Revitalizing Department Store Shopping Value and In-store Experiences: A Case Study on Debenhams and Selfridges

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Abstract

Traditional department stores have been struggling to attract customers for several years. Many retail stores have closed in recent years, even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The reinvention of in-store shopping value and experience is imperative to attract customers and reinvigorate retail business. The purpose of this study was to discover which in-store components can improve customer experiences and loyalty while also identifying dissatisfaction issues in consumer experiences in department stores. The data was collected from two consumer groups—luxury department store (Selfridges) customers and mid-market department store (Debenhams) customers—to identify the types of value and experiences they seek most often. The findings showed that to enhance their store patronage, Debenhams should reposition their brand image in a way that allows customers to connect with their self-image and lifestyle by improving efficiency and convenience and prioritizing the utilitarian and social value types. By contrast, Selfridges should enhance their store atmosphere, visual merchandising and sensory experiences by maximizing slow retailing experiences and emphasizing the aspirational self-concept image for symbolic and hedonic value. This research uncovered the existence of numerous overlapping value dimensions, each of which contributed to the enhancement of the others. Several young customers expressed their support for ecologically responsible, cost-effective second-hand luxury products. Instead of focusing merely on conventional value dimensions, department retailers should determine how environmental and ethical objectives can be fulfilled. This study explained how department stores can craft their in-store environments to appeal to their customers' preferred value types to ensure success in a competitive market.

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I. Introduction

Department stores, which commonly offer a variety of curated inspirational products and services under one roof, are now under threat by the large assortment of e-tailing businesses (Donnelly, Gee, & Silva, 2020). As the Covid-19 pandemic swept the globe, more than 1,100 fashion retail stores disappeared throughout the UK in 2020, the worst downturn in history (Butler, 2021). To secure the future of physical retail stores, it is now essential for them to adopt new methods unique to their attributes, including the commodification of experience, and find ways of relating their approaches to their customers' values. Rintamäki, Kanto, Kuusela, & Spence (2006) assert that retailers must deliver consumer value to survive today's dynamic and competitive market environments, and a way in which retailers can foster this value is by catering to the customers' values – the things they hold dear.

It is commonplace to agree that types of consumer value are wide-ranging and contribute substantially to our understanding of purchasing behaviour and consumer intentions. Babin, Darden & Griffin (1994), for instance, grouped consumer shopping value into hedonic or utilitarian constructs. Utilitarian-oriented shopping is concerned with the practical nature of consumption (e.g., shopping convenience, availability and quality of the product, and the best price; Lee & Ko, 2021). Hedonic-oriented shoppers expect enjoyable shopping experiences, playfulness and experiential consumption. Playing good music, diffusing pleasing scents, designing a shop layout that allows shoppers to travel seamlessly through the store, or offering a customer rest zone all enhance the "hedonic" experience (Calvo-Porral & Lévy-Mangin, 2021).

This classification of customer value types into either hedonic or utilitarian categories has become an evident theme throughout the literature (e.g., Babin et al., 1994; Calvo-Porral & Lévy-Mangin, 2021; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Lee & Ko, 2021; Yoon & Park, 2018). However, there have been limited investigations into the wide range of customer motivations behind shopping. Past studies (e.g., Davis & Hodges, 2012; Rintamäki et al., 2006) argue that this classification into hedonic or utilitarian is a restrictive perspective that fails to recognise the complex nature of the subject. They have identified the need to recognise social types of customer value as an independent division. However, their work challenges the category of symbolic types of customer value that Boksberger and Melsen (2011) acknowledge as being intrinsic to customer value. Despite each of these theories, research is lacking on a holistic understanding of customer value and the deterrent factors to purchasing goods from department stores. Not only would such research afford a deeper theoretical understanding of the complex notion of value, but it would also increase the utility of such a study on a practical level, as it would allow for an application of further customer segmentation to tailor store experiences and target sets of customer value types to a more precise degree.

The department store embodies a long history of pioneering the retail market as we know it today. It serves as the focus of the present study due to the impact of department stores on the high street, and their physical size and longevity, as well as their status as household names. Grewal and Roggeveen (2020) observe that there has been little empirical academic study on customer responses to different types of merchandise and merchandising decisions, nor much work done on how the retail image formulated by these retailers aided or hindered the creation of a retailer-customer relationship. Moreover, considering this incredibly challenging time for physical stores, it is important to review whether current department stores offer sufficient customer value and investigate future roles for department stores beyond the existing store patronage value types discussed in the literature. This study focuses on how different types of department stores employ their merchandising strategies and identifies crucial value dimensions through which to enhance customer experiences and maximise store loyalty.

The following research questions were underpinned to conduct the overall study: (1) What are the major barriers and dissatisfaction factors that hinder consumers from visiting department stores? (2) What major customer value types and shopping experiences should be improved to enhance customer loyalty to the department store? (3) What are the major motivations and consumer value for shopping at luxury and mid-market department stores? (4) What major retail strategies can be effective for customers from luxury and mid-market department stores? The overall aim of this study was to understand what in-store components are preferable to customers from two department stores that are on different market levels, and in what ways the total in-store environment connects with their core shopping values, leading to increased revisit intention. It also aimed to identify factors that devalue the department stores' products and services in the eyes of the current customer.

This article is organised as follows: First, the key themes of customer value are clarified, and the various techniques utilised to create the in-store customer experience are examined. Second, the study seeks an insight into which in-store experiential components are favoured among customers from two department stores in the UK, Debenhams and Selfridges, and to what degree it will impact their revisit intention. Third, this study proposes a customer value framework based on empirical analysis of consumer attitudes towards a middle-market and luxury department store. Finally, the implications for retailing strategy are discussed, looking at how department stores can increase loyalty by responding to their customers' value. This study comes at an intensely relevant time for department stores as they are experiencing extreme ongoing pressure and challenges, with many recent store closures. The research findings offer an insight into what values were most dominantly held by the customers from each department store, as well as aspects of their preferred in-store experience, and suggestions were made as to what could be changed in enhancing their loyalty to the store.

