

An exploration of the pop-up for fashion SME's

Bethan Alexander

London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London, UK

b.alexander@fashion.arts.ac.uk

Jessie Kaitlin Bain

London College of Fashion, University of the Arts, London, UK

Jessie.k.bain@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Purpose – This paper explores why the pop-up store has gained popularity among fashion SMEs, examines the role of experiential retailing in the pop-up space and suggests how it can be used strategically as a retail format in the future by SMEs.

Design/methodology/approach – An extensive literature review of experiential and sensory retailing, the pop-up shop phenomenon and the Canadian fashion market was conducted to provide a context. A multiple case study approach was adopted, using triangulated data collection. Qualitative research took the form of structured observation of pop-up stores, interviews with fashion SMEs who had engaged with the pop-up format and with consumers who had experienced a fashion pop-up; collectively enabling strategy development.

Findings – The findings revealed that although the pop up concept is grounded in experiential retailing, SMEs utilise it as a quick fix solution, not as a long-term strategy to build brand awareness and enhance customer engagement. The findings assisted with the development of pop-up opportunities for Canadian fashion SMEs and guidelines for other SMEs to utilise.

Research limitations/implications – The findings are limited to Canadian fashion SME retailers and cannot be generalised outside the examined cases. Time restraints prevented in-person pop up store observations.

Originality/value - This study contributes to the dearth of academic research on the pop-up store, specifically, multi-sensory experiences and how they can be applied to specific retail

spaces, such as the pop-up. The limited literature focuses on larger fashion players, ignoring the unique challenges presented by SMEs, a research gap this paper attempts to fill. Practically, it provides SME retailers with strategic recommendations that can be adopted for future pop-up stores.

Keywords – experiential, sensory, pop-up store, small to medium enterprises (SMEs), retailing, engagement.

Research paper

INTRODUCTION

Due to the industries dynamic nature and consumers' growing desire for novel experiences, fashion retailers have had to continuously rethink retail spaces and get consumers in-store (Pedroni, 2011; Clark, 2013). This has resulted in a new way of approaching fashion retail, through experiential retailing. Originally grounded in the marketing discipline, this concept has spread to the physical retail environment, aiming to create spaces that fully engage customers within the retail experience (Carú & Cova, 2003).

The pop-up store is encompassed within experiential retail (Surchi, 2011). Offering novelty, surprise and excitement around a temporary space (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The concept plays on the notion of time, and offers specific product at a highly desirable location for a limited time period. When concluded, the store vanishes from the retail landscape. The concept aims to surprise customers with a spontaneous experience, and offers an air of exclusivity (Pedroni, 2011; Spire 2013). With the pop-up stores ability to generate buzz, fashion players are engaging in this experiential retail concept, thus capturing the attention of a global audience (Forney, Kim, & Sullivan, 2007; Sage & Tourres, 2013).

While this phenomenon has been wide spread across the UK and the United States, Canadian retailers are just beginning to experiment with the concept (Spire, 2013). Specifically, Canadian small to medium enterprises (SMEs) have demonstrated a high level of interest in these temporary stores, with new pop-ups openings on a regular basis (Koszuta, 2012; Spire, 2013). However, academic study around this retail phenomenon is scarce and the research that has been conducted primarily focuses on large multi channel retailers (Surchi, 2011). Often the literature groups all retailers together, ignoring the unique challenges faced by SMEs, such as limited financial resources, foreign competition, and lack of marketing expertise (Droge & Runyan, 2008). As the Canadian fashion retail sector expands, SMEs will continue to play a significant roll in the economy (CIS, 2013). Therefore, given the popular rise of the pop-up store, it is important to understand why this concept has gained popularity among SMEs, and how it can be used as a retail concept now and in the future.

THE LITERATURE

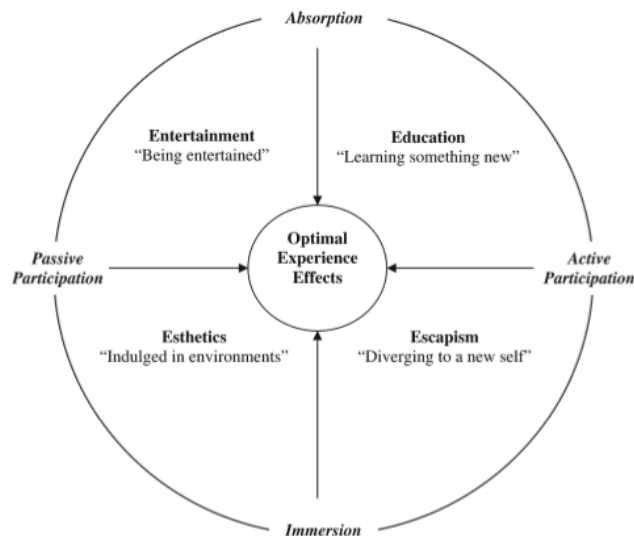
Experiential retailing in the fashion space

Experiences are not just occurrences. They are personal, emotional and have the power to transform the ordinary (Schmitt, 1999; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Forney, Kim, & Sullivan, 2007). Consumers want interactions to not only provide them with tangible goods but with extraordinary experiences (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Schmitt, 1999). This has resulted in a dynamic shift in the way retailers present their offerings, and new retail strategies have emerged (Carú & Cova, 2003). One such strategy is experiential retailing.

