the interaction with staff (e.g. a conversation or small talk) is likely to occur, namely If the staff is a bit intrusive, I can tolerate it more.

I: Is there a moment when you are in a good mood, and you chat with the staff proactively?

J: I only remember once I were in a good mood and a staff approached me and talked with me. I feel that she was nice so I responded and chatted with her.

I: Have you ever started a small talk with in-store staff first in your life?

J: No.

What exactly the phrase 'depending on my mood' implies? J did not talk more about the meaning of the phrase, nor the way her good/bad mood is formed. Rather, her description is more about the outcome of her good/bad mood, which links to her social energy. With a good mood J was opener towards other people, while a bad mood reduces her willingness to interact and being less tolerant of others in terms of the demeanour. Here if the interpretation is based on a 'part-to-whole' manner referring other respondents, the mood in the context of this research and Gen Z's life can be defined as *an overall quality of their recent personal life at the moment when patronising a fashion store*. This represents one's throwtness, by which J find herself already being-in-the-world. Mood mirrors attunement which unceasingly influences one about how things and others appear in the world, it is, one's understanding. Taking J's experience as an example: in good mood normally she would feel the staff nice and friendly and hence more likely to interact with them, even in the form of small talk that is otherwise what she dislikes. However, in bad mood the interaction would be unlikely to occur since J would be less tolerant and feel staff intrusive. As such, an experience, from positive to negative, of the staff at each stage of J's in-store Intentionality is largely tuned by moods, alongside the environment can also somewhat influence her experiences with staff. Thus, the whole picture begins to emerge that the forwardness (for the sake of) in advance determines the possibilities of J's in-store comportment, which in turn affects her experience with staff. Her throwtness influence how she understands the surroundings as well as things and others within it. The surrounding environment and people are what J is entangled with at present when experience is being formed. This structure will be elucidated and shown diagrammatically in the following section.

- *Descriptive Summary*

A detailed interpretation of the interview with J has been presented. After the icebreaker to soften the atmosphere and build rapport with the interviewee, several general questions were asked to set the context of the study. Beginning with the description of patronising fashion stores, the conversation covered multiple scenes of being-in-fashion-stores in J's everyday life including patronising fashion store alone, with friends, with parents, buying a pair of sports shoes, buying a pair of Chelsea boots and buying a suit. The conversation also uncovers how J visits fashion stores and how she purchases fashion products in her everyday life in terms of both 'everyday' and 'non-everyday' clothing. For her, what can be counted as 'non-everyday' clothing is a formal suit for job interview. By referring to other interviews, a formal dress for the university graduation ceremony are also repeatedly mentioned by other interviewees. Through the part-to-whole

interpretive circle, the cusp of 'everyday clothes' and 'non-everyday clothes' for Gen Z can be drawn according to the seriousness of the event a fashion product is used for. This will be across-explained the chapter of findings. By recollecting these scenes, J's experience with staff as well as its formation are disclosed. To reiterate, one of the pivotal aspects of the interpretation in this study is to seek the respondent's in-store Intentionality through the narrative of lived experience that contains the description of related comportment and experience. By seeking the directedness of engagement, how the interpersonal experience is formed becomes clear. Thus, based on in-store Intentionality, participants' experience of staff can be better seen.

Apropos of J's in-store Intentionality, it is primarily affected by the purpose of patronising fashion stores, which can be categorised into two scenarios: 'for the sake of seeing' and 'for the sake of purchasing'. For the first scenario, J's in-store Intentionality is directed to the store environment first and then the fashion products on display, under which the greeting moment turns out to be the main touchpoint of human-based service, in which J's experience oscillates and varies according to staff demeanour such as impersonalness and intrusiveness, warmth and embarrassment, professionalness and unprofessionalness. For the second scenario 'for the sake of purchasing', the in-store Intentionality is directed to the store environment first, then the fashion products on display too, but finally being directed to 'pay and leave'. Although the product on display engages J under whatever scenarios, the two situations are fundamentally different. The 'for the sake of purchasing' makes J project herself forward to the future and opens more possibilities compared to the 'for the sake of seeing' including the occurrence of the interaction with staff. As a result, human-based service is more likely to be triggered throughout the three stages of Intentionality. Under the 'for the sake of purchasing', J's experience with staff oscillates and varies involving trustfulness and distrustfulness, being lured and being autonomous, efficiency and inefficiency. In addition, the environmental aspect too plays a role in J's interpersonal experience of staff, albeit in a very subtle way. For example, the condition of a fashion store, tidy or messy, leads to the feeling of professionalness and unprofessionalness, namely consumers already understand the staff as a part of the store and the brand.

The interpretation on the experience of staff in this single case also implies that for J, a large part of the role of staff has been replaced by technology, friends, parents and herself. The technological aspect in most times interferes with her interaction with staff such as doing research via smart devices, wear headphones when browsing, using self-check-out terminal, placing an order online. As a result, J has been (willingly) doing self-service throughout her shopping journey where in-store staff are heavily objectified relegating to a machine-like role merely for checking availability of certain sizes and colours. Besides the rapid development of technology these days, there are three underlying factors removing human-based service from Gen Z consumers' everyday life. First, the feeling of being manipulated by staff repels J who prefers a more candid, sincere kind of human-based interaction and advice. Second, J pursues more personalised information, thereby doing research by herself as well as seeking advice from her friends and parents who know about herself far more than staff do. Third, the companionship of friends is a significant element when it comes to everyday visits to fashion stores in J's life. Additionally, mood formed in her everyday life, can be quite influential in interactive experience with staff. Above all, by reading and interpreting J's transcript as a whole, one of leading factors that turns staff into a machine-like role is the impression of staff that J mentioned at the beginning of the interview. This is a pre-occupied feeling and can be established by both J's own lived experience and the experience from others. Putting it in Heidegger's terminology, the latter is hearsay composed by the '*they*', which will be elaborated in the chapter of findings and the chapter of discussion.

The richness of the experience with staff varies individually. For example, since having accustomed to online and offline mixed shopping style with less tolerance of queuing and more use of self-check-out terminals, it is evident that J would have less experience with staff at the stage of 'pay and leave' compared to one who uses human-based checkout service more frequently. Therefore, the final demonstration of Gen Z' experience with staff will be based on the findings gleaned from all the five interviews through a circular process moving from the single case to all as a whole. The interpretation of each single case is for a better and holistic understanding of Gen Z's experiences of in-store staff and its formation, which in turn could help better understand each single case.