II. Literature review

1. Consumer Value Concepts

Customers interact with the store ambience, brands, staff, other customers, and product ranges in the physical retail space, and they consciously and unconsciously evaluate the various types of value offered by the products or services during the consumption process (Dalmoro, Isabella, Almeida, & dos Santos Fleck, 2019). Customer value is strongly rooted in economics, with a focus on the concept of total benefits, or getting the most output for a given amount of input (Kim, Lee, & Park, 2014). Holbrook (1999) advocated for the establishment of a typology of customer value and proposed the concept of value as a component of the customer experience. Accordingly, Holbrook defines customer value as the end result of an interactive process between the customer and the product that leads to an outcome based on the individual's "evaluative judgement", delineating customer value as circumstantial and subjective and emphasising the complexity of the idea. Utilitarian value is implicit in the level of efficiency customers attain when shopping, parallel with attributes such as product price, functionality, convenience and accessibility variables (Calvo-Porral & Lévy-Mangin, 2021; Dalmoro et al., 2019; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). By contrast, hedonic value is considered as a component of consumer behaviour that connects to the perceptual sensory experience, and imaginative and emotional factors from people's product or service experience (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Cachero-Martínez and Vázquez-Casielles (2017) observe that customers purchase goods and services to satisfy fundamental emotional experiences and hedonistic desires. As a result, marketing literature encourages marketers to pay more attention to hedonic intake. Hedonic shopping has been proposed in previous studies as the most effective way to preserve bricks-and-mortar retailing (Brito, McGoldrick, & Raut, 2019), a suggestion that is highly relevant to department stores.

Despite hedonic and utilitarian facets of customer values providing an intuitive insight into shopping motivations, these elements do not fully account for the outcomes of consumer choices. A Davis and Hodges (2012) view social value as an independent construct as opposed to a sub-dimension of hedonic value. Social value can be expressed or experienced in regard to consumption patterns via social interaction within the store, social acceptance, and identity or image (Belk, 1982). Social value when shopping are reflected in the customer's need to transmit a certain social image, and thus affiliation with the product represents the ideals held by the user (Hyllegard, Ogle & Dunbar, 2006). The decision to patronise a department store with certain attributes, associations or atmospherics may depend on how the customer wants to be viewed from an external as well as an internal perspective (Erdem, Ben Oumlil, & Tuncalp, 1999), which arises from the social value type of the customer. Erdem et al. found that the image associated with the store was the most important determinant in store patronage motivation, thus highlighting the importance of social value among customers.

This social value type overlaps with symbolic value which has been acknowledged mostly by the luxury consumption research (Shukla & Purani, 2012; Zhang & Zhao, 2019). According to Shukla and Purani (2012), symbolic value has two crucial dimensions: "self-directed" and "other-directed" symbolic aspects. In theoretical studies, status is expressed as the outcome of projecting a "desired self-image and identity" (Richins and Dawson, 1992, p. 304) via symbolic images to convey their status to others. The psychological connection between users' identity and brand images is termed 'self-congruity' (Sirgy, 1982). The perceived store image is commonly positively impacted by the upscale image of retail stores due to self-congruency with consumer imagery of retail stores. When customers locate a luxury brand shop in an area where other consumers share their idealistic self-concept, they rate the luxury brand highly. By contrast, consumers rate a non-luxury brand highly when consumers' self-concept and image are similar to their own (Kumagai & Nagasawa, 2019). A quest for symbolic satisfactions mirror product/service consumption to meet the symbolic needs of consumers, such as self-improvement, social status, group association or ego recognition (Boksberger & Melsen, 2011).

2. In-Store Shopping Experience

The customer's experience with a store's physical surroundings, people, products, and customer-related rules and procedures that are key to developing value perceptions in retailing is known as the in-store experience (Davis & Hodges, 2012). The store experience is essential to enable brands to build consumer loyalty and to increase store patronage (Sahin et al., 2011) and therefore an important tool to be capitalised on within department stores. Retailers are increasingly pursuing sensory marketing techniques that engage consumers' five senses to generate multisensory experiences (Krishna, 2012). In-store customer experiences stimulate sensory enjoyment, resulting in long-term memories that are easily recalled on a subsequent visit (Yoon & Park, 2018). This statement indicates the significance of sensory elements' effects on consumer behaviour and that when stores implement sensory marketing, they can authentically generate customer value and satisfaction more naturally and subconsciously. Findings from Yoon & Park (2018)'s extensive survey research emphasised how department stores had the highest overall level of customer experience and the highest rating regarding sense, feel and act/related experience.

Visual atmospherics are also key among sensory in-store elements, which Kotler (1973) regarded as brightness, colour, size and the shape of the retail space. Chebat and Morrin (2007) looked at the effect of warm or cool colours used in mall décor and whether those effects are driven by affective (relating to mood) or cognitive (relating to product quality) mechanisms. Their results indicated that 'perceptual enhancements were mediated largely by cognitive rather than affective mechanisms' (Chebat & Morrin, 2007, p. 190). Consistent with these findings, Park et al. (2007) found that cognitive methods, such as educational and aesthetic in-store experiences, were more influential in their impact on customer satisfaction and store patronage in comparison to an affective measure, such as escapism and entertainment. Despite this, 'a substantial body of research has established that (in-store elements) can alter moods, and mood changes affect behaviour' (Yalch & Spangenberg, 1990, p. 60), which lends itself to affective responses.

To analyse the customer experience from a holistic viewpoint is to evaluate the entirety of components that comprise the customer experience. For instance, Baker et al. (1992) found that ambient cues (music and lighting) and social cues (friendliness of employees) indirectly shaped consumers' store patronage intentions. Moreover, independent features within the store such as colour (Chebat & Morrin, 2007), music (Bruner, 1990) and ambient scent (Michon et al., 2005) have been found to guide consumer behaviour in store patronage, length of visit and purchase intention. Although these studies provide a powerful and in-depth insight into specific store attributes, this study projects beyond a limited selection of aspects in order to gain a much broader understanding of the multiple elements that compose the entire customer experience.

