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# Customer journey self-mapping: a qualitative method for evaluating new store formats

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## Introduction

Digitalization has metamorphosed the retail landscape, inspiring new touchpoints, channels and customer behaviours. Retailers have developed new store concepts to meet customers' changing preferences and we have seen the development of store formats that offer unique and exciting experiences (e.g., pop-up stores), those that use new technology (e.g., scan-and-go, unmanned stores), or unusual geographical locations (e.g., IKEA city-centre stores, shop-in-shops) in order to offer convenience (e.g., Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Gauri et al., 2020; Hultman et al., 2017; Rudkowski et al., 2020).

The new retail landscape, comprising new types of touchpoints and new store formats enables increasingly complex customer journeys, involving multiple online and offline touchpoints, perhaps simultaneously (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Mele et al., 2021). Despite considerable research on both the customer journey (e.g., Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Rudkowski et al., 2020; Towers & Towers, 2022) and on retail format development (e.g., Egan-Wyer et al., 2021; Hultman et al., 2017; Reutterer & Teller, 2009; Rudkowski et al., 2020; Willems, Leroi-Werelds & Swinnen, 2016) our knowledge on how new retail formats create value in contemporary customer journeys is still scarce. Given the subjective and individual nature of contemporary customer journeys, how should academics and practitioners understand customers' shopping behaviours and preferences in the new retail landscape? In this paper, we present a methodological approach to help capture the complex and contextual nature of contemporary customer journeys from the consumer's perspective.

## Literature overview

Existing methods for capturing or "mapping" customer journeys seek to abstract a typically linear (e.g., Stein & Ramaseshan, 2016) journey map from data extracted from customers (Wolny & Charoensuksai, 2014) via surveys (Ieva & Ziliani, 2018), interviews (Marquez, Downey & Clement, 2015), diaries (Halvorsrud, Kvale & Følstad, 2016), smart phones (Kojo, Heiskala & Virtanen, 2014) experiments (Vakulenko et al., 2019) or a combination of the above. According to Følstad and Kvale's (2018) systematic review of customer journey literature, these abstracted maps tend to aggregate observations from multiple individuals into a common or typical customer journey (e.g., Crosier & Handford, 2012; Trischler & Zehrer, 2012) rather than exploring the situational and contextual nature of individual customer journeys and experiences. While this is clearly useful for understanding the big picture, it is less helpful for understanding the nuances that emerge when differentiated touchpoints, such as new store formats, make existing customer journeys more complex.

## Theory

Today, it is widely accepted that a customer journey is made up of multiple touchpoints, each potentially involving different kinds of contact, all of which contribute to the overall customer experience of a retail organisation (e.g., Bagdare & Jain, 2013; Jain & Bagdare, 2009; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Pine & Gilmore, 1998; Verhoef et al., 2009). It is also recognised that customer experience is co-created (e.g., Chandler & Lusch, 2015; De Keyser et al., 2015; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2002) and cannot be understood in isolation (Verhoef et al., 2009). A customer experience is constructed through emotional, cognitive, social and sensorial components created during the customer journey (e.g., Homburg, Jozic & Kuehnl, 2015; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Schmitt, 2003; Verhoef et al., 2009), where experiences occur each



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