Over the years experiential retailing has been referred to as “Shoptainment”, and “Retailtainment”, moving from the realm of marketing into a more retail orientated discipline (Bradbury, 2012; Clark, 2013). According to Forney et al. (2007) experiential retailing can be defined as, “A retail strategy that transforms products and services into a total consumption experience. It satisfies emotional or expressive desires, as well as rational or functional needs of the consumer” (p.3). It is a strategy that aims to make connections with customers who

come into a store for more than just the goods and services provided. Experiential retailing aims to create a holistic experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Backstrom & Johansson, 2006; Forney, et al. 2007) as Pine & Gilmore’s “Experience Realms Model”, represented in Figure 1 conceptualises.

Figure 1 Experience Realms



Source: Pine & Gilmore, 1999.

Both Pine & Gilmore (1999) and Schmitt (1999) raised the importance of creating memorable experiences. However, the original concept proposed that the company provided the point of reference for value creation (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Petersman & Van Cleempoel 2009). As the 21st century progressed this company centric perspective was criticized, resulting in a rethinking of the original concept. Instead of companies dictating the experience to customers, customers engage companies in an open dialogue thus forming the basis for the co-creation of experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Lemon, et al. 2009). This experience- based co-creation outlook is parallel to the idea of experiential retailing, where emotions, contexts, aesthetics and other symbolic aspects of the brand and customer experiences are significant (Brito, Hulten & Rodrigues 2011).

Multi-Sensory Experiences

To deliver customer value, fashion retailers are turning towards multi-sensory stimuli to enhance their experience offerings. A multi-sensory experience aims to engage all of the customer’s senses within a retail space, resulting in complete sensory immersion (Hulten, 2009; Lemon et al., 2009; Barclay & Barnes 2011). This in turn, allows retailers to distinguish and express themselves thus relating to and engaging customers on a deeper more emotional level. This concept is depicted in Hulten’s sensory model in Table 1. By employing a

combination of sensors, sensations and sensory expressions a multi sensory experience can be created.

Table 1: Sensory Model

Sensors	Sensations	Sensory expressions
Smell sensors	Atmospheric	Product congruence, intensity and sex. Atmosphere, advertency and theme. Scent brand and signature scent.
Sound sensors	Auditory	Jingle, voice and music. Atmosphere, attentiveness and theme. Signature sound and sound brand.
Sight sensors	Visual	Design, packaging and style. Colour, light and theme. Graphic, exterior and interior.
Taste sensors	Gastronomic	Interplay, symbiosis and synergies. Name, presentation and environment. Knowledge, lifestyle and delight.
Touch sensors	Tactile	Material and surface. Temperature and weight. Form and steadiness

Source: Hulten, 2009

Experiential Places

Experiential places are becoming a familiar part of the fashion retail landscape. An over saturated market, the threat of e-commerce, and the growing indifference of the consumer to average shopping experience, has made it a prominent strategy for survival (Petermans & Van Cleempoel, 2009; Pedroni, 2011). These experiences are diverse in nature, and come in many different forms such as department stores, flagship stores and pop up stores (Nike, 2010; Pine & Gilmore, 2002; Gaffney, 2008). The literature surrounding experiential retailing is abundant, however limited research has been conducted regarding the forms of experiential retailing and why implemented by fashion retailers. The present study aims to gain a better understanding of why fashion retailers implement a relatively new form of experiential retailing, the pop-up store.

Origins & development of the pop up store

The pop-up store has seen significant attention since it first appeared over a decade ago (Surchi, 2011). Pop-up shop, temporary store, and flash retailing are just a few of the terms used to describe the phenomena. The concept plays on the notion of time, and offers specific products at a desirable location for a limited time period. As defined by Pomodoro (2013) a pop-up store is a store that remains open for a few days to up to one year, with an estimated average of one month. When concluded, the store vanishes as quickly as it appeared from the retail landscape.

The origin of the pop-up store is unclear. It is believed that the concept was borne out of guerrilla marketing, an anti-establishment tactic, using word-of-mouth unconventional marketing strategies to generate buzz and excitement around a fashion retailer (Niehm et al. 2007). It is thought it was originally used by small designers who would set up their offerings

in sidewalks or abandoned spaces to generate customer awareness (Surchi, 2011). Others have speculated that seasonally appearing themed stores (E.g. Christmas) provided the origins of the pop-up (Lee, 2013). Some state that it wasn't until 2004 and the opening of Comme des Garçon's "guerrilla stores" that the fashion industry began to take note and engage with the concept (Fortini, 2004; Trendwatch, 2004; Niehm et al., 2007; Cochrane 2010). While others have conceived that it is simply the reworking of older retail concepts, such as the "trunk show" (Jackson, 2013). Although its origins are uncertain, it is apparent that fashion retailers have embraced the concept.