Practices of holistic consumer experience frameworks have been outlined in previous literature. Terblanche and Boshoff (2006) encapsulated the dimensions of in-store shopping experience. They classified five store experience components: 'personal interaction', 'internal store environment', 'merchandise variety and assortment', 'handling complaints' and 'merchandise value'. Terblanche (2018) further recognised two additional factors, which they named 'customer in-shop emotions' and 'interaction with other customers'. Verhoef et al. (2009) argued that customers' perspectives on one channel (for example, a department store) can be influenced by their experiences with other channels (for example, their social media or websites). Furthermore, price and special offers can influence customer experience. Verhoef et al. (2009) emphasised a holistic store experience. Their classifications of in-store shopping experiences included 'social environment', 'service interface', 'retail atmosphere', 'product assortment', 'price' and 'customer experiences in alternative channels'. In recent years, a simplified model has been proposed by Koronaki & Theodoridis (2020). They categorised three major elements of retail store experience, namely, 'atmospheric elements', 'physical elements' and 'social elements'. Atmospheric elements include 'ambient and non-structural elements, music, decoration, light and any scents used. These intangible elements enhance consumer mood. Physical elements, which include store structure, product assortment, product display and ways in which customers obtain products, can create a powerful consumer experience. Social elements refer to any social interactions, both among staff and with other consumers, that may be cultivated. Figure 1 shows a summary of the in-store shopping experience framework, which is combined from various researchers' perspectives.

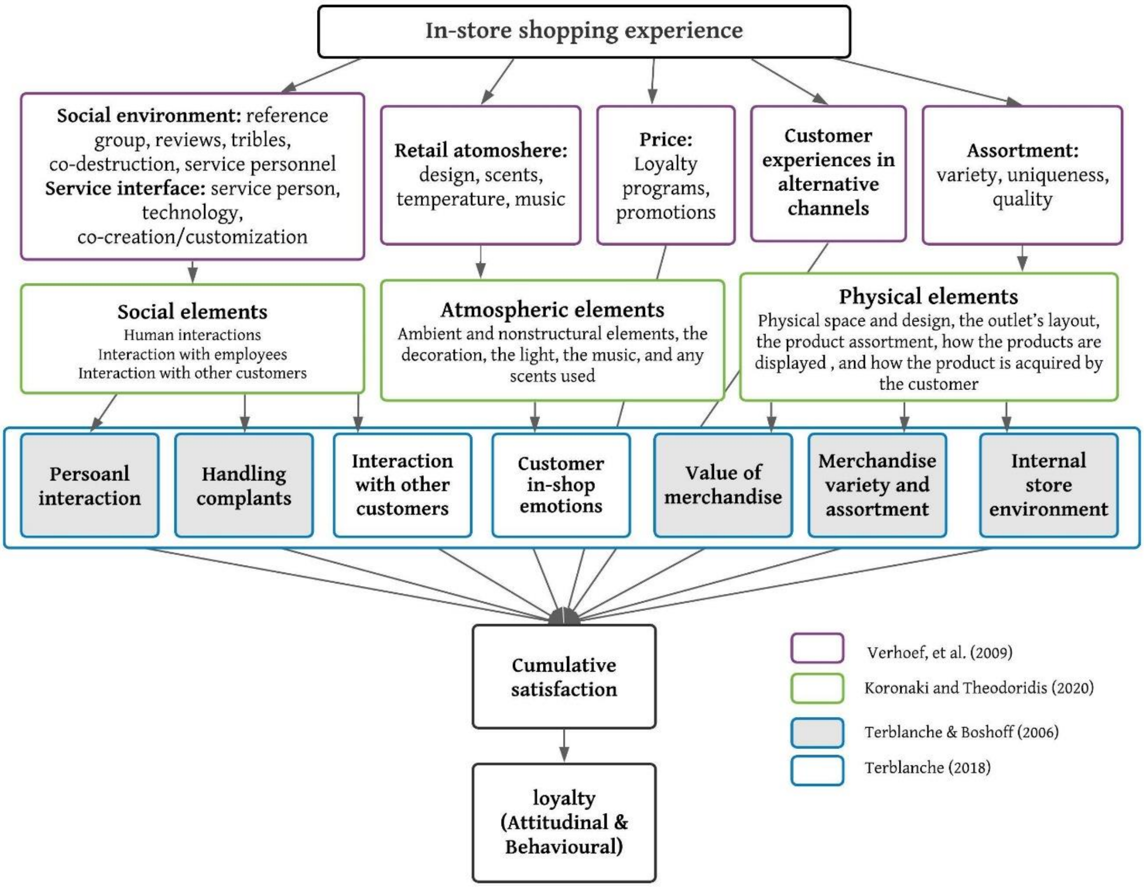

Figure 1: Summary of In-store Shopping Experiences from Various Researchers' Findings

3. Research Gaps

Although several extant studies have emphasised the importance of social, retail atmospheric and product assortment, how different types of customer value, in-store experiences and customer satisfaction relate to each other remains unclear. Information remains lacking on how department stores can enhance their store experiences beyond existing typical categorisations of utilitarian, hedonic and social value types. Furthermore, not every in-store environmental characteristic has the same effect on customer loyalty. Several past studies (Davis & Hodges, 2012; Diallo et al., 2015) have acknowledged that empirical examination with specific case studies has yet been conducted to enable full comprehension of types of customer value to be found in department stores at different market levels. Moreover, too little is known about the factors that influence customer dissatisfaction in department stores at different market levels. This study fills this void and is likely to be beneficial for strategic planning in retail practice.

III. Method

1. Research Approach and Case Selection

Case study research has been utilised to uncover customer value types in-depth within their real-world context. A qualitative research method allows great consideration of respondents' thoughts, ideas, and experiences and allows the interpretation of their actions. It assists in gaining an in-depth understanding of the human experience in certain circumstances, in discovering participants' internal experiences and in determining how meanings are produced via interaction (Rahman, 2016). The majority of extant studies focused on hedonic versus utilitarian shopping value types from different market-level brands or analyse consumer shopping experiences in the context of 'hedonic, utilitarian and social value' types based on defined measurable scales by using a quantitative research approach. Although past studies offer valuable insights, previous approaches could miss the opportunity to find other potential value dimensions and additional store experiences that department stores should consider to enhance customer store experience and redefining the roles of department stores. Explanations for a deeper insight into the phenomenon and their implications in that specific department environment have not been explored in past studies.

The selection criteria for the case studies are as follows. All case studies should be based on department stores, one from the mid-market (non-luxury) and another from the luxury market. Several researchers and industry professionals (i.e., (BBC, 2019; Donnelly et al., 2020; Ritch & McColl, 2021; Taylor, 2021)) commonly view Debenhams as a typical mid-market UK department store, along with House of Fraser. Selfridges is a representative luxury department store in the UK (Stoll-Kleemann, 2019). The UK mid-market department stores such as Debenhams and House of Fraser face the danger of obsolescence due to a lack of innovation and an inability to supply attractive fashion items (Donnelly et al., 2020). When House of Fraser went into administration in August 2018, Sports Direct immediately bought it and rebranded it as Frasers Group in December 2019 (Finch, 2021). Debenhams' management declared its entry into the administration process in December 2020; 118 stores closed, and 12,000 jobs were lost (Parker, 2021). These failures are not just being felt by mid-market department stores in the UK. Stores in the US and other European countries have seen similar levels of closures (Donnelly et al., 2020). However, luxury department stores such as Selfridges and Harvey Nichols have a distinct market positioning and brand identity, a strong emphasis on customer service, and a branding strategy that customers recognise (Donnelly et al., 2020). For example, Selfridges has recently collaborated with SoulCycle to deliver outdoor spin courses, as well as rooftop catering. Harrods has partnered with premium retailers on a series of in-store pop-ups and moved its dining offerings outside (Dirvanauskas, 2021).

Debenhams has been a household name in Britain due to its proud heritage tracing back to 1778. However, as a result of the volatile, highly competitive and over-saturated market of recent years, Debenhams suffered financial deterioration and consequently entered administration. Selfridges is a luxury department store chain distributed across four locations in Britain, with their London flagship store the second-largest individual department store in the UK. Selfridges is experiencing admirable growth amidst the malaise of the high street, with the latest full-year results delivering £1.85 billion in sales in 2019, a 6% rise from the previous year (Deely, 2019).

2. Data Collection and Analysis

Responses from a total of 200 respondents (100 from Selfridges customers and 100 from Debenhams customers) were obtained during January and February 2020, in the UK, sourced by the snowballing sampling technique. Two identical online questionnaires were designed, one relevant to Selfridges customers and the other to Debenhams'. Before participating, respondents were required to read the information on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, their withdrawal rights, the research duration and their complete anonymity. The participants in this self-administered survey were mostly female. The majority of respondents from both department stores were young consumers between the ages of 18 and 34 years. Respondents from Debenhams customers (59%) were below the age of 24 years (Gen Z), with incomes of less than £20,000. Respondents from Selfridges (49%) were aged 25–34 years, who were slightly older young professionals (Gen Y), with incomes ranging from £20,000 to £34,999. See Table 1.

Table 1: Participants by Age, Gender and Income

Socio-demographic Information		Percentage	
		Debenhams	**Selfridges**
Age	18–24	59%	43%
	25–34	31%	49%
	35–44	8%	7%
	45–54	2%	1%
	55–65	0%	0%
Gender	Male	0%	5%
	Female	100%	95%
Income	Less than £20,000	59%	34%
	£20,000–£34,999	29%	55%
	£35,000–£49,999	10%	10%
	£50,000–£74,999	2%	1%

Open-ended online questions were used to garner an in-depth understanding of respondents' motivations to visit, attitudes towards, and previous experiences at each department store. Questions included the respondents' profile (age, gender and income), past purchase experiences (e.g., how often and how long they spent shopping), respondents' major motivations and any dissatisfaction factors while shopping. Respondents' attitudes towards and preferences concerning the department store's service and in-store activity, their perceptions of such monetary things as prices and promotions, identity association and any suggested improvements for enhancing store loyalty were solicited to identify the overall in-store experiences which influence them to continue their patronage.

The qualitative responses were analysed and categorised into major themes. With the adoption of Braun's and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, two authors read the qualitative data thoroughly. The four code categories (Hedonic, Utilitarian, Social and Symbolic value types) were utilised as initial coding themes. Two coders independently examined the data to minimise any potential confounding caused by the coders' prior experience and interpretations. Triangulation was used to determine content relevance, a process which consisted of comparing the findings of different coders and reviewing the category to which a response was assigned until agreement was reached on a common category (Lucia-Palacios et al., 2016).

IV. Findings

In understanding the past and current purchasing behaviour of Debenhams and Selfridges customers, the participants of each survey were asked how often they visited the store, how many purchases they normally made and how long they tended to stay in the store when they visited. The major distinction between Debenhams and Selfridges respondents is the length of time spent in each store. The majority of Debenhams customers do not spend more than 30 minutes in the store, whereas the Selfridges respondents tend to spend 1–2 hours. Interestingly, this does not directly correlate with the number of items purchased, as the majority of both the Selfridges and Debenhams respondents tend to buy 1–2 items per visit. However, almost as many Selfridges respondents buy 3–4 items as buy 1–2, compared to Debenhams customers who mostly only ever buy 1–2 products. This might be linked to the frequency of store visits, as it may be that customers purchase less if they visit more regularly or more if they visit less frequently. Respondents from customers of Debenhams and Selfridges were asked whether they had visited the stores within the last three months. Frequent shopping at each department store was quite rare, with 59% of Selfridges respondents and 72% of Debenhams respondents not visiting the store within the last three months. Debenhams received an overall lower rate of recent visits compared with Selfridges. Several participants from Debenhams commented that 'Nothing very special about the brand makes me want to visit', emphasising the lack of a unique shopping experience. Respondents frequently mentioned 'I tend to shop online' or 'I buy directly from brands rather than through the middleman'. The results were formulated into percentages and displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Consumer Purchase Experience at Selfridges and Debenhams

Questionnaire items	Debenhams	Selfridges
Frequency of visits		
Every month	0%	1%
Every 2–4 months	20%	16%
Once or twice a year	67%	65%
Less than once a year	13%	18%
Number of items normally purchased		
None	15%	20%
1–2 items	74%	41%
3–4 items	9%	35%
4–5 items	2%	4%
More than 5	0%	0%
Length of time usually spent shopping		
Under 10 minutes	28.28%	0%
10–30 minutes	45.45%	2%
30–60 minutes	20.20%	33%
1–2 hours	6.06%	59%
More than 4 hours	0%	0%
Visit to the Department store within the last three months		
Yes		
No	72.73%	59%
	27.27%	41%

1. Consumer Motivations for Shopping at a Department Store

Respondents were also asked about their major motivations for shopping at each store. The Debenhams respondents highlighted a very utilitarian-based motivation to shop, as 75% of their answers consisted of shopping there if they needed something in particular and 13% were for the purpose of collecting online orders. The few remaining answers mostly selected for social aspects (11%) with no selection of hedonic or symbolic drivers, such as escapism or events. A prominent driver was monetary concerns, such as whether the products were cheaper in Debenhams than elsewhere. Another common response related to the convenience of the store location, as Debenhams stores are situated in easy, central locations in close proximity to consumers and therefore allow for a practical picking up of items in one go. These themes fall under the utilitarian consumer value bracket. Additionally, social value was established as figuring among the respondents, as they shop there with friends.