Pop up form and function

Literature states that the pop-up store is designed to engage the customer in memorable, theatrical and sensorial experiences. The concept aims to surprise customers and offers an air of exclusivity (Pedroni, 2011; Spire, 2013). It plays on societies fear of "missing out" on the unrepeatable, and for those who participate, creates a feeling of personal discovery. The pop-up store is rooted in the "now" (Pomodoro, 2013). It is fleeting in nature and therefore should be conceived not as a shop but as an event (Ibid). The event should provide an exciting experience, and engage all of the customer's senses. Therefore, pop-up stores are not only a form of experiential retailing but use various forms of guerrilla marketing to generate buzz around the retailer. This brand awareness is often top priority, making sales a secondary function (Bradbury, 2012). However, the literature fails to recognize that small retailers may not have the financial means to create pop-up stores as a marketing ploy and sales may be more of a driving factor for their implementation.

According to Pomodoro (2013) pop-up stores have four tools at their disposal; location, time period, the event itself and product offer. The location must be creative, innovative, and unexpected. Second, the fashion retailer must choose when and for how long the pop-up store will appear (Cochrane, 2010; Pomodoro, 2013). Thirdly, the event should be exciting, memorable and engage customers. Finally the product offering should be unique. Items may be exclusively on sale, limited edition, or part of a new line or collection. The goal is to create excitement and "stay away from the ordinary" (Pomodoro, 2013: 5).

The pop-up store can take different forms. According to Surchi (2009) the pop-up store, depending on location, can be classified into four typologies; guerrilla stores (unconventional location), nomad stores (mobile), temporary online stores and temporary outdoor sites. Pomodoro (2013) also attempted to identify a pop up store taxonomy, as shown in Table 2, which is applied to fashion retail.

Table 2: Pop up store taxonomy

Pop-up Store taxonomy (Pomodoro, 2013)	Attributes	Examples
Concept brand store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used to increase awareness, launch new merchandise, and reinforce brand image. - Aims to create a cohesive image. 	<p>H&M (July 2012): Launched multiple pop-up stores in London, UK, to promote its new sportswear collection, and sell limited merchandise (Fashion, 2012).</p> <p>Holt Renfrew (September 2012): Launched pop-up stores across Canada to celebrate its 175 anniversary, selling limited addition sweaters (Gillies, 2012).</p>
Community Store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used to support the existing relationship between customer and brand and increase sense of belonging. - The event itself is the key strategy. 	<p>Kate Spade (December 2010): Launched a pop-up store in New York for the holiday season, resembling an igloo; located in Bryant Park beside the skating rink (Grinspan, 2010).</p> <p>Tommy Hilfiger (July 2013): Travelling surf shack in Toronto Canada, offering its' summer collection as well as selling limited addition surfboards (Venerayan, 2013).</p>
Test-store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used to launch a new line, brand, or test a new market. - Pop- up store is used as a market research tool. 	<p>Free people (June 2013): Company launched its first pop-up at Selfridges (Selfridges, 2013).</p> <p>Target (February 2012): Opened pop-ups across Canada to create hype and test the market (Yelaja, 2012).</p>
Sustainable store	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Used within the eco-sustainable trend. - Focused on sustainability and creating awareness. 	<p>Vintage Pop-up Boutique (February 2012): A vintage store offering a curated selection of vintage pieces opens in Edmonton Alberta. It held workshops on how to recycle old clothing (Barber, 2012).</p> <p>Lost Girls (July 2013): Mobile pop-up shop travelling around Chicago dedicated to recycling vintage clothing (Optican, 2013).</p>

Source: Authors own

Due to the fleeting nature of the pop up, categorizing it into distinct categories is challenging. Further forms such as the “collaborative pop-up store” (a pop-up store joint venture with another brand, offering complimentary merchandise), and “shopsharing” (a permanent retail space, hosting revolving pop-up stores for a temporary time period) have also been discussed (Pomodoro, 2013; Toronto News, 2013b).

The benefits surrounding this retail tool are abundant. For larger fashion retailers it is used to increase brand image, test new markets, offer limited edition merchandise, and promote new collections (Yelaja, 2012; Diderich, 2013). For smaller fashion retailers, pop-up stores are believed to generate buzz, test new markets and merchandise with small economic risk (Trendwatch, 2004). The phenomenon has gone global, and is emerging as a force on the Canadian retail landscape. Despite the pop-up stores apparent popularity as an experiential retail strategy the academic community has paid little attention to it. The literature that is available focuses on large fashion players within Europe, ignoring specific challenges faced by SMEs. This study therefore diverges from existing research to provide a Canadian context to the use of pop up’s by fashion SMEs.

Canadian market context

Canada has typically been viewed as a relatively small player in the global fashion apparel industry (Industry Canada, 2012). The market was valued at \$27.1 billion in 2012 and is forecast to increase to \$31.5 billion by 2017 (Industry Canada, 2012). The market is composed of a large number of micro, small and medium fashion retailers with relatively few large fashion players (Industry Canada, 2012; CIS, 2013), as Table 3 depicts. With increasing competition from new entrants, it is predicted that for small players to survive, they will need to rejuvenate their stores, differentiate their product offerings, and engage the customers in a holistic experience to remain relevant (CIS, 2013).

Table 3: Fashion Retailers in Canada

Province or Territory	Number of Employees			
	Micro 1-4	Small 5-99	Med. 100-499	Large 500+
Alberta	444	1,174	10	0
British Columbia	713	1,341	5	2
Manitoba	125	261	0	0
New Brunswick	87	194	2	0
Newfoundland and Labrador	56	125	1	0
Northwest Territories	5	7	0	0
Nova Scotia	102	257	1	1
Nunavut	0	0	0	0
Ontario	1,647	3,230	31	10
Prince Edward Island	15	44	0	0
Quebec	1,305	2,288	28	17
Saskatchewan	124	300	0	0
Yukon Territory	7	5	0	0
Canada	4,630	9,226	78	30

Source: Industry Canada, 2012

SME's in Canada

SMEs play a significant role in the Canadian economy (Industry Canada, 2012). According to the 2012 Key Small Business Statistics, they can be defined as enterprises that consist of less than 500 employees, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Firm Sizes in Canada

Size of Firm	# Of Firms in Canada
Micro (1-4 employees)	615,599
Small (4-99 employees)	485,180
Medium (100-499 employees)	18,999

Source: Industry Canada, 2012

The number of SMEs specifically in the fashion retail sector is estimated around 13,934 or 99.9% of all fashion retailers in Canada (CIS, 2013). They experience a unique set of challenges that hold back expansion and growth, such as limited access to finance and marketing expertise (Industry Canada, 2012). These challenges have resulted in the use of the pop-up shop as a new and innovative retail tool.

Canadian fashion SME's and the pop up store

Growing competition within the Canadian fashion market emphasizes the need for SMEs to explore new ways to remain competitive. It is postulated that the pop up store is one cost effective way to do so (Cochrane, 2010; Jackson, 2013; Toronto News, 2013a). Table 5 documents Canadian SME's implementation of the pop up in recent years.

Table 5: Pop-up stores implemented by Canadian fashion retail SMEs

Store Name	Location / Date of Pop-up	Brief Description
A Vintage Affair	Calgary, Alberta March 2010	A vintage clothing boutique opens a pop-up store to create customer awareness (Bailey 2012).
Inside Out	Toronto, Ontario September 2011	Montreal based retailer specializing in vintage furs opens pop-up store for two weeks (Toronto News, 2013b).
Obviously Chic	Regina, Saskatchewan May 2011	Affordable fashion retailer opens a one-day pop-up store (Bottrel 2010).
Travis Taddeo	Montreal, Quebec April 2011	Menswear designer opens a one-day pop-up shop to celebrate the launch of his latest collection (Gajo 2011).
Coup {Garment Boutique}	Edmonton, Alberta February 2012	High-end boutique opens a pop-up store for 8 days in an empty retail space (Barber 2012).

The Latest Scoop	Vancouver, BC June 2013 (began in 2004)	Pop-up fashion retailer that opens its doors for eight weeks at a time (Style 2013).
Krystle Lee, In this Closet, E-closet and Cheap Thrills	Toronto, Ontario June 2013	Four SME fashion retailers open pop-up stores and take on a summer long lease in a large empty retail space (Toronto News, 2013a).

The experiential theories proposed by Pine & Gilmore (1999), Schmitt (1999) and Hulten (2009) provide a basis to explore the critical research questions arising in this study – Why are SMEs implementing the pop-up store and How are they doing it? More specifically, do SMEs incorporate experiential retailing into the pop-up store? What types of pop up stores are they using? How long do they last? What are the key features of the pop up store? and What is the potential of using pop up stores for SMEs in the future?

METHODOLOGY

As the study of SMEs and their use of pop-up shops in a Canadian context is novel, the purpose of this study was to explore the phenomena. Due to the dearth of literature on pop up's, an inductive approach was taken yet theories related to experiential retailing served to inform the study also, thus aiming to draw on past theories to develop new theoretical insight (Dawson, 2010; Coffey, 2012). A qualitative multi-method study provided opportunities to answer the 'how' and 'why' research questions (Flynn & Foster, 2009) using a case study strategy. According to Silverman (2010) case studies are used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in its real life context. Furthermore, this study takes a multi-case study approach, specifically four case studies conducted with SMEs in Canada (in the Alberta region). This allowed the researcher to identify if a phenomenon was occurring within other cases and increases the generalizability of the study (Yin, 2009). The use of triangulation is an important attempt to fully explain the rich and imaginative way of maximising the amount of data collected for this cross sectional study (Denzin, 1970; Easterby-Smith et al. 2008).

The research is based on secondary data, collected through the literature and primary data obtained from focus groups, interviews, and desktop observations. The study comprised three distinct phases:

1. Investigation – secondary research to understand key theories informing the study
2. Exploration – primary research in the form of desk-top observations of implemented pop up stores, interviews with four SME cases who had previously hosted pop up stores to understand why and how they did it and focus groups with consumers who had visited pop ups.
3. Development – of strategic recommendations that can be adopted for future pop-up stores.

Desktop observations

Observation of photographs of pop-up stores hosted by 20 SME retailers and 10 large fashion retailers were conducted. This was to gain an understanding of the pop-up stores offered by fashion retailers, with an emphasis on the visual elements informed by theory of multi-

sensory experiences proposed by Hulten (2009). Table 6 provides a summary of the variables observed.

Table 6: Observation elements

Purpose of Observation:	To gain an understanding of pop-up stores with a focus on the visual elements utilized
Visual Sensory Expressions:	Description:
Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Store floor plan? - Where are key store features placed? - Use of props?
Colour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensity - Variety of colours used - Use of colour within the space
Light	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brightness - Type of lighting used? - Use of lighting used within the space?
Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Simplistic? - Chaotic? - Modern? - Retro?
Theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there an over arching theme / story being told throughout the pop-up space?
Signage/Graphics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of text within the space? - Use of graphics?
Merchandising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use of displays? - How is merchandise arranged within the space?