In striking contrast, Selfridges responses presented a wide range of reasons to visit the store, with mostly hedonic value at the forefront, escapism representing the most common of drivers (41%) and entertainment the second (26%). The majority of answers reflected the attraction of pure entertainment in visiting the store, such as the activities inside and the sights to see. Answers also indicated the significance of the positive brand perception, with which they desire to associate by shopping there. Table 3 displays the key themes identified from the qualitative responses about customers' motivations for shopping at each store. Debenhams customers often commented that they buy make-up and beauty-related products, lingerie and speciality products that require checking specific sizes, colours and product quality in person. Selfridges customers purchased luxury speciality, goods such as gifts and bags, but visited the store more because of the hedonistic experience of buying there and the symbolic concept that Selfridges is renowned for.

Table 3: Consumer Motivations for Shopping at Debenhams and Selfridges

	Customer value	Themes	Sample responses
Debenhams	Utilitarian	Convenience	"I work nearby Debenhams so I browse/shop during my lu nch break" (P40) "Close to where I live" (P10) "Convenient to collect online orders" (P25) "One-stop-shop so I can get everything in one go" (P32)
		Monetary	"If I could get something specific from there that was che aper than elsewhere" (P36) "If there was a special promotion on" (P45)
		Product availability	"If I needed something that only they sold" (P7) "Only if I need make-up" (P61)
	Social	Social engagement	"Usually go here with friends for the beauty hall and linge rie department" (P82) "Sometimes browse with my mum" (P 46)
		Customer service	"Staff are friendly and assist me more here than other dep artment stores" (P9)
Selfridges	Hedonic	Entertainment	"Simply walking around the store, viewing the beautiful an d luxurious products with creative displays is a day out in itself" (P 39) "I go for the pop-ups/brand installations which are fun" (P 93) "Good feeling when you shop there" (P 57)
		Experience over pr oduct	"It is such a large store with so much to see/do, so I wo uld visit with friends for a mooch around and lunch" (P61) "The amazing window displays always draw me in" (P35)
		Escapism	"I like to look at the brand installations and new products/ trends from luxury designers." (P54) "Good escape from reality" (P71)
	Symbolic	Exclusivity	"Elite and stylish reputation" (P5) "I like having the association with a glamourous, expensive brand" (P84)
		Aspirational	"The brand identity of creativity is really strong and somet hing I admire" (P25) "I resonate with the values of individuality and uniquenes s that Selfridges represents" (P70)

2. Enhancing Store Experiences and Loyalty

2.1. Debenhams

With regard to what will improve Debenhams customers' store loyalty, the results revealed that a stronger identity association would be most influential, which requires Debenhams to tap into the store attributes that can best offer the customers symbolic value. The negative perception of the retailer's brand image remains a barrier to people shopping at Debenhams. Respondents frequently commented along these lines: "I don't really identify strongly with the brand, not sure of their values or what they stand for" (P10) and "Debenhams isn't known for having a strong purpose which doesn't attract me to the store" (P22).

In-store activities, events and entertainment were also revealed as strong potential drivers of increased patronage at Debenhams, reflecting social value characteristics. Respondents expressed the importance of in-store activities that link with their lifestyle and role or position in the household, in the workplace or in society. One respondent observed that "a mother with two children needs to find ways of shopping within that lifestyle" (P42); another said, "As a parent, it is more my role position to shop here for anything we need for the house" (P52). Debenhams customers often expressed the view that it lacked characteristics that fit with their lifestyle, interests or social values. Respondent 12 stated: "Fitting the impression […] you want to give others with where you shop is important – I don't associate Debenhams with my style or vibe."

Regarding their perception of Debenhams' customer service, respondents were seen to take a mostly utilitarian perspective, as they mainly saw this aspect as a matter of information about products or their location, the presence of sizing guides and changing rooms, and promotional options for saving money. Some also commented on the social side of customer service, as it allows for engaging with and chatting to people, which was categorised into the social value category. There was also an evident demand in the explanatory responses for more friendly staff who could help to immerse customers in the experience, which denoted the hedonic value type.

A preference for the utilitarian value type remained prominent among the Debenhams participants. This was evident in the importance the majority of respondents placed on clear navigation through the store for swift shopping and also in their mentions of time being precious when it comes to visiting Debenhams. However, when it came to ways to enhance their experience, many answers were aligned with the hedonic value type, such as the demand for more creative thought in the store displays and windows of the kind that would be appreciated by those customers. Table 4 summarises Debenhams customers' observations and suggestions for further enhancements to the store experience to foster store loyalty.

Table 4: Observations/Suggested Improvements for Enhancing Store Loyalty at Debenhams

Value	Themes	Sample responses
Symbolic	Brand image refresh	"The way in which they position themselves is not attractive to me as a younger person, I associate it with somewhere my mum shops" (P40) "As a young person I don't feel like it reflects my taste or style" (P24) "I think of Debenhams as an older person's brand so maybe changing this perception would enhance my loyalty to the store" (P15)
	More trend-driven	"Debenhams always seem late to the game when it comes to providing the latest trends or varied styles. All the brands mesh into one" (P42) "More upcoming/interesting brands to engage with younger consumers" (P17)
Social & Utilitarian	Increased customer service engagement	"I like to chat to staff and make conversation" (P48) "Social side of speaking to salespeople when you're shopping on your own" (P50) "I don't currently engage much with sales assistants in Debenhams, but I enjoy store assistants who help you immerse in the experience that relaxes you and makes you feel welcome in other stores" (P42) "Friendly staff that are always willing to help and very approachable is important in my shopping experience, which I don't find much in Debenhams" (P25)
	Practical information	"Mostly to ask store assistants on information about size information or altering items in the changing rooms" (P7) "Important if I need more info on a garment" (P19)
Hedonic	Entertainment	"More in-store events for beauty" (P3) "All events seem to happen at the flagship rather than my local Debenhams. I would like to see more in-store events/brand activations or installations in my local store" (P33) "Debenhams doesn't offer a very fun experience that makes them stand out, so I would say more events or activities" (P67)

Utilitarian & Hedonic	Clear layout	"Clear layout so I can shop quickly" (P27) "I don't shop for long so it's important that I can navigate the store easily" (P59) "Knowing where everything is/easy access so that I can shop fairly quickly" (P16) "Sometimes the layout can be confusing and take more time than needed to shop so navigation is important" (P32)
	More visually captivating displays	"Attractive displays that make items look appealing and give styling inspiration" (P89) "An attractive interior helps to make the shopping experience feel special" (P46) "Attractive window displays would make me enter the store more and make the shop look more appealing" (P2)
Monetary value	Promotion options	"There are cheaper options out there like the supermarket, where I can get most things, I need in one go" (P57) "Member of Debenhams beauty club – I save money on make-up through regular discounts" (P32) "To save money here – they offer student discount as well which is a must for when I shop" (P14)

2.2. Selfridges

The Selfridges respondents expressed the belief that Selfridges needs to further engage with hedonic, social and utilitarian value types to enhance customer loyalty. A large proportion of participants emphasised that the mood-enhancing characteristics of Selfridges' simple sensory design played a large role in their shopping experience. Selfridges customers often emphasised this element: "I always leave Selfridges in a good mood which is probably down to these subtle factors. I think I enjoy store music the most as it is the most influential in affecting mood" (P5). Consumers expressed approbation for the displays that transform the store, transcending it from just a place to shop to something akin to a fantasy realm. Moreover, symbolic value attributes were portrayed in the importance of the store layout in maintaining a luxurious brand perception. Respondents frequently made such comments as "I like to give a good impression to others about where I shop and Selfridges is such a well-known and prestigious name, it does make you feel good about yourself that you are privileged to shop there" (P36).

Citing such things as the potential for increased sensory design to differentiate it even further from other stores, Selfridges customers suggested improvements to hedonic and symbolic luxury experiences. Respondents commented favourably on Selfridges' deployment of mood-enhancing sensory effects such as music, lighting, smell and a visual transformation of the store to create an atmosphere similar to that of an art gallery. Some Selfridges customers recommended more in-store group activities, social engagement or events. Young consumers were also looking for more affordable options and suggested alternative luxury second-hand clothing ranges and articulated ethical and environmental values. The summary of suggested improvements for enhancing store loyalty at Selfridges is shown in table 5.

Table 5: Observations/Suggested Improvements for Enhancing Store Loyalty at Selfridges

Values	Themes	Sample responses
Hedonic	Luxury display and art gallery format of installations	"I have visited brand installations and even art exhibitions at Selfridges that have transcended the space to feel like more than just a shop, which is really important" (P32) "Having an attractive display that makes you feel like you are in a very luxurious setting that takes you out of reality" (P16) "The aesthetic of the layout is really important as they stock very high-end brands and therefore you expect a luxury visual merchandising to match the brands" (P36)
	Mood-enhancing sensory experiences	"Being able to touch and try products is really important reason for me shopping in physical stores" (P45) "I like to feel and see the product in the flesh before purchasing, especially if it is a large money investment" (P32) "There is not one sensory aspect in particular that I prefer, however, they can work together to create a great experience" (P29) "Music is a big one, when it is upbeat and enhances your mood it makes you feel good" (P34) "Lighting effects always create a cool, appealing visual – sometimes makes me want to take images of the store and share on Instagram as it displays a cool look" (P67)
Social	In-store group activities	"More events to go to with my friends. A lot of stores now host workshops which brings a social side to visiting the store" (P44) "More fun activities for groups (they already might do this, but I am unaware of it)" (P52)
	Customer engagement	"Selfridges sales assistants help you to fully immerse in the experience through their attentive and friendly nature that makes you feel special and makes the experience memorable" (P48) "Store assistants that are well presented provide the first good impression when entering the store which is important in communicating a prestigious brand like Selfridges" (P12)
Utilitarian	Affordable options	"I could probably find cheaper options, but I am willing to pay more for the luxury experience at Selfridges" (P63) "I would purchase more if there were more affordable options at Selfridges or a discount scheme" (P29) "Cheaper alternative such as a second-hand department that allowed others to shop for second-hand luxury items for cheaper prices" (P15)
Symbolic	Brand reputation	"It gives a good impression to others when you have s hopped here and says something about your taste and s tyle and wealth which I like", (P15) "I know exactly what Selfridges is about, such as inno vation, newness, creativity and glamour, characteristics t o which I align myself" (P41)

V. Discussion and Conclusion

1. Theoretical Contributions

Previous studies on in-store shopping experiences and consumer shopping value types predominantly focused on a quantitative research approach to analyse highly established existing variables. A large proportion of the literature has mostly found utilitarian or hedonic customer value types when classifying the in-store experiences (Babin et al., 1994; Boksberger & Melsen, 2011; Brito et al., 2019; Calvo-Porral & Lévy-Mangin, 2021; Lee et al., 2017). Existing literature is often fragmented and lacks integration (Davis & Hodges, 2012; Diallo et al., 2015; Vieira et al., 2018). Vieira et al. (2018) identified that customers can seek both utilitarian and hedonic value at the same time, allowing for a synergistic effect between these two components. The current study reveals the existence of several overlapping value dimensions that each assist in enhancing the others. It provides detailed drivers and dissatisfaction factors that influence department store loyalty by examining the roles of utilitarian, hedonic, symbolic and social value in meeting fast-changing consumer demands.

Furthermore, several young customers expressed their support for ecologically responsible, cost-effective second-hand luxury products. Instead of focusing merely on conventional value dimensions, department retailers should determine how environmental and ethical objectives can be fulfilled. Selfridges introduced ‘Project Earth’ in August 2020, which is a new sustainability programme that aims to revolutionise ‘the way we shop by 2025’. The initiative aims to transform more sustainable shopping habits via three methods: (1) addressing the materials that are utilised in their items; (2) by introducing new retail models, such as repair and resale; and (3) by inspiring a transformation in mindsets through interacting with teams, partners and customers (Writtle, 2020). Existing dimensions of value and in-store customer experience theories are challenging to explain new initiatives from the department store.