Source: authors own

The photographs observed were chosen according to purposive sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2007). All pop-up stores had occurred over a period of three years, between 2010 to 2013, including images of the pop-up stores hosted by 3 out of the 4 cases: Gravity Pope, Sublime Swimwear and Sole Revival (images of the Coup Garment Boutique pop-up store were unavailable).

Interviews

Utilising purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews with owners of four Canadian SMEs who had implemented pop-up stores in the past were conducted. The semi-structured interviews aimed to gain an understanding of why SMEs used the pop up, key features, design elements and how it was implemented. The questions for the interviews were formulated from the literature, specifically embedding experiential retailing and multi-sensory experiences (Hulten, 2009; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Table 7 provides an overview of topics covered within the interviews.

Table 7: Semi-Structured Interview Overview

Topics	Example Question(s)
Experiential Retailing	“Do you attempt to engage the customers with elements other than the merchandise?”
	“If so, how?”
Multi-sensory experiences	“Do you attempt to engage a customer’s senses when they are in the pop-up store environment?”
Use of pop up stores	“Why do you use pop up stores?”
	“How many pop-up stores have you been involved with?”
Pop up store design features	“Where do you look for inspiration when designing the interior of a pop-up space?”
	“What are the design elements of a pop-up store?”

Focus groups

Two consumer focus groups each containing 6 participants were conducted, which allowed the researcher to gain insight into the thoughts and reactions towards the pop-up store phenomenon. During the focus groups the researcher took the role of the moderator, facilitating discussion and ensuring participation (Dawson, 2010). The focus groups were divided into two sections, as shown in Table 8. The first explored perceptions of pop up stores and the experience associated with them, the second explored pop up store design elements specifically. Anonymous images of pop up stores, taken from the pictorial observations were used in both sections to facilitate discussion.

Table 8: Focus group design overview

	Topics Covered in Questions
Screening Question	Have you ever been to a pop-up store?
Section One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploration of pop-up stores. - First impressions. - The pop-up experience. - Why are retailers using them? - Multi-sensory experiences.
Section two	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pop-up store design. - Visual elements including: lighting, signage, location, and use of props.

Participants were chosen using non-probability sampling, specifically self-selection (Dawson, 2010). Potential participants were asked a screening question to determine if they had previously attended any pop-up stores. Only those who had were asked to participate.

Content analysis was used to analyse the observations, interviews and focus groups, as it allowed the researcher to examine a variety of artefacts, including visual representations, by “objectively and systematically identifying special characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1968:608; Wiles, 2012). Transcripts were coded and emerging categories were analysed and grouped accordingly.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This section is organized around the research questions, which support the overarching questions - “Why are SMEs implementing the pop-up store and How can it be used for a SME fashion retailer”.

SME pop up and experiential retailing

The SME interviews conducted to determine if they were incorporating multi-sensory experiences into their pop-up stores revealed a lack of consideration of engagement through the use of sensory elements. Sight and sound were the two senses most frequently considered when creating their pop-up spaces. A common consensus was that the temporary nature of the pop-up did not lend itself to creating multi-sensory spaces:

“We’ve only done pop-up sales in the past. So the main goal is to move inventory and the people who come are there to buy, not many people just browse...it’s not the right atmosphere”.

SMEs are not creating intentional experiential retail spaces. The sensory elements are after thoughts, present within the space merely to create a pleasant atmosphere, as quotation Table 9 summarises.

Table 9: SME Owners - Multi-sensory Experience

SME	Senses	Quotes
Gravity Pope	Sight (Visuals)	“I don’t think they are really considered”.
	Sound	“Music has always been something”.
	Smell	“We do sell perfume but nothing that is used in the pop-up stores”.
	Taste	“Last time they had food”.
	Touch	“I guess just the quality of the clothes and the other products we offer”.
Coup Garment Boutique	Sight (Visuals)	“The overall look is always important”.
	Sound	“Music is a must. It helps create an atmosphere”.
	Smell	“I’m usually opposed to using scents”.
	Taste	“We haven’t done food or drinks because it’s not the right atmosphere”.
	Touch	“I think it comes down to the quality of the clothes that we offer”.

Sublime Swimwear	Sight (Visuals)	“You want it to look tidy and appealing”.
	Sound	“The music is always important... keep it fast and bouncy”.
	Smell	“No it not something I’ve ever thought about including”.
	Taste	“We have only ever offered food in the regular store”.
	Touch	“I’m not really sure”.
Sole Revival	Sight (Visuals)	“I prefer things to look nice and neat, but it’s not always realistic. Or people just don’t really care all that much”.
	Sound	“We do have music”.
	Smell	“No, I don’t use perfume. The smell of the leather is enough”.
	Taste	“We don’t do food”.
	Touch	“We do little giveaways like a little thing of lotion”.