There has been a dramatic transformation in the characteristics and functionality of physical stores with the rise of e-commerce. As Alexander & Blazquez Cano (2020) have observed, the roles of retail spaces have evolved into those of a playful and inspiring experiential destination and a venue for a community and networking alliance – a place for a social, cultural, and informative conversation. A value-based framework has been developed here which lays the foundations for proprietary research to be undertaken by Selfridges and Debenhams to help both stores optimally effect this evolutionary transition (see figure 1). This consumer value–led research provides a more fine-grained insight into contrasting department store consumer values and identifies the key dimensions of the value sought by each target consumer set at each store. Although this study specifically homes in on Debenhams and Selfridges, the framework has been designed to be easily replicated in researching different retail stores across different industries.

In addition to its wide-ranging practical applications, the framework unifies the fragmented research on key consumer value constructs to provide for the first time an all-encompassing exploration of value types, featuring the key consumer value constructs, which adds to its theoretical value. As such, this study sheds new light on the distinctive types of value sought by the customer base of any one department store chain and offers a range of suggestions for improvement for luxury and mid-market department stores. The findings of the study can help point the way to re-attracting consumer attention and regaining store loyalty. A summary of the implications of the retail strategies for luxury and mid-market department stores is presented in figure 2.

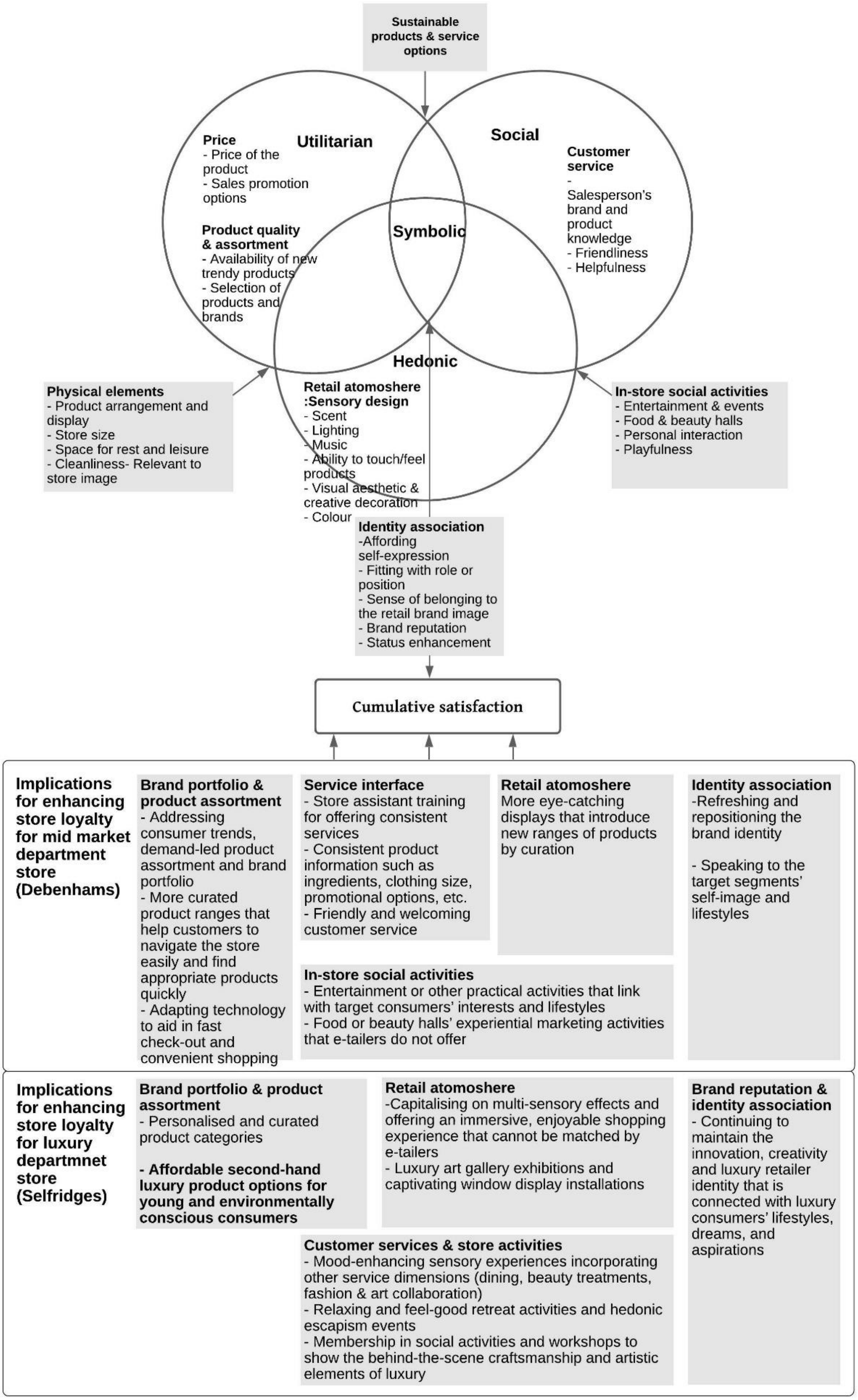

Figure 2: Summary of the Implications of the Retail Strategies for Luxury and Mid-market Department Stores

2. Managerial Implications

2.1. Utilitarian and Hedonic Value: Fast & Slow Retailing

This present study reveals the shift in contemporary consumer attitudes towards the department store, with the majority of consumers only visiting department stores for special occasions. Selfridges stores were found to be a place where people would pass the hours in a leisurely manner; however, the majority of Debenhams respondents claimed to not spend more than 30 minutes in the store, reflecting the basic and fleeting engagement with retail outlets today. 'Slow retail', such as that offered by Selfridges, is concentrated on immersive hedonic experiences and value by offering a curated product portfolio, visual merchandising, personalisation, variety, quality and a slow and relaxed integrated design environment, while 'fast retailing' is focused on standardised efficiency, convenience, and quick response, prioritising the utilitarian value type (Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2020).