This diverges from the literature, which emphasizes the pop-up store as a strategic happening with a focus on creating brand awareness (Niehm et al. 2007; Suchi, 2011; Pomodoro, 2013). Even by engaging only one or two of the senses, pop-up stores could differentiate and distinguish themselves from their competition (Surchi, 2011; Bradbury, 2012; Pomodoro, 2013; Jackson 2013). For SMEs the pop-up shop however seems to be a means to an end. This view was further supported by the focus groups, as depicted:

“I think part of the appeal of some stores is how beautiful the space is but with a pop-up it’s different. It’s like, this is what we have, this is all you are getting. Most pop-ups don’t really try”.

It could be argued that the very nature of the pop-up is enough to stand out in the over crowded fashion arena. Its unexpectedness generates customer surprise and therefore results in memory formation (Suchi, 2011; Birch, 2013; Pomodoro, 2013). However, as the pop-up store becomes increasingly popular creating an intentional experientially lead space may prove beneficial, by differentiating the SME pop-up store and building competitive advantage (Hulten, 2009; Petermans & Van Cleempoel, 2009; Barclay & Barnes, 2011).

SME pop up store typology

The literature highlighted variations of the pop-up format. To determine which type of pop-up applied to fashion SMEs each were explored in the primary research. Findings determined that the traditional pop up store was the preferred and most viable format to pursue. The use of the traditional pop-up store format is cited throughout the literature, with brands engaging with this storefront based form (Strugatz, 2013; Yannetta, 2013). This was further supported through the observations. Out of the 20 SME pop-up shops observed 16 fell within the traditional pop-up store format, being located in a static unexpected location, for a limited time period (Suchi, 2012).

SME pop up time-span

To determine the ideal duration of the SME pop-up store, interviews from the four SMEs were examined and findings evidenced in Table 10.

Table 10: SME pop up store time spans

Store	Time Span	Supporting Quote
Gravity Pope	3 Days	“ The last one was over three days”.
Sublime Swimwear	3 days	“Typically we open our pop-up store for 3-4 days”
Coup Garment Boutique	2 days	“Our pop-ups happened over two days”.
Sole Revival	1 Day	“I pop-up fast, its just a one day thing”.

It shows that for SMEs the duration of a pop up is less than one week. This is inconsistent with the literature in which the average time period for pop-up spaces has been defined as up to a year, with a monthly average (Niehm et al. 2007; Surchi 2011; Pomodoro, 2013). For smaller retailers the shorter time period seems to stem from its utilitarian nature; a retail tool used to get customers into a space to efficiently move stock, as depicted.

“Pop-up and pop-out. Make it urgent, make it now or you wont get anything”.

This is inconsistent with the literature, which suggests that fashion retailers create pop-up spaces that encourage customers to linger (Fumo, 2013; Pomodoro, 2013). However, SMEs may not be able to construct and host such longstanding spaces due to limited resources (Industry Canada, 2012).

SME pop up purpose

The research question, “What is the purpose of the pop-up?” was explored for which SME interviews and consumer focus groups provided a proposed rationale. Three dominant themes emerged: making space, store promotion, and community collaboration, as outlined as follows.

Making Space

During the SME interviews, one of the dominant thoughts was to reduce stock and make room within the main store. Many of the retailers even described the pop-up store as a “pop-up sale”, where they could eliminate marked down merchandise and make room for new stock:

“The pop-up sale is a great way to clear inventory”.

“I found we were doing it to clear out, move units. Liquidate...get ride of inventory”.

A sale pop-up store is not discussed within the literature (Niehm et al. 2007; Suchi, 2011; Pomodoro, 2013). The pop-up sale space is tactical in nature, which differs from the

strategically executed pop-up stores hosted by larger fashion brands. This could be a reflection of SMEs typically smaller size, increasing their need to turn over stock at a higher rate, to make room for new inventory, as reflected below:

“We do our pop-up stores to clear out some inventory so we can prep for the upcoming season”.

The focus groups revealed that customers also believed this to be a primary purpose for SME pop-up's, as shown.

“Clear inventory. To create more room within the existing space”.

“To sell extra stuff”.

Store Promotion

Using the pop-up as a way to promote the store and increase customer awareness was another theme that emerged:

“We also do pop-ups to gain different exposure to attract new clientele”.

“It's a chance to create new relationships with potential new clients who haven't been to your store”.

This is consistent with the literature, which states that many pop-up stores attempt to gain new customers and promote their brand (Suchi, 2012; Pomodoro, 2013). It provides the retailer with another touch point in which they can reach out and interact with their potential customers. This is beneficial for SMEs as they often have only one store location in which to interact with customers (Industry Canada, 2012):

“It has helped me bring people from different communities...they come out to my store...they didn't know we were there”.

Consumers agreed that the pop-up store provided retailers with the ability to bring awareness to the store, as depicted:

“I think it's a pretty good opportunity for them to market themselves and get people talking”.

“I think word spreads well with pop-ups too”.

SMEs are using the pop-up store to generate customer awareness and promote their brand, thus increasing customer engagement. These brand orientated pop-up stores solidify the retailer in the minds of the consumer and create a cohesive image between pop-up shop and the fashion retailer (Surchi, 2011; Pomodoro, 2013; Spire, 2013).

Community Collaboration

The final theme that emerged was the pop-up stores ability to allow retailers to interact with other businesses within the community. Three of the four SME owners stated that they had popped up with other businesses. These collaborations can be beneficial as evidenced:

“It was a really good opportunity. When her traffic was slow, I brought in all my stuff, and generated a lot of traffic and a lot of sales. She also got some advertisement out of it and gained new customers. So for her it was a win for me it was a win”.

Collaboration allows both retailers to benefit from added traffic and advertising. This could also reduce the cost of hosting the pop-up store as costs could be shared. Using pop-ups as a collaborative tool enables the retailer to interact with the community and provide more of an event to customers, as stated:

“Its fun interacting with people and other businesses in new neighbourhoods. It creates a interactive and positive environment”.

The concept of collaborative pop-up is considered to be relatively new and is only briefly mentioned in the literature, however due to its popularity among SMEs further research in this area may be beneficial (Pomodoro, 2013).

SME pop up features

Interviews with the SMEs and consumers provided insight on addressing, “What are the key features of a SME pop-up?”.

Consumers were asked to list the three most important features they would consider when creating their own pop-up store. Three common themes were identified: location, merchandise and atmosphere/experience, which are captured in quotation Table 11.

Table 11: Pop up store features

Themes		Supporting Quotes
Location:	High traffic	“ A popular location is important to get people into the space”.
		“I need a good location whether it is in a trending area or heavily trafficked spot”.
		“ I would want a good location, that people know about. A popular location”.
		“ A good location definitely”.
		“Interesting location that you aren’t going to usually”.
Merchandise:	Sale prices	“An assortment of deal pieces but also new and unusual things”.
		“Merchandise, whether it is exclusive or getting a great deal”.
	Exclusive product	“Some sort of incentive, like price. And then exclusivity”.
		“Deals you might not get in the normal store”.
Store Atmosphere/ Experience:	Engaging the senses	“Attractive atmosphere, so music maybe”
		“Good signage or something”.
		“Cool atmosphere. So like drinks and music”.
		“I think it needs to look attractive on the outside as well as the inside”.
		“Atmosphere kind of like if you are hanging art on the wall or instillations”.

Location

Location was stated by the majority of participants as being a key pop up feature. This is consistent with the literature, which states location of the pop-up store is of the utmost importance (Niehm, 2007; Pomodoro, 2013). They believed the SME pop-up should be a popular or highly trafficked location. Although pop-up stores have been defined as being located in unexpected places, this does not mean that it should compromise on accessibility. SME interviews provided similar results, as evidenced:

“I really look for traffic”.

Having a highly trafficked area allows the pop-up to gain exposure and therefore potentially attract new customers:

“In order to attract any new potential customers, we need to be in a location that they will come across by either driving or walking by”.

Merchandise

Product offer is an important consideration and according to the literature is one of the primary “weapons” of the pop-up store (Pomodoro, 2013). Two dominant themes emerged during SME interviews and consumer focus groups around merchandise offered within the pop-up: exclusive and sale merchandise. Consumers agreed that a combination of both was ideal. This deviates from the literature, which states that pop-ups should introduce new product lines and highlight exclusive merchandise (Surchi 2011, Pomodoro 2013). Results from the SMEs differed, with most stating that sale merchandise was used over exclusive product:

“All our pop-ups have only been “Sale” related. So we are bringing in the entire inventory that we need to clear to make room for the upcoming season”.

“In the pop-up store it is simply about clearing merchandise, and selling sale stuff”.

However, two SMEs discussed the importance of choosing merchandise to suit the target market of their pop-up stores:

“When we recently did the pop-up store in Vancouver we didn’t just bring the oldest stock, we brought brands that we knew our customers would care about too”.

“I try to curate a selection per location.”

These findings are consistent with the literature which states choosing merchandise based on the target consumer yields the best results (Forney, et al. 2007, Pedroni 2011). Although the majority of SMEs only provided sale merchandise, some are beginning to see the value of using selective merchandising techniques and catering to the needs and wants of the customer.

Pop-up Store Experience

Consumers identified a unique experience as a key feature of the SME pop-up store. As seen in Table 12, they identified ‘music’, ‘signage’ or some combination of sensory elements, as important to create a welcoming atmosphere within the store.

Table 12: Pop up store experience

Key Quotes from Focus Groups	
Participant 1	“The look of the space is key”.
Participant 2	“So attractive atmosphere, so music maybe some sort of other event or whatever”.
Participant 3	“Atmosphere kind of like if you are hanging art on the wall or installations”.
Participant 4	“If you have cupcakes or something it sets the mood.
Participant 5	“I think it needs to look attractive on the outside as well as the inside with good signage or something”
Participant 6	“Any sort of out of the box idea that sets it apart”.

According to Pine & Gilmore (1999) and Hulten (2009) atmospheric variables such as smell, sight, taste, and touch can be used to create a memorable store experience. Participants did not list all of the senses as being needed to create an appropriate atmosphere. However, incorporating some of the elements of the sensory experience were deemed necessary, even if the participants were not always sure of what that specifically was. As previously highlighted, the multi-sensory experience is often perceived as an after thought for many SMEs, with the pop-up store providing the minimum it terms of experiential retailing.