In hedonic retail environments such as Selfridges, customer loyalty is vastly influenced by the interior ambience and hedonic experiences (Calvo-Porral & Lévy-Mangin, 2021). The motivations behind shopping at Selfridges accentuated the power of hedonic and symbolic value in particular, such as the entertainment, escapism and exclusivity that echo the founding philosophy of the store, with 41% of Selfridges respondents claiming the primary reason for shopping there is the escapism it offered. The importance of sensory design for offering escapism cuts across some other findings in the field. Krishna's theory (2012), for instance, maintains that sensory design is the most essential component in customer engagement and increased store loyalty, but the current study clarifies that while this element underpins success for luxury department stores such as Selfridges, it would be a less effective strategy for mid-market department stores such as Debenhams. Shopping at Debenhams is mostly affected by a desire for utilitarian value, motivated by such things as the merchandise arrangements, prices, and convenient location, which are distinctive cues for increasing customer satisfaction. Debenhams could integrate technology (e.g., blockchain, cashierless checkout, etc.) to enhance retailing experiences with convenience, introduce store activities, and improve store layout to fit into the target customers' lifestyles.

2.2. Symbolic Value: Brand Identity Association

The strength of the Selfridges brand identity is one of the major attributes that attracts consumers. The indistinct identity of Debenhams is a major barrier to consumer loyalty, thus highlighting the significance this factor plays in increasing customer patronage and further confirming the evolution in perceptions of department stores in a contemporary context. Debenhams respondents commented on the absence of a desirable brand identity and uniqueness, along with an outdated brand image that hindered brand loyalty. Furthermore, old-fashioned product assortments left over from previous seasons, lack of trendy products, and lack of store curation contribute to shaping the negative perception of brand identity.

Donnelly et al. (2020) found that consumers place a higher value on a department store with brands that are consistent with their tangible and intangible values and that offer products and services that are in line with the customers' identity and the store's brand portfolio. Traditional mid-market department stores are increasingly dependent on promotional discounting with tight margins, addressing the problem with a short-term solution. Ultimately, there is a lack of cash flow to improve store experiences, diminishing the value proposition and brand identity (Donnelly et al., 2020). A significant transformation is required for Debenhams to refresh and reposition its brand identity to link to the target consumers' self-image and desired lifestyle. Many participants expressed the opinion that they did not know what the Debenhams brand intrinsically stands for, making it difficult for them to associate themselves with shopping there; the reversal of this situation would serve as a key element in improving their loyalty to the store.

Furthermore, Debenhams respondents identified the desirability of improving the store brand by updating the brands the store stocks and placing more priority on supplying trend-driven clothing. In line with the study by Donnelly et al. (2020), creating a stronger impression that the product options had been carefully curated could improve buying intent and add value. Careful selection of the brand portfolio and curated product ranges can help customers to navigate the store easily and find appropriate products quickly. More visually captivating displays could be employed through the curation of new ranges of products.

2.3. Social and Hedonic Value: In-Store Activities & Customer Service

A suggested improvement noted by respondents for both stores concerned in-store activities. However, for Selfridges, such activities should offer hedonic value through increased use of sensory experiences and mood-enhancing activities at the store, while for Debenhams, it is the utilitarian value that should be foremost, linking customer service and social activities to consumers' lifestyle and interests. Informative practical details such as product ingredients and clothing size, along with promotional options and consistent customer service, are important elements for Debenhams customers. Nevertheless, making the most of sensory effects through experiential marketing is one tactic that could be utilised at Debenhams' flagship store or temporarily in pop-up stores to offer social entertainment and practical value to their target consumers. Additionally, Debenhams should differentiate the store by providing unique experiences that only they offer, as respondents communicated the lack of brand identity and individuality found at Debenhams.

The suggestions for Selfridges maintained that creating a more transcendent space to lift the experience above mere shopping could be achieved through enhancing those sensory design aspects that make the experience of shopping at one department store from another truly distinctive and memorable. Boksberger & Melsen (2011) describe hedonistic responses as the multi-sensory, dreamlike, and emotive dimensions of consumers' perceptions of service, while symbolic responses represent the use of services to meet consumers' symbolic needs (self-enhancement, role or position, group identity, or ego recognition). Therefore, although to be implemented in different ways, it is clear that the overall consensus among both sets of consumers is the desire for unique store activity and experiences, which will underpin their ultimate store loyalty. Furthermore, several young consumers also commented on their desire for environmentally friendly, affordable luxury product options. Department stores should therefore also consider how to meet environmental and ethical values instead of focusing on traditional value dimensions only.

3. Limitations and Future Studies

Although it has practical and theoretical value, as mentioned above, there are some limitations to this study. First, the data was collected via an online survey during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 in the UK. Pre-pandemic attitudes might be noticeably different from post-pandemic attitudes. The post-pandemic period could significantly influence consumers' values and expectations regarding interactions with sales personnel, products and spaces. Future work could be undertaken through store observations and consumer studies on how Covid-19 influenced department store shopping experiences. Second, this study relies entirely on the claims of customers. A disparity could exist between individuals' words and their actions. Respondents who completed the survey were typically based on collective memories and perceived images of the department store, given that they may find difficulty in remembering their complete shopping experiences. Observational study at the department stores could be further carried out to identify a gap between consumer perceptions and actual behaviours.

Third, the study investigated the impact of store components on customer loyalty, when various other important factors may contribute to how loyal a customer is to a store. Future study could be carried out on how pre-consumption and post-consumption service activities could leverage physical store experiences and identify other factors to enhance store loyalty through examination of the entire customer journey. Fourth, this study only focused on UK consumers' perspectives on two department stores. Future study could extend to cross-cultural studies to uncover other unknown department store shopping value types beyond traditional shopping value dimensions. Finally, retailers' perspectives on the challenges could be examined to minimise the organisational and cultural barriers to delivering the experiences, products and services that best overlap with customers' preferred value types.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire design

Category	Questions
Profile of respondents	Age Gender Income
Consumer purchase experience at the department store	How often do you visit this department store? How many fashion items do you normally purchase from the department store? How long do you normally spend in the department store?
Barriers to visiting the department store	What were the major barriers to visiting the department store within the last three months?
Consumer motivations	Why do you shop at this department store?
Enhancing store experiences and loyalty	What aspect should be most improved to enhance customer loyalty to this department store? Which factor of store layout is most important to you in enhancing your loyalty to the store? Which factor of sensory design is most important for you in enhancing your loyalty to the store? Which factor of in-store activity is most important to you in enhancing your loyalty to the store? Which factor of monetary perception is most important to you in enhancing your loyalty to the store? Which factor of identity association is most important to you in enhancing your loyalty to the store?