SME pop up sight elements

According to Hulten (2009) having a prominent sight strategy is considered significant in creating a memorable experience that allows the retailer to express their identity and distinguish them from the competition. The pictorial observations were instrumental in identifying common features of SME pop up stores, summarised as follows:

1. **Colour** – neutral backdrop. White, grey or black walls most frequently observed. Colour tends to be added through props and merchandise instead.
2. **Use of props** – varied. E.g. photographs, crates, surfboards used. The variety of props reflected each retailer’s individual identity and supported a specific theme within the space. A few props were consistent across the majority of the pop-up stores specifically display tables and single rail clothing racks. 18 of the SME pop-ups reviewed used single rail clothing racks to display their clothing (the two stores that did not, only sold shoes) and 16 used display tables.
3. **Lighting** – varied. Included recessed, track and specialty lighting.
4. **Visual merchandising** – consistent across SMEs. Merchandise was primarily organized according to product category or coordinated with merchandise grouped together to create cohesive looks. In contrast, larger retailers tend to use more creative VM displays in their pop up’s.
5. **Signage** – scarce. E.g. chalkboards, few window decals.
6. **Size of store** – small for SMEs.
7. **Floor plan** – open. Clear walkways, ease of circulation.

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

This study reveals that the SME pop-up is used primarily as a tactical tool, attempting to reduce stock, promote the store and collaborate with other businesses. The concept for SMEs appears to be more simplistic in nature in comparison to larger fashion players, seeking to solve present retail problems instead of strategically aiming to grow the retail brand. It is used as a second sale space, with few, if any experiential retail aspects considered. Design elements are also lacking with many elements only partially considered. The study presents a number of similarities and differences with previous studies and suggests opportunities for future SME pop up stores, as depicted in Table 13.

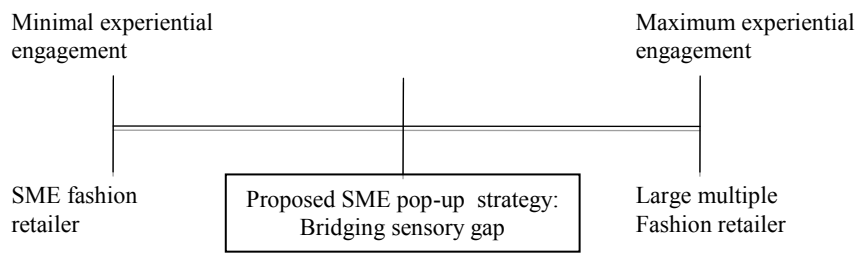
Table 13: Study similarities and differences with previous research

Research element	Discourse Similarities	Discourse Differences	Opportunities
1. Pop up as experience		Pop up utilised more as sales than multi-sensory experiential tool to build the brand	Utilise multi-sensory aspects to differentiate and distinguish SME in cluttered market
2. Pop up form	Traditional pop up store format most popular		Explore other cost effective pop up forms
3. Pop up time span		Less than 1 week	Community collaborations may enable longer pop up's, by reducing costs of execution
4. Pop up purpose	Store promotion	Making space – sales focus Community collaborations	Explore more strategic use of pop up's beyond sales. Community collaboration area of newness to explore further
5. Pop up features	Location - prominent	Merchandise – less exclusive more sales led Experiential aspects - limited	Explore how to embed more experiential features into SME pop up's to drive consumer engagement.

SME Pop up recommendations

As the pop-up store continues to grow in popularity it is recommended that SMEs encompass more experiential and creative elements and potential new forms within their pop-up offerings. The concept of collaborative pop up should be further explored as a new and largely unexplored way of delivering pop up's by SMEs, which might overcome some of the unique resource challenges faced. Despite lack of resources compared to larger retailers, cost efficient and strategically orientated pop-up store initiatives should be adopted by SMEs. Greater attempt should be made to engage consumers within the pop-up store experience and present them with a memorable event that is intentional, bridging the gap between the mainly non-experiential pop-ups currently presented by SMEs and the highly experiential pop-up models offered by large multiple fashion retailers, as conceptualised in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Experiential pop up gap



Source: authors own

This study provides practical insight to SME retailers looking to create their own pop-up stores. It highlights primary features and design elements of the SME pop-up store and illuminates possible areas for growth, such as creating pop-up stores that are more experientially lead. Moreover, it provides strategic recommendations for the use of a pop-up store specifically for Canadian fashion SMEs. Although, these should not be generalized to all SMEs, as each case will present unique challenges and each have a unique brand identity, it offers a starting point to other SMEs wishing to engage in this retail format.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

Whilst the study contributes to a nascent field of research, the limitations of the study are still recognised. The limited academic research available on the topic placed emphasis on contemporary trade sources resulting in a lack of theoretical underpinning. Due to the temporary nature of the pop up, in person observations of SME pop-up stores could not be conducted, restricting the scope and depth of the observations. In addition, the findings are limited to Canadian SME fashion retail and cannot be generalised outside the examined cases. Yet this study contributes to the body of research that is experiential retailing. Specifically, multi-sensory experiences and how they can be applied to specific retail environments, such as the pop-up store. It provides insight into the limited academic research surrounding the pop-up store as a retail phenomenon and highlights how the SME utilizes the pop-up store in a Canadian context. As this study does not differentiate between the different types of pop-up stores, future research could explore specific pop-up store typologies such as mobile or outdoor pop-up stores, and how they differ in their execution of experiential elements. It would also be interesting to observe SME pop-up stores over a longitudinal study to determine if the SME pop-up becomes more experiential as the phenomena continues to gain popularity.

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ISBN: 978-989-20-5